

# MEMORANDUM

TO THE BOARD:

SUBJECT: General's Manager Report

DATE: May 6, 2005

FROM: Steve Oltmans, General Manager

---

---

A. **INFORMATION/EDUCATION REPORT**: A copy of the I&E Report detailing Information and Education activities for the month of April, 2005, is attached for your review.

B. **MISCELLANEOUS/PERSONNEL ITEMS**:

1. Thank You's and Miscellaneous Letters:

- a. Attached is a letter from Melanie Siedschlag, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher at Mockingbird Elementary School. The letter thanks **Christine Jacobsen**, Education/Volunteer Coordinator, and the District for helping her class with a personal newspaper project.

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, 2005. 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 18, 2005. I would ask each Director to review this listing. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

E. **DRAFT SUPPLEMENTAL WATERSHED PLAN/ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR REHAB OF PAPIO CREEK WATERSHED STRUCTURES S-27, 31, AND 32**: The NRCS plans on mailing the draft Supplemental Watershed Plan/Environmental Assessment for rehab of Papio Creek Watershed Structures S-27, 31 and 32 to Directors on about May 27th. I hope that Directors have the opportunity to review this material. If you have any questions regarding the draft, please feel free to contact me. The Draft Plan and Supplemental Watershed Agreement No. 7 will be considered at the June 7 PPO Subcommittee meeting.

F. **NEWS CLIPS**:

- April 13, 2005, Omaha World Herald Editorial – Groundwater issue must shift its focus

- April 13, 2005, Omaha World Herald Article – County Board gives go-ahead to new trail. Elkhorn, Waterloo, Valley and the Papio-Missouri River NRD already have approved the trail.
- April 18, 2005, Omaha World Herald Article – Keystone bridge will move to another trail
- April 21, 2005, Lincoln Journal Star Article – State budget plan includes a few little ‘extras.’ And there’s another \$22 million that isn’t spoken for ... yet.
- April 23, 2005, Lincoln Journal Star Article – Irrigators avoid mandatory reports of water use. Cooler weather and rains kept the Upper Big Blue levels from dropping too far.
- April 24, 2005, Omaha World Herald Article – Sun stars at rainless Omaha Earth Day
- April 25, 2005, Omaha World Herald Article – 3 state counties listed among best rural places to live
- April 26, 2005, Omaha World Herald Article – More federal funds flow for wetlands restoration. People are now recognizing the value of wetlands.
- April 27, 2005, Washington County Enterprise Letter to the Editor – The NRD at its finest, written by Wayne Dressen
- May 3, 2005, Omaha World Herald Article – Water conservation contracts are signed
- May 3, 2005, Omaha World Herald Photos – Field Day Reels in Kids – WaterWorks 2005
- May 3, 2005, Omaha World Herald Article – Joint landfill idea draws opposition. Some Cass County residents don’t want Sarpy County refuse coming their way.
- May 3, 2005, Omaha World Herald Article – Corps sets releases from Missouri dams. An additional 500,000 acre-feet of water will be held in three big reservoirs.
- May 3, 2005, Burt County Plaindealer Picture – Arbor Day

## April 2005

### Information & Education Report

#### Information

- Continued work on story and photos for pages within Omaha Chamber book
- Continued work on Spring 05 SPECTUM.
- Co-sponsored Earth Day Omaha Celebration at Elmwood Park
- Continued work on Trails Day ads on Ch. 3 KMTV
- Began work on update of BttR audio/visual program
- Continued work on NRD Speakers Bureau flier
- Developed I&E Budget recommendations.
- Gave presentation to State Government Contest students at Millard South

#### Education

- Met with Keep Omaha Beautiful to plan Fall Watershed Festival
- Continued planning changes to NRC traveling and permanent displays
- Met with Prairie Construction and Omaha Raptor Team for final site inspection and planning for Flight Cages at NRC
- Continued planning for Water Works 2005
- Arranged for Millard South Environmental Biology Class service project
- Arranged for Carleen Pruess and Martin Willet to speak on Geocaching at April Board Meeting
- Presented Bird Banding/Nature Hikes to Prairie Wind 1<sup>st</sup> graders
- Presented Nature Hike/Bird Nests to Karen Western Kindergarteners
- Trained 15 Creighton students in Project Learning Tree, Project WILD, Project WET, and Leopold Education Project
- Presented Senses Nature Hike to Benson West Kindergarteners
- Held Tree pick-up for teachers (gave out 8,000 trees)
- Planted 6 maple trees at Millard South High School with Environmental Biology Class
- Arranged for Omaha Raptor Team and Wildlife Encounters to present to all 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders at Benson West Elementary
- Presented Nature Hikes to all Benson West Elementary 1<sup>st</sup> graders
- Scheduled and Managed 85 volunteer hours
- Arranged for Papio-Missouri River NRD to sponsor Bellevue East's team at State Envirothon
- Arranged for Papio-Missouri River NRD to sponsor Lewis & Clark insert in Omaha World Herald's Newspaper In the Classroom
- Sent out press releases on tree give away, Wildlife programs at Benson West, and Water Works
- Sent out mini-grant checks, and teacher scholarship checks
- Assisted with planning for Omaha Earth Day 2005
- Presented to Boy Scout Pack Meeting on Water Quality and Walnut Creek

