

MEMORANDUM

TO THE BOARD:

SUBJECT: General's Manager Report

DATE: May 102004

FROM: Steve Oltmans, General Manager

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- A. **INFORMATION/EDUCATION REPORT**: A copy of the I&E Report detailing Information and Education activities of the District for the month of April, 2004, is attached for your review.
- B. **MISCELLANEOUS/PERSONNEL ITEMS**: - None.
- C. **REPORT ON PURCHASES – CONSTRUCTION SERVICES, PROFESSIONAL SERVICES, PERSONAL PROPERTY**: Pursuant to Board direction, attached is a report indicating construction services, professional services and personal property purchases for the month of April, 2004. Please review this report and contact me if you have any questions.
- D. **CURRENT AND ON-GOING PROJECTS – P-MRNRD LEGAL COUNSEL**: Attached is a copy of the current and on-going projects for District Legal Counsel, Paul Peters, as of April 19, 2004. I would ask each Director to review this listing. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.
- E. **POSITION PAPERS ON NATURAL RESOURCES NEEDS AND WATER POLICY**: The Chamber of Commerce Ag Council held its annual Washington D.C. Trip on April 27 – 29, 2004. Unfortunately the GM was unable to participate in this trip, but did provide position papers on Natural Resources Needs and Water Policy for the group. I have attached copies of both for your information.
- F. **NEWS CLIPS**:
- April 8, 2004, The Omaha Reader Article – Metro Area Trails Connect Humans to the Outdoors
 - April 9, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – Urban population increases; Sarpy County leads the way
 - April 9, 2004, Papillion Times Article – Household waste facility nearing completion
 - April 13, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – Power line to go on 72nd Street
 - April 14, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – 72nd Street neighbors bracing for power lines. OPPD decides not to place the poles along the Keystone Trail.
 - April 14, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – Trail system a go, its developer says. He tells officials in Waterloo and Valley about the project linking Fremont with Omaha.

- April 14, 2004, Bellevue Leader Article – City wins grant to clean up site of power plant.
- April 21, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – City begins removing houses along Cole Creek
- April 22, 2004, Papillion Times Article – Eagle project aims to make the wild more enjoyable.
- April 26, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – Lincoln, NRD reach water pact
- April 29, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – Report supports aiding species. The National Academy of Sciences urges an ecosystem approach to the Platte River.
- April 29, 2004, Omaha World Herald Editorial – A job well done. An independent review finds Platte River is vital to cranes, other species.
- May 2, 2004, Omaha World Herald Editorial Cartoon – Platte River – Need Water
- May 2, 2004, Omaha World Herald Editorial – Getting into the field. Conservation funds achieve no good if they're left on the table.
- May 4, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – State's list of polluted lakes, streams grows.
- May 6, 2004, Burt County Plain dealer Picture – Arbor Day
- May 6, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – Oh, the view from the new bridges
- May 10, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – Foes of well field get another shot to block project. MUD wants permission to pump water out of a Saunders County aquifer.

April 2004

Information & Education Report

Information

- Finalized work on Spring 04 SPECTRUM
- Continued preparations for NE Envirothon at Platte River State Park
- Staffed booth with Omaha Rotary at Activate Omaha event at Qwest Center
- Began work on Omaha 150 ad in World Herald
- Continued preparations for Earth Day Omaha Celebration
- Set up and attended Western Douglas Trails news conference
- Gave presentation to S.W. Kiwanis Club
- Updated web site pages
- Continued work on staff survey

Education

- Facilitated LEP teacher training
- Outlined PMRNRD education programs for LPSNRD Education Specialist
- Toured HD Zoo education programs
- Presented to Morton Elementary Cub Scouts
- Packaged and handed out 8,000 education trees
- Sent out press release on NRD spring programs
- Set-up and Staffed ACTivate Omaha booth
- Presented at Arlington Elementary Earth Day Festival
- Presented Enviroscope to all 3rd Graders at St. Wenceslaus
- Assisted at Benson West Elementary Arbor Day Festival
- Continued taking seed orders
- Sent out confirmation letters for spring hikes at Chalco
- Managed 135 volunteer hours
- Finished LEP correlations to NE Education Standards
- Continued NRD 'KUDOS' program
- Sent Wellness e-mails to staff and continued planning Wellness activities
- Sent out Karen Western Mini-Grants
- Continued working on dye-cut handout for NRD programs (currently at printers)

Updated: April 19, 2004

**Current and On-Going Projects
P-MRNRD Legal Counsel**

★ = Top Priority
F = Future Work – No Assignment
N = New Assignment
O = Others Handling
W = Work in Progress
P = PFP's Portion Completed

- **Big Papio Channel Project - West Center Road to West Dodge Road (Woodward):**
- **Little Papio:** (Cleveland)
- **Big Papio :** (Cleveland)
- **West Branch** (Cleveland):
 - Land Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96th St.) (W)
 - Purchase Agreements, deeds (90th to Giles) (N)
- **Western Sarpy Dike** (Sklenar, Cleveland):
 - Closing with Bundy' s (potentially modify ROW/offer) (F)
 - Complete easements – three dikes and one drainage ditch (F)
 - ★ Amended drainage ditch easements on Hickey (First National and Bundy Properties) (W)
 - ★ Levee ROW Documents (RSP, etc.) (W)
 - ★ Cabin ROW Documents, as needed (W)
- **Floodway Purchase Program** (Woodward):
 - Floodway Property Purchase Agreements for Proskel Property at Elbow Bend (P)
- **Trail Projects** (Bowen):
 - Bennington Trail Interlocal Agreement (W)
- **Missouri River Corridor Project** (Becic):
 - California Bend – Final settlement with tenant (Wright' s) (W)
 - Lower Decatur Bend – Appraisal Review, ROW documents and habitat easements (W)
 - Missouri River Pedestrian Bridge Professional Services Contract Review (N)

- **USDA P.L. 566 Projects, Silver Creek and Pigeon/Jones Watershed** (Puls/Cleveland):
 - Silver Creek Site Easements– as needed (W)
 - Release of Site S-7 Easement (W)
 - ★ Papio Site S-27 (Fox Ridge Estates) Trail Easements (W)
- **Papio Watershed Dam Sites:**
 - Dam Site 19 agreement (Petermann) (F)
 - Dam Site 13 Agreement (Petermann) (F)
- **Papio Creek Watershed Partnership (Stormwater)** (Woodward):
 - NRD Bonding Authority Legislation (N)
 - Partnership Interlocal Agreement (P)
- **Rural Water Projects:** (Sklenar)
 - ★ Agreement with SID 296 for WCRW #1 (N)
- **Other:**
 - Interlocal Agreement with Bellevue for Missouri Riverfront Development (W) (Becic)
 - ★ Interlocal Agreement for Dakota County Natural Resources Center (W) (Puls)
 - ★ Professional Services Contract with BCDM for Elkhorn River Access Site (N) Sklenar

Position Paper on Natural Resources Needs
For Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce
Ag Council – Washington D.C. Trip

Nebraska's whole agricultural base rests with wise management of the soil and water, surface and groundwater.

The 2002 Farm Bill is investing millions of dollars nationwide, and in Nebraska, to protect these natural resources. It almost truly is a "golden era for conservation." Most of these dollars are going to private, working lands, and not to land retirement programs, thus keeping the economic wheels turning.

The Conservation Reserve Program however, does idle highly erodible land which is a benefit for combating soil erosion and improving wildlife habitat. Currently 1.1 million acres are in CRP. These former cropland acres are now planted to grass and trees. While idling land and reducing erosion, this program offers a viable option to reduce marginal production on marginal land yet providing some financial return to the landowner.

The 2002 Farm Bill conservation programs, other than CRP, are aimed at protecting privately held crop and range land that is still in production.

The largest of these programs is the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. In this last Farm Bill, this program grew in Nebraska from a 1997 five million dollar program to the 2004, \$23.5? million program. These dollars are targeted at range problems, crop land soil erosion and other natural resource concerns.

About \$4.4 million of EQIP is aimed at converting furrow irrigation systems, which are highly inefficient water users, to more efficient sprinkler irrigation systems. This change alone is saving literally thousands of gallons of water from being pumped, better management of the water supply, better management of the chemicals applied to the crops, and a cleaner environment.

Omaha has a historical connection to the beef industry. Another \$2.3 million dollars of the EQIP funds are directed at improving the animal manure management systems. These improvements involve everything from building a manageable manure pit to keep fecal matter from the streams, to proper application of this natural fertilizer to the cropland at the proper rates.

