

MEMORANDUM

TO THE BOARD:

SUBJECT: General's Manager Report

DATE: November 7, 2003

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 October, 2003, is attached for your review.
- B. **MISCELLANEOUS/PERSONNEL ITEMS**:
1. On October 13, 2003, a Papio-Missouri River NRD "All Employees Meeting" was held at the Natural Resources Center. A copy of the agenda is attached for your information. Highlight of the day was the "Back to the River Tour." Staff visited downtown development sites, the Lewis and Clark Council Bluffs Interpretive Monument at Ft. Atkinson and California Bend.
 2. Attached is a thank you letter from Kellie Hall, Special Events Coordinator for the Alzheimer's Association, thanking Park Superintendent Jerry Herbster and staff for their support at the 2003 Omaha Memory Walk on September 24, 2003. In her letter Ms. Hall reported that over 1,000 people participated in the event.
- 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 October, 2003. 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 October 24, 2003. I would ask each Director to review this listing. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.
- E. **P-MRNRD 2003 UNITED WAY/CHAD CAMPAIGN**: The P-MRNRD 2003 United Way/CHAD Campaign was a success. A total of \$4,995.32 was raised, which reflects an increase of 4.3% from last year. The District's United Way/CHAP Campaign is coordinated by staff member **Marty Nissen**. I have attached a memo to employees from Marty thanking them for their continued support of the United Way. I have also attached a letter from Daniel Matejka, Loaned United Way Executive, thanking the District for their participation in the

campaign and a special acknowledgement of Marty for his commitment to make this a successful campaign. I would also like to thank Marty for his efforts.

F. **NEWS CLIPS:**

- * October 7, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Trails not ruled out near some airports. Security concerns haven't been strong enough to close recreational paths near Reagan National or Offutt Air Force Base.
- * October 7, 2003, Omaha world Herald Article – Nelson wants U.S. to be drought-ready. He says the farm bill wasn't intended to address long-term problems of climate change.
- * October 8, 2003, Omaha World Herald Letter to the Editor – Pallids were rare by Paul Johnston, in reply to September 18, 2003 Omaha World Herald Editorial – For the pallid (attached).
- * October 12, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Health risks can lurk in private wells.
- * October 13, 2003, Omaha world Herald Letter to the Editor – Of a trail and safety, by Brant Hanquist.
- * October 15, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Valley may pay Fremont to handle wastewater. [GM NOTE: Regional concept is a must for the future! Rural water falls into the regional concept!]
- * October 15, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Missouri River runoff 42% below normal.
- * October 20, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Tribute paid to Curtis at site's naming.
- * October 21, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – EPA probes water contamination.
- * October 28, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Airport's board issues conditions for bide trail.
- * October 28, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Water mandate may affect taxes. Officials are trying to decide how to pay for new federal pollution rules.
- * October 29, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Bid wish list, little startup fund. Cunningham Lake residents meet to reconcile \$8 million in proposed improvements with a \$300,000 budget.
- * October 30, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – City seeks way to fund runoff fixes.
- * October 30, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Plan links trail system to points west. Community officials generally approve of a proposal to link communities and recreation points in Douglas County.
- * October 31, 2003, Blair Enterprise Article – Plans for rural water system outlined.
- * November 1, 2003, Omaha World Herald Editorial – Bridging the cities. A bluffs councilman is overrating what are minor rivalries.
- * November 4, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Nebraska parks benefit from bill.
- * November 5, 2003, Lincoln Journal Star – District looks at well-drilling ban along Platte.
- * November 6, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Water quality called key health factor. Farm runoff and faulty sewers lead to disease, an expert says.
- * November 6, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Delays in new ad rules annoy Harkin.
- * November 6, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Farmers' new approach boosts groundwater in valley near Sidney.
- * November 6, 2003, Omaha World Herald Article – Fahey selects condo towers. The last piece of underdeveloped riverfront property.

October 2003

Information & Education Report

Information

- Continued work on Walnut Creek watershed handout.
- Attended Public Relations Society International Conference in New Orleans and served as NE Chapter Delegate.
- Continued work on Fall 03 Spectrum.
- Began preparations for Spring 04 seedling give away.
- Began preparations for 2004 Sports Show booth
- Help publicize public meetings on Western Douglas County Trails Plan and Washington County Water Supply Project.
- Began work on NRD staff opinion research.

Education

- Presented at Summit Lake Field Day
- Presented 8 Fall Chalco Hills Nature Hikes
- Managed 60 volunteer hours
- Held Wellness Committee Meeting and presented information at All Employees Meeting
- Planned and held NRD Wellness Bike Ride
- Presented Leaf I.D. and Bird Banding programs to Millard South Environmental Studies Students
- Attended PLT/WET/WILD advisory committee meeting
- Presented bird programs to all third graders at St. Wenceslaus
- Sent out press release concerning Fall programs
- Attended Bat workshop put on by International Organization for Bat Conservation
- Applied for Newman's Own Organics Grant
- Prepared all LEP, Envirothon, and Water Works files for archiving
- Attended NATS conference



**Papio-Missouri River NRD
All Employees Meeting
October 13, 2003
9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
AGENDA**

- 9:00-9:05 a.m. **WELCOME** -- Steve Oltmans
- 9:05 – 9:45 a.m. **UNITED WAY PRESENTATION** – Daniel Matejka, United Way Loaned Executive; Bob Koley, YMCA, and Marty Nissen, P-MRNRD United Way Coordinator
- 9:45 – 10:00 a.m. **P-MRNRD WELLNESS COMMITTEE REPORT** – Members: Christy Jacobsen, Bernie Taylor, Marty Thieman, Paul Woodward and Penny Zobel
- 10:00 – 10:15 a.m. **GM REPORT:**
- ➔ Update on Dakota County Service Center
 - ➔ Update on Pigeon-Jones Creek Flood Control/Rec Area Site #15
- 10:15 – 10:45 a.m. **NARD INSURANCE/RETIREMENT UPDATE** – Mike Tefft
- 10:45 – 11:30 a.m. **SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT** – Members: Linda Ellett, Keith Lienemann, Tom Pleiss, Dick Sklenar, Terry Schumacher and Jean Tait
- ➔ Video
 - ➔ Safety Game
- 11:30 – 12:30 p.m. **LUNCH**
- FLU SHOTS** - Administered by Alegent Personnel in the Small Conference Room. *If you have dependents (16 years or older) that would like to get their flu shot, have them be at the NRC at 11:30 a.m. The cost for non-employees is \$15.00.*
- 12:30-3:00 p.m. **BACK TO THE RIVER TOUR**
- ➔ Back to the River Downtown Development – Omaha Qwest Center, Gallup Campus, Lewis and Clark Landing Park, Miller Landing Park, etc.
 - ➔ Lewis and Clark Council Bluffs Interpretive Monument at Ft. Atkinson
 - ➔ California Bend

Notes: 1. Flu Shots are on a strictly voluntary basis.
2. Dress is casual – be sure to wear comfortable shoes.



F.U.I.
File
Herb

October 9, 2003

Papio NRD
Jerry Herbster
8901 S. 154 ST
Omaha, NE 68138

Dear Mr. Herbster:

On behalf of the Alzheimer's Association Midlands Chapter, we would like to thank you and your staff for supporting our 2003 Omaha Memory Walk. Over 1000 people attended our event at Chalco Hills to support the Alzheimer's Association Memory Walk. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive and it is because of your support that the Memory Walk was such a fun and successful event.

As our largest annual fundraiser, Memory Walk helps the Chapter raise funds needed to continue to provide programs and services to those affected by Alzheimer's disease.

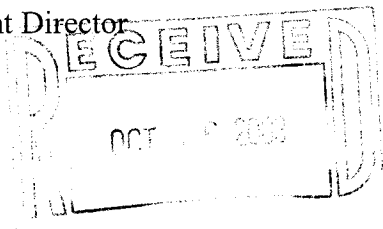
Thank you for contributing the use of your facility, which was valued at \$1500. We hope you will continue your support for Memory Walk 2004, which will again be held at Chalco Hills Recreation Area on September 26, 2004.

Please feel free to call 572-3059 or e-mail to kellie.hall@midlandsalz.org for information about Memory Walk or any of the Chapter's events.

Thank you, again, for being part of the 2003 Omaha Memory Walk. Your support is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Leigh Goodman
Development Director



Kellie Hall
Special Events Coordinator

Thanks to you and your
wonderful staff for
all of your help!

Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Association Inc., Midlands Chapter
1-800-309-2112 • Web Page: www.midlandsalz.org • E-mail: midlandschapter@midlandsalz.org

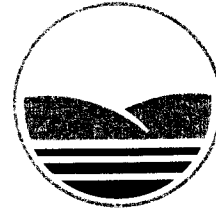
Eastern Nebraska Regional Center: 7101 Newport Avenue Suite 305, Omaha, NE 68152 • Phone: (402) 572-3010 • Fax: (402) 572-3038
Southwest Iowa Regional Center: 3319 Nebraska Avenue, Council Bluffs, IA 51501 • Phone: (712) 322-8840 • Fax: (712) 322-0688
Northeast Nebraska Regional Center: 811 East 14 Street, Wayne, NE 68787 • Phone: (402) 375-1790 • Fax: (402) 375-3304

October, 2003

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Updated: October 24, 2003

PAPIO-MISSOURI RIVER



NATURAL
RESOURCES
DISTRICT

8901 S. 154TH ST.
OMAHA, NE 68138-3621
(402) 444-6272
FAX (402) 895-6543

**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)
 - Land Exchange with Bellino (96th St.) (W)
- **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)
 - Preview Corps draft scope of services for appraisals(W)
 - ★ Review cabin floodproofing appraisal contract w/V.S. (W)
- **Floodway Purchase Program** (Woodward):
 - Prepare draft Interlocal Agreement for Flood Mitigation Planning and Mapping Assistance Program (P)
 - Floodway Property Purchase Agreements as needed (F)
- **Trail Projects** (Bowen):
 - Bennington Trail Interlocal Agreement (N)
 - Savannah Shores Agreement (N)

- **Missouri River Corridor Project** (Becic):
 - ✪ California Bend – Final settlement with tenant (Wright's) (W)
 - ✪ Lower Decatur Bend – Appraisal Review, prepare ROW purchase agreement documents (W)
 - ✪ Review/comment on LDB habitat easement letter to the COE (P)
- **USDA P.L. 566 Projects, Silver Creek and Pigeon/Jones Watershed** (Puls/Cleveland):
 - Papio Site S-30 – development agreements (F)
 - Silver Creek Site Easements– as needed (W)
 - Release of Site S-7 Easement (W)
- **Papio Watershed Dam Sites:**
 - Dam Site 19 agreement (Petermann) (W)
 - Candlewood Easements (Chris Curzon) (O)
 - Dam Site 13 Agreement (Petermann) (F)
- **Papio Creek Watershed Partnership (Stormwater)** (Woodward):
 - Storm water Utility Legislation (P)
 - Partnership Interlocal Agreement (P)
- **Rural Water Projects:** (Sklenar)
 - ✪ Water Purchase Agreement for WCRW Country Estates Mobile Home Park (W)
 - ✪ Water Purchase Agreement with Blair for WCRW #2 (N)
- **Other:**
 - Aerial photo/GIS Consortium Agreement with MAPA (N) (Woodward)

Nissen, Marty

From: Nissen, Marty
Sent: Friday, October 24, 2003 12:27 PM
To: Everyone @ NRD
Subject: United Way of the Midlands Campaign



Memorandum

To: PAPIO-MR NRD Staff
From: Marty Nissen – NRD/ United Way Campaign Manager
Date: October 24th, 2003
Re: United Way of the Midlands Campaign for NRD

The 2003 United Way Campaign for the NRD was once again successful. Our donations go directly to the United Way of the Midlands and its 52 health and human services agencies.

Many thanks go to the generous contributions from the NRD staff . This year a total of \$4,995.32 was raised. This is a 4.3% **Increase** from last year's campaign. I attached a chart reflecting the history of NRD contributions to this memo. This year's winner for the free day of annual leave is Evelyn Maslonka.

Thanks again for your continued support and to all who participated in this years campaign!

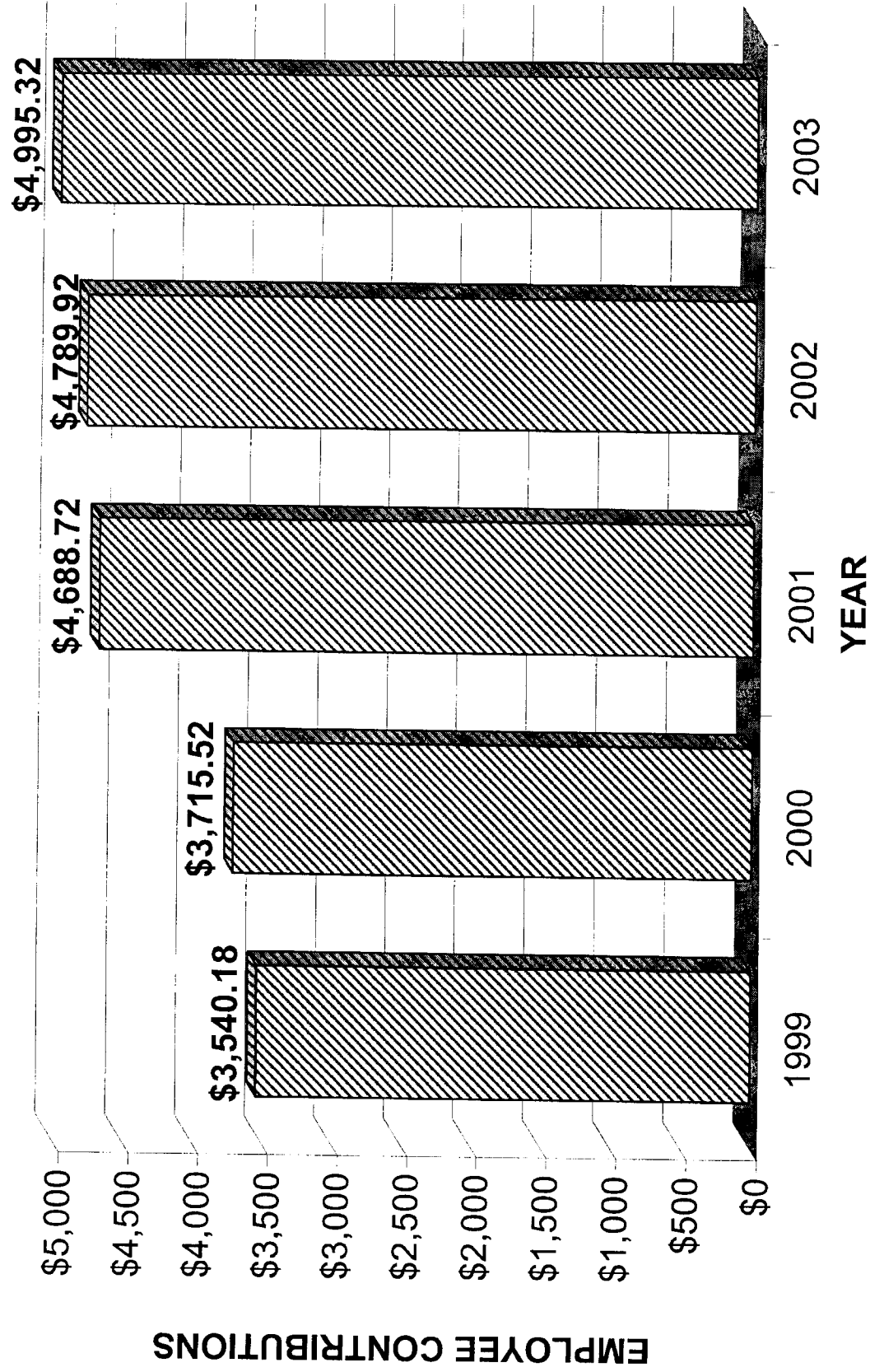
Sincerely,
Marty Nissen
Campaign Manager

mnissen@papiionrd.org
<http://www.uwmidlands.org>

attached chart

10/24/2003

PAPIO-MR NRD UNITED WAY CONTRIBUTIONS





Please Give Generously.

October 27, 2003

Mr. Steve Oltmans
General Manager
Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District
8901 S 154th St
Omaha, NE 68138-3621

Dear Mr. Oltmans:

Year after year, the challenge to Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District has been made and year after year, you and your employees have met that challenge and succeeded. Your annual workplace campaign to raise funds for the United Way of the Midlands campaign was a tremendous success due in no small way to your enthusiastic support and commitment. With your employee contribution of \$4995.32, you clearly demonstrated that you care about community betterment.

You can rest assured that the United Way of the Midlands also demonstrates consistency and reliability as a widely respected and efficient distributor of dollars raised by companies like yours.

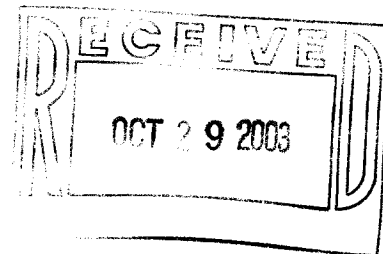
United Way gets to the heart of what matters in our community by addressing the underlying causes of critical problems and, thanks to you, we'll bring about measurable results.

Please extend a special thank you to Marty Nissen for coordinating such a successful campaign. His commitment and effort is greatly appreciated and it was a pleasure to work with him.

I'm deeply grateful for your continuing generosity and your support of the United Way of the Midlands during our 2003 campaign.

Sincerely,

Daniel Matejka
Loaned Executive
2003 United Way of the Midlands Campaign
Cc: Marty Nissen



Trails not ruled out near some airports

■ Security concerns haven't been strong enough to close recreational paths near Reagan National or Offutt Air Force Base.

10-7-83

By C. DAVID KOTOK
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

If airports and recreation trails are incompatible, don't tell the folks at the nation's most sensitive airport — Ronald Reagan National Airport in the shadow of the Washington Monument.

Gravelly Point near the end of

the runway is one of the most popular stops along the Mount Vernon Trail, partly because of the view of the jets landing and taking off.

In opposing routing a bike and pedestrian path on the Missouri River levee east of Omaha's Eppey Airfield, airport officials have insisted that it would pre-

sent a security risk and would be inappropriate.

"It is the sense of the Omaha Airport Authority board that the interests of aviation are best served by routing the recreational trail away from Eppey Airfield," the board chairman, Howard Kooper, wrote Mayor Mike Fahey in the summer.

