

MEMORANDUM

TO THE BOARD:

SUBJECT: General's Manager Report

DATE: November 12, 2004

FROM: Steve Oltmans, General Manager

A. **INFORMATION/EDUCATION REPORT:** A copy of the I&E Report detailing Information and Education activities of the District for the month of October, 2004, is attached for your review.

B. **MISCELLANEOUS/PERSONNEL ITEMS:**

1. Thank You Letters and Notes:

- Thank you letter from State Senator Pam Brown thanking the GM for speaking at the I-80 Economic Summit on October 1, 2004. I have also attached a memo from Rodney Verhoeff, Lower Platte River Corridor Coordinator, detailing highlights of the Summit.
- Thank you letter from John Holdenried, Board President for the Alzheimer's Association, thanking Park Superintendent **Jerry Herbster** and his staff for their assistance and commitment with the implementation of the "Memory Walk at Chalco Hills.
- Thank you letter from Laura Terlisner Mehew, Program Attorney for the CLE International seminar on "Law of the Missouri River, which was held October 14-15, 2004 in Omaha, NE. Ms. Mehew thanks the GM for giving a presentation at the seminar.

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, 2004. Please review this report and contact me if you have any questions.

D. **CURRENT AND ON-GOING PROJECTS – P-MRNRD LEGAL COUNSEL:** Attached is a copy of the current and on-going projects for District Legal Counsel, Paul Peters, as of October 18, 2004. I would ask each Director to review this listing. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

- E. **PAPIO CREEK WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP MEETING:** The Papio Creek Watershed Partnership will hold a public forum on Wednesday, November 17, 2004 at 7:00 p.m. at the Natural Resources Center. The forum is being held to introduce important issues in the development of a Green, Clean and Safe Papillion Creek Watershed; and, to gather ideas and comments regarding these issues. A flyer regarding the forum that was sent to over 400 interested parties is attached. **All Directors are encouraged to attend.**
- F. **P-MRNRD 2004 UNITED WAY CAMPAIGN:** The P-MRNRD 2004 United Way/CHAD Campaign was a success. A total of \$5,383.70 was raised, which reflects an increase of 7.8% from last year. I have attached a memo to employees from **Marty Nissen**, P-MRNRD United Way/CHAD Campaign Coordinator, thanking them for their continued support of the United Way. I would also like to thank **Marty** for his efforts.
- G. **UPDATE ON P-MRNRD "PAPERLESS PROJECT":** Attached is a memo from staff member, **Jean Tait**, regarding the District's "Paperless Project". It is noted that since going "paperless" January, 2003, the District has experienced a cost savings of \$8,551.89. This figure does not include staff time.
- H. **NEWS CLIPS:**
- ➔ October 4, 2004, Daily Record Article – Chamber Agricultural Council Members Tour Western Nebraska Communities
 - ➔ October 15, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – Aim high, planners urge Omaha. The city faces tough decisions as it strives to create a more beautiful community, but the changes are said to be feasible.
 - ➔ October 18, 2004, Omaha World Herald Editorial – Water for the future. Get the facts, not the gossip; then work with state officials to rectify any inequities.
 - ➔ October 19, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – Outlook for water in West isn't good.
 - ➔ October 21, 2004, Omaha World Herald Editorial – Midlands Voices – The Republican basin just wants to survive, written by Jennifer Smith.
 - ➔ November 2, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – Big Mac forecasts continue to sink.
 - ➔ November 4, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – A different vision for water use. An economist says recreation and other quality-of-life issues should receive more consideration.
 - ➔ November 8, 2004, Omaha World Herald Article – Water system expected to spur growth. The new service promises higher quality of life for residents of the fast-growing southeast section of Washington County.
 - ➔ November 9, 2004, Blair Pilot-Tribune Article – Rural water project progressing.
 - ➔ November 10, 2004, Omaha World Herald Editorial – The specter of Micro Mac. Those who use McConaughy must conserve shrinking lake for well-being of the region.
 - ➔ November 10, 2004, Omaha World Herald Editorial – Midlands Voices – Big Mac water rights leave recreation out, written by J. David Aiken
 - ➔ November 11, 2004, Omaha World Herald Editorial – Nature teaches lessons. Intricate relationship of surface water, groundwater is even knottier.

