



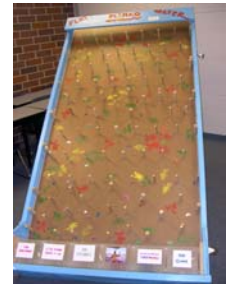
The Coordinator's Corner

Quarterly Report from the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance * Rodney L. Verhoeff, Coordinator
For the period of January through March 2007

Educational & Outreach Efforts

One of the primary responsibilities of the LPRCA is to help students and adults learn more about the Lower Platte River and gain an appreciation for its importance. We do this through a number of ways including classroom presentations, public meetings, newsletters, reports, special events such as the airboat tour and the Water Quality Open, public service announcements, videos, and most recently the first Lower Platte River Summit. Below are a few recent and upcoming educational & outreach activities:

- **LPSNRD Earth Wellness Festival (EWF)** - The LPSNRD puts on an annual festival for 3,000 5th graders in Lancaster County. Students participate in activities and games related to various natural resources issues. Each year, the LPRCA participates by hosting "Flatwater Plinko" where kids roll balls down the plinko board (similar to the one on "The Price is Right") and then answer various river-related questions to earn points. This event is held at Southeast Community College in Lincoln
- **LPNDRD Spring Sensation** - This educational event for 350 - 5th graders from Butler, Saunders, Dodge, Platte, and Colfax Counties is similar in format to the EWF above in that students engage in activities related to natural resources. At this event though, the location is outdoors at Czechland Lake near Prague. Activities range from fishing to tree planning to wildlife species.
- **UNL Classes** - In addition to two UNL Sociology classes - Environmental Sociology 446/846 & Sociology 415/815 that I presented to in January, I also presented to a UNL Honors Water Class on two occasions and am working with students on projects related to the Lower Platte River Corridor. UNL has a new program called "U-Cares" that provides students a stipend to work with entities in their fields in addressing a real world problem. We plan to work with a group of UNL student this summer on resource awareness project and another student on watershed assessment project.



Lower Platte River Ice Jam

Ice can create problems for people along the Platte River too as we saw Feb 21-23 of this year. A 2-mile long ice jam on the Platte River near Vencil's Island forced water to overtop the Clear Creek Levee in one area. Fortunately, it did not break through and eventually broke loose without the use of explosives. Some cabins on Vencil's Island did get inundated with flood waters and people had to evacuate. Luckily, no one was hurt. According to Marlin Petermann with the P-MRNRD, the Vencil's Island area is a recognized bottleneck for ice jams and the energy needed to push ice through often dissipates as the flow moves over the island area. Here are a few photos of the most recent ice jam (*courtesy of the P-MRNRD & Tim Bryson*):



Programs /Projects/Activities

Important Events Coming Up

WQ Open Golf Tourney. **Wednesday, Sept 5th, 2007** * Quarry Oaks Golf Course * 10:00 am presentation by UNL Professor Roch Gaussoin on turfgrass, water conservation, and water quality issues related to golf courses and lawns * 12:30 tee-off * Cost will be \$65/person including all fees and a burger/brat buffet. This year, I want to feature the "8 Reasons to Protect the Lower Platte River" by having one demo for each reason on various tees.

Airboat Tour. **Friday, July 20th, 2007** * 9:00 am start time * Touring the lower stretch from Hwy 50 to the confluence with the MO River. Besides several stops, we will take an extensive tour of Schilling WMA. Details will be posted on our website at www.lowerplatte.org.

Environmental Suitability Assessment (ESA) Project. This is the new name of the Environmental Carrying Capacity Study. As we began to scope out PHASE II of this project, we realized that "environmental carrying capacity" has a very specific meaning and did not reflect what we were really doing - - assessing environmentally constrained/sensitive areas. Thus, we renamed the study to better reflect that idea. The tasks and deliverable - a GIS and Reference Document - remain the same. We continue to work with the NE Innovation Zone Commission (NIZC) to develop a partnership to carry out this project, but are also continuing to move forward as we have not formalized this partnership nor identified additional funding to assist. Hopes are to fold our effort into the NIZC's effort to develop a regional economic development plan to ensure environmental issues are considered. We will also focus on the Fremont to Plattsmouth area for this phase and capture the upper "tail" in future phases.