City Council President Jim Vokal will ask the council today to join Fahey, former Mayor Hal Daub and former U.S. Sen. Bob Kerrey in calling on the Airport Authority to drop its opposition to the river trail.

Kooper and Don Smith, Eppey executive director, are trying to fend off the pressure by saying as little as possible. Smith said last week that the matter is being handled by the board.

"We will consider it," Kooper said, but not at the board's next meeting. "It's not a simple problem."

There is little evidence that fear of terrorists is shared by other airports when it comes to the location of trails and parks.

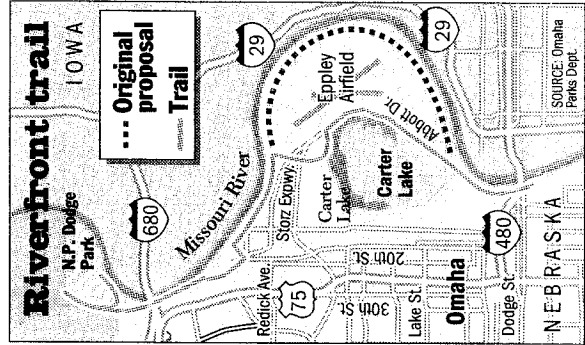
Trails surround Offutt Air Force Base, south of Bellevue, on

three sides, although they are farther from the runways than the proposed Eppey pathway.

✕ The Air Force "has not expressed any concern about the trails," said Martin Petermann of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

The most famous and most used path near an airport is the Mount Vernon Trail, which runs 18.5 miles from George Washington's home to the Theodore Roosevelt Island near the Lincoln Memorial.

See Trail: Page 2



Trail: Omaha Airport Authority sees security risk

Continued from Page 1

It skirts Reagan National on three sides, with Gravelly Point within about 100 feet of the runway fence.

The area is packed with bicyclists and runners. It also includes a parking lot and one of the few public boat ramps to the Potomac River.

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Reagan National was the last major national airport to remain open. But the trail remains.

"It's never been closed," said Tom Sullivan of the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority.

When the national terrorist threat is upgraded to orange or red, additional National Park Service police step up patrols along the trail, said Audrey Calhoun, superintendent of the George Washington Memorial Parkway.

"As far as I understand, someone walking or riding a bike is not nearly as much of a concern as someone in a vehicle," Calhoun said.

The potential of a plane crash gives parks officials more worries than terrorists on the trail, Calhoun said. "We've weighed

the consequences and decided it's better to keep the trail open," she said.

David Z. Playin, president of Airports Council International-North America, said several airports have adjacent recreation trails.

"Security in these situations is always relevant and becomes more significant depending on how close the path is to the airport perimeter," he said.

Eppey's objections are valid, said Playin, who heads the trade organization that includes the Omaha airport.

"All in all, we don't think such a path at this kind of location is a good idea for bicyclists or for the airport community," he said.

The Federal Aviation Administration probably would have to approve any trail along Eppey's perimeter. There is no general rule concerning how close a recreational trail or park can be to an airport, said Tony Molinaro, spokesman for the FAA's Great Lakes Region.

"It depends," he said, saying flight paths, possible buildings along the trail and future runway expansion all come into play.

Nelson wants U.S. to be drought-ready

■ He says the farm bill wasn't intended to address long-term problems of climate change.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

W-H 10-1-03

As drought has plagued Nebraska for four straight years, Sen. Ben Nelson, D-Neb., said the government should take steps to mitigate damage that a long-term climate change could have on U.S. agriculture.

Last week in Washington, D.C., a bipartisan group of senators, including Nelson, sponsored a briefing by leading experts on global climate changes.

The briefing examined some of the impacts that climate change — warmer, more variable weather — has had and is

projected to have on U.S. agriculture.

Nelson said questions have been raised about the impact of global warming on U.S. agriculture if such a climate change is taking place.

"The questions on this are based on assumptions and theories," he said. "While there is some evidence that climate is warming, you are going to have as many people take the other side of that issue."

But Nelson said he and colleagues in the Senate want to take the side that if there is a potential of global warming, especially as Nebraska is experiencing continued drought, what positive steps can be taken in mitigating any future drought or climate changes?

"As we try to invest in flood-

proofing roads and earthquake-proofing buildings and fire-proofing our homes . . . we believe there's something we should do to drought-proof our fields," he said.

Nelson said that although a lot of experts can explain why drought occurs, scientists still need to figure out how to minimize drought damage and how to better respond to that damage with economic assistance.

Nelson said there was never any expectation that the farm bill adopted last year by Congress would be able to take care of problems facing farmers and ranchers with long-term drought or problems created if the climate is changing.

Crop insurance is aimed at trying to take care of what happens from year to year but not multiyear disasters, such as drought, he said.

OMAHA DAILY HERALD FOUNDED 1865
 OMAHA DAILY WORLD FOUNDED BY GILBERT M. HITCHCOCK 1885
 OMAHA WORLD-HERALD FIRST PUBLISHED JULY 15, 1889

Pallids were rare

This is in regard to a Sept. 18 editorial, "For the pallid."

The pallid sturgeon, which is not flat, never "used to swim in large numbers" in the Missouri River. Studies by biologists S.A. Forbes and R.E. Richardson in 1905 and R.M. Bailey and F.B. Cross in 1954 indicate that the pallid sturgeon was always uncommon. The fish's historical rarity was also cited in the Preliminary Report on the Status of the Pallid Sturgeon published by the South Dakota Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit in 1988.

In addition, the Missouri is not the exclusive territory of the pallids. There is a stable, self-sustaining population in the middle and lower reaches of the Mississippi River.

In the past 12 years, 30,000 acres of habitat have been acquired and restored at 28 sites. The two larval sturgeons mentioned in the editorial were captured at one of them.

Additionally, there is \$64 million in the president's 2004 budget to acquire and develop property from willing sellers, to notch selected dikes and remove others, to set back or breach levees, build sandbars and provide hatchery support and intensive research, monitoring and evaluation.

In the future, with this intensive re-engineering of the river, not only will commercial barges and recreational boaters ply the Missouri River, but a more diverse aquatic ecosystem will thrive.

Paul Johnston, Omaha
 Army Corps of Engineers

Omaha World-Herald

JOHN GOTTSCHALK, *Publisher*
 LARRY KING, *Executive Editor* CHARLES REINKEN, *Editorial Page Editor*
 DEANNA J. SANDS, *Managing Editor*

For the pallid

Most Midlanders might never see a pallid sturgeon, one of the endangered species at the heart of the debate over the Army Corps of Engineers' management of the Missouri River. There are only a few of them around.

Estimates contained in a recent Billings (Mont.) Gazette series on the fish, which can grow to 80 pounds or more, indicate that only a couple hundred of the primitive-looking creatures still inhabit the Missouri River system, where they used to swim in large numbers. They are found nowhere else, though their smaller cousin, the shovel-nosed sturgeon, seems to be thriving.

The pallid, a flat fish that also has a shovel-shaped nose, has a back lined head-to-tail with bony plates called scutes. The species liked the Missouri system the way it used to be — muddy and turbid, full of sandbars and deep holes, with varying fast and slow currents.

It depended on spring floods to warm the chilly water to spawning temperature and to stimulate it to swim upstream to good breeding grounds. Human intervention has removed both cues — dams thrown across the Missouri both control spring flooding and block upstream migration.

As a consequence, the pallids that remain in the system rarely spawn. For the past 35 years, biologists searching the river system have not found any young, wild-bred hatchlings surviving to adulthood. In 2002, searchers netted two tiny pallids.

Make the right decision for the future by preserving Missouri River habitat.

The fish have been raised in hatcheries and released since 1998, which could help the species bridge the gap to long-term survival if conditions on the river are changing so that becomes possible. But hatchery-raised fish leave unanswered questions — will they be able to survive in the wild? Will they reproduce when they reach spawning age? Where will their instincts tell them to spawn? It is not a real solution.

The adult pallids now in the river are aging; biologists estimate that the males outnumber the females by four to one. Even under ideal conditions, they don't reproduce every year, and at some point, the fish will grow too old to spawn at all. By 2016, one estimate indicates, every one will have died of old age.

The pallid does not live alone in the river. Improving habitat for it would also improve habitat for other species — endangered, threatened or not — that once flourished along the Missouri. Allowing the habitat to continue to degrade will drag other species down with it.

This primitive sturgeon, which evolved from a group of fish that lived with the dinosaurs during the Cretaceous Period 70 million years ago, is on the edge of disappearing. Every species is important in the great web of life. Throwing even one of them away can ripple through the ecosystem in ways that can't be predicted.

The hand of man can kill. But the hand of man can also preserve and protect. It is hugely important to make the right decision — for the pallid and for the future.

10/12/03

Health risks can lurk in private wells

BY NANCY GAARDER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

A Grand Island neighborhood has learned a hard truth about Nebraska: In a state heavily dependent on well water, if you don't get your water from a public well, you may not know what's in it.

And even in communities where water is tested regularly, there have been rude awakenings.

More than 50 private wells in the southwest Grand Island area have tested above federal drinking water standards for solvents, some more than 25 times the limit.

For the most part, state experts say, Nebraska groundwater is of good to excellent quality. But as some Grand Island residents have learned, that isn't always the case.