October 2004

Information & Education Report

Information

- Completed production of Trails and Overview videos
- Continued work on Trails Brochure update
- Began work on Fall 2004 SPECTRUM
- Co-Hosted Summit Lake Field Day for 400 students
- Attended Public Relations Society Annual Conference in New York
- Attended NARD I & E staff committee meeting
- Reviewed Outdoor Classroom Grants applications
- Updated Web Site pages and continued planning for site design update

Education

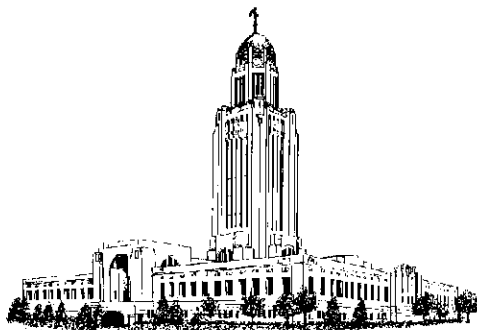
- Presented Fall Birds Program to all 1st graders at Milliken Park School
- Participated in Millard South Interview Project
- Held trash pick-up and NRD program for St. Andrew's Youth Group
- Presented GPS/Geo-caching program for All Employees Meeting
- Presented Nature Hike to Rockwell Elementary (20 kids)
- Presented Surface Water program at Mt. Calvary School
- Presented GPS/Geo-caching program for all senior Environmental Studies students at Burke High School
- Read for Fullerton Magnet Read Across America Program
- Presented Nature Hike for daycare children (15 kids)
- Started planning for Water Works 2005
- Attended copier training
- Presented Frogs & Turtles program for all kindergarten classes at Willowdale Environmental Day
- Up-dated LRIP cover
- Attended UNL Wild Fruit & Nut Jam
- Continued planning for Teacher workshops in Nov/Dec
- Continued planning for Pheasant Fest 2005
- Arranged for staff birthday cards/office artwork from Adopt-A-School
- Scheduled interviews for I&E intern
- Started scheduling programs for Spring 2005

Nebraska State Legislature

SENATOR PAM BROWN

District 6
525 North 72nd Avenue
Omaha, Nebraska 68114

Legislative Address:
State Capitol
PO Box 94604
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-4604
(402) 471-2714
E-Mail:
pbrown@unicam.state.ne.us



COMMITTEES

Government, Military and Veterans Affairs
Transportation and Telecommunications
Intergovernmental Cooperation
Legislative Program Evaluation

October 5, 2004

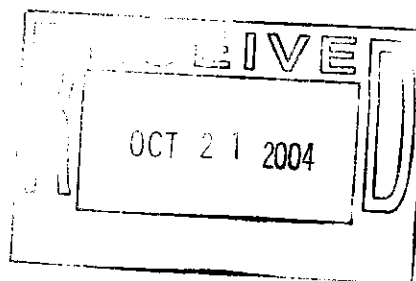
Steve Oltmans
Papio-Missouri River NRD
8901 S. 154th Street
Omaha, NE 68803

Dear Mr. *Steve* Oltmans,

I wanted to thank you for making time in your schedule to speak at the Economic Summit this past Friday. I have already received many positive responses to the summit and its vision for Nebraska. Thank you for your discussion of the importance of water to the state's economic future. You touched on agricultural uses, recreational opportunities and the water needed for development. It was an additional pleasure to serve on the same panel as you. This will be the first of many such gatherings and I look forward to working with you in the future.

Thank you again for your help in making the summit such a success.

Pam
Senator Pam Brown
District #6, Omaha





Memorandum

Date: October 13, 2004
To: FILE
From: Rodney L. Verhoeff, Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance Coordinator
Subject: I-80 Economic Summit – October 1, 2004

On Friday, October 1, along with Glenn Johnson and LPRCA/LPSNRD intern Craig Wacker, I attended an I-80 Corridor Economic Summit at the SAC Museum. This is the second summit that has been held which focuses on economic development and growth in the corridor from Omaha to Lincoln along I-80. Recent studies and projections indicate that this area is considered a prime location for future economic development. With a wealth of attributes including good transportation, location, natural resources, scenic qualities, and recreation/tourism opportunities, the area is being eyed for a variety of ideas. The purpose of the summit was to get all stakeholders together to start working together as a region and to plan for the future of the corridor. It was also to raise awareness of the many interests to consider. Attendees included business leaders from Omaha and Lincoln, state senators, agency heads, natural resources entities, economic development representatives, private business, NGO's, consulting / engineering firms, community leaders, public utilities, and UNL representatives to name a few. All in all, well over 200 people were in attendance. J.B. Miliken, the new President of UNL gave the opening address. He discussed his most recent experience in North Carolina where the University of North Carolina along with private business partners established a research triangle between the communities of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill. This institution marries research, technology, and private industry to create a tremendous partnership for technology and economic development. He stressed the need for Nebraska to help get adults educated in technology to meet today's industry needs and compete nationally and internationally.