April 12, 2005

To: Christine Jacobsen  
Re: Melanie Siedschlag

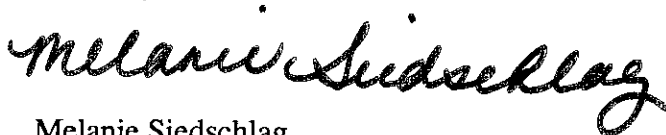
Hello, Papio-Missouri River National Resource District!

How do I begin to express my gratitude to your company for providing my students with the opportunity to read, explore, and keep their personal newspapers? My students couldn't wait for Wednesdays just because they knew that they were going to be able to have the hands on connection with their very own newspaper.

As a fifth grade class, my students wrote letters to you for your marvelous paper for being a wonderful sponsor. We discussed the idea of sponsors and how other companies support education. They also wanted to thank you for the pencils and seeds. A few of my students are planning to plant those seeds at our building during environmental club!

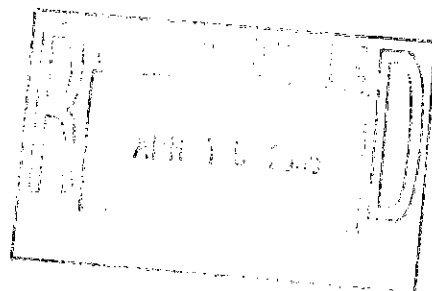
Again, Thank you for supporting reading of all materials in the elementary schools. My students love to find things that relate to their lives and they love getting their hands on something other than a novel. I hope to continue using the Omaha World-Herald as a resource in my classroom!

Sincerely,



Melanie Siedschlag  
5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher

Mockingbird Elementary 5100 S. 93<sup>rd</sup> St. Omaha, NE 68127





Updated: April 18, 2005

**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. (96<sup>th</sup> St.) (W)
  - Purchase Agreements, deeds (90<sup>th</sup> to Giles) (P)
  - ★ Interlocal Agreement with Sarpy County and Bellino (N)
  - ★ Dittus ROW Condemnation (N)
- **Western Sarpy Dike** (Cleveland):
  - Closing with Bundy's (potentially modify ROW/offer) (F)
  - Amended drainage ditch easements on Hickey (First National Property) (P)
  - Cabin ROW Documents, closing for Vosler & Grothe (W)
  - Hansen ROW Condemnation (W)
- **Floodway Purchase Program** (Woodward):
  - Floodway Property Purchase Agreements as needed (F)
- **Trail Projects** (Bowen):
  - Western Douglas County Trail – Ehrhart Griffin professional services contract (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 (P)

- **USDA P.L. 566 Projects, Silver Creek and Pigeon/Jones Watershed** (Puls/Cleveland):
  - Pigeon/Jones Creek Site Easements – as needed (P)
  - 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** (Woodward/Petermann):
  - Dam Site 19 agreement (F)
  - DS 13 Closing with Lyman-Richey Corp (P)
  - ★ DS 13 Agreement with Elkhorn and Omaha (W)
  - ★ DS 13 Easement with Metro Community College (W)
  - ★ Shadow Lakes Agreement with SIDs (N)
  
- **Papio Creek Watershed Partnership (Stormwater)** (Woodward):
  
- **Rural Water Projects:** (Sklenar)
  
- **Elkhorn River Public Access Sites** (Sklenar):
  
- **Other:**

# Groundwater issue must shift its focus

BY AL HEUTON

W - H 4 - 13 - 05

*The writer, of Gering, Neb., is executive director of the Panhandle Area Development District and economic development representative on the North Platte Natural Resources District stakeholders group.*

The headline on a March 28 editorial, "New law no answer," hit the nail on the head if it were turned and applied to Nebraska's new water law.

Nebraska's new law (approved last year as Legislative Bill 962) contains no answers, although several water conservation alternatives are mentioned.

These options, which are being discussed and implemented by natural resources districts, include education, monitoring, water allocation restrictions, payments to farmers not to irrigate and exacting baselines and allocations on cities.