"This kind of thing is not particularly an anomaly," said Roy Spalding, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln professor who studies groundwater and contamination.

Hastings, Waverly, Bruno and Ogallala are among communities that are having groundwater cleaned up through the federal Superfund program.

Hall County has two nationally listed Superfund sites, one in Grand Island and one west of town. The federal Superfund program is assisting state and local officials with their investigation of this latest site.

"You're going to see us, every chance we get, saying if you can get on a public system, it will ensure your well-being and public health."

Howard Isaacs, a state water quality official

What these communities generally have in common is the proximity of industry and businesses to municipal or private wells.

Heavy manufacturing, large dry cleaning establishments, old grain elevators, electronics manufacturing and old munitions plants are the general sources of industrial contamination of groundwater in Nebraska.

Overall in Nebraska, nitrates and bacterial contamination are the larger problems, with the sources generally being such things as livestock, septic tanks and fertilizer.

Groundwater contamination is difficult to detect. It's hidden from view, the original source of pollution may not be obvious and years can pass before pollution migrates into a well.

"There are spots of high contamination," said Gary Mader, *See Water: Page 2*

Continued

Water: Testing not required for private wells

Continued from Page 1

utilities director for the City of Grand Island. "And those spots don't show up unless you sample the water."

The city regularly tests its water for more than 120 contaminants. A routine test of a municipal well prompted the investigation that led public officials to discover the highly contaminated private wells. The source of the contamination is under investigation.

In Grand Island, the same things that make it easy to tap water for wells make the water susceptible to contamination: a high water table and porous soils.

"Anything that hits the ground," Mader said, "soaks in."

But there is no requirement, for Grand Island or anywhere in Nebraska, that residents test their own wells.

"With these private wells — where there are no regulations — people have no way of knowing what they're drinking."

Howard Isaacs, a state water official

"With these private wells — where there are no regulations — people have no way of knowing what they're drinking," said Howard Isaacs, a state water official.

"Is the public need or public health being served by that? No. You're going to see us, every chance we get, saying if you can get on a public system, it will ensure your well-being and public health."

Hooking into a public water system doesn't come cheap. Extending water mains to these Grand Island residents will cost about \$3,000 to \$4,000 per household, Mader said.

Among public water systems, where water quality is known, a look at statistics from the Health and Human Services System underscores the reality that contamination is a continuing concern.

Currently, more than 10 percent of the state's 1,374 public water systems have enough problems with nitrates that they require stepped-up monitoring.

And 50 have serious enough problems with nitrates, total coliform, lead or copper contamination that they're under administrative review by the state. These 50 systems have to notify the public of the problem and

take steps to protect public health.

The best defense a homeowner with a private well has, Isaacs said, is to be informed.

"Look at where your well is, look at its construction and the surrounding area," he said. "If at anytime something arises that causes concern, have your water tested."

If you want to test your well but blanch at the expense, Isaacs recommends that you focus on what is most likely to be in your water.

The broad test used before activating a new municipal well costs \$3,500, Isaacs said. But by narrowing the focus of the tests, the costs can be greatly reduced.

Hall County, for example, is spending about \$160 per well to test for the solvents that have caused problems in southwest Grand Island.

w-H 10-12-01

Of a trail and safety

This is in response to recent news coverage and an Oct. 7 World-Herald article, "Some trails, airports co-exist."

The Omaha Airport Authority of course knows that a public road currently exists between the airport and the levee. If the OAA wants to assert that a bike trail on the levee is a safety concern due to the closeness of the perimeter, it should close the road immediately for the same reason.

I ride my bike around the airport once a week on that road, and vehicles routinely use it. No one has ever stopped me on my bike for being too close to the airport. I would also point out that several hundred bicyclists participating in the annual Corporate Bicycle Challenge travel on that road.

Until that road is permanently closed, please do not use "safety" as the excuse. If the OAA can give a reasonable response for not wanting the trail, then so be it. The real safety concern for the public is to have a bike trail cross a busy street (Abbott Drive) twice when it is not necessary and a more scenic route is available.

Brant Hanquist, Omaha

Valley may pay Fremont to handle wastewater

BY CHRIS OLSON

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

With Fremont's OK, Valley is looking at sending its sewage there rather than building a new wastewater treatment plant.

The results of a study indicate that Fremont's upgraded treatment plant has the capacity to treat Valley's wastewater without limiting its own potential growth, said Derril Marshall, general manager of Fremont's Department of Utilities.

Fremont has spent \$21 million to improve its 40-year-old treatment plant. The city treats sewage for the village of Inglewood and also is considering handling Arlington's wastewater.

Fremont has submitted a rate to treat Valley's 350,000 gallons of domestic sewage daily, Marshall said. The rate is comparable to the charge Fremont resi-

dents pay for similar services.

"Fremont would treat Valley as an individual customer," Marshall said.

Valley will compare the \$5 million cost of replacing its 26-year-old treatment plant to Fremont's rate and the cost of constructing 11½ miles of underground pipe to convey its wastewater to Fremont for treatment, said Jim Olmsted of Olmsted and Perry Consulting. Those figures should be available within 60 days, he said Tuesday.

Even if the cost to build a new plant is comparable to sending sewage to Fremont, the Fremont solution could be a better long-term plan, Olmsted said.

"Pipeline has a lot longer lifespan than a new plant," Olmsted said.

Valley Mayor Joe Roberts sees the Valley-Fremont collaboration as productive.

Missouri River runoff 42% below normal

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — September runoff into the Missouri River and its tributaries upstream from Sioux City, Iowa, was the fourth-lowest in the 106 years that records have been kept, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said.

The runoff for the month was 42 percent of normal, pushing reservoirs to record low levels.

"Fort Peck and Garrison inflows were only 40 and 25 percent of normal, respectively,"

said Brig. Gen. William Grisoli, the Northwestern Division engineer for the corps.

Garrison Dam releases in North Dakota averaged 16,900 cubic feet per second last month, the corps said. The releases were cut to 10,000 cfs in early October, where they will remain until mid-November, the corps said.

North Dakota's Lake Sakakawea is expected to end this month nearly 7 feet lower than

last year and 19 feet below normal, the corps said. It ended September at an elevation of 1,820.9 feet.

Lake Oahe, upstream from Pierre, hit a record low early this month, eclipsing the mark set in November 1989. Oahe dropped 3 feet during September and ended the month 23 feet below normal.

Tributary flows are small below the reservoirs, Grisoli said.

The navigation season downstream from Sioux City will be

shortened six days, the corps statement said.

The September runoff was 495,000 acre-feet of water. An acre-foot is the amount that covers 1 acre with 1 foot of water.

"Our runoff forecast above Sioux City for 2003 has been reduced to 17.7 million acre-feet," Grisoli said. The normal annual runoff is 25.2 million acre-feet.

The storage in the reservoir system ended September at 41.1 million acre-feet, a record low for that date.

Tribute paid to Curtis at site's naming

By JUDITH NYGREN

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

10-20-03

His widow described him as an environmentalist ahead of his time.

Congressional delegates called him a humble, honorable public servant who went to Washington, D.C., to do right for Nebraska.

Now future generations will be able to recall the late Carl T. Curtis and his 40 years of congressional service.

The National Park Service of-

ficially named its new Midwest regional headquarters Sunday for the man who represented Nebraska in both the House and Senate.

The building still is a skeleton of steel and concrete on the Omaha riverfront. But the roughly 100 people who gathered under a ceremonial tent had a clear view of the Missouri River that Curtis took pride in helping tame.

Congressman Doug Bereuter, R-Neb., noted that the crowd probably wouldn't be standing on the ground of the new head-

quarters if it weren't for Curtis' work.

Curtis, who died in 2000 at the age of 94, sponsored a resolution that ultimately led to the creation of the Pick-Sloan Plan, the blueprint for flood control in the Missouri Basin.

It's fitting to name the park service's Midwest headquarters for her late husband, said Mildred Curtis.

When the building is done — possibly as early as next spring — it will "house the protectors and administrators of our natural resources," Mildred Curtis

said.

Her husband, she said, always was interested in protecting the environment. He was an environmentalist before the word came into vogue, she said.

U.S. Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Neb., said he worked to put Curtis' name on the building because it is important to remember such a far-reaching legacy.

Curtis "never sought glory," Hagel said. He just wanted to do a good job of representing his state. And because of that, Hagel said, generations of Nebraskans will reap the benefits.

EPA probes water contamination

10-21-03
By DAVID HENDEE

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Grand Island will be poked and probed for several days as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency seeks to determine the size and shape of the plume of contaminated water under the city.

The tests under way this week will for the first time evaluate the extent and definition of the industrial contamination recently found in private water wells on the edge of Nebraska's

fourth-largest city.

"At this point, all we have is a lot of questions," said Gary Mader, the city's utilities director. "This sampling will get us closer to answers."

Residents of at least 50 houses in southwest Grand Island have been advised not to use their tap water for drinking, dishwashing, showering or bathing because the water could give off toxic vapors.

The EPA work is one of three initiatives under way in the community to resolve the dilemma.

Others include extending city water lines to the neighborhood and installing whole-house filtration to houses with the highest concentrations of contamination.

The City Council tonight is scheduled to award a contract for extending water lines at no cost to 21 residents in the area near Mary Lane.

A similar project for the Kentish Hills neighborhood north of the Mary Lane area is expected to be ready to come before the City Council next week.