The Wetlands Reserve Program, operational since 1993 in Nebraska, has restored over 30,000 acres of wetlands. Wetlands provide a valuable natural filter of runoff water, chemicals and sediment keeping the waterways cleaner. Many of these wetlands have been installed along the Missouri River, on land damaged by the floods of the early 1990's. These wetlands will reduce damages and help capture some of the excess flows, whenever the river may flood again. In addition, many of these wetlands are improving wildlife habitat and have become highly sought after sites for nature watchers or hunters. The farmer has found a new source of income!

Two other programs are aiding the protection of agriculture land. The Farm & Ranchland Protection Program, and the Grassland Reserve Program are aimed at landowners who want to keep for the future the best cropland as farm land and to preserve the grass lands as well.

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, since 2002, has pumped over \$2.2 million dollars in 265 contracts on wildlife habitat improvements on over 138,000 acres. These improvements have multiple benefits of creating more habitat for wildlife, especially threatened and endangered species, and recreational opportunities for people.

In summary, the protection of the natural resources in Nebraska has a direct link to the Omaha area. Omaha is literally downstream from much of Nebraska. People still like to eat. People still like to drive cars, and more hopefully will with less oil dependent fuel and crop based fuel. The trees and crop residues on the agricultural land remove carbon dioxide from the air and store the carbon for plant growth. People and businesses need water and Omaha is dependent on clean water in the rivers.

Some people have said Omaha is no longer dependent on the states' agricultural industry. Yes the swings of agriculture may have less of an impact. But as long as people eat, drink clean water, and breathe air, Omaha has a vested interest in the protection of this states' natural resources.

We encourage our legislature, our President and our Congress to continue these present Farm Bill investment in our natural resources.

April, 2004

Position Paper on Water Policy
For Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce
Ag Council – Washington D.C. Trip

The Agriculture Council of the Omaha, Nebraska Chamber of Commerce strongly encourages all Federal agencies with responsibilities for water to work closely with the respective States. It is important to recognize:

- Water is the lifeblood of each of the arid Western States, the allocation of which determines the future of each Western State's economic, environmental, social and cultural fortunes; and
- Each Western State has developed comprehensive systems for the appropriation, use and distribution of water tailored to its unique physiographic, hydrologic and climatic conditions found within that state;
- The United States does not have a water management system that is equivalent to those of the Western States for the appropriation, use or distribution of water; and
- Congress has consistently recognized the primacy of state water law because of the need for comprehensive water management systems tailored to the unique needs and characteristics of the individual states

Resolution of contemporary water issues requires a collaborative partnership between Federal, State, tribal, and local government as well as stakeholders.

EXPANSION OF NEBRASKA NRCS WORKLOAD

Bolded items are new for year shown

1988 Staffing: 441	1990 423	1996 357	2001 310	2002 310	2003 313	2004 now 335, may go to 344
Federal Programs: Agriculture Conservation Prog. (ACP) Great Plains Cons. Program (GPCP) Watershed Operations Watershed Planning Soil Survey Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) HEL Compliance Sodbuster Wetland Conservation Conservation Reserve Program	Agriculture Conservation Prog. Great Plains Cons. Program Watershed Operations Watershed Planning Soil Survey Resource Conservation and Development HEL Compliance Sodbuster Wetland Conservation Compl. Conservation Reserve Prog. CO-30 Hydrologic Unit Areas Demonstrations	Great Plains Cons. Program* Watershed Operations Watershed Planning Soil Survey Resource Conservation and Development HEL Compliance Sodbuster Wetland Conservation Compliance Conservation Reserve Prog. CO-30 Hydrologic Unit Areas Demonstrations Continuous CRP Environmental Quality Incentives Prog. (\$130 mil.) Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program Wetland Reserve Program Farmland Protection Program Conservation Farm Operation Emergency Watershed Protection + Fldpin Easmt.	Great Plains Cons. Program* Watershed Operations Watershed Planning Soil Survey Resource Conservation and Development HEL Compliance Sodbuster Wetland Conservation Compliance Conservation Reserve Prog. Continuous CRP Environmental Quality Incentives Program (\$200 million) Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (\$10 million) Wetland Reserve Program Farmland Protection Program (\$10 million) Emergency Watershed Protection + Floodplain Easement Clean Water Action Plan Animal Feeding Op/Confined AFO CRP Wetland Pilot Soil & Water Cons. Act	Great Plains Cons. Program* Watershed Operations Watershed Planning Soil Survey Resource Conservation and Development HEL Compliance Sod Buster Wetland Conservation Compl. Conservation Reserve Program Continuous CRP Environmental Quality Incentives Program (\$400 million) Wildlife Habitat Incentives Prog. (\$15 million) Wetland Reserve Program expanded up to 250,000 acres Farm & Ranch Protection Program (\$10 million) Emergency Watershed Protection + Floodplain Easement Clean Water Action Plan Animal Feeding Op/Confined AFO expanded by dropping 1000 AU Limit in EQIP CRP Wetl. Pilot, part of continuous Soil & Water Cons. Act*	Great Plains Cons. Program* Watershed Operations Watershed Planning Soil Survey Resource Conservation and Development (statewide) HEL Compliance Sod Buster Wetland Conservation Compliance Conservation Reserve Program expanded up to 39.2 million acres Continuous CRP Environmental Quality Incentives Program (\$695 million) Wildlife Habitat Incentives Prog. (\$30 million) Wetland Reserve Program expanded up to 245,000 acres Farm & Ranch Protection Program (expanded to \$100 million) Emergency Watershed Protection + Floodplain Easement Clean Water Action Plan Animal Feeding Op/Confined AFO expanded by dropping 1000 AU Limit in EQIP Soil & Water Cons. Act* Grassland Reserve Program Conservation Security Program Conservation Reserve Enhancement Prog. (CREP) Watershed Rehabilitation Program	Great Plains Cons. Program* Watershed Operations (\$87 million) Watershed Planning (\$10.5 million) Soil Survey Resource Conservation and Development (\$51.9 million) HEL Compliance Sod Buster Wetland Conservation Compliance Conservation Reserve Program expanded up to 39.2 million acres Continuous CRP Environmental Quality Incentives Program (\$975 million) EQIP GW/SW (\$51 million) Wildlife Habitat Incentives Prog. (\$42 million) Wetland Reserve Program expanded up to 245,000 acres Capped at 189,144 Farm& Ranch Protection Program (to \$112 million) Emergency Watershed Protection + Floodplain Easement Clean Water Action Plan Animal Feeding Op/Confined AFO expanded by dropping 1000 AU Limit in EQIP Soil & Water Cons. Act* Grassland Reserve Program (\$85 million) Conservation Security Program (\$41 million) Conservation Reserve Enhancement Prog. (CREP) Watershed Rehabilitation Program (\$29 million)
Fiscal Year	Direct TA Obligations					
(Excludes reimbursements and easements)						
1994	\$ 19,134,789					
1995	\$ 17,509,113					
1996	\$ 19,096,108					
1997	\$ 18,088,091					
1998	\$ 18,799,042					
1999	\$ 21,708,584					
2000	\$ 21,709,594					
2001	\$ 21,893,928					
2002	\$ 24,251,326					
2003	\$ 28,041,124					
2004	\$ 31,933,780 ***					
State/Local:				Watershed Rehab Program		
NE Soil & Water Cons. Program NRD Cost/Share 319	NE Soil & Water Cons. Prog. NRD Cost/Share 319	NE Soil & Water Cons. Program NRD Cost/Share 319 NE Environmental Trust (NET)	NE Soil & Water Cons. Program NRD Cost/Share 319** + DEQ Watershed Treatment NE Environmental Trust (NET) NE Buffer Strip Program State Livestock Waste	NE Soil & Water Cons. Program NRD Cost/Share 319 + DEQ Watershed Treatment NE Environmental Trust (NET) NE Buffer Strip Program State Livestock Waste	NE Soil & Water Cons. Program NRD Cost/Share 319 + DEQ Watershed Treatment NE Environmental Trust (NET) NE Buffer Strip Program State Livestock Waste	NE Soil & Water Cons. Program NRD Cost/Share 319 + DEQ Watershed Treatment NE Environmental Trust (NET) NE Buffer Strip Program State Livestock Waste

* Program not funded, but we are still servicing contracts

** Program funding doubled in 1999

***Subject to change

From 1990 to present, increased Partnership activities such as State Technical Committee, local work groups, Rainwater Basin Joint Venture, Agribility, Sandhills Task Force and Grazing Lands Coalition.

Technical Service Provider coordination

as of March 2004

APR 8 - 2004

Universal Information Services, Inc.