Cumulative Impact Study (CIS). The CIS group met following the NARD Legislative Conference on Jan 24th at the Embassy Suites in Lincoln. Attendees reviewed progress to date and viewed maps comparing a river section near Fremont for 1993 and 1938. It was interesting, but not surprising to see how much development there has been over that time period. Several representatives of the CIS partner group followed up this meeting with another meeting in February at the COE's Omaha office. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss QA/QC issues and requesting assistance from CALMIT. Most recently, the CIS partner group met at the LPSNRD in Lincoln to review the draft workplan and a QA/QC plan. The group will be contacting CALMIT in the near future to solicit input on the scope of their services related to QA/QC and to request a bid for these services. The COE has contracted with UNO to help digitize and rectify the 1950's and 1970's aerial photos just recently received. We expect them to be complete by late summer. The next meeting of the partner group will be May 31, 2007 at the LPSNRD in Lincoln starting at 10 am.

Water Quality Monitoring Network. The program should be kicking off this month (April) with installation of two sampling sondes (sensors) on the stream gage near Louisville and one on the Elkhorn River near Waterloo. Sampling will start soon thereafter and continue through September. Plans are to expand the program next year by moving upstream and installing additional sondes.

LPRCA Newsletter – "Corridor Connections." The next edition (VOL 5, NO. 1) of the LPRCA newsletter, "Corridor Connections," will be published in late spring of 2007 and we are looking for submissions. This newsletter goes out to over 1,700 people with an interest in LPR issues. We will continue to feature various LPRCA members in each issue.

Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). The House passed their version of a WRDA bill that does include a \$12 million authorization for Lower Platte River Watershed Restoration efforts. The Senate is still working on their version of WRDA but it could be considered in May. Once both houses have passed a version of WRDA, then we could expect a conference to develop a combined bill. WRDA bills were intended to be passed every 2 years, but haven't been passed since 2000.

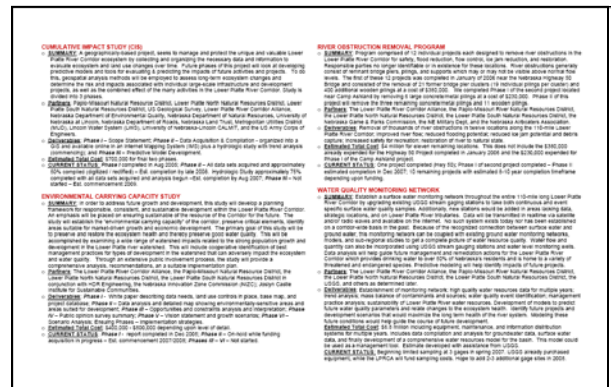
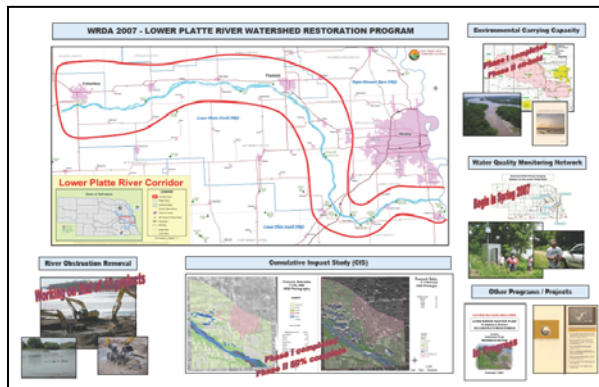
LPRCA Website. The LPRCA website (www.lowerplatte.org) has a "Featured Project" section. Currently, we are featuring PHASE I of the Camp Ashland River Obstruction Removal Project. View photos, videos, plans, reports, and details on the project. Also, check out the "Meetings" section for archived minutes and information/documents related to the most current quarterly meeting.