Perhaps it is time the water discussion look beyond attempting to plug holes in the groundwater sieve. To do that, we must face up to a few simple facts:

■ **Our groundwater resource cannot support our agricultural economy as it exists today.** The Upper Republican NRD has been implementing groundwater conservation efforts much longer than most NRDs.

At a recent meeting, the Upper Republican NRD stated that irrigators receive a 14.5-inch allocation of water. It also was stated that to reach a sustainable level of groundwater use, this allocation would need to drop to 8 inches. It appears we are managing the decline of a precious public resource and have not yet found a solution to the problem.

■ **Increased groundwater use by cities and industry is not the cause of the problem.** Cities and industry use roughly 4 percent of the pumped groundwater each year. Irrigation agriculture uses about 96 percent of the pumped groundwater.

To further illustrate how little cities have impacted the groundwater situation, consider the change that has occurred in groundwater use during the last three decades.

From 1970 to 2000, the annual water use by cities in the 11-county Panhandle region increased by only an estimated 193 million gallons. By comparison, the amount of water used to irrigate the land associated with new 50-plus-gallons-per-minute irrigation wells in the Panhandle region increased by an estimated 164 billion gallons per year (applying a 1 acre-foot allocation).

The imbalance in water use at the expense of other water users has not been created by the cities. Furthermore, completely eliminating the cities would do little more than dent the water issue.

■ **All water users are not be-**

**ing treated equally in the proposed solutions.** Proposed solutions, such as establishing baselines for water use by cities and then suggesting growth allocations, may be part of a larger solution.

However, these same rules do not apply to rural residents. Rural residents have no baselines, no restrictions and no meters, and this discussion is off the table. Why?

If the State Water Policy Task Force, the NRDs or both are viewed as a "court of first resort," should not their structure provide a mechanism that entitles the cities to a jury of their peers?

■ **Agriculture is and always will be an important part of our economy. But it is not producing a level of job creation that will sustain our population base.** From 1970 to 2000, net non-farm employment in our region increased by 14,984 jobs. Net farm employment decreased by 1,918 jobs.

In 2002, the market value of all agricultural products sold in our region was \$896 million. The 2002 revenue for Cabela's was listed by the Securities and Exchange Commission at \$1.2 billion, nearly half again as much as the region's total agricultural sales.

New economic alternatives, both agricultural and nonagricultural, are desperately needed in rural Nebraska. Perhaps it is time we dispense with the urban-rural issue and put commerce and industry on equal footing with agriculture in Nebraska water law.

■ **We need real solutions, not corks.** It seems clear that our agricultural economy must evolve. Yet research funding at our agricultural research stations is being cut, and positions are being eliminated.

At the same time, solutions, such as spending \$150 million to pay farmers not to irrigate, are being proposed. The focus should be on creating a new rural economy capable of generating growth.

The editorial was correct in stating that the water issue should not become an urban-rural battle. The state water issue is not urban or rural but, rather, urban and rural.

It is incumbent upon all of us to recognize that our groundwater is a precious "public" commodity, that its use, misuse or both should not be taken lightly and that our future (both rural and urban) depends upon our ability to utilize groundwater in a manner that is sustainable from both a resource and economic perspective.



# County Board gives go-ahead to new trail

4-13-05

By KRISTIN ZAGURSKI  
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Tie your shoes and pump up your tires.

Omaha and Fremont will be connected by 20 miles of hiking-biking trails under an agreement approved Tuesday by the Douglas County Board.

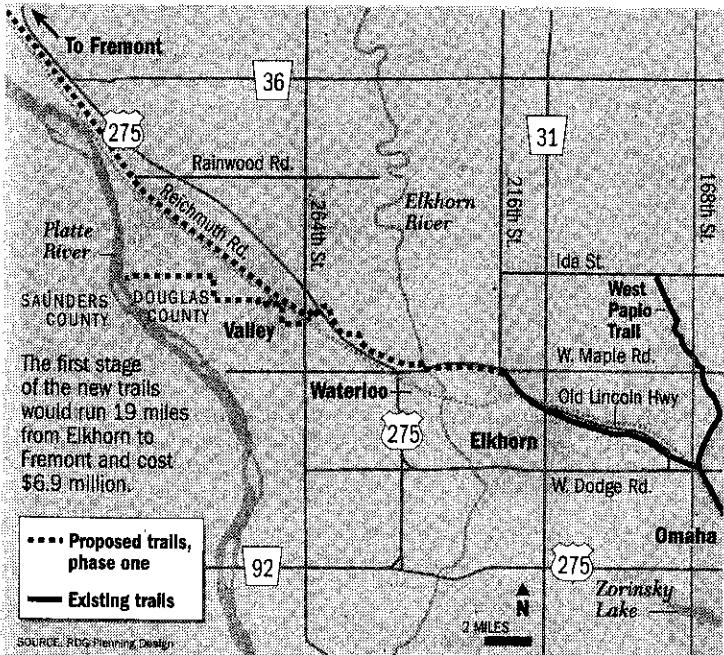
Two weeks ago, the board fell one vote short of agreeing to chip in \$550,000 for the trail from property tax revenues.