Metro Area Trails Connect Humans to the Outdoors

by **Anthony Barker**

The arrival of spring means more Omaha residents will venture out to enjoy the warmer temperatures and the greening landscape.

At a press conference held April 3, U.S. Rep. Lee Terry announced a proposal for a Western Douglas County Trail system. The grand 100-mile trail plan could take almost 20 years to complete and cost an estimated \$13 million. The first phase scheduled to begin next year and completed in 2009 would be 19 miles long and connect Elkhorn to Fremont, Neb., at an estimated cost of \$3 million. The long-term goal is to connect western Douglas County trails to those throughout Omaha.

There is no need to wait five years to enjoy the benefits a trail can offer. Utilizing the current system of interconnected hiking and biking trails throughout the city is a great way to get some of that much-needed fresh air.

The Metropolitan Area Trails Network consists of nine trails covering 80 miles of Omaha area. The nine paved pathways include the West Papio Trail, 144th Street Trail, Big Papio Trail, Military Road Trail, Sorenson Parkway, Keystone Trail/Bellevue Loop, Elmwood Park Connector, Field Club Trail, and Back-to-the-River Trail.

The first section of the Keystone Trail was opened for public use on July 4, 1990. The three-

mile section, which would later become Omaha's largest trail at just over 25 miles, ushered in a record-setting construction effort that lasted over the next 11 years.

"We are in the top 10 percent in the construction of trails, across the nation. I mean, 80 miles in 11 years is a record," said Larry Foster, acting director of the Parks and Recreation department. "[The trails] are all similarly constructed. They were about 8 feet in width and now they are about 10 and 12 feet."

Foster said the majority of trails in Omaha run from North to South and link together parks, sporting facilities and a variety of other recreational locations across the city, and because they are paved the trails provide greater accessibility to those with disabilities.

Foster estimated that it takes \$200,000 per mile to fund the construction of a trail, but each trail may have special circumstances that could increase the cost.

"They all vary because of location, width, plus the amount of earthwork that needs to be done," Foster said. "It could be different. It could be \$400,000."

Gerry Bowen of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District said that local government sponsors design the trail and cover 20 percent of the funding for construction. Additional funding is appropriated through the U.S. Department of Transportation. Omaha has

PHOTO: ANTHONY BARKER



The Keystone Trail is one of many trails throughout the city

received almost \$20 million since 1990 for trail construction and development.

Future trail projects include construction of the newly approved stretch of the Elmwood Park connector, commonly referred to as the Dundee Trail. Foster said the trail will be the first to utilize bike lanes on city streets. The trail will run from Memorial Park to Metcalfe Park along Happy Hollow Boulevard. Construction is scheduled to begin this summer.

Originally neighbors resisted plans for the Dundee Trail sighting concerns about trail maintenance and safety.

"I think that there was a disagreement in the neighborhood about having the trail period,"

Foster said.

Efforts are also underway to connect Omaha area trail riders to those in the state capitol. The first major hurdle was overcome when the Papio-Missouri NRD opened the Lied Platte River Bridge on June 1, 2002. The renovated, former Rock Island Bridge once used for a railroad, stretches over the Platte River and is the first bridge in the eastern part of the state to be constructed for recreational purposes. The bridge cost \$2.7 million to complete, but Bowen warned that it could take years to finish the trail connecting Omaha and Lincoln.

"It will probably be completed in the next five to 10 years," Bowen said. **AB**

Urban population increases; Sarpy County leads the way

4-9-04
By PAUL GOODSELL

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Five new houses per day.

Forty-four babies a week.

Two hundred and fifty more people a month.

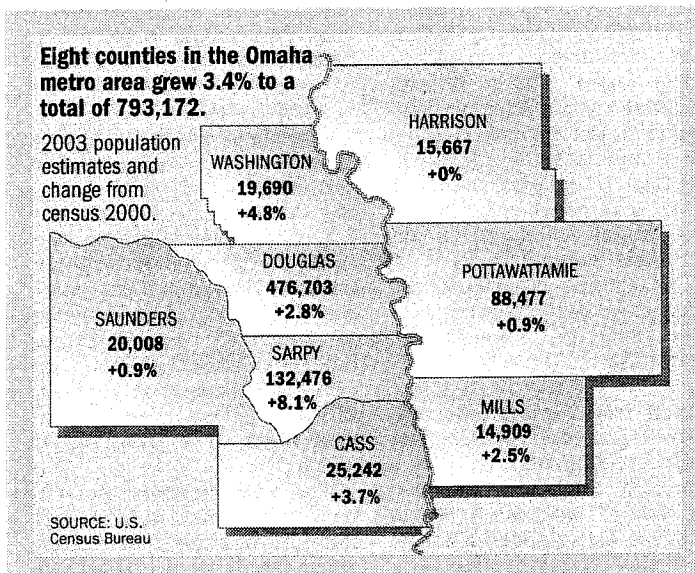
Those numbers show why Sarpy is growing faster than any county in Nebraska or western Iowa, according to new estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Perched on Omaha's southern boundary, Sarpy grew by 8.1 percent between the latest census in April 2000 and the July 2003 estimates released today.

The gains in Sarpy and, to a lesser extent, in other large or suburban counties contrast sharply with many parts of Nebraska and Iowa.

Overall, Nebraska grew 1.6 percent during those 39 months. Iowa gained less than 1 percent. And more than two-thirds of the counties in the two states lost population.

"It's a continuation of the past



DEAN WEINLAUB/THE WORLD-HERALD

several decades, where (Nebraska's) population is becoming more and more concentrated in its largest counties," said Jerry Deichert, a census specialist at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

The eight-county Omaha metro area grew by 3.4 percent since Census 2000 and now totals 793,172. Lincoln and surrounding Lancaster County increased 4.3 percent.

See Census: Page 2

Census: Sarpy leads state in growth

Continued from Page 1

For the first time in history, Nebraska's three largest counties — Douglas, Sarpy and Lancaster — account for a majority of the state's residents. Back in 1930, the three counties had just 25 percent of Nebraska's population.

The trend isn't about to turn around quickly, Deichert said. Population changes occur because of births, deaths and people moving in or out of an area, and none of those elements is favorable in many rural counties.

Young people have left those

areas in recent decades. The result has been fewer young couples to have children, and an aging population that is gradually dying out. And people continue to migrate out of rural areas faster than they move in from elsewhere.

The opposite is true in booming Sarpy County. Seven babies were born in Sarpy for every two people who died. Statewide, the ratio was three births per two deaths.

Meanwhile, a net 1,500 people moved last year into Sarpy from other places, including nearby Douglas County. Those new res-

idents have spurred Sarpy's building boom: 1,842 building permits for single-family houses and \$313 million in new residential construction in 2003.

Deichert noted, however, that Omaha's economic engine is creating Sarpy's growth. The 2000 Census, he said, showed that more Sarpy residents work in Douglas County than in Sarpy.

"It's predominantly a bedroom community for Omaha," he said.

World-Herald staff writer Tom Shaw contributed to this report.

Household waste facility nearing completion

4-9-04

By Mitch Beaumont
Times News Editor

Do you ever wonder what the landfill does with the fees it collects whenever someone deposits something?

Come this June, you will no longer have to wonder, because the physical evidence will be there for all to see.

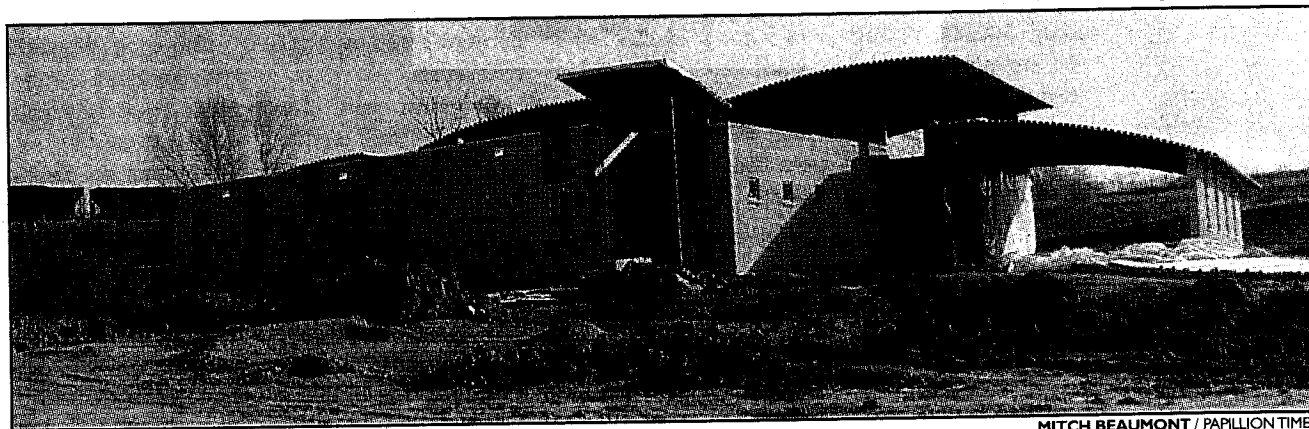
Sarpy County, along with the city of Omaha, Douglas County, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District and several other smaller organizations, has contributed funding to the construction

of a household hazardous waste facility near 120th and L streets in Omaha.