Two discussion panels followed. The first discussed the topic, "Next Generation of Economic Development" and included panelists from the Omaha and Lincoln Chambers of Commerce and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. The main point that came out of this panel is the need to work together as a region and to take advantage of the opportunity we have right now before it passes us by. Also, LB 775, the bill that gave economic/tax incentives to bring business to Nebraska, was given much praise as the catalyst for bringing many big businesses to our state. The second panel of the afternoon covered the topic "Here and Now, Resources Along the I-80 Corridor." Along with the State Highway Commission and a venture capital firm, Steve Olmans with the PMRNRD served as a panelist. Steve pointed out the unique and valuable natural resources of the I-80 corridor and particularly where it intersects the Lower Platte River Corridor. Steve took time to introduce me to the group and hand out the LPRCA brochure to the 200+ attendees. He also plugged the many projects the Alliance is undertaking including recent infrastructure projects to address water supply/wastewater. One of the biggest points to emerge from this discussion was the need to guide and direct development to allow for economic development, while protecting the natural qualities of the area. The panelist from the venture capital firm also mentioned that we don't pursue much venture capital in Nebraska and there is a tremendous opportunity to do so.

One of the most stirring and interesting presentations came from Robert Siegel with Siegal and Associates, a market analysis firm. His firm has studied the Nebraska market for the past 30 years, focusing on the Omaha to Lincoln I-80 Corridor. The population of the nation is moving inward from the coasts as they run out of room and opportunities for economic development. However, in our case more people move out of Nebraska than move in. Mr. Siegel says that those outside Nebraska see the state as a dying state because of the population exodus and the lack of employment opportunities. Generally, large companies look for metro areas with at least a million in population. Omaha alone does not meet this number. However, combining Omaha and Lincoln into an "Omaha-Lincoln" regional area would meet this level and could interest companies to move here. He likened this idea to the *

Raleigh-Durham and Dallas-Fort Worth areas. Mr. Siegel had several recommendations: (1) Hold annual I-80 conference/summit; (2) Create an I-80 Commission to bring stakeholders together – statewide entity; (3) Do a study on infrastructure – If we were even keeping pace with U.S., our state would have a population of 4 million minimum rather than our current population of 1.7 million; (4) The State of Nebraska needs to do whatever it takes to put Omaha-Lincoln on the map - - even if it includes raising taxes; (5) Create a research park or similar regional technology/business/economic development area similar to what North Carolina has done in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area; (6) have our representatives in Congress and all state officials mention the area as “Omaha-Lincoln” - - as one metro area. Also get the economic area redefined as one unified area - - most business looks to locate in metro areas with 1 million people or more and combining would put the area at that level; (7) Continue and build cooperation between Omaha and Lincoln; (8) Have high capacity highways to move people in and out of core areas; (9) Create a webpage to promote the I-80 Corridor; and (10) Include the Council Bluffs, Iowa area in the area.

The next presentation, which led into a third panel discussion on “High Tech and Information in Nebraska” was by Bart Stenco with Gartner, a research advisory firm and the largest IT (information and technology) consultant in the nation. According to Mr. Stanco, Nebraska isn’t even on the radar screen for high tech jobs, but we can change that and become a high tech Mecca. Things to consider include: infrastructure, quality of life, social issues, regulatory issues, skilled and available workforce, fortune 500 company clusters, climate, and natural resources. To put the area on the radar screen for high tech issues, the following need to be addressed: educational system, investment capital, sustainability, communications, advisors, incubators, alignment, workforce programs, and apprenticeship programs.

The third panel discussion included IT (information and technology) professionals from the region. They stressed three types of leadership necessary to have success in the high tech industry: (1) visionary, (2) strategic, and (3) tactical. You need people who are idea people, but you also need the “do-ers.” The forth and final panel of the day was entitled, “Developing Good Jobs in IT, BT, Financial Services, and Agri-Business” and included panelists from the University, NEBCO, and Cargil - - successful Nebraska businesses and institutions. The panelists discussed what attracts businesses and the current efforts underway including partnerships in Omaha between business and educational institutions (i.e. J.D. Edwards Honors Program, Peter Kiewit Institute, Scott Technology Transfer and Incubator Center, and University of Nebraska Technology Park). The discussion again emphasized the importance of LB 775 to encourage businesses to locate in Nebraska. Global marketing and competition were also common themes in the discussion.

The next presenter was Theo Freye, President of CLAAS North America, a maker of large agricultural implement equipment including a 16 row combine. Mr. Freye discussed what attracted his company to the Omaha area. CLAAS is a German company and in order to locate here there had to be a skilled work force, good infrastructure, and economic incentives to make it work. Nebraska had all of that and LB 775 provided the incentives. Inland states such as Nebraska are often at a disadvantage since they are located quite a distance from shipping ports. Workers and management at CLAAS in Omaha appreciate the atmosphere Nebraska offers (social benefits).