Since then, the county decided to change the funding source to keno and road funds.

That plan received the endorsement Tuesday of five

County Board members, including Mike Boyle, who opposed the original plan, and Chip Maxwell, who initially abstained. Two of the seven board members were absent.

County Board Chairman Kyle Hutchings, who was out of town Tuesday, said Monday that the  
*See Trail: Page 2*



## Trail: Cities will hook up

Continued from Page 1  
compromise still wasn't his preference.

He said he preferred that the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, with which the county is splitting a portion of the cost, pay more than half the share because it has a larger tax base.

Still, he said, "it's probably a pretty good solution."

County Board member Kathleen McCallister, who voted against the plan last time, also was absent Tuesday.

County Engineer Tom Doyle said Monday that the county decided to make the trails a priority for county road funds.

The keno money hadn't been reserved for anything, said Steve Walker, the county's fis-

**Elkhorn, Waterloo, Valley and the Papio-Missouri River NRD already have approved the trail.**

cal administrator.

Elkhorn, Waterloo, Valley and the NRD already have approved the trail, which will cost about \$6.9 million. Federal money will cover \$5.5 million. The county won't have to pay maintenance costs.

Construction is scheduled to start next spring and is expected to take six years.

# Keystone bridge will move to another trail

By NANCY GAARDER

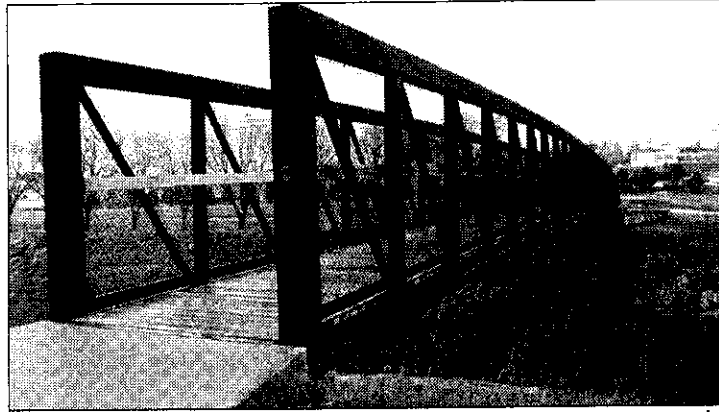
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

A popular midtown hiking and biking trail is expected to give up one of its bridges so that a similar trail can be completed around Standing Bear Lake.

The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District last week gave preliminary approval to donating one of the three Keystone Trail bridges across the Little Papio Creek between the College of St. Mary and Ak-Sar-Ben.

The bridge is being donated to the City of Omaha for a trail at Standing Bear Lake. Use of the Keystone won't be affected because two other bridges are at the same site.

The Standing Bear trail is one of several recreation projects approved by the NRD. Thursday's vote signals the NRD's willingness to take on the projects. Final approval requires setting aside



RUDY SMITH/THE WORLD-HERALD

**One of three Keystone Trail bridges across the Little Papio Creek between the College of St. Mary and Ak-Sar-Ben is being donated.**

money during this summer's budgeting.

The other projects include:

- Picnic shelters in Raymond Park at South Sioux City and the Papio Bay Ball Field Complex in Papillion.

- Improved parking and access to Hastings Banner Park in Bellevue.

- A new pedestrian bridge in Greenbrier Park in Elkhorn.

- City trails in Springfield, Arlington and Winnebago.

- Extending the Field Club Trail in Omaha to Dodge Street via Turner Boulevard.

If all goes according to schedule, the Turner Boulevard and Standing Bear trails would be completed next year.

In a separate decision, the board also approved studying the cost of building a horse trail alongside a pedestrian trail between Springfield and the Platte River.

More than 400 people signed a petition supporting the use of horses along the existing trail, something the NRD does not allow, for safety and maintenance reasons.

Vicki Fraser of Springfield, who organized the petition drive, told the NRD that her group would work with the district to make the horse trail possible.

As the metro area expands, she said, it is becoming more difficult to find safe areas to ride.

## State budget plan includes a few little 'extras'

And there's another \$22 million that isn't spoken for ... yet.