The new water mains and service lines will be paid for by Case New Holland, whose combine manufacturing plant is nearby. The company insists that it is not the source of the contamination.

Jeff Walsh, a company spokesman, said that although information indicates that another site is a more likely source of the contamination, the company supports the city government's rapid response to the public health issue.

Airport's board issues conditions for bike trail

OWH
10-28-03

By JOHN TAYLOR
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The Omaha Airport Authority said Monday that it was willing to consider allowing a bicycling and hiking trail on Eppley Airfield property but called for a number of restrictions that would appear to rule out a route along the levee.

The board said it would consider a trail on airport property provided it wouldn't:

- Result in any risk to airport operations.

- Affect future air service.

- Hold up airport development projects.

- Have any economic or financial risk for which the authority would be responsible.

The board heard a report list-

ing technical issues that would be created by a proposed trail that would run along the Missouri River atop a levee bordering Eppley runways.

Daniel B. Owens, vice president of Lamp, Rynearson & Associates Inc., said there were three problems arising from such a trail:

- Interference with electronic navigation equipment needed in aircraft approaches, especially in low visibility.

- Interference with the approach lights.

- Wake turbulence.

Owens said the Federal Aviation Administration requires that no objects be higher than the approach surface, or plane, or the approach lights.

See Trail: Page 2

Trail: Airport board lists conditions for project

Continued from Page 1

If a trail is built on the levee, he said, a bicycle or pedestrian will be high enough to penetrate the approach surface, interfering with electronic navigation aids needed to help align airplanes with the runway.

A trail would require that the runways be shortened 300 feet, he said.

On one of the runways, Owens said, approach lights would have to be raised, which would cost \$1.5 million to \$2 million.

Wake turbulence — the high winds that spin off an airplane's wingtips — would also be a problem, he said. Some tests have shown the turbulence could reach 200 miles an hour.

"It would be somewhat less over the levee, but there would be some high winds with an air-

plane coming over low, especially on a missed approach," he said.

The board said it wanted Mayor Mike Fahey and the City Council, which have been pushing for the trail, to hear Owens' presentation.

Board member David Sokol said that, so far, proponents have offered the airport board nothing in return for permitting the land to be used.

"I'm not saying there should be something," he said. "But no one has come forward and said (they) want to provide the airport authority something for doing this."

In its resolution, the board said it would fail to do its duty if it didn't ask for "contractual safeguards." The safeguards are aimed at making sure Ep-

pley can continue to be developed without a risk of delay, added cost or disapproval from other agencies, the board said.

The board asked proponents of the trail to make "binding and enforceable commitments" on seven concerns.

If the commitments are made, "the matter will be presented for a formal vote of the board," the resolution said.

Among those things it's asking for, the board would require that the trail be placed in a location so that neither it, nor anyone using the trail, would intrude into any protected airspace or interfere with electronic signals or lights.

The board also expressed concern that laws protecting federally funded park land would result in what it called "very costly and time-consuming federal en-

vironmental requirements" that could delay airport projects.

Because of that, the board asked for agreements that would remove the trail from such regulation.

The board said it wanted the power to terminate the use of the trail at any time without cost.

In addition, the board said it wanted agreements freeing the authority of responsibility to provide security for the trail, reimbursing the authority for all expenses it might have in preparing documents for the Federal Aviation Administration and confirming that no Land and Water Conservation Fund money be used for the trail.

The board also wanted confirmation that the National Park Service would have no jurisdiction over the project at any time.

Water mandate may affect taxes

■ Officials are trying to decide how to pay for new federal pollution rules.

By NANCY GAARDER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

A new federally mandated plan to better control water pollution in Omaha has gone into effect with the potential to affect taxpayers across the city.

If the new program works as intended, 11 streams and lakes in the metropolitan area will be cleaner. But at a cost.

Required by the federal Clean Water Act, the new Omaha-specific regulations have been more than 10 years in the making, said Bob Sink, the city's environmental services manager.

The regulations target storm water runoff, which can be contaminated by such everyday sources as motor oil, dog feces and lawn fertilizer.

Storm water runoff, said Rich Webster of the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, is the major cause of polluted streams and lakes.

Like Omaha, Lincoln is being required to meet new standards. Other urban areas of Douglas, Sarpy and Washington Counties will have to comply as well.

Because everyone in Omaha contributes to this type of pollution, everyone probably will have

Public meetings on pollution standards

Wednesday, 3:30 p.m.,
Metropolitan Area Planning Agency, 2222 Cuming St., lower level meeting room.

Wednesday, 6:30 p.m.,
Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District offices, Chalco Hills Recreation Area, 8901 S. 154th St.

to pay to prevent it, Sink said.

And therein lies the tax battle. Should everyone pay equally, no matter how much pollution they cause? Or should bigger polluters pay more?

Sink said the new requirements will add about \$680,000 to the \$11.5 million the city already spends to lessen pollution in storm water. (The money goes toward such things as street sweeping and cleaning out ditches.)

By itself, the extra requirements aren't adding a lot to taxes — sewer fees have risen 36 cents a month because of them.

But costs are guaranteed to rise, Sink said, as further requirements fall into place. And potentially enormous costs lie ahead if Omaha is unable to meet requirements or if future standards become much stricter.

He said there is an underlying philosophical question: Should a specific tax be dedicated to

storm water prevention? If so, should some or all of the \$11.5 million in existing costs be paid for through that tax?

To learn how the public wants to pay for storm water pollution prevention, the city will hold a series of public meetings and create focus groups.

Funding could come from the property or sales tax, or a new storm water fee or permit fee. The first meetings will be Wednesday. The city's goal, Sink said, is to decide on a funding source by mid-December.

And the city doesn't really have a choice. The state and federal government could fine the city as much as \$37,500 per day per infraction if it violates the regulations.

Sink said the new standards require the city to:

■ Increase public education. You'll be reminded to take care in applying pesticides and fertilizers to your lawns and to not pour motor oil down the sewer.

■ Better control household hazardous waste disposal. A dropoff center that will open next year will address this requirement.

■ Analyze storm water runoff and water quality in streams and lakes.

■ Issue permits to industries and businesses.

■ Check for illegal discharges.

Already, the city knows that four lakes — Cunningham, Zorinsky, Standing Bear and Carter — the Missouri River and a

Bodies of water affected by Omaha storm water

Missouri River

Big Papio Creek

Little Papio Creek

West Papio Creek

Cole Creek

Hell Creek

Boxelder Creek

Zorinsky Lake

Carter Lake

Standing Bear Lake

Cunningham Lake

five-mile stretch of the Big Papio Creek are polluted enough to be designated impaired.

Carter Lake, the Big Papio and the Missouri suffer from high amounts of fecal coliform bacteria. Zorinsky, Standing Bear and Cunningham have too much sediment and nutrients, such as fertilizer, draining into them.

Webster said the new regulations should improve water quality.

"It should lead to better control of sediment runoff, better control of pathogens like fecal coliform and fewer nutrients running off into water bodies," he said. "All in all, it should lead to improved water quality."

Big wish list, little startup fund

■ Cunnigham Lake residents meet to reconcile \$8 million in proposed improvements with a \$300,000 budget.

By Rick Ruggles
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The City of Omaha has a long list of improvement projects at Cunnigham Lake and only \$300,000 with which to start.

Parks Department administrators met Tuesday night with 70 citizens to consider which improvements are crucial and which can wait.

Parks Director Larry Foster and consultant Kevin Strehle

cited \$8 million worth of work, including building a concrete or compacted limestone trail around the lake, expanding the campground on the southeast edge, replacing bathrooms, repairing parking lots and numerous other tasks.

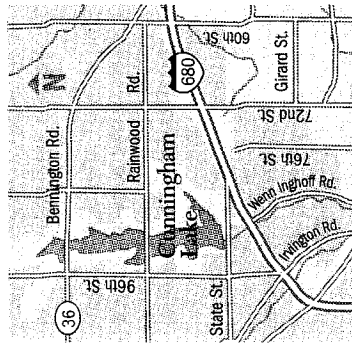
That doesn't include efforts to improve Cunnigham Lake's water quality, which has diminished over the years because of high sediment levels. A separate process will address water qual-

ity.

Foster said during the public meeting that he expected to increase the city's pool of money. The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District and other groups might pitch in, he said.

That raised questions from at least two in the audience about whether the Walter Scott Jr. family, which owns three mansions and considerable property on the lake's east side, would be

See Lake: Page 2



Lake: Residents discuss options

Continued from Page 1

involved. And if so, Foster was asked, what did the Scotts want in return?

Foster said he has spoken to a Scott representative, but no agreement was reached. Letters between Foster and Scott's attorney, John Boyer, indicate that Scott would like a decaying access road on the east side of the lake closed.

Foster wouldn't confirm that the Scotts would like to see the half-mile of Rainwood Road from 84th Street west to the lake closed. That part of Rainwood connects with the decaying access road. Walter Scott is chairman emeritus of Peter

Kiewit Sons' Inc.

Susan Bogard, who lives just northwest of the lake, said horse riders like to use the Rainwood Road entry point because they can maneuver their trailers there.

Members of the audience cited building the loop trail, keeping Rainwood open, repairing the decaying access road, patching the marina parking lot and tearing down existing restrooms that hide illicit activities as some of their top priorities.

Foster said parks administrators would consider options and schedule another public meeting, possibly next month.