The final speaker of the day was Governor Johanns. The Governor reiterated the importance of economic development in Nebraska to keep the state viable and competitive. We need to consider both local national and international markets. He also praised LB 775 and other similar legislation that has brought so many jobs to our state. Governor Johanns also stressed the need to continue to work together in the state. Final thoughts from Senator Pam Brown summed up many of the points made at the summit and hinted at future gatherings of the attendees to put the ideas into action. There was a social gathering following the summit. I did notice that LPRCA projects and collaborative projects were mentioned in handouts including: The Environmental Carrying Capacity Study, the infrastructure studies in Cass and Sarpy Counties, and the Joslyn Castle Institute’s Flatwater Metroplex Study. Overall, this was a very good summit to attend. Not only did it bring all stakeholders together to look at the many issues, but it is also approaching development in the I-80 Corridor in a proactive manner. I certainly think we need to continue to be involved in these early stages to ensure environmental issues are taken into account. Several NRD and LPRCA projects go hand-in-hand with this summit including the Environmental Carrying Capacity Study, the Cass County and Sarpy County infrastructure studies, the Cumulative Impact Study, and the COE/WRDA 2000 flood reduction projects.

RLV/rlv

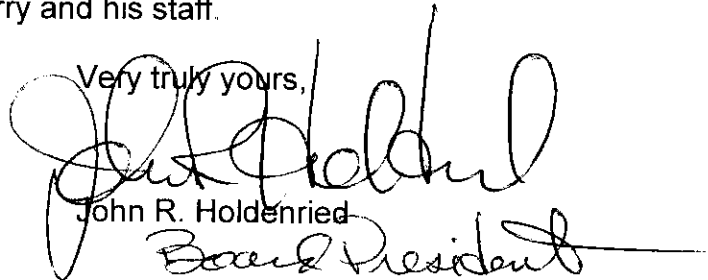
October 19, 2004

Mr. Steve Oltmans
General Manager
Chalco Hills Park
8901 South 154 Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68138

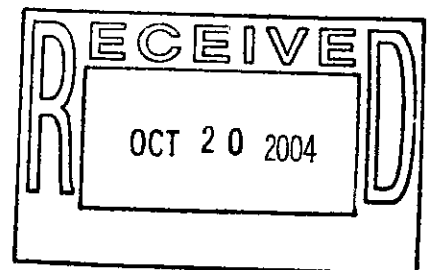
Dear Steve:

I would like to thank Jerry Herbster and his staff for their assistance and commitment with the implementation of the Memory Walk at Chalco Hills. Over the past twelve years, their guidance, the usage of your excellent facility, and their continual assistance on the day of the walk have helped to make the walk a successful event each year. We had a great turnout this year and that would not have been possible without the excellent assistance from Jerry and his staff.

Very truly yours,


John R. Holdenried
Board President

JRH/grw
DOCS/633269.1



ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND RELATED DISORDERS ASSOCIATION, INC.-MIDLANDS CHAPTER
1-800-309-2112 Web Page: www.midlandsalz.org E-mail midlandschapter@midlands.org

Main Office 7101 Newport Avenue 305 Omaha, NE 68152 • 402-572-3059
Southwest Iowa Outreach Office 3319 Nebraska Avenue 51501 • 712-322-8840
Northeast Nebraska Outreach Project • 402-375-1790



October 19, 2004

Mr. Steven G. Oltmans
Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District
8901 S. 154th Street
Omaha, NE 68138-3621

Re: Law of the Missouri River, October 14 & 15, 2004, Omaha, NE

Dear Mr. Oltmans:

Just a brief note to thank you for your excellent presentation at our recent Law of the Missouri River Conference in Omaha, which was well received and contributed to the high quality and success of the overall program.

Enclosed is a Teaching Certificate to acknowledge your participation in the program.

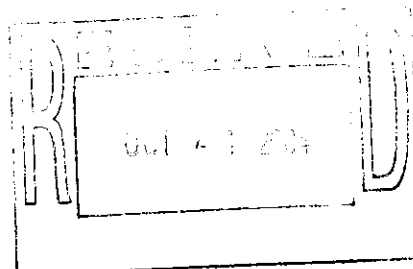
It was a pleasure working with you and I hope that we may call on you again in connection with future conferences. In the meantime, please call me if you have any comments with respect to this conference or if you have any suggestions for other programs we should organize.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Laura", is written over a faint, larger cursive signature that is partially visible in the background.