NE Natural Legacy Plan. Representatives of the LPRCA met with NG&PC recently to discuss how we can cooperatively implement the NE Natural Legacy Plan (NNLP). This plan is a blueprint for assessing, managing, and protecting We've discussed housing a coordinating biologist to assist this effort and focus on habitat issues by assisting landowners and other willing partners. Funds for this position would come from NE State Wildlife Grant Program funds and a NE Environmental Trust Fund grant. No dollars would be required from the LPRCA, only in-kind contributions. This unique arrangement is still being discussed but there seems to be support by some LPRCA members to move forward. This issue will be further discussed at the April 24th, 2007 quarterly meeting.

TMDL Presentation & Discussion

The LPRCA recently hosted a presentation and discussion on proposed Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for E. coli in the Lower Platte River Basin. Seven stream segments in the Lower Platte River Basin have been shown to have elevated levels of E. coli and associated harmful bacteria that can limit contact recreational activities (wading, swimming, etc). The federal Clean Water Act requires that NDEQ develop TMDLs for specific pollutants when criteria are met such as the case with limited contact recreational in the Lower Platte River Basin. Pat O'Brien with NDEQ gave a great presentation on the TMDL process and outlined remaining steps to develop the TMDLs. Communities, counties, or other entities wanting to review the draft TMDLs need to contact Pat or Dick Ehrman with the NARD and submit comments prior to July 1, 2007. There will be public meetings later this summer before the TMDLs are finalized. Pat O'Brien can be reached via e-mail at patrick.obrien@ndeq.ne.gov and Dick Ehrman can be reached at dehrman@nrddnet.org.

Washington D.C. Meetings. February 27th was the annual pilgrimage to DC for meetings with our Congressional delegation and the Corps of Engineers. We had a series of great meetings update everyone on the 3 WRDA-authorized projects (i.e. Antelope Valley, W. Sarpy-Clear Creek, and Sand Creek) and current LPRCA activities. I produced a sheet showing the major LPRCA projects currently underway. Recall, we have been working to get new federal authorization to the tune of \$12 million in a new WRDA bill. This funding would help support the current projects.



UNL Water Law, Science, and Policy Conference. March 26 & 27 were the dates of the annual UNL Water Law, Science, and Policy Conference. One of the most interesting topics this year was the ethanol industry and the movement to produce this alternative fuel. There were many different sessions focusing on this topic and many pointed out that we really have not fully identified the direct and indirect impacts of increased ethanol production - both good and bad. Increased ethanol production certainly has a major beneficial impact on our dependence on foreign oil, but the demand for resources (water, land, nutrients) could offset that benefit. Additionally, one by-product of ethanol production is distiller's grains. Because these can be feed to cattle, ethanol plants are often located near feedlots. Although this is a great benefit, these grains also have concentrated amounts of nutrients and can build up in cattle manure. This could lead to more nutrients finding its way into the soil and groundwater when the manure is spread. As we produce more ethanol and subsequently more distillers' grains, we assumedly will feed more cattle, which will produce more manure. This will require more area to spread it on. Many of these anticipated results have not yet been realized and may never be, but many of the researchers at the conference were pointing out that we need to proceed with some caution, analysis, and planning so our ethanol solution does not become a problem in itself.

Nebraska Land Trust (NLT). The NLT will hold a strategic planning effort to coincide with the next scheduled board meeting. June 1, 2007 will be the board meeting and the following day will be a strategic planning exercise.

LPRCA Intern Position. We had 20 very good applicants for the LPRCA/LPSNRD intern position this time around and brought five candidates in for interviews. It was very difficult to choose just one applicant for the position as all were well-qualified. However, we did select Doug Vrana as the new LPRCA/LPSNRD intern. Doug is a senior Agronomy major with a soil science option at UNL. In 2005, he received his A.A. Degree from Southeast Community College in Beatrice majoring in Natural Resources. Originally from Prague, Nebraska, Doug has a familiarity with the NRDs and many of the programs and people we work with. He most recently served as a student worker for the USDA collecting and analyzing lagoon and soil samples. He has also helped out on his family's farm and participates in a variety of activities including the Horticulture Club, SCC Ag Club, and intramural sports at UNL. Doug will be making the rounds to meet many of you in the near future. Welcome Doug!