City seeks way to fund runoff fixes

10-30-02

By JOSEPH MORTON

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Homeowners abhor property taxes.

Retailers dread sales taxes.

Businesses and other entities dislike paying large service fees.

So what's the best way to raise money for federally mandated requirements on handling storm-water runoff?

That's what the city of Omaha is trying to figure out.

City officials hosted two public hearings Wednesday to distribute information about the federal Clean Water Act and what it means for local residents and businesses.

The act means Omaha will need to spend possibly millions of dollars to comply with regulations on runoff, which can be polluted by everything from pet feces to yard waste.

The city has brought in outside experts to help inform the public and organize focus groups so planners can receive more input.

Several focus groups are planned for the next two months during which a cross-section of the community will be able to voice opinions on the subject.

In particular, the groups will debate whether a special tax should be established to pay for pollution prevention or whether some other way of raising the money would be more equitable.

Plan links trail system to points west

■ Community officials generally approve of a proposal to link communities and recreation points in Douglas County.

10-30-03
By CHRIS OLSON

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Those who like to walk, run or bike would have new places to explore with a recently unveiled trail plan that connects communities and recreation points along existing roadways in western Douglas County.

A \$14,000 study was funded by a coalition that included

Douglas County, local municipalities and government agencies.

So far, reaction has been supportive of the proposal that links 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 to existing Omaha and Fremont trail systems.

"People came to oppose the plan but went away happy with it," said Marty Shukert of Crose Gardner Shukert Inc., which developed the trail network.

Ralph Wilson of Waterloo sees great potential in developing western Douglas County's trail system.

"Some might think a trail system would take funds from other projects, but the money this plan would use is earmarked for trails," Wilson said.



ON OMAHA.COM
A map of the proposed trail system

Some outdoor enthusiasts are disappointed that the trail system isn't more off the beaten path along rivers, rail lines or across open country.

"More isolated trails could be too far from emergency services," said Gerry Bowen of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, which helped fund the plan.

Access to such land also can be more expensive than along roadways, Bowen said.

Sharon Steere, a long-time trails advocate in Waterloo, agrees. "Trails along the river could cause erosion and interfere with fishermen."

The goal of the trails study was to create a practical plan

that could be implemented with minimal roadblocks, Shukert said.

"This plan allows us to actually do something," Shukert said.

The first step is support of local communities. Elkhorn, Waterloo and Valley officials say the project would enhance their towns.

All agree the plan could take 10 to 15 years to fully implement. Federal funding, county and municipal support and private donations would be needed. The first priority is to build trails connecting Elkhorn, Waterloo and Valley.

"The project is ambitious, but can be done," said Bill Christian, transportation planner for Metropolitan Area Planning Agency. "Trails are becoming more popular. People use them because they are enjoyable recreation."

Blair Enterprise

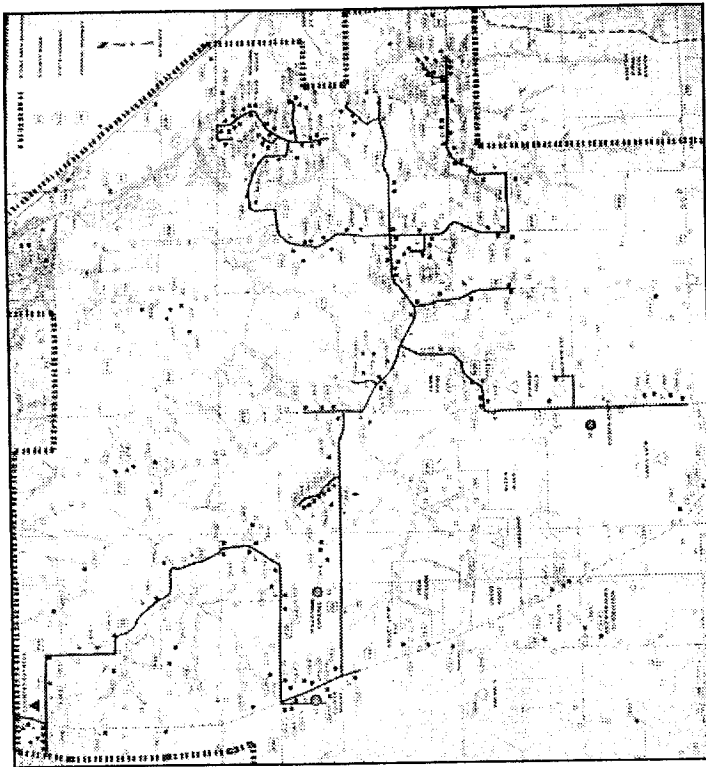
By Keith Rydberg 10/31/03

The main purpose of the meeting, which was Tuesday, Oct. 28, at Fort Calhoun High School, was to let interested landowners know whether or not they were chosen to receive water through the district as part of a \$1.56 million project. In total, 230 of the 302 applicants will receive rural water with the decision based primarily on the population density of the 26-square-mile study area and the locations from where the applications were received. Applicants not selected by the district will have their \$2,600 hookup fees refunded next month.

As presented, the water route runs from Nebraska Highway 133 south of Blair to the Country Estates Mobile Home Park approximately one mile south of the city. The line will then continue east on County Road P26, running south of County Road 33 and west on County Road P30 to the Cooper Woods housing development. The line will then continue south to County Road 32 and then east to the road's intersection with County Road P35. At the intersection, lateral water lines will run north and south to accommodate property owners in that area. Continuing east on County Road P32, lateral lines will also be established on county roads P37, 37 and north and south along County Road P39.

Although the hookup fee may have been the reason why some people did not apply, Trista Farrens, executive director of the Gateway Development Corporation, then gave a brief presentation regarding an interest rate buydown program for applicants. In what is essentially a joint effort between area banks and the corporation, landowners interested in signing up for the program may receive a \$5,000 loan at an interest rate of 4 percent for three years. Once a landowner is approved, loan payments will begin within 90 days.

SEE WATER PAGE 3A



This map outlines the area where the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District plans to construct a rural water system. The plan has been scaled back from the NRD's original proposal.

Continued

WATER: Details of NRD's rural system unveiled

FROM PAGE 1
cost-effective for the district, the basic rule of thumb used was that at least seven customers per mile had to submit applications before the area would be considered. Dick Sklenar, project manager for the NRD, said the solution presented serves the most people while remaining profitable for the district.

"We looked at all kinds of alternatives to serve as many of the applicants as we could serve," Sklenar said. "This is the best solution we have and it is barely economically feasible as it is. For some of you, there just isn't enough density in your

area to warrant installing water lines there and this is unfortunate. In other areas, the density was there but there were no signups."

Even with the 230 properties and the Country Estates Mobile Home Park signed up, Sklenar said there are approximately 105 properties along the water route whose owners have yet to sign up for the rural water system. With HGM Associates Project Manager Chris Koenig commenting that more signups may occur once construction begins, Sklenar added much has to be done before then.

"This is not a done deal yet,"

Sklenar said. "We still need to have negotiations with the city of Blair on the water supply. Also, we need to get easements from the property owners. We will likely have one-half of the easements on private property and the other half on the county road right-of-way but that will be determined this winter when the final design is made."

Along with hiring an engineering firm that will spend the remainder of the year completing the final design for the water route, the district will spend the

first half of 2004 getting easements from property owners. If all goes well, construction on the project could begin by the end of 2004 and take about six months.

Negotiations are also continuing with the city of Blair regarding how water will be supplied to the project area. One of the possibilities that is being considered is constructing a

watertower near Country Estates at a cost of \$1.1 million. If the plan is approved, the district is also looking at connecting the watertower to the district's sys-

tem south of Fort Calhoun in order to have an emergency water supply if one of the watertowers is damaged.

Blair and the NRD are also considering oversizing the main trunk line of the route in order to better allow water to be transferred back and forth between the systems in the event of an emergency.

Sklenar said the district is considering oversizing the lateral lines as well in order to better adapt the system if new applications are received.

Bridging the cities

If Council Bluffs City Councilman David Tobias were right, it would be a depressing pronouncement on the state of affairs between the two cities straddling the Missouri River.

Tobias voted against two resolutions needed to advance progress on the planned pedestrian bridge over the Missouri. While the rest of the councilmen voted to proceed on the project, Tobias said he was protesting remarks some Omahans have made about Council Bluffs.

Some jealousies between the two cities may linger, but we believe that such petty envies have decreased over the years and now are relatively few. Such feelings certainly do little to help either city. In terms of economic development and attracting cultural and recreational amenities, what helps one helps the other. The two may have different tax and governance systems, but they are effectively intertwined by many work, shopping and other travel patterns.

Job-commuting statistics bear

A Bluffs councilman is overrating what are minor rivalries.

that out. More than 31,600 area residents now cross the Missouri River daily on their way to work — up from 27,000 a decade ago.

The planned pedestrian bridge will play a significant role in enhancing the cities' relationship. As we've noted before, development plans on both sides of the river complement each other well, and the bridge will link the two halves of the whole riverfront scheme. The convention center, offices, residential developments and recreational attractions will benefit from foot and bicycle traffic over the river.

Voting against the bridge because of cost concerns would have been understandable (though shortsighted, in our view). As a senseless protest against purported parochialism, though, Tobias' vote neither furthers the area's best interests nor seeks to heal the rifts he decries.