Laura Terlisner Mehew
Program Attorney

Enclosure



October, 2004

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Updated: October 18, 2004

Current and On-Going Projects P-MRNRD Legal Counsel

★ = Top Priority

F = Future Work – No Assignment

N = New Assignment

O = Others Handling

W = Work in Progress

P = PFP's Portion Completed

- **Big Papio Channel Project - West Center Road to West Dodge Road** (Woodward):
- **Little Papio**: (Cleveland)
- **Big Papio**: (Cleveland)
- **West Branch** (Cleveland):
 - Land Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96th St.) (W)
 - ★ Purchase Agreements, deeds (90th to Giles) (W)
- **Western Sarpy Dike** (Cleveland):
 - Closing with Bundy's (potentially modify ROW/offer) (F)
 - Amended drainage ditch easements on Hickey (First National Property) (P)
 - Cabin ROW Documents, as needed (P)
 - ★ Three Cabin ROW Condemnations (W)
- **Floodway Purchase Program** (Woodward):
 - Floodway Property Purchase Agreements as needed (F)
 - Flood Mitigation Planning and Mapping Assistant Agreement w/ Blair (W)
- **Trail Projects** (Bowen):
 - Bennington Trail Interlocal Agreement (P)
 - Western Douglas County Trails Agreement (W)
- **Missouri River Corridor Project** (Becic):
 - California Bend – Final settlement with tenant (Wright's) (W)
 - Lower Decatur Bend – Appraisal Review, ROW documents and habitat easements (P)

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

**Watershed by Design
Green, Clean, and Safe**



PUBLIC FORUM ANNOUNCEMENT

A Watershed Master Plan is needed for the Papillion Creek Watershed. The purpose of the plan is to improve water quality and reduce the potential impacts of flooding in this unique 402-square-mile watershed located in Washington, Douglas, and Sarpy Counties. Public participation is critical to developing and implementing this type of plan. Your input is very important, so please plan on attending the:



Watershed by Design Public Forum
Wednesday, November 17, 2004 @ 7:00 PM
Natural Resources Center @ the Chalco Hills Recreation Area
8901 S. 154th Street, Omaha, NE 68138

Formed in August 2001, the Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership (Partnership) is represented by nine cities, two counties, and the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (NRD) for the purpose of addressing water quality and stormwater quantity within the watershed. The Partnership has conceived a vision for a **Green, Clean, and Safe** watershed. Now the Partnership needs public input to develop sustainable solutions to the various demands placed on the watershed, capture them in an effective Watershed Master Plan, and successfully implement the solutions.

The Partnership is holding this initial public forum:

- To introduce important issues in the development of a **Green, Clean, and Safe** Papillion Creek Watershed, and
- To gather your ideas and comments regarding these issues.

A series of additional public input sessions will follow this forum to address these issues and your comments in more detail as they relate to the creation of a **Green, Clean, and Safe** watershed. A major focus will be to investigate how recommendations made in the City of Omaha's recent Omaha by Design planning effort can be incorporated on a watershed-wide basis. This watershed approach allows the multiple jurisdictions within the watershed to manage stormwater in a consistent and comprehensive manner, and by working together, will continue to provide an economic benefit to their citizens.

Your participation is needed to make the forum a success! Be part of the solution, as the Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership works toward achieving a **Green, Clean, and Safe** watershed for everyone in this area to enjoy.

Schedule:

Time	Activity
7:00 p.m.	Presentation
7:30 – 8:00 p.m.	Question card responses
8:00 – 9:00 p.m.	Information stations

Learn more by visiting www.papiopartnership.org

Bellevue
Papillion

Bennington
Ralston

Boys Town
Douglas County

PARTNERS

Elkhorn

Gretna
Sarpy County

La Vista
Papio-Missouri River NRD

Omaha



Memorandum

To: PAPIO-MR NRD Staff
From: Marty Nissen – NRD/ United Way Campaign Manager
Date: October 19th, 2004
Re: United Way of the Midlands Campaign for NRD

The 2004 United Way Campaign for the NRD was once again successful. Our donations go directly to the United Way of the Midlands and its 55 health and human services agencies.