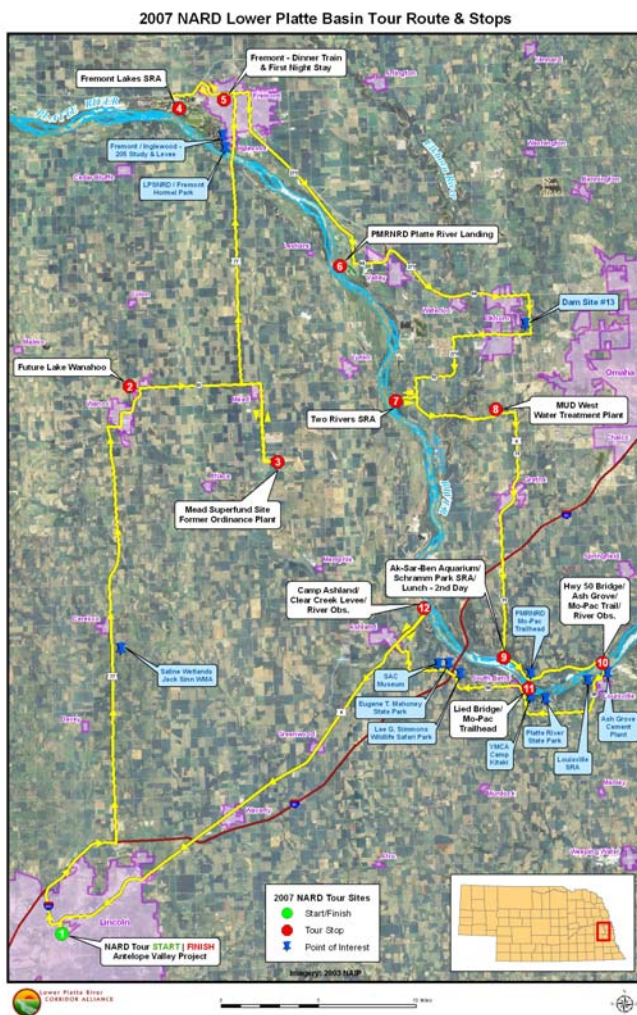
NARD Tour. The NARD tour this year is scheduled to take place in the Lower Platte River Basin traveling through 3 NRDs - the LPSNRD, LPNNRD, and P-MRNRD. I've been working with the NARD to develop a route and stops, which feature many LPRCA member projects. This past Friday, we took a dry run of the route, which heads out from Lincoln through Wahoo and Fremont back around through Louisville and South Bend to Lincoln (see map at right). This is a very ambitious tour covering 150 miles, 3 NRDs, 11 communities, and one dinner train (Fremont). This annual tour is sponsored by the NARD to help educate NRD directors and staff. Generally, there are 50+ participants and each year the tour rotates to other areas around the state. A special thank you to Shaula Ross, GIS staff at the LPSNRD, who has helped develop the tour map.

New fiscal Year. A new fiscal year (FY08) is just around the corner and we are in the middle of budget development. The LPRCA fiscal year runs on the state fiscal year from July 1 to June 30. At the quarterly meeting, the LPRCA will approve its FY08 budget and then forward that info to the NRDs for inclusion in their budget development process.

UN-L School of Nat Res (SNR). I mentioned last report that UNL is looking for a permanent director of the School of Natural Resources and I sit on an External Advisory Committee helping to evaluate candidates. At this time, UNL has not selected anyone to fill this position and continues to evaluate candidates.

When hired, the director will come into a school where various departments with ties to natural resources have been brought together into one academic unit for the first time. Formerly they had been scattered throughout the UNL campus in various departments and buildings. The recently-renovated Clifford Harding SNR Building on 33rd and Holdrege was completed this past fall and now boasts offices, classrooms, labs, lecture halls, and an auditorium.