Sarpy has given about \$20,000, taken from the county's landfill tipping fees, for the initial construction of the more-than-5,600-square-foot facility, said Duwaine Brigman, the manager of the county's landfill.

To fund the operation of the facility, aptly dubbed "Under the Sink", Brigman said the county is setting aside 30 cents per ton of the tipping

*Please see **Waste**, Page A2*



MITCH BEAUMONT / PAPILLION TIMES

Sarpy County is a partner in the construction and eventual operation of the Under the Sink facility near 120th and L streets in Omaha.

Continued

Waste: Facility could be open in mid June

from PAGE A1

fees.

"It's a continual payment. The city of Omaha sends us a bill for that," he said. "This is going to be an ongoing program."

Solid waste coming from within Sarpy County is charged \$22 a ton.

Once complete sometime this June, Brigman said the Under the Sink facility will act as a disposal location for household products such as latex paint, motor oil and lead acid batteries.

According to underthesink.org, the facility's Web site, it is expected to take in about 500,000 pounds of household hazardous waste products per year, 29 percent of which is anticipated to be latex paint.

The past success of



MITCH BEAUMONT / PAPILLION TIMES

The Under the Sink facility could be open to the public by June.

countywide paint swaps is evidence of the need for the facility, Brigman said.

"The paint collections have been successful; we've been overwhelmed at each of those events," he said. "Douglas (County) started having those events after we did, and after four years they stopped because it was over-

whelming. One year we were there until 2 o'clock in the morning.

"The money that we are contributing to this is worthwhile. This is money well spent. It is needed in the county demonstrated over and over again."

Brigman said the Under the Sink facility, which will be owned and staffed by the city of Omaha, was slated to be open by Earth Day, March 19-20. But several weather delays have caused the completion of the building to be set back until sometime this June.

He recently gave an update on the facility to the Sarpy County Board.

"Nothing with this project has gone smoothly," he said. "The city of Omaha had all those budget cuts and personnel layoffs and during that time one of the fellows that was acting as project manager for the project took early

retirement so that alone created a bit of a hassle."

There is still a large amount of concrete and landscaping work to be done, Brigman said.

Choosing the facility's location was a more-than-two-year-long process, he said. There was an original list of 40 possible sites throughout the metro area, two in Sarpy County, and gradually through that two-year process, the sites were narrowed down to the one near 120th and L streets.

"It's really going to be a nice facility and it should be fairly attractive," he said. "One of the reasons that we ended up choosing this site was the easy access from much of the city. From much of the city and from much of Sarpy County you can be there in 15 minutes. It's not necessarily the closest, but it's easy to get to."

Page 1
Tonight

UNIVERSAL

Evening World Herald
Omaha, NE
Cir. D. 96,122

APR 13 2004

Universal Information Services, Inc.

METROPOLITAN EDITION
TUESDAY, APRIL 13, 2004

Power line to go on 72nd Street

*OPPD avoids delay
over Keystone Trail*

But cost to be higher

BY NANCY GAARDER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Feeling an urgent need to get its transmission line built, the Omaha Public Power District has decided to place it along 72nd Street instead of the Keystone Trail.

Gary Gates, chief executive officer for the utility, told board members Tuesday that if OPPD is to have the high-voltage line built by June 2005, a route must be chosen and materials ordered by mid-May.

Potential opposition from the Douglas County Board, whose approval would be needed to put the line along the trail, had raised the possibility that the project could be further delayed.

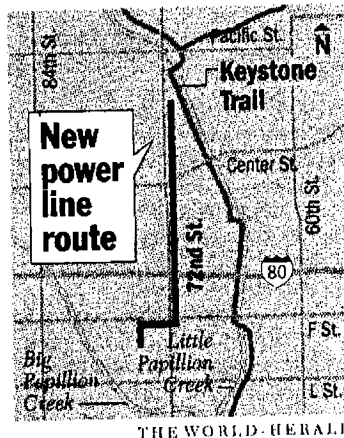
The line is needed to improve electrical reliability in the midtown area, Gates said. The area is near to exceeding existing capacity, and a serious outage in years ahead could "eat up quite a bit of money in a very short amount of time," he said.

Furthermore, steel prices are escalating, meaning the longer the project is delayed, the more it will cost. OPPD has been working to get approval for the line since late last year.

Plans to build it along Keystone ran into opposition from some community groups and property owners who feared the line would harm the aesthetics of the popular trail and the value of land for development.

Some County Board members also had expressed reservations.

See Power: Page 2



Power: OPPD to avoid Keystone, put line on 72nd

Continued from Page 1

The OPPD board did not vote on the issue because its consent is not necessary for OPPD management to move ahead. But the board did discuss the power line at a work session Tuesday and asked Gates what management had decided to do.

Board member N.P. "Sandy" Dodge objected to the way the decision has come about.

OPPD "is not making any decision here," he said. "It's being made for us. The County Board has made the decision for us on where the line is going to go."

Putting the line along 72nd Street will cost potentially \$400,000 more than building along the trail and may present other unseen problems.

Some board members asked whether OPPD could proceed with the Keystone Trail route over the county's objections. Board attorney Stephen Olson said OPPD could condemn the land it needs — but that would mean delays.

Board member John Green said it was important to take community opposition into account and to maintain good rela-

tions with other political entities. He and others said the utility should begin taking aesthetics into account when selecting routes.

Plans to build the power line coincided with an \$800,000 community effort, called Omaha By Design, to improve the look of the city. That has fueled some of the opposition to a Keystone Trail route.

Board member Fred Ulrich, a farmer from Sarpy County, cautioned that rural residents who might face the prospect of a line running through their property will be taking note of the utility's

action.

"These guys will start valuing their aesthetics," he said. "They'll take their bib overalls off and put on the khaki pants and come down to our meetings."

But Del Weber, who is on the OPPD board and is active in Omaha By Design, said the issue also was one of economic development.

"One of the reasons that people talk about this as a 'no image city' is that we haven't been paying attention to these kinds of things," he said. "We can do better than that."

72nd Street neighbors bracing for power lines

■ OPPD decides not to place the poles along the Keystone Trail.

4-14-04
BY NANCY GAARDER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Now that Omaha Public Power District has decided to place a high voltage line along 72nd Street instead of the Keystone Trail, the question becomes just how much disruption lies ahead on the busy street.

"We've been through so much construction in the past eight years," said Warren Anderson, owner of Anderson's BP Amoco Station at 72nd and Grover Streets. "I don't know where OPPD is going to put their poles. I hope it won't be on my corner. I don't have any land left."

Cynthia Buettner, OPPD spokeswoman, said the utility will do everything it can to minimize the impact on residents, businesses and traffic.

Until OPPD completes the design work, it won't know where the poles will go or how construction will affect traffic. The poles will be three to four feet wide and stand about 10 stories high. City officials plan to limit the hours that traffic can be blocked.

OPPD's decision drew a range of reactions Tuesday.

Melissa Gardner, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District board member who helped lead the effort to keep the lines off the trail, called the decision "fantastic."

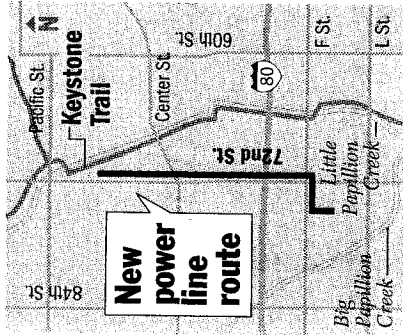
"Kudos to OPPD for listening to people," she said, "and being aware of how important green space is."

Kathleen McCallister, a Douglas County Board member who opposed using the trail, also was pleased.

"That's wonderful," she said. "That's just exactly what I wanted them to do. We have very little green space in midtown."

A possible veto by the county, and the resulting delays, was one reason OPPD decided not to use

See Power: Page 2



Power: 72nd Street braces for high-voltage lines

Also, steel prices are rising, meaning the longer the project is delayed, the more it will cost.