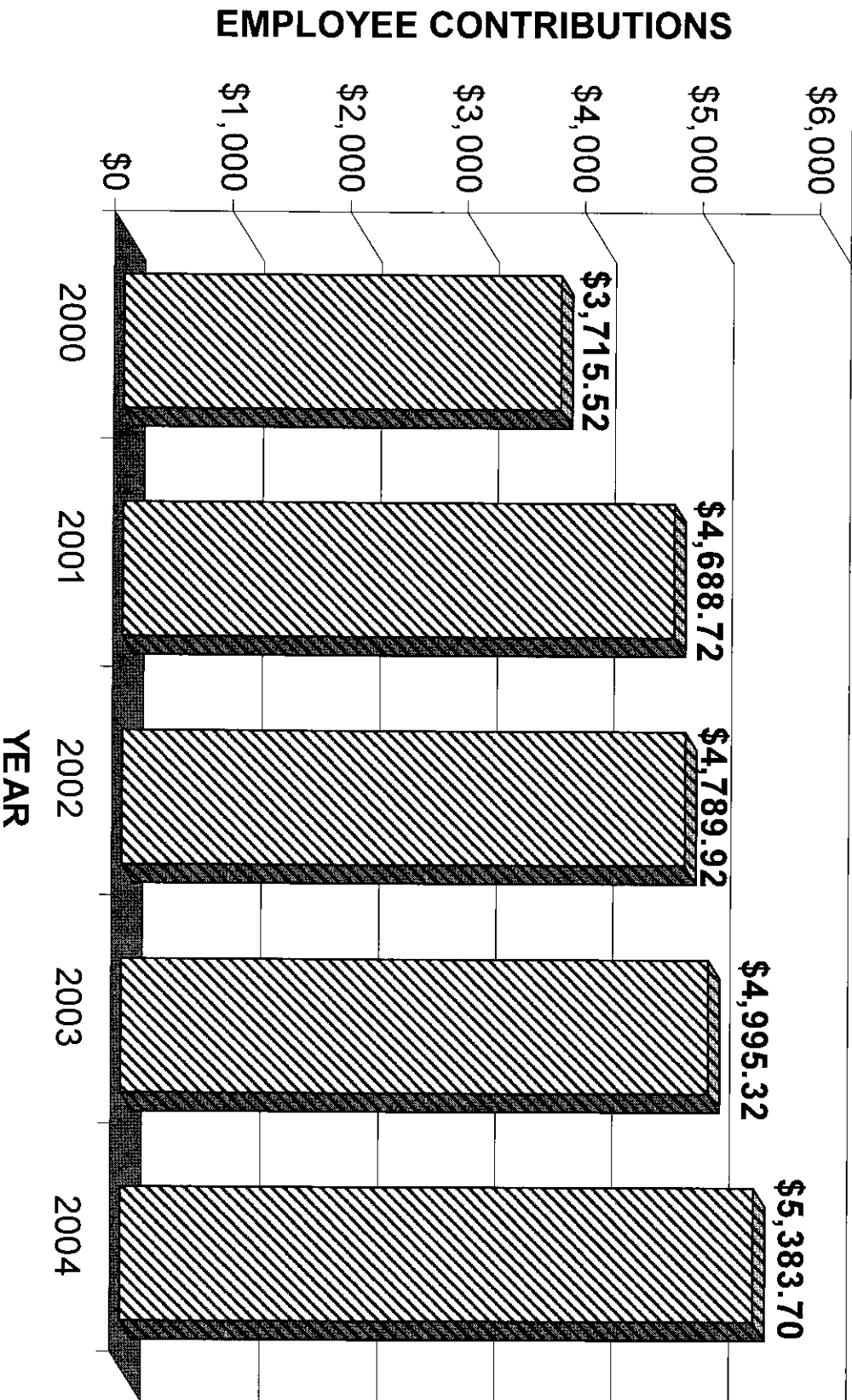
Many thanks go to the generous contributions from the NRD staff . This year a total of **\$5,383.70** was raised. This is a 7.8 % **Increase** from last year's campaign. I attached a chart reflecting the history of NRD contributions to this memo. This year's winner for the free day of annual leave is Kelly Favel.

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>
<http://www.papiionrd.org>

PAPIO-MR NRD UNITED WAY CONTRIBUTIONS



Memorandum

TO THE BOARD

SUBJECT: Cost Saving of Paperless Board Project

DATE: November 12, 2004

FROM: Jean Friends Tait

[illegible]

Please find attached a spreadsheet reflecting the cost savings by going to a "Paperless Board" from January 2003-June 2004 (keep in mind employee time is not included and would greatly increase the dollars saved). The approximate cost of each director's laptop including upgrades and accessories was \$1,200. If any of you would like additional information or would like me to continue tracking the savings, please let me know.