Kiosk Program. Frank Albrecht & I met with other NG&PC staff to make final selections of photos for the kiosk panels. We are now completing the text and will have a final draft design by the end of April. Installation is targeted for June 2007.

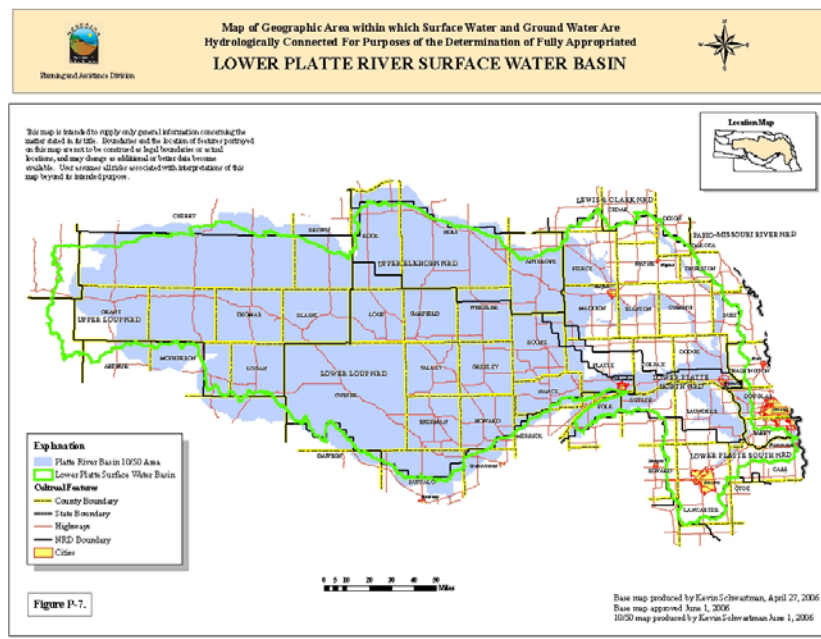


NE Innovation Zone Commission. The NE Innovation Zone Commission (NIZC) continues to meet monthly on the first Thursday of each month usually at Mahoney State Park or Quarry Oaks Golf Course starting at 7:00 p.m. The February meeting was actually held at the State Capitol Building and took the form of a reception with state senators. For the past several meetings, the NIZC group has been discussing legislation that would help fund the development of an I-80 Comprehensive Economic Development Plan. The LPRCA has been working hard to have the NIZC include an environmental impact analysis in this document. Most recently, several members of the NIZC flew out to Colorado to meet with the federal Department of Commerce and discussed grant opportunities. There may be up to \$500,000 in grant funding to assist with creation of the comprehensive plan. The group met more recently on March 15th, 2007 and then on April 5th, 2007. At the March meeting, Cecil Steward with the Joslyn Castle Institute for Sustainable Communities gave a presentation on a series of charrettes his organization held last fall to look into sustainable development between Omaha and Lincoln. More information can be found at www.ecospheres.org. At the April meeting, the NIZC reviewed a draft outlining a regional comprehensive economic development plan for the I-80 Corridor. There are three proposed phases: PHASE 1 - Best Land Use Practice Study; PHASE 2 - Regional Infrastructure Study; and PHASE 3 - Carrying Capacity Study (in conjunction with the LPRCA study). Our two NRD reps on the commission argued that PHASE 3 - Carrying Capacity Study should come first since this study will identify environmental constraints and sensitive areas. Once this is known, then the economic development zones and opportunities can be identified. Recall, that the LPRCA had put the Environmental Carrying Capacity Study on hold for the past year so we could establish a partnership with the NIZC. However, this partnership has been slow to develop and we plan to continue with our original plans for the study, which is now renamed the Environmental Suitability Assessment. However, we would still entertain opportunities to partner with the NIZC in the future. The next NIZC meeting will be May 3rd, 2007 at Mahoney Park - River view Lodge starting at 7 p.m. Check out the NIZC website at www.nizc.org for more info.