Gates informed the OPPD board of his decision Tuesday during a work session. Although a vote by the board wasn't necessary and wasn't taken, board members did discuss the two routes.

Board member John Green said it was important to take community opposition into account and to maintain good relations with other political entities. Green and others said the utility should begin taking aesthetics into account when selecting routes.

OPPD's plans to build the power lines coincided with an \$800,000 community effort, doesn't make as much sense to put it down the street."

Carson's neighbor Patricia Headrick said she was surprised that OPPD chose the more expensive route. Current estimates indicate that using 72nd Street will cost \$400,000 more than using the trail.

The utility needs to start the project if it is going to meet its goal of completing the line by June 2005, said Gary Gates, chief executive officer for OPPD.

Midtown Omaha is redeveloping rapidly and soon will use up the capacity on existing lines, Gates said. A serious outage in the years ahead, he said, could "eat up quite a bit of money in a very short amount of time."

Still, resident Scott Carson, whose backyard abuts 72nd Street, wished that OPPD "would have at least tried" to get the county's approval.

"It's a visual thing," he said. "I don't care to look at it every day. And it will disrupt traffic. It

Omaha By Design, to improve the look of the city. That has fueled some of the opposition to the Keystone Trail route.

Board member Fred Ulrich, who farms near Louisville, Neb., cautioned that rural residents who face the prospect of a line across their property will take note of the utility's action.

"These guys will start valuing their aesthetics," he said.

Board member Del Weber, who is active in Omaha By Design, said economic development was another issue.

"One of the reasons that people talk about this as a 'no image city' is that we haven't been paying attention to these kinds of things," Weber said. "We can do better than that."

Trail system a go, its developer says

■ He tells officials
in Waterloo and
Valley about the
project linking
Fremont with
Omaha.

4-14-04
BY CHRIS OLSON

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The developer of a trail system that would connect western Douglas County with Omaha and Fremont, Neb., brought good news to Waterloo and Valley officials Tuesday night.

Marty Shukert of Crose, Gardner Shukert Inc., which developed the project, told the Waterloo Village Board of Trustees and the Valley City Council that recently approved funding should ensure its start.

"This is one of the few projects that comes with funding," Shukert told the Waterloo board.

Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb., announced earlier this month that a federal transportation bill, passed by the House, earmarked \$5.5 million for the new trails. Differences between House and Senate versions of the bill are still to be resolved, but the trail project is expected to survive.

The project is the culmination of efforts by Douglas County, the Papio-Missouri

River Natural Resources District, Elkhorn, Waterloo, Valley, the Metropolitan Area Planning Agency, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the YMCA.

Shukert outlined the trail system Tuesday for the Waterloo and Valley boards. In Waterloo, he acknowledged the work accomplished by Sharon Steere, a longtime trails advocate.

Federal funds will provide 80 percent of the trail costs, with local support providing the rest. The entire project would cost more than \$13 million over 20 years.

Trails would be constructed along existing roadways in four phases to connect existing Omaha and Fremont trail systems to Elkhorn, Waterloo, Valley, Ginger Cove, King's Lake, Elkhorn Crossing, Elk City, Elk Crossing, West Shores, Two Rivers State Recreation Area and the Platte and Elkhorn Rivers.

The first phase, which could begin as early as next year, would involve the trail system's 19-mile tri-community core, linking Elkhorn, Waterloo and Valley with trails in Omaha and Fremont.

Valley Mayor Joe Roberts praised the combined recreational and economic benefits to the area.

"The trails will not only bring people to our communities, but give them an opportunity to stop and do business with us," he said.

APRIL 14, 2004

City wins grant to clean up site of power plant

By MARGARET BEHM
Leader staff writer

The City of Bellevue has received a \$200,000 grant for developing the Kramer Power Plant property.

The city owns the land and will develop it after the plant is demolished. The plant's smokestacks have already been removed, and the rest of the building is expected to be demolished by October.

Phil Davidson, a grant writer for the city, said the Nebraska Environmental Trust awarded the grant Thursday with the intent to give another grant next year for the same amount.

This year's grant, Davidson said, will be used to clean out brush and trash on 40 acres north of the power plant beginning in late summer. The clean-up will help clear the way for the establishment of a walking trail through the area.

The grant money will also pay for preserving the environmental qualities of the area and the posting of signs that explain some of the environmental features of the area.

Davidson said the city is applying for other grants to continue with its plans to develop the area.

As for preparing the power plant building for demolition, the city and the city contractor are adhering to the phrase "reuse, recycle."

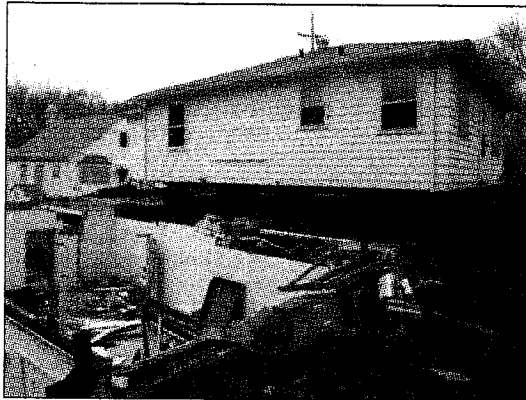
The power plant will be demolished by knocking it down into its own basement, but there won't be enough building to fill up the area. Streets Superintendent George Graham said crews have collected 7 million pounds of sand from city streets, and that is being used — along with concrete the department has collected from street repairs — as basement filler.

Dave Goedeken, acting public works director, said the demolition contractor, Husky Industrial Services Inc., of St. Joseph, Mo., is salvaging metals from the plant, including aluminum, stainless steel, copper and precious metals. The plant's condenser alone had 120,000 pounds of copper, he said.

The contractor will sell the metals and keep the profits, and because of that the contractor reduced the demolition bill for the city.

City begins removing houses along Cole Creek

This house near 67th Street and Military Avenue is scheduled to be hauled away within a week.



KILEY CRUSE/THE WORLD-HERALD

By ERIN GRACE 4-21-04
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Hitched up on steel beams, plywood shielding its windows, the compact, square house stands like a traveler — coat on, suitcase packed, ready to depart.

The two-bedroom house has stood for nearly 90 years along Military Avenue at 67th Street, near the sometimes trickling, sometimes dangerous Cole Creek that is forcing its move within a week.

The house is one of the first in the creek's flood plain slated for

demolition or removal by the city, which bought the houses in an effort to reduce the risk of residential flooding and potential destruction.

The \$3.2 million buyout is being financed primarily through the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The city and the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District are splitting the local share.

Cole Creek's winding path starts near 65th Street and Sorensen Parkway and joins the
See Cole Creek: Page 2

Cole Creek: City begins home-removal project

Continued from Page 1

Little Papillion Creek near 76th and Cass Streets.

As soon as this week, the city will close the intersection of Western and 77th Avenues to replace the culvert underneath the street through which the flood-prone Cole Creek flows. The city plans later to fix the culvert at 69th Street and Military Avenue.

The effort is part of the city's response to the 1999 storm that poured up to 10 inches of rain on parts of the Omaha-Council Bluffs metropolitan area, sending several creeks, including Cole Creek, over their banks.

"We're getting there," said City Public Works Director Norm Jackman, who is overseeing the city's voluntary buyout of some of the most flood-prone

homes, their demolition and removal and the improvement of culverts.

Neighbors in the area have raised concerns about blowing dirt from work sites, the future upkeep of newly vacant lots and what they say is a lack of information about city plans.

Jackman said a number of public meetings have been held where plans were explained. He said the city's contractor is responsible for improving soil drainage and seeding properties where houses have been removed.

The city will maintain these new green spaces unless neighbors want to take them over and create gardens. No new structures can be built.

Though neighbors had complained for years about flooding, it took the 1999 storm,

which damaged 5,500 homes in the Omaha-Council Bluffs area, and one Cole Creek neighborhood resident's death, to force a new look at the issue.

The city commissioned a study, neighbors formed a task force and the result was a decision to buy out some of the most flood-prone homes along the creek's path and fix culverts.

The city chose that route rather than the more expensive options of enclosing the creek channel, building a detention pond or widening the creek bed, which would have required demolishing scores of homes and businesses.

So far the city has moved or torn down 11 of the 14 houses in the first phase.

That work is evident particularly at Military Avenue and along Maenner Drive, where a

boarded-up house sits on a truck bed, its dirt footprint gaping open.

Behind a two-story house near 69th and Spaulding Streets runs a now-tame Cole Creek, which under a clear blue sky doesn't seem like much of a threat.