BY NANCY HICKS  
Lincoln Journal Star

After four years of skimping and cutting and saying no to new ideas, the Legislature's Appropriations Committee this year had enough money to give a few little extras.

The committee is putting the finishing touches on a \$6.1 billion, two-year budget proposal that will go to the full Legislature late next week.

Included in that plan is an extra \$1.2 million to pay for more addiction treatment programs, intended to keep nonviolent offenders out of prison.

The state's seven community health centers, which serve the poor and uninsured, will get more money, about \$875,000 a year for



the group. There's money for five new state troopers, but not the 10 sought by the governor.

The Historical Society will get money for space-saving equipment. The Game and Parks Department will be able to hire two more conservation off-

cers. The attorney general will get money to raise the salaries of attorneys on his staff.

Day-care providers who care for the children of low-income working parents will get their first rate raise in four years.

The Legislature will provide \$7.5 million to fund water conservation programs, including paying farmers not to irrigate during the first year. But the committee expects the Department of Natural Resources to develop a fee system

to pay for the programs beyond that.

And for the first time in several years, the committee left some money on the table — about \$22 million over the two years — that can be used by the Legislature for programs not included in the committee budget plan.

That \$22 million is not nearly enough to pay for the kind of tax breaks the business community would like to see, committee Chairman Don Pederson acknowledged.

"But this (budget plan) is what the group determined to be the best use of the money," Pederson said.

The plan provides increases to some of the state programs that have been underfunded for a long time, Pederson said.

The committee budget plan includes an average 6.9 percent growth in spending over each of the two years and requires no tax rate increases. It calls for paying off the

See BUDGET, Page 3B

## Budget

Continued from Page 1B

\$145.8 million low-level radioactive waste facility law suit settlement in one lump sum with money from the more than \$283 million in surplus the state has accumulated over the past two years as economic conditions improved.

And it leaves the rest of the surplus, about \$200 million, in the cash reserve fund, a likely target for the money needed to pay for business tax incentive programs.

The lion's share of the increase will go to the three highest-cost areas: state aid to schools, Medicaid and the University of Nebraska. In fact, the big three will eat up more

than half the \$216 million increase slated for fiscal year 2005-06, the first year of the biennium.

The committee plan is about \$11.3 million higher than the governor's proposal for the two years.

About 75 percent of the difference is in three areas, according to fiscal staff analysis. The committee plan provides more money for the university, and state college salary increases and health insurance, gives 2 percent and 3 percent rate increases each year to health care providers that serve Medicaid clients and others, and provides more money for special education.

This year's budget work has been easier than in previous years, when senators had to cut some programs, raise some tax rates and face unhap-

py state agency directors and their supporters at budget hearings, acknowledged Lincoln Sen. Chris Beutler.

In fact, if it weren't for the business community's desire to have additional tax incentives, "the road to recovery would be fairly smooth," said Beutler, a veteran member of the committee.

And he warned against using the cash reserve fund for those tax incentives. "That is one-time money, income that may not be sustained in the future. But the tax incentives are ongoing," he said.

It would be better to "wait and see" what happens with tax revenues, he said.

Reach Nancy Hicks at 473-7250 or nhicks@journalstar.com.

## Budget plan

Size: \$6.1 billion for two years.

Growth: Average 6.9 percent growth each year.

Big Spenders: Three programs will consume more than half the spending growth: state aid to schools, Medicaid, the University of Nebraska system.

What's next: The full Legislature will begin debating the budget plan in early May. Gov. Dave Heineman will have the opportunity to veto specific spending items when it reaches his desk, likely in late May.

# Irrigators avoid mandatory reporting of water use

## Cooler weather and rains kept the Upper Big Blue levels from dropping too far.

BY ART HOVEY  
Lincoln Journal Star

Several thousand irrigating farmers in Southeast Nebraska could breathe a collective sigh of relief Friday.

Spring groundwater readings collected from some 500 test wells show that water levels did not drop enough in the past year to trigger mandatory reporting of water use in the Upper Big Blue Natural Re-

sources District in 2005. The trigger for almost 12,000 wells and about 1 million irrigated acres was 1.14 feet. The average rate of decline in the area, which includes York County and parts of eight surrounding counties, was 0.79 feet.

Rod DeBuhr, based in York as the NRD's water department manager, had been among those holding his breath.

"I told the board, when they started asking last fall and last winter, that it was going to be too close to call," DeBuhr said Friday.

Because of cooler weather and timely rains during the 2004 irrigation season, "I had a feeling that we would be teetering right around that (1.14) number," he added.