LB962 Determination. At the last quarterly meeting, Jesse Bradley with DNR gave a great presentation on LB 962 - the integrated water management law and I wanted to reiterate the importance of this legislation by summarizing below. LB962, passed in 2004, requires a review of all river basins in NE regarding available water resources for the hydrologically-connected areas (ground and surface water connected). If an area is found to be "fully-appropriated" then restrictions on water use for irrigation and other high volume uses may occur. Additionally, this designation triggers a process where DNR and the NRDs in that basin must collaboratively develop an Integrated Management Plan and determine what management options to employ. This is a radical change to traditional Nebraska water management where the DNR manages surface water and the NRDs manage ground water. Now that Nebraska legally and scientifically recognizes that there are areas where the two are hydrologically-connected, a methodology was necessary to manage both simultaneously. LB 962 was passed to do just address this exact issue and guide the process.

Hydrologically-Connected Areas

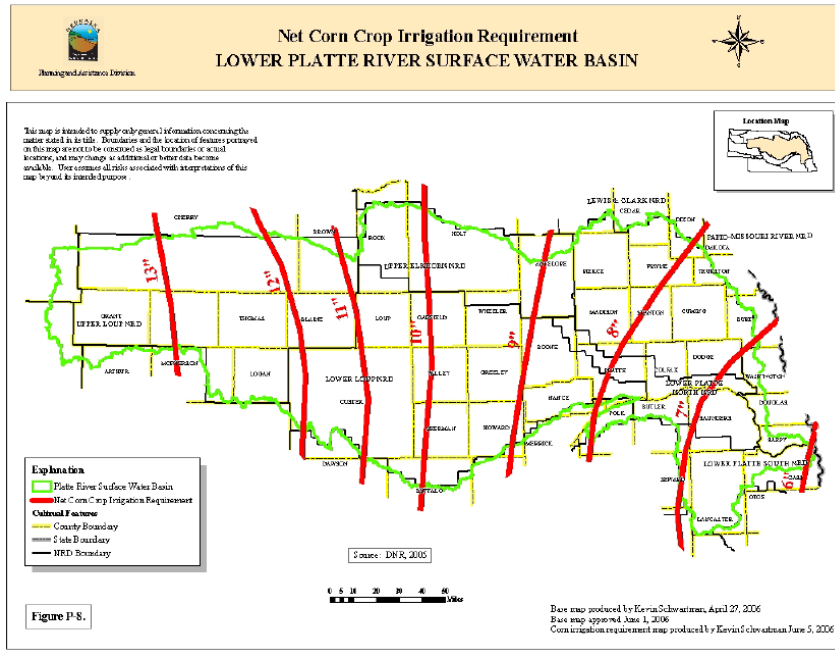
In these areas, DNR uses the "10 % Depletion / 50 Years" as criteria to see if the current use is sustainable or is depletive. The Jenkins SDF Methodology is used to calculate these values, which are represented by the light blue shaded area on the map at the left.



65% / 85% Rule

Crop water usage is used to determine if there is adequate surface water available and the basin is "fully appropriate" or not.

According to the 65%/85% Rule: "The surface water supply shall be deemed insufficient, after considering the lag effect from existing ground water pumping (25 years), if the appropriation cannot divert 85% of the annual crop irrigation requirement between May 1 and September 30 or 65% of the annual crop irrigation requirement between July 1 and August 31."



For more information, visit DNR's website at: http://www.dnr.ne.gov/LB962/AnnualReport_2007/AnnualReport2007.pdf for the annual report OR <http://www.dnr.ne.gov/LB962/LB962Implementation.html> for more detailed integrated water management program information.

Railroad Expansion / Mahoney State Park.

If you attended our airboat tour last year, you heard about BNSF's railroad line expansion from Louisville to Ashland. They have now nearly completed the expansion going from one to two tracks. Recently, I visited Mahoney State Park and took these photos from a vantage point just above the tracks in addition to some other photos from the park:



Please visit our website at www.lowerplatte.org for updates and more details on our activities. We are continuing to develop the website and will soon have a short survey to gather your thoughts on the pertinent resource issues in the Lower Platte River Corridor.