Cindy Mahr, daughter of the home's late owner, Della Lee Cantwell, said her mother threw away the city's buyout papers, opting instead to remain in the beloved home where she had raised flowers and vegetables for years.

Now Mahr's brother plans to move in with his family.

The house stands near the spot where Leo Daskiewicz died when roiling water crashed through his basement wall, dumping his body 40 yards behind the house.

Eagle project aims to make the wild more enjoyable

By **Bethany Berscheid**
Times Staff Writer

As more and more residents begin to use the Walnut Creek recreation nature facility, interest in developing the facility through service projects has gone through the roof.

Thanks to local scouting projects and community service efforts, Walnut Creek offers more than just a 5-kilometer trail.

One such project nearing completion is a handicapped-accessible waterfowl observation deck organized by Andrew White-Hamilton, a St. Columbille Boy Scout working toward his Eagle Scout rank.

White-Hamilton, an avid outdoorsman and hunter, recognized the need for the waterfowl observation deck while out hunting with his father.

"I thought it'd be important and nice to have," he said. "People can go and see the waterfowl in any weather. Plus, it'd be available for everyone to go and see the beauty of nature in a protected setting."

Putting together such a proj-



SCOTT R. KEMPER / PAPILLION TIMES

Andrew White-Hamilton, center, is joined by Tom Pleiss, left, and Randy Lee, employees of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

ect takes lots of planning, he said, not only to gather materials, but to organize adult help.

Randy Lee, a Papio-Missouri

use power tools such as saws in their projects, so Lee's help in building the deck was important in the project's success.

White-Hamilton said planning began in early December, and the hard labor started a few weeks ago.

"There's a lot of planning that goes into our projects," he said. "Safety is a big concern, not only for the scouts physically putting it all together, but also for the people that will use it later."

Lee said the future Eagle Scout was careful and thoughtful in his planning, both in remembering why a waterfowl observation deck would be important, and in getting the resources he needed to do such a project.

"Andrew has done a great job," Lee said. "He's been very organized, and he's a very capable person to do a job like this."

Once the structure is finished, White-Hamilton won't have lingering responsibilities. It will be up to the NRD to keep the site up. But he expects he'll use it and will work to keep the site clean and useful for other enthusiasts.

"It will protect people not only on the rainy days, but on the really hot ones, too," he said. "It's

nice to be protected, and it's nice to just sit and watch the birds sometimes than to do other things here. I hope people appreciate it and the work we've done, and I really hope they use it."

Lee said there are about five projects for Walnut Creek on the schedule for the spring and early summer. Another will be duck feeders set up in the lake, and a third is landscaping the picnic areas.

"This is a little bit bigger of a project that Andrew is doing, but it really depends on the kids and their abilities and organization of the project," he said. "But at the same time, we like to see kids getting out here and working at this stuff."

While popularity in developing the area is high, Lee said keeping the number of projects low is necessary.

"We get five to 10 phone calls a month for requests, but we can only handle about five to six projects a year with our staff," he said. "We've really got to look for kids with contacts and the ability to set up a serious service project that will last."

W-H
4-26-04

Lincoln, NRD reach water pact

LINCOLN — The City of Lincoln and the Central Platte Natural Resources District have tried for more than a decade to agree on how much water should flow by Lincoln's well fields on the Platte River at Ashland.

Now, the NRD has approved a deal giving Lincoln rights to 700 cubic feet of water per second flowing by the well field during the summer and 200 cubic feet the rest of the year.

That's a lot less than the city had sought.

Lincoln had asked for rights to 2,300 cubic feet per second at the well field, which supplies 90 percent of the city's drinking water.

Lincoln Assistant City Attorney Steve Huggenberger said the city is satisfied with what it got and will be able to provide enough water to meet its needs.

"As we put more wells into the scenario, we need less stream flow," Huggenberger said. He said the city may place more horizontal wells near its well fields, which could further reduce the need for a larger water right appropriation.

Unlike traditional wells that go straight down, horizontal wells collect much more water from laterals that shoot out from the center.

Huggenberger said Lincoln already has two such wells on a city-owned island north of Interstate 80 and is discussing placing similar wells on both sides of the Platte River.

The agreement, reached Thursday, still must be reviewed by the State Department of Natural Resources. — AP

Report supports aiding species

By NANCY GAARDER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

4-29-04

Nebraskans will be disappointed if they were hoping that an independent analysis would provide evidence to ease the state's burden for protecting endangered species along the Platte River.

A National Academy of Sciences study — a yearlong, \$655,000 effort whose results were released Wednesday — has found that sound science was used to determine that the Platte is critical to the survival of endangered species.

But more than that, the study

The National

Academy of

Sciences urges

an ecosystem

approach to the

Platte River.

found that the central Platte is in such bad shape that current conditions "adversely affect" the survival of the whooping crane, piping plover and least tern, three species of birds listed as threatened or endangered.

The report recommended that the river be approached as

an entire ecosystem, rather than taking a species-by-species approach.

The lower Platte, the portion of the river downstream of the confluence with the Elkhorn River, remains in good enough shape, according to the report, to provide habitat for the pallid sturgeon. However, that stretch is "pivotal" to the endangered fish because suitable habitat is rare.

Much of the state's human population depends upon the river and its aquifer for drinking water, irrigation, industry and sanitation. But those human

See **Platte:** Page 2

A Platte primer

Why does the Platte River matter? The Platte is an important nesting area and a stopping point along an international migratory route for birds. No other rivers or wetlands in Nebraska provide as reliable a habitat. The Platte's broad, shallow waters meet some fish species' unique needs.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Whooping crane: About 185 exist in the wild (at right); 118 in captivity.

Interior least tern: About 7,000 noted regionally in 1995. Fewer than 500 are believed to be found along the lower Platte River; rarely seen on the central Platte.

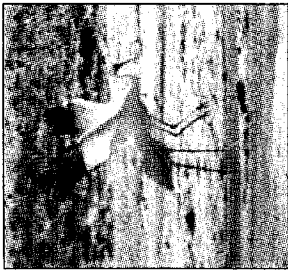
Pallid sturgeon: Rarely found.

THREATENED SPECIES

Piping plover: 85 pairs nested along the Platte in 2001.

To read the report:

www.nationalacademies.org



Platte: Report says human pressures strain river

Continued from Page 1

pressures have put tremendous strain on the Platte. An estimated 70 percent of the river's flow is diverted for human uses.

Because some species along the Platte are in danger of extinction, the Endangered Species Act requires that protective and often costly steps be taken. For example, much of the \$40 million spent relicensing Kingsley Dam at Lake McCook was used to address endangered species.

To reduce costs, Nebraska, Colorado and Wyoming are working out an agreement on what needs to be done to meet the Endangered Species Act's requirements. The report released Wednesday examined the science behind that effort.

Rep. Tom Osborne, R-Neb., who had pushed for a study, said there are two basic ways that Nebraskans who might have hoped for a different answer can react:

For Osborne, the study's recommendation of an ecosystem approach raises a red flag.

"Does that mean we broaden the amount of critical habitat?" he asked. "Does it mean we'll have more species involved? That was one of the risks we ran when we indicated that we wanted to do this (study)."

And the congressman, who represents the central Platte area and has pushed for changes in the Endangered Species Act, questioned the makeup of the academy panel that produced the findings. Osborne said he would have preferred a group that had more than one Nebraskan on it.

The National Academy of Sciences is the nation's foremost scientific organization and was created to provide expert advice to the federal government.

William Graf, the University of South Carolina scientist who led the 14-person committee, said the group brings more than

three centuries of cumulative experience in biology and river science.

The committee agreed unanimously on its findings, which were vetted internally and by 13 outside scientists.

Conservation groups that have been working to protect the Platte praised the findings.

The report, Duane Hovorka of the Nebraska Wildlife Federation said in a statement, indicates in "no uncertain terms" that habitat loss has helped push some species to near extinction.

"The report is a clarion call to action," he said. "The science is clear — the Platte River's wildlife can't wait indefinitely for a solution."

The National Academy committee recommended that additional studies be done and pointed to some areas where there are gaps in knowledge. For example, the cost-effectiveness of some conservation efforts is not well enough known.

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A job well done

4-29-04

Scientists who studied the central and lower Platte River with an eye toward protecting endangered species got good marks for their work from the nation's premier scientific organization Wednesday.

The report from the National Academies of Science did, however, carry some recommendations and caveats, all the better to strengthen protections not only for endangered species but also for other animals and plants that depend on the Platte.

The review was triggered by U.S. Rep. Tom Osborne in response to complaints by groundwater irrigators angry about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Agency's 1978 designation of critical habitat for whooping cranes on the river. The irrigators demanded, and got, an independent review.