The Upper Big Blue has never imposed limits on how much water irrigators could pump. But the board upgraded its allocation rules last year as drought and increasing numbers of wells put more demands on groundwater resources. Similar concerns at the state level led to the passage of LB962 last year. That gave the state Department of Natural Resources the authority to declare portions of about a dozen river basins off-limits to any well drilling that would add to either agricultural or municipal demand.

John Turnbull, the Upper Big Blue's general manager, has been warning NRD residents that concerns about northern portions of the district along the Platte River could prompt a state declaration meant to protect surface water users from the depleting effects of nearby groundwater pumping.

Ann Bleed, deputy director of Natural Resources, said Friday's news from the Upper Big Blue would not necessarily affect the decisions Patterson must make after the 2005 irrigation season.

Bleed said the criteria for declarations are now under committee

review in Lincoln.

"Certainly, levels coming in under the reporting trigger is a good thing," she said of the Upper Big Blue. However "the trigger of the NRD and their levels explicitly are not one of the criteria the committee is looking at."

When it comes to groundwater levels and moratoriums, Bleed said, "the real key is to what extent an area is hydrologically connected to a river of concern." **4/23/05 1:58 PM**

Reach Art Hovey at (402) 523-4949 or [ahovey@alltel.net](mailto:ahovey@alltel.net)

# Sun stars at rainless Omaha Earth Day

By MARION RHODES  
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Mother Nature gave Omaha a surprise Earth Day present Saturday: nice weather.

Organizers of Earth Day Omaha 2005 happily forgave her for the chilly wind gusts. Compared with last year—or the year before, or the year before that—Saturday was just perfect.

Three years in a row, the event, which celebrates the worldwide April 22 observance of Earth Day, has been rained out. After a windy, wet and cold festival in 2002, organizers moved the event to May in hopes

of sunnier, drier weather. "We kept pushing it back," said organizer Cammy Watkins of the Omaha chapter of the Sierra Club. "It rained anyway."

Resigning to the whims of the weather, organizers decided to hold the event on time this year. And the sun smiled.

The weather drew bikers, kite flyers, dog walkers and other outdoor buffs to the event site at Elmwood Park. About 300 people had visited within the first hour. Organizers expected about 2,000 visitors by the time the event wrapped up at 6 p.m.

"It's just a beautiful day out," said Shannon Germandt, who was

Isabel Cohen of Omaha said events such as Earth Day are crucial to raise awareness about the need to protect nature.

"I'm just devastated what's happened to the environment," she said.

Together with her husband, Carl, she used the day to take their dogs—Hannah, a Shih Tzu-poodle mix; Sophie, a bichon frise; and Maggie, a Rottweiler—for a walk in the park.

"It's a beautiful day for Earth Day, because the trees are just springing, and it's rejuvenating," Isabel Cohen said. "Maybe there's still some hope for the world."

picnicking in the park while watching local ska-rockers Anchoondo on the event stage.

Every year, the Omaha mother takes her kids, 4-year-old Jack and 6-year-old Hannah, to the Earth Day festivities. She said she comes for the live music, the food and "to teach my children more about Mother Earth."

The event featured vendors and exhibits with environmental connections, as well as live music, activities such as yoga and crafts for kids and a speaker and 2,000 free trees for adults.

The goal of the day is to educate and mobilize people to protect the environment.



RUDY SMITH/THE WORLD-HERALD  
Bill Seibert, Omaha Raptor Team president, introduces Harley the barred owl to admirers participating in Earth Day activities Saturday in Omaha's Elmwood Park. The team is a committee of the Audubon Society of Omaha that promotes birds of prey such as owls, hawks and falcons.

# Nebraska & the Region

## 3 state counties listed among best rural places to live

### THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Three Nebraska counties — Washington, Seward and Saunders — are listed among the top 100 "Best Places to Live in Rural America," according to Progressive Farmer magazine.

Washington was No. 49, Seward No. 65 and Saunders No. 68 in the publication's first ranking of the nation's rural counties.

"I never would have imagined we would have made the list out of the entire country," said Kent Wilcox, a member of the Washington County Board of Supervisors. "Washington County is an excellent place to live, a wonderful place to have a family and raise a family. So many things are going for it."

The magazine said it re-

searched 600 rural counties and rated them based on level of health care, education, climate, pollution index, crime index and taxes. Also considered were quality-of-life issues such as leisure and cultural pursuits and scenery.

Blair, the Washington County seat, is a 25-minute drive from Omaha.

"We've got big-city benefits, yet we're in more of a rural setting," Wilcox said. "There's just more of a small-town flavor out here."

Jack Odle, editor in chief of Progressive Farmer, said there is a trend of people choosing to live in the country rather than in urban areas.

Seward County Commissioner

Bill White said proximity to Lincoln and Interstate 80 weighs in his county's favor.