We hope others will see the pedestrian bridge, and the cooperation needed to erect it, as building more than a physical link between the two cities.

Nebraska parks benefit from bill

Passage of the Interior Department's appropriations bill for fiscal 2004 will bring money to Nebraska for several parks projects.

U.S. Sens. Ben Nelson and Chuck Hagel say \$1.1 million in the bill will go to the Intertribal Bison Cooperative. The cooperative is dedicated to the development and restoration of bison on American Indian lands.

The bill also has \$500,000 for Nebraska's Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuge and \$50,000 for the National Park Service's visitors center at Homestead National Monument outside Beatrice.

The bill was sent to President Bush Monday for his signature.

— AP

District looks at well-drilling ban along Platte

The Associated Press

LEXINGTON — A proposal to suspend the drilling of new wells near the Platte River in central Nebraska has many concerned.

Public hearings on the proposal held Monday in Lexington and Kearney drew scores of people.

The proposed three-year ban on well drilling would stretch along the Platte from western Dawson County through Merrick County, generally about six to eight miles on either side of the river.

The 80 to 100 people who attended the meeting in Lexington offered opposing views on the proposal.

Some said parts of the Platte River basin are over-appropriated, leading to water shortages, while others said any water supply problems only reflect the current drought.

Don Adams of Lincoln, executive director of a coalition of irrigators, said groundwater pumping has little effect on central Platte River flows.

"Groundwater irrigation is the lifeblood that sustains every local economy here," Adams said. A moratorium will send a message to farmers that any future growth is over, he added.

Dawson County farmer Jim Lundgren said farmers in his coun-

ty use groundwater and water from tributaries and lakes, pitting groundwater and surface water users against each other.

The Central Platte Natural Resources District's board of directors should not act on a ban until various studies of water use and supply are finished, Lundgren said.

If the proposed ban is approved by the district board, it would start Nov. 20. The ban would cover about 60 percent of the district.

The district is considering the ban to give time for a study meant to assess whether water in the Platte River area is over-appropriated.

The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources requested the

ban because surface water supplies have failed to meet water rights in recent years, Bishop said.

Some of those rights date to the 1880s.

Surface water right-holders who believe their rights are being taken by groundwater pumping near some streams are pressing their complaints.

Nebraska Department of Natural Resources officials have said the Platte River is over-appropriated, or at least fully appropriated, in different areas.

The proposed ban area now has 14,437 registered wells, including 10,650 for irrigation, said district general manager Ron Bishop.

Groundwater has dropped 7 to 10 feet in wells some distance from the river in Dawson and Buffalo counties, monitoring shows. There have been smaller declines in wells closer to the river.

The district saw its largest number of new wells drilled last year.

"And so far this year, we've had a large number of permits and a large number of new wells going in, considering we have a couple months to go," Bishop said.

Other meetings on the proposed ban will be held Thursday in Central City and Grand Island.

The proposed ban includes irrigation, municipal and industrial wells.

Water quality called key health factor

■ Farm runoff
and faulty sewers
lead to disease, an
expert says.

LINCOLN (AP) — Don't drink the water, it could kill you.

Really.

Water quality, modern agricultural practices and climate change are presenting significant health risks around the world, Dr. Jonathan Patz of the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health told a Wednesday gathering of Nebraska public health and water resource managers.

"Water quality remains a high priority for public health," Patz said.

Although improving water quality has made a tremendous impact on reducing and even eradicating some diseases, failure to keep the water clean is a problem, he said.

Nationwide, 40 percent of streams, lakes and other bodies of water are not clean enough to support activities like fishing and swimming, Patz said. Just 1 gram of feces can contain 10 million viruses, 1 million bacteria, 1,000 parasite cysts and 100 parasite eggs, he said.

Adding to the problem are modern industrial agricultural practices in which large numbers of animals are concentrated in one area, he said.

Agriculture causes 70 percent of the U.S. water pollution from such things as fertilizers, pesticides, animal waste, and soil and sediment erosion, Patz said.

The more animal waste that enters the water supply, the greater the risk of human exposure. Humans could be exposed in a number of ways, not only through leakage to the water supply, but also by contact when the waste is spread on fields, he said.

The problems are not confined to agriculture.

About 950 communities across the United States combine sewage with storm runoff in sewer systems. After a large storm, the sewage spills over, he said.

Each year, enough sewage and storm water are discharged during sewer overflows to keep Niagara Falls flowing for 18 days, Patz said.

Climate change also will increase the threat of disease around the world, Patz said. Rising temperatures will create more precipitation and higher sea levels, which, in turn, will have an effect on agriculture, water resources, coastal areas and animal life, he said.

Although not all climatologists agree about the likelihood or level of global warming, Patz said, a majority of them say it is here to stay, and therefore public health officials should be preparing for it.

Patz spoke at a daylong symposium organized by the Groundwater Foundation that focused on pathogens in drinking water and the public risk it poses.

Delays in new ag rules annoy Harkin

11-6-03
BY JAKE THOMPSON

WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration is “dragging its feet” on issuing rules for a new federal program that would pay additional subsidies to farmers for good environmental practices, U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin said Wednesday.

Because of the delay, the Conservation Security Program enacted as part of the 2002 farm bill hasn’t helped farmers, said Harkin, an Iowa Democrat and author of the new program.

Funding for the program also is in jeopardy before Congress, despite recent letters of support from a broad alliance of farm groups, environmental organiz-

“This is too important . . . and it has wide support from every state.”

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa

ations and members of Congress.

“It looks like the White House is determined to kill the CSP program permanently,” Harkin said in a conference call with reporters. “This is too important for our country, for rural areas, and it has wide support from every state.”

The conservation program would pay farmers for such practices as no-till farming, putting marginal cropland back into grass and controlling runoff. Payments would be capped

at \$45,000 per farming operation.

Many of Nebraska’s 52,000 farm operations could qualify for some subsidies in the program, said Rob Robertson of the Nebraska Farm Bureau. A large number of Iowa’s 93,000 farms might as well.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture was to issue the program’s rules by May but has not done so. Harkin said he was “sick and tired” of hearing Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman promise them soon.

A spokeswoman for the department said Wednesday that they would be issued soon.

Several months ago, 24 senators, including Harkin, Democrat Ben Nelson of Nebraska and Republican Charles Grassley of Iowa, sent a letter to Veneman requesting quick release of the rules.

The program’s cost initially was pegged at \$2 billion over 10 years, but a later estimate by the federal Office of Management and Budget said it could be three times that.

Late last month, a House committee eliminated the \$53 million needed for the new program in 2004. The Senate supports the program.

Farmers' new approach boosts groundwater in valley near Sidney

By DAVID HENDEE
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

A billion-gallon gamble by a group of western Nebraska farmers may have paid its first dividend.

While the water levels in wells across the southern Panhandle continue to decline after another year of drought, groundwater levels in a dry valley west of Sidney climbed about 4 inches this year.

Farmers in the Sidney Draw

who planted crops that use less water, converted irrigated acres to nonirrigated crops, and turned off the end guns on center-pivot irrigation systems get the credit for the rebounding water level, said Ken Quandt, water resources coordinator for the South Platte Natural Resources District based in drought-worried Sidney.

"Had everyone planted corn and alfalfa instead of converting many of those acres to wheat and oats, there's no doubt the levels would have fallen, not risen,"

Quandt said.

The changes saved an estimated 1 billion gallons of water from the more than 6 billion used in 2002, according to the NRD.

An official with the state's top water agency said the initiative taken by the Sidney-area farmers is the kind of approach that could be followed throughout the state in the face of tight water supplies.

State and local natural resources districts are grappling with overuse concerns created

by years of largely unchecked groundwater pumping throughout Nebraska, including on the North Platte, South Platte, Platte and Republican Rivers.

Resolving those issues ultimately could result in water conservation limits for some users. The Central Platte Natural Resources District board will meet Nov. 20 to consider a temporary suspension of drilling new wells in the district.

Planting less water-dependent crops can keep producers in the field in the face of such limits,

said Ann Bleed, deputy director of the State Natural Resources Department.

The rebounding wells near Sidney are good news, Bleed said, though it's probably too soon to determine the long-term significance of the change.

"It's very likely that conservation is paying off there," she said, "but the key lesson is that only when you decrease the amount of water that crops consume are you truly going to help sustain the water supply."

The Sidney area experienced its fourth consecutive growing season of drought.

Five-year comparisons show a 14.17-foot average decline in 20 wells west of Sidney.

The decision by more than 30 farmers in the Sidney Draw to cut back on irrigation by planting alternative crops was triggered by an earlier proposal from the

NRD board to save water by limiting irrigation to 12 hours a day. The producers developed their own alternative plan.

The farmers reduced the number of irrigated crop acres to 8,348 this year from 9,006 last year. The acres of irrigated oats — a crop that requires less water than corn — went to 1,455 acres this year from 69 acres in 2002. Irrigated corn acres fell 66 percent to 1,406 acres.

Despite a wetter spring that brought hopes of improvement, groundwater levels over most of Cheyenne, Deuel and Kimball Counties continued to fall in the past year, said Kerry Ferguson, a South Platte NRD spokesman.

The Sidney Draw was the only area in the district to see an increase in groundwater levels.

World-Herald staff writer Henry J. Cordes contributed to this report.