The national academy is credible — the gold standard for reviews of such technical issues. And its report said that not only is the critical habitat designation for the endangered whooping crane proper, but so is the designation for the least tern, the pallid sturgeon and the threatened piping plover.

For instance, the report indicated that 7 percent of wild migratory whoopers stop on the central Platte River annually. Many, if not all, use the river at some point in their lives. The river is important because 70 percent to 80 percent of crane deaths occur during migration, and there is no other suitable crane habitat nearby.

The population of whoopers is so

**An independent
 review finds
 Platte River is
 vital to cranes,
 other species.**

brittle that if annual mortality were to increase by just 3 percent — one or two birds, perhaps — the species would become unstable. Eliminate

the Platte from the equation and "population-wide effects would be likely."

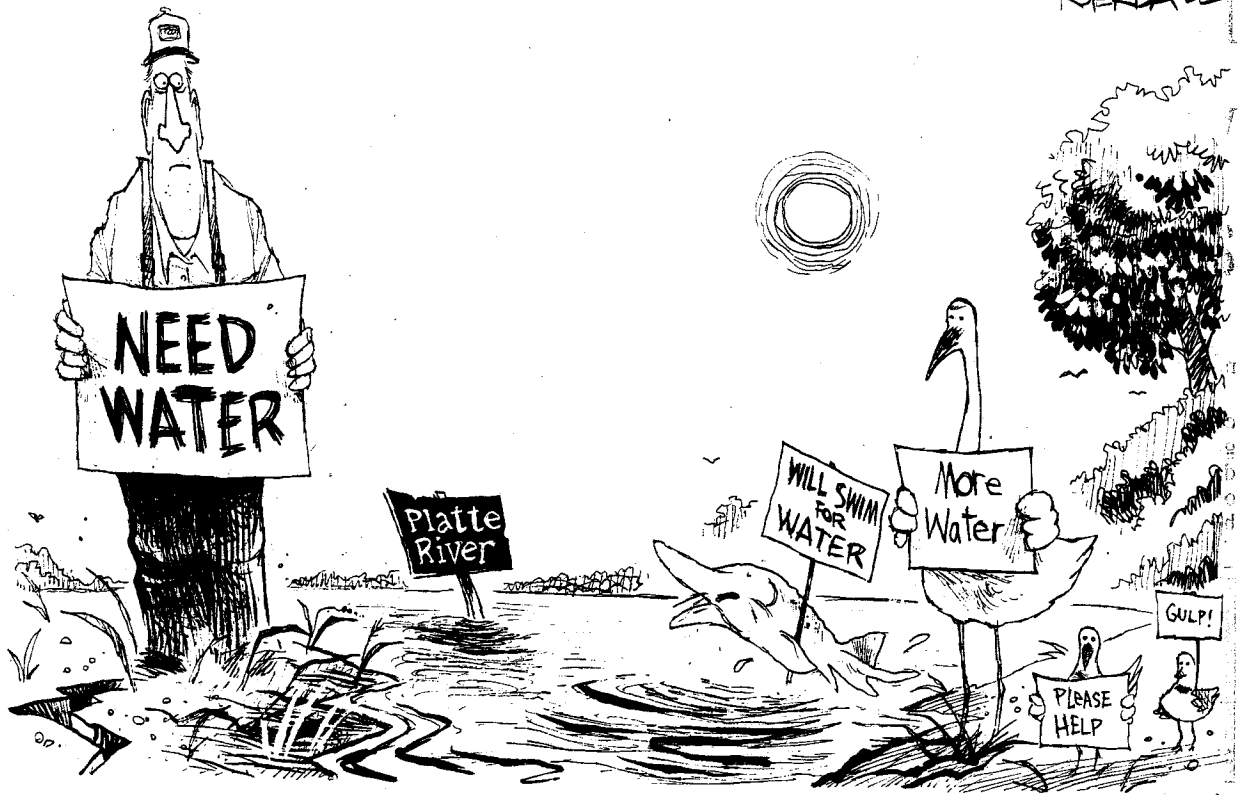
The report goes into similar detail on the least tern, the piping plover and the pallid sturgeon. The birds are disappearing, the report suggested, due to "harassment caused by human activities . . . and losses of suitable habitat. . . ." Some of the restoration work that has been done, such as construction of sand pits, is suitable but inadequate.

The report stressed the need to update the science on the river. For instance, it noted that cranes had abandoned some of the designated critical habitat and begun using land nearby. That keeps unnecessary restrictions on the owner of the abandoned land and leaves the cranes on alternative areas vulnerable.

The report recommends more research, more data collection, more information and more updating. And, significant to Nebraskans as they struggle with laws and policies to equitably manage the integration of surface- and groundwater policy, "the connections between surface water and groundwater are not well accounted for in research or decision-making."

The report resoundingly upholds the importance of the Platte River in protecting endangered and threatened species and urges a wider view of the goals of environmental preservation. We second both motions.

OMAHA WORLD-HERALD
KIERBA



W-H
5-2-04

Getting into the field

One of the bright spots in the bloated 2002 federal farm bill was a new Conservation Security Program. Instead of poorly managed, ineffective programs that applied penalties to poor conservation practices, the Conservation Security Program instead would offer incentives to farmers to implement environmentally friendly practices.

Another farm season is getting under way, however, while the U.S. Department of Agriculture continues to drag out implementation of this well-conceived program.

It was intended by Congress to have been running by February 2003. But the USDA is still working on the administrative outline.

Farm interests lobbied hard to obtain a \$41 million appropriation for the program this year in difficult budget times. Unless some arrangement is made to launch the program

**Conservation
funds achieve
no good
if they're left
on the table.**

before October, however, when the next fiscal year starts, that money will be left on the table.

The Center for Rural Affairs, a Nebraska-based rural advocacy group, has suggested that the USDA use the \$41 million to implement a pilot program this year, administered through the states. That would give the USDA time to continue drafting rules for the permanent Conservation Security Program that more closely match what will best serve farm and conservation needs.

The pilot-program alternative suggested by the Center for Rural Affairs has been used in other cases, such as the Grasslands Reserve Program. It strikes us as a sensible method for making a start on the new conservation program.

Midlands leaders should join the call to get this program rolling.

State's list of polluted lakes, streams grows

5-4-04

By NANCY GAARDER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Nebraska's task of cleaning up polluted lakes and streams just got a lot harder.

The number of lakes and stretches of streams needing work has grown by 50 percent because of a more comprehensive method for figuring out which are contaminated.

The state now has 146 "impaired" bodies of water in need of regulation, up from the 97 listed two years ago. The list became final late last week when it was approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"This shows we've got some problems," said Pat O'Brien, water quality specialist for the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality.

The list has grown, O'Brien said, not because water quality



ON OMAHA.COM

Read the complete report

is getting worse in Nebraska, but because the state has changed the way it assesses data.

The list ranges from little Pebble Creek to the wide Missouri River and includes just about everything in between, including stretches of the Platte, Loup, Elkhorn, Dismal and Niobrara River systems. (The same river can show up more than once based on results from different monitoring points.)

* Pathogens are the most common pollutants present in Nebraska waters, O'Brien said.

Pathogens are bacteria and viruses that make people ill, and

the state detects them by monitoring for E. coli and fecal coliform.

Thus, an E. coli listing for the Republican River doesn't mean that E. coli is a health threat, but that there is an increased likelihood that other health risks exist for swimmers.

While some rivers and lakes are listed because of the health risk to swimmers and boaters, others are listed because of the threat to fish and water plants. Selenium, a metal, PCBs and Dieldrin, a banned insecticide, appear in Nebraska water and harm its aquatic life.

Mercury shows up more than 15 times on the state's list. This is the first year that it is included.

The list is compiled every two years. There are three main reasons it is jumping by so much this year, O'Brien said.

First, the state is collecting more data so it has a better idea of what is going on. Second, the state now is including results from its analysis of fish tissue. Third, nutrients in lakes and reservoirs are being considered.

Being listed as an impaired body of water has "serious ramifications," O'Brien said.

That's because the state now must try to reduce the pollution by setting target levels. That, in turn, means people and businesses polluting the water eventually will have to change their practices.

This list shouldn't be considered the definitive list of troubled waters in Nebraska.

The state has identified 1,556 stream segments and 520 lakes within its borders, and for most of those, O'Brien said, data haven't been collected.



Arbor day

Planted
5-6-04

Fourth graders at Tekamah and Herman Elementary observed Arbor Day, Nebraska's holiday, by planting trees at the football field. Youngsters planted two amur maples and two blaze maples under the guidance of Tekamah Tree Board members and school personnel. The trees were provided by Papio Missouri River Natural Resources District and Siffring Landscaping.