Respectfully,

Jean

	January-03	February-03	March-03	April-03	May-03	June-03	July-03	August-03
# Pages	151	499	475	528	260	702	503	645
# of Sets	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36
Total Pages	5,436	17,964	17,100	19,008	9,360	25,272	18,108	23,220
Paper Cost	34.10	111.60	105.40	117.80	58.90	158.10	114.70	145.70
Cost per copy	0.008225	0.008225	0.008225	0.008225	0.008225	0.008225	0.008225	0.008225
Total Copy Cost	44.71	147.75	140.65	156.34	76.99	207.86	148.94	190.99
Individual Cost to Mail	3.95	5.85	5.85	5.85	4.75	6.80	5.85	6.80
Total Cost to Mail	142.20	210.60	210.60	210.60	171.00	244.80	210.60	244.80
Est. Monthly Expense	\$221.01	\$469.95	\$456.65	\$484.74	\$306.89	\$610.76	\$474.24	\$581.49

[illegible]

Chamber Agricultural Council Members Tour Western Nebraska Communities

115
Daily Record
10-4-04

The Greater Omaha chamber of Commerce Agricultural Council toured western Nebraska including North Platte, Saxton, Sutherland and Ogallala last week.

Chamber President and CEO David G. Brown and Agricultural Council Chairman and President of Farmers National Company Richard C. Hahn, led the delegation of 20 Chamber business and agricultural leaders, including: Theo & Baerbel Freye, Claas Omaha LLC; Gary Gates, OPPD; John Heck, The Scoular company; Jim Jones, Ayres Kahler; David Knutson, Farmers National Company; April Koske, Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce; Dave Krecek, P.I. Midwest; Mark Lakers, Agribusiness & Food Associates; Steve Oltmans, Papio-Missouri NRD; Natalie Peetz, Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce; Charles Schneider, Schneider Engineering; Ann Smith, G & I Farms; Robert Snoozy, Lindsay Manufacturing; Ted Tietjen, Big Byron Agriculture and Kevin Wilkins, Greater Fremont Development Council.

Two important issues impacting Nebraska's business climate – water and energy – were the focus of this year's tour, as well as the development of relationships with business leaders in western Nebraska communities. The tour delegation members encouraged communication with fellow Nebraskans, emphasizing the need to work together in order to grow the state and attract jobs and investment.

Hahn said, "Water and power are issues that affect all of Ne-

braska. It's important for the Omaha business leaders to visit our colleagues in western Nebraska to discuss concerns that we all share about the challenges that face our state."

The Omaha tour members toured the Wal-Mart Distribution Center and the Union Pacific Railyard in North Platte prior to a dinner at Ole's Prairie Ridge in Paxton on Wednesday. Following dinner, the guests toured the farm of Ralph Holz-faster, the recipient of the Agricultural council's annual Heritage Award presented at the River City Roundup Heritage Award Luncheon in Omaha.

Tour members began their day Thursday meeting North Platte Community leaders at a breakfast. They toured the Gerald Gentleman Power Plant at Sutherland where Gary Gates, president and CEO of Omaha Public Power District and Bill Fehrman, president and CEO of Nebraska Public Power District spoke to the delegation. At a luncheon at the Visitor's Center at Lake McConaughy in Ogallala, the group met with Grant and Ogallala chambers of commerce members. The luncheon presenter was Roger Patterson; director of Department of Natural Resources. The final stop before returning to Omaha was a tour of the hydroplant at Lake McConaughy.

Sponsors for various activities of the tour included Papio-Missouri Natural Resources District, Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben, Adams Bank, Pinnacle Bank, Nebraska Public Power District, Farm Credit Services and Ralph, Tim and John Holzfaster.

Aim high, planners urge Omaha

■ The city faces tough decisions as it strives to create a more beautiful community, but the changes are said to be feasible.

By C. DAVID KOTOK
AND JEFFREY ROBB

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITERS
10-15-00

A new "downtown" rising at 72nd and Dodge Streets. A lake and park down the street where the Little Papio and Cole Creeks meet. A hip boulevard emerging at 90th and Maple Streets.

Dreamy ideas? Absolutely.

Crazy notions? Not according to city officials, urban planners and corporate and community leaders who unveiled the concepts Thursday.

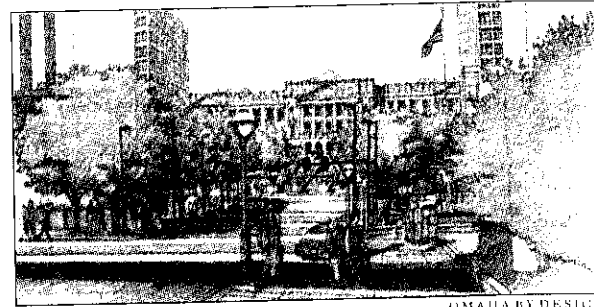
As the Omaha By Design initiative announced its recommendations, organizers embraced the plan as a practical

vision to transform Omaha.

The plan still requires City Council approval. But if that happens as expected Dec. 7, Omaha faces tough decisions as it strives to create a more beautiful, progressive community.