"People who move into a rural setting from an urban one don't want to be 500 miles away from the big malls and such," White said.

Wahoo Mayor Daryl Reitmajer said Saunders County has been doing all it can to make it an

attractive place to live.

A new library and aquatics center will be built this year, and talks of a new elementary school are in the works in Wahoo, he said. Also, a new drymill ethanol plant could open by early 2006, employing about 30 people.

"I find Saunders County an ideal place to live," Reitmajer said.

# More federal funds flow for wetlands restoration

4/26/05

BY NANCY GAARDER  
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

From the driver's seat of a bulldozer, Ernie Glup had a good view of the loss of habitat along the Missouri River.

A dirt contractor for 40 years, Glup made his living in part by converting farmsteads, fence rows and groves of trees to cropland as large farms gobbled up smaller ones.

Now, he is among the first to participate in a federal program launched last year in Nebraska to restore wetlands.

Since June, Glup and 34 other Nebraska landowners have been approved for federal aid as part of a long-term effort to restore 18,200 acres along the Missouri River in Nebraska.

And the chance for other Nebraska landowners to sign up just got better. The Agriculture Department has announced that another \$2 million has been freed up to spend on the Nebraska side of the river.

This latest round of funding brings to \$10 million the amount set aside for Nebraska. If Congress continues to fund the program as planned, the state could see another \$14 million in the next five years, said Pat McGrane of the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

"People are now recognizing the value of wetlands," McGrane said. "We learned from the floods of '93 and '94 that the river is going to do what it wants. Maybe we're better off not trying to fight it."

Wetlands reduce flooding, recharge aquifers, filter sediments and pollutants out of wa-

**"People are now recognizing the value of wetlands."**

*Pat McGrane of the Natural Resources Conservation Service*

ter, and provide habitat for wildlife.

Nebraska is among two states approved for the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program; Minnesota is the other. Iowa is applying.

The program complements an effort by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to boost habitat for endangered species along the Missouri River.

Now retired, Glup said he decided that the wetlands program was simply too good to pass up, and it gives him an opportunity to help out.

"I feel like I should pay something back," Glup said. "I've hunted and fished all my life."

The government is paying Glup about \$140,000 to allow conservation restrictions to be attached to the deed for 78½ acres he owns in Burt County. The government also is paying for the cost to restore the land, which includes a shallow 30-acre duck pond.

Glup will continue to pay taxes on the land, but he will no longer be able to lease it for farming. He will, however, be able to lease it for hunting, and possibly grazing. Because the restrictions are permanent, anyone who buys the land from Glup will have to abide by the

easeement.

McGrane said the ability to retain hunting rights — even lease them — is one of the things that makes the program attractive to landowners.

Applications for a share of the \$2 million are due by September. Because the paperwork and legal work take a couple of months, Steve Chick, state conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, said Nebraska landowners interested in this cycle of funding should begin the process now.

The government wants to build large swaths of habitat, McGrane said, so coordinated projects among neighboring landowners have a better chance of getting funded.

Glup said interest in the program is high among neighboring landowners.

"It's a wonderful program," he said. "It's not for everybody, but I'm surprised how many people are interested in it."

# 'The NRD at its finest'

To the editor,

All the average taxpayer has to do is go to the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District monthly board meeting to see how these elected NRD board members get caught walking the fine line between right and wrong. Lately, more wrong than right.

At the April NRD Board meeting, just a month after a taxpayer lawsuit was filed against the P-MRNRD for not following its own District Policy Manual on taking competitive bids, the P-MRNRD wants to change its District Policy Manual so they won't have to take competitive bids.

The proposed change in the District Policy Manual (a manual these board members have probably never even read) would make it "legal" to partner with private developers and "legal" to not have to take competitive bids for projects over \$20,000. It looks very suspicious that the NRD is changing its District Policy Manual right in the middle of a lawsuit. Shouldn't this send up a few red flags??

Don't get me wrong, the NRD does a lot of good things in helping preserve our natural resources. But what business does a Natural Resources District have in helping subsidize developers? The P-MRNRD and Dial Realty Corp. have "private-partnered" to implement a "flood control" dam site at 192nd and Dodge that provides "flood control" for 2-square miles of a 402-square mile area. Yes, that equates to providing less than one-half of 1 percent "flood control."

The P-MRNRD is spending \$6.2 million taxpayer dollars to build a "flood control" dam that provides hardly any flood control. Dial Realty will then pay the NRD \$1 million for letting them build the dam and develop the land around the lake, thus providing Dial with the opportunity to make a huge profit by selling lakefront property.

All this while contributing to the stormwater runoff problem that additional concrete and rooftops create.