Fahey selects condo towers

11-6-03

By C. DAVID KOTOK

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

A 105-unit condo community proposed by a group of Western developers is the choice to sit in the middle of Omaha's new riverfront.

The plan calls for two 12-story condominium towers, town houses, a restaurant, coffee shop, small market and public plaza.

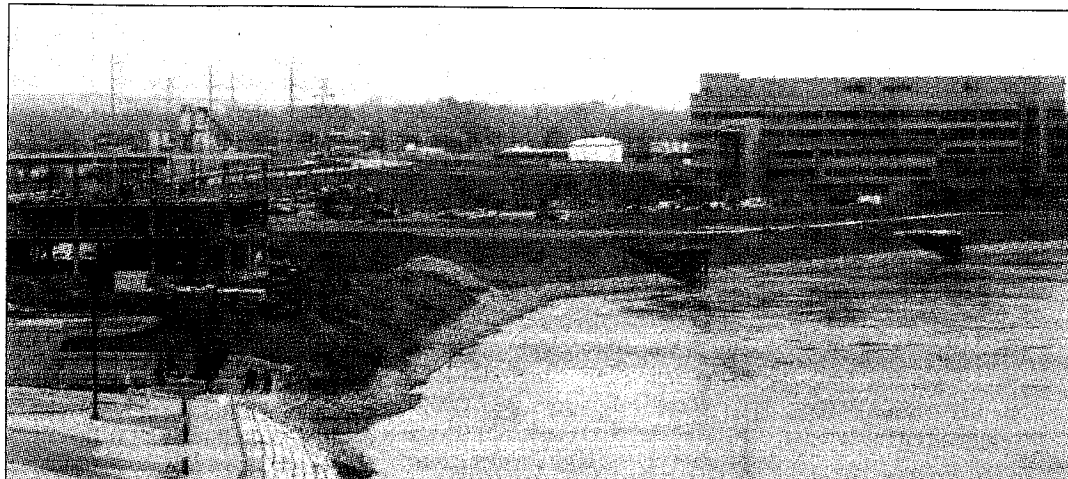
Riverfront Place will emerge as Omaha's "new, clean urban neighborhood," Mayor Mike Fahey said Wednesday.

The condos will be on the last piece of undeveloped property on Omaha's riverfront — framed by the National Park Service headquarters and pedestrian bridge to the south, and the new Gallup University campus on the north. Riverfront Place also will be situated just northeast of the new downtown convention center and arena.

In choosing the \$35 million Riverfront Place, Fahey rejected competing plans from two prominent Omaha development companies.

Broadmoor Development had proposed a \$38 million upscale apartment project and Noddle Development proposed a \$24.7 million office and housing plan.

Fahey said the local developers are "professional guys. They know you win some and lose some."



PHIL JOHNSON/THE WORLD-HERALD

Riverfront Place will sit on 6 acres south of the new Gallup University campus, at right, and north of the National Park Service headquarters under construction, at left.

He said the project from the group of developers based in Tempe, Ariz., Park City, Utah, and Santa Barbara, Calif., was "a cut above."

Fahey's decision must be approved by the City Council. The mayor and city officials said they do not expect either Broadmoor or Noddle to protest.

The Riverfront Place developers plan to break ground next summer. The first condominium tower, holding 38 units, and most of the 27 town houses are expected to be completed by late 2005 or the spring of 2006.

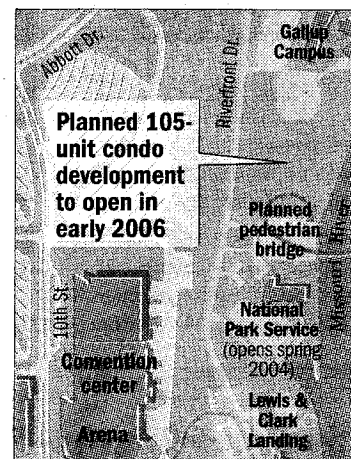
The first phase would be

timed to open about the same time as the pedestrian bridge over the Missouri River is completed.

The condos will range in price from about \$200,000 for a 1,000-square foot one-bedroom and den unit, to more than \$500,000 for a two-story customized penthouse with 2,500 square feet.

The marketing of these units began Wednesday when Ross Robb, a developer from Tempe, joined Fahey in the mayor's conference room. The developers already have a Web site at www.riverfrontplace.com.

See Condos: Page 2



DARRELL FORBES
THE WORLD-HERALD

Condos: Fahey selects Riverfront Place project

Continued from Page 1

How quickly the second condo tower (40 units) is developed will depend on how quickly the first condos are snapped up.

Developers will pay the city \$1.6 million to buy the property; they and the city will split an estimated \$5 million in tax-incre-

ment financing for site preparation.

No direct public funds will go into the project, said City Planning Director Bob Peters. The Broadmoor apartment proposal would have required some direct city financing, he said.

Robb and his partners said they believe Omaha is ready for

this type of development, which has been done successfully in such cities as Vancouver, Seattle, Portland, Salt Lake City and Phoenix.

Robb said he first saw the Omaha riverfront two years ago and thought, "What a tremendous location."

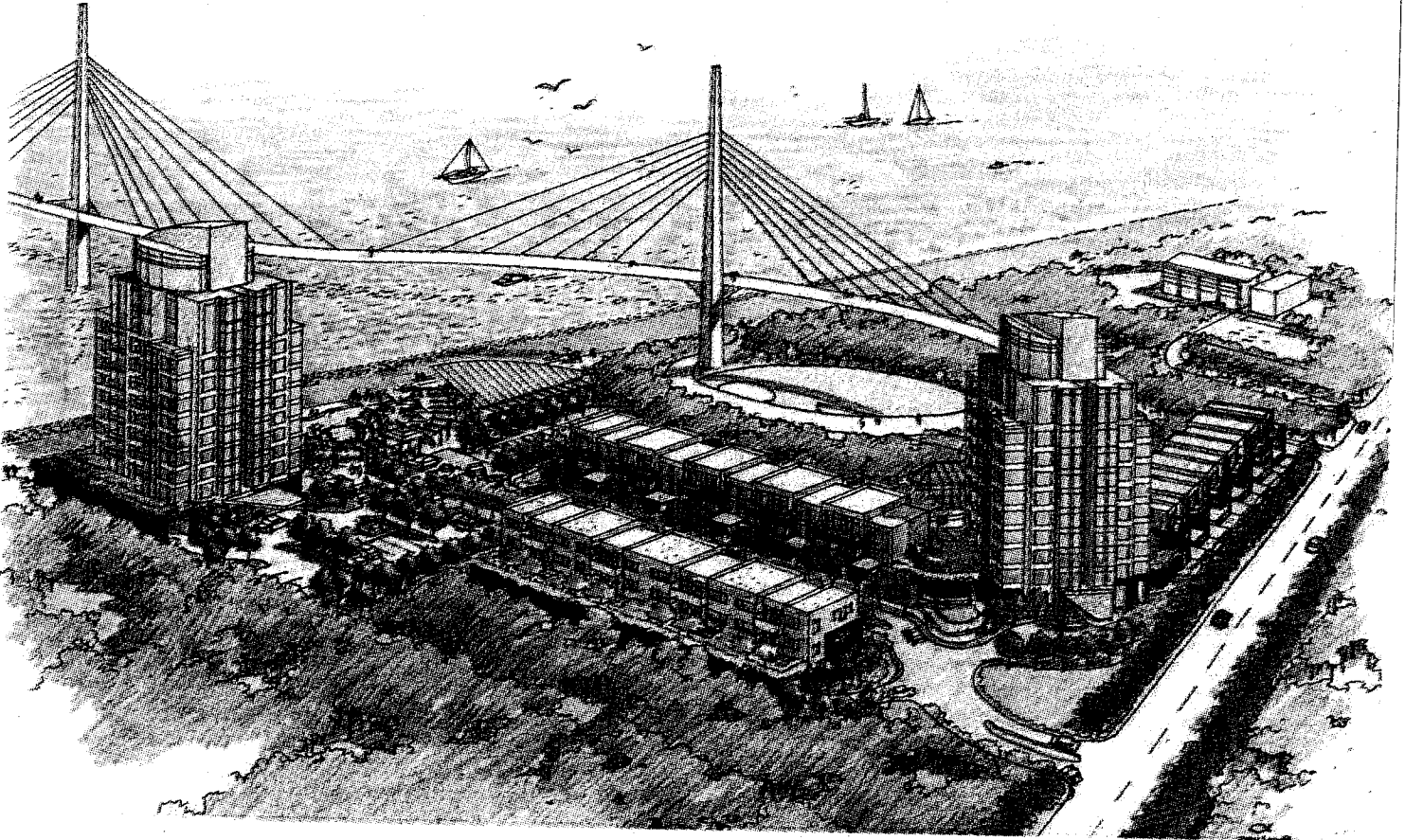
"We take our obligation to

Omaha seriously," he said. "We intend to create an extraordinary place."

Fahey said the project addresses Omaha's need to project itself as a progressive city, "ready to embrace the idea that a downtown succeeds when it becomes not just a place to work or visit, but a place to live."

Continued

The last piece of undeveloped riverfront property



A condo development of 105 units selected for Omaha's riverfront is modeled after similar communities along Puget Sound. Omahans could be moving in to the first of the two condo towers by late 2005.

ARCHITECT'S SKETCH BY HANCOCK BRUCKNER ENB + WRIGHT