Foes of well field get another shot to block project

■ MUD wants permission to pump water out of a Saunders County aquifer.

5-10-04
BY JOHN FERAK

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

WAHOO, Neb. — Foes of a proposed well field near Yutan could learn tonight if their arguments will throw up another red light.

Or, the Lower Platte North Natural Resources District Board could find their arguments baseless and give the Metropolitan Utilities District a green light to proceed with its controversial project.

As many as 100 people could turn out to express their views on the project. At the center of the debate is the wells' impact on the aquifer in Saunders County.

Opponents worry that the wells could lead to greater contamination of the aquifer. MUD maintains that the aquifer is safe and the project is needed to provide water to developments west of Omaha.

MUD has waited several years to construct 40 wells, most of which will go on 1,100 acres of farmland in Saunders County. The utility has received the necessary state and federal permits to proceed. It has permission to pump up to 104 million gallons of water a day, with an average of 52 million gallons a day.

NRD General Manager John Miyoshi said he expects the 19-member board to make a decision tonight. The board's approval of MUD's request is seen as one of the project's last hurdles.

Ashland officials want the NRD to delay a vote until a study examines the impact of Ashland, MUD and Lincoln sharing the aquifer in Saunders County for municipal water.

"Nobody has ever studied that," said Wes Blecke, Ashland's city administrator.

The Saunders County Board also has concerns about the

Meeting change

The site of the Lower Platte North Natural Resource District's 7 p.m. meeting today has been moved to the Saunders County Fairgrounds on East First Street in Wahoo to accommodate a large turnout.

wells. Chairman Ken Kuncel said the board hopes the NRD can stop the project from moving ahead.

Nonetheless, after several months of delays, the Saunders County Board voted last week to grant MUD a flood plain construction permit. MUD maintains it will build at least 3 feet above the 100-year flood level for the Yutan region.

"I would like for everyone to understand that the motion certifies that the wells are being built above the flood plain, and that is all it does," Kuncel said. "This vote in no way means Saunders County supports this project."

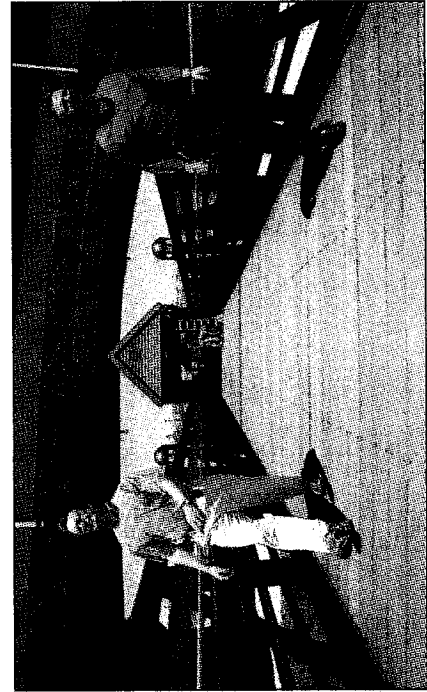
Saunders County hopes a study will be done to determine the effect of contamination near the former Mead ordnance plant on the proposed wells.

The contamination is slowly moving southeast to south. The MUD well field is due east. Opponents worry that pumping will pull the contamination across clean parts of the aquifer.

MUD has maintained its project will not harm any water tables or cause the contamination near Mead to spread to water systems in neighboring Douglas County.

MUD attorney Dan Crouchley said the project has undergone enough studies and is ready to move ahead.

"We're scheduled to be online with Platte West (project) ... for the summer of 2008."



JEFF BEIERMANN/THE WORLD-HERALD
Mike Sullivan, left, and Dirk Frey on the bridge connecting Heartland of America Park to Lewis & Clark Landing.

Oh, the view from the new bridges

5-6-04

By C. DAVID KOTOK
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Mary Ann Beck's lunchtime power walks are suddenly more breathtaking, and it's not because of the flowering trees or a stepped-up pace.

"It's a beautiful view along the river," Beck said of what she sees from a new bridge joining Heartland of America Park and Lewis & Clark Landing.

For downtown workers trying

to burn off calories during the lunch hour, two small pedestrian bridges have further opened Omaha's expanding waterfront.

The Heartland bridge officially opens Friday.

But the downtown walking crowd already has begun using it, along with the Martin Luther King Jr. pedestrian bridge linking the new Omaha Arena to Lewis & Clark Landing.

The bridges allow walkers to avoid traffic from Gene Leahy

Mall under 10th Street to Heartland of America Park, over to Lewis & Clark Landing, on to the arena plaza before stopping at the intersection of 10th Street and Capitol Avenue.

"They make for a nice lunchtime walk," said Beck, who spends her hour break from her job at First National Bank on the move.

The \$1.4 million Heartland bridge and the \$3 million King See *Bridges: Page 2*

Bridges: Two spans give workers a place to walk those calories away

Continued from Page 1
bridge help form a 1½- to two-mile loop from downtown offices.

"It's nice to get something for our tax dollars," said Lynn Andrews as he kept up with two other Union Pacific workers.

Both bridges provide safe routes over railroad tracks and streets.

"Not that we don't like railroad tracks," said Steve Loyd, another U.P. worker.

Without the newest pedestrian bridge, the 31-acre Heartland of America Park, owned by the Douglas County, would have remained detached from the city-owned 22-acre Lewis & Clark Landing.

Kent Holm, who is in charge of Douglas County parks, said the wood and metal bridge will make Heartland more of a destination. From September until April, Holm said, Heartland can be "a desolate place."

People had to make their own path away from the river, across streets and tracks to get from one park to the other. The bridge not

only makes the walk safer, it also provides an open view of the bend in the Missouri River.

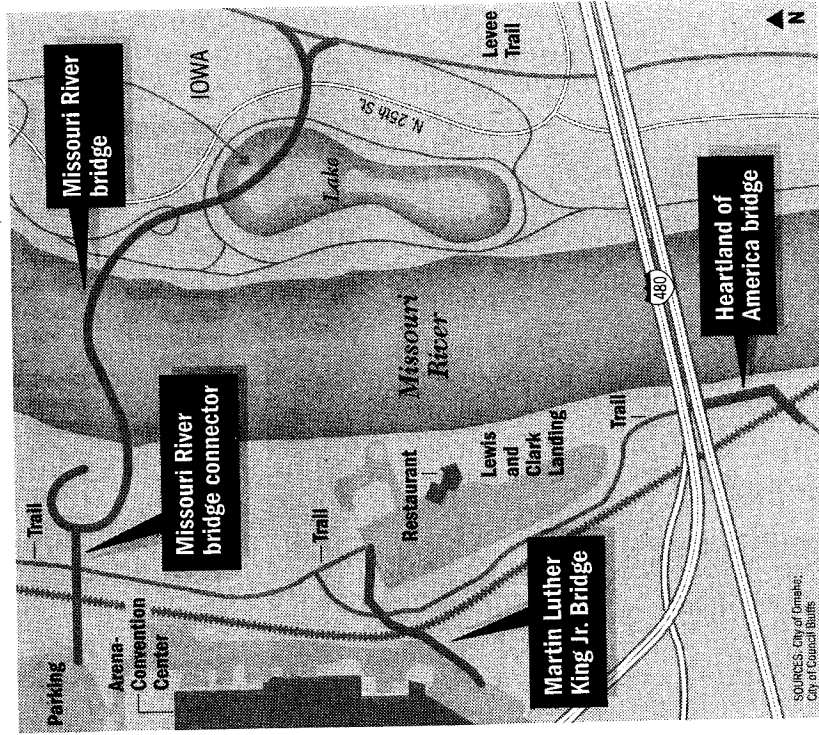
The canopies over parts of the bridge provide protection from debris coming off Interstate 480.

The Martin Luther King Jr. bridge, which was named by the City Council, is as modern as the Heartland bridge is rustic. The zinc-coated steel expanse, dotted with red umbrellas, recently was recognized by the American Galvanizers Association for its "clean appearance."

The King bridge leads to and from the plaza at the upper entrance to the arena. From there, walkers can pause to take in the full vista of the new riverfront development.

Beck approves but isn't totally satisfied: "I'm looking forward to the bridge over to Iowa."

That pedestrian bridge, planned to cross the Missouri north of Lewis & Clark Landing, was put on hold after construction bids came in \$20 million higher than the \$23 million estimated cost.



SOURCES: City of Omaha; City of Council Bluffs

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