Can anyone tell me what is REALLY going on here???????

Dial Realty could build the dam without the financial contribution of our tax dollars. But apparently our NRD feels the need to subsidize these developers, all at the expense of the taxpayer. I am not so sure that the NRD has the legal authority to be partnering with developers, anyway. LB552, drafted by Paul Peters, le-

gal counsel for the P-MRNRD (all at the request of the P-MRNRD general manager, Mr. Steve Oltmans) was written not only to allow this NRD to issue general obligation bonds, but also to make it legal for this NRD to partner with private developers on flood control projects. If partnering with private developers is legal, why was the NRD trying to get it passed through legislation?

Apparently it doesn't matter; they just partner with these developers anyway, with no regard for the law.

What we can do as concerned citizens is go to these meetings and show these 11 elected board members that we are concerned with the way they are spending our tax dollars. When you don't like what you see, get involved by electing board members who are willing to listen to their constituents rather than just blindly following an agenda-driven general manager. We need to remind these board members who they are elected to serve. (Hint—it is not the general manager)

Wayne Dreessen  
Kennard



## **Water conservation contracts are signed**

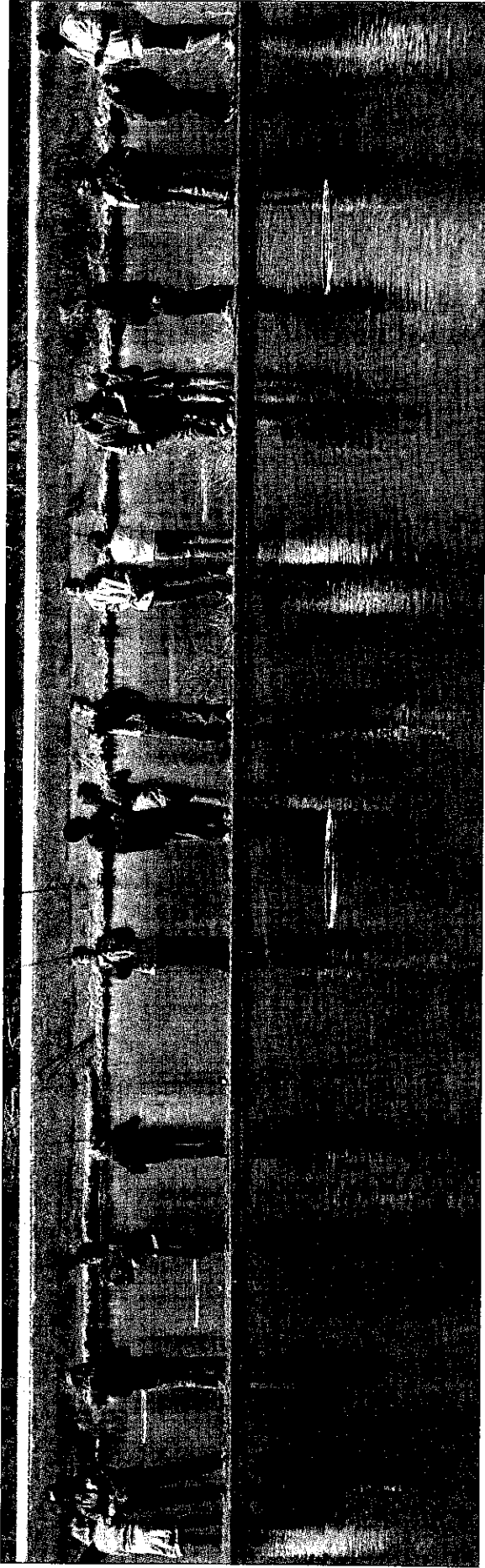
LINCOLN — The first contracts in two new programs that pay farmers not to irrigate cropland in central and western Nebraska were signed Tuesday by the director of the Nebraska Natural Resources Department.

Director Roger Patterson signed five contracts with Republican River basin farmers who voluntarily enrolled a total of about 10,000 acres in the Environmental Incentives Program, known as EQIP.

Patterson also signed eight contracts with farmers in the Republican basin to convert irrigated land to grass or similar habitat for 10 or 15 years in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, known as CREP.

—David Hendee

W-H  
5-3-05



# FIELD DAY REELS IN KIDS

About 1,350 fifth-graders from Douglas and Sarpy Counties took part Tuesday in Water Works 2005, an environmental field day at Schramm Park, near Gretna, Neb. Above, students from Fort Crook Elementary in Bellevue practice their casting skills. At left, Derrell Taylor, left, and Davon Stennis from Belvedere Elementary in Omaha release a water rocket.

Photos by  
Kent Sievers

W-H 5-3-05