Many of the changes won't be easy, quick or cheap. But the plan's architects were urged to dream no small dream and set aside financial concerns.

"Together we think it adds up to a transformation of the city," said urban planner Jonathan See Design: Page 2



This illustration shows how Capitol Avenue would appear under a dramatic plan to create a plaza in the area east of Central High School.

Design: Don't be afraid to aim high, planners urge

Continued from Page 1

Barnett, who led the study. "We think it's well within your reach."

The 21 goals and 73 recommendations went well beyond demanding more attractive construction by large retailers and subdivision developers. Last year, the City of Omaha and the Omaha Community Foundation, through its Lively Omaha program, launched the project after an outcry for more high-quality mega-retail development.

The additions proposed for the city's master plan are meant to bring out Omaha's natural beauty, create distinctive civic centers and enhance the livability of its neighborhoods. The plan covers everything from planting trees in parking lots to transforming Dodge Street.

Among the futuristic concepts:

■ The transformation of Capitol Avenue downtown, leading up to Central High School, by re-routing the current Interstate 480 exit onto 20th Street.

■ The revitalization and beautification of 90th and Maple Streets, creating an anchor for the Keystone neighborhood. At 90th and Maple Streets, few realize that Cole Creek flows under the development north of Maple. Cole Creek would reappear under the plan.

■ Creation of an office and residential center at 72nd and Dodge Streets.

At 72nd and Dodge, the con-

Recommended first steps

Green Omaha: Create a park along the Keystone Trail near 78th and Cass Streets, where Cole Creek meets the Little Papio Creek.

Civic Omaha: Enhance the Gene Leahy Mall downtown to make it more people-friendly, with another pedestrian bridge and perhaps a restaurant.

Neighborhood Omaha: Create a development plan for 15 broad neighborhood alliances, beginning in Benson, using the model from the recently completed Destination Midtown project.

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cept is to ring the intersection with 10-story office or condo buildings, with a residential area stretching west from Crossroads to a new, small lake near 78th Street, where Cole Creek flows into the Little Papio Creek.

The lake idea might be grand. But the concept is taking its first step forward as engineering consultant Lamp, Rynearson & Associates studies the possibilities.

Bob Batt, executive vice president of Nebraska Furni-

ture Mart, said he wants a more beautiful city, too, but questioned why the Dodge Street idea couldn't be done at Ak-Sar-Ben.

If investors want to redevelop the Dodge Street area, Batt said, "go right ahead." But he said the proposal should not encourage the city to take land through eminent domain.

"You've got a great concept," Batt said. "The first thing I've got to say is, 'Who's paying?'"

The plan includes no cost estimates. Planners see city government as a partner but hope their ideas primarily will spark private developers to initiate the projects.

Bob Peters, Omaha's planning director, said organizers haven't discussed the use of eminent domain, although the power is in Omaha's "kit of tools."

Pete Festersen, Mayor Mike Fahey's deputy chief of staff, said the plan's success will require cooperation among private developers, philanthropists and city government.

But city and community officials insist this is no pie-in-the-sky proposal.

They point to Omaha's history of generous philanthropic gifts. And they say the community set a new standard with the rapid \$1.8 billion transformation of downtown Omaha and its riverfront.

Omaha By Design's recom-

Timeline

Oct. 20: Public session and explanation, 6:30 p.m., Scott Conference Center, 6450 Pine St.

Nov. 3: Omaha Planning Board takes up the proposal.

Nov. 14: Special insert and public questionnaire distributed with The World-Herald.

Nov. 30: City Council public hearing.

Dec. 7: City Council vote on adding the proposal to the city's master plan.

mendations were hammered out by an advisory group that included developers who have bought into the plan.

Several steps are under way to make more immediate impacts.

The Benson neighborhood and commercial district is the next neighborhood targeted for redevelopment. Omaha By Design also is linking up with efforts to rejuvenate Gene Leahy Mall.

David Kuehl, a review committee member from the Kuehl Capital Corp., said that even if parts of the plan might not be realized for decades, at least the concepts will be up for discussion when opportunities arise.

"How can city officials make it work?" Kuehl asked. "There are things that are costly, but at the same time, there are other avenues to get money."

W-H
10-18-04

Water for the future

Misunderstandings and anxiety concerning water issues are rampant in portions of Nebraska, marked by unnecessary hard feelings, distrust and poisonous accusations among irrigators, regulators and others.

The atmosphere is particularly unhealthy because now is the time the various interests should be coming together to solve these increasingly pressing water problems.

Water is, quite simply, the state's future. Without it, agriculture, business and industry would wither away. But, for several reasons, there isn't enough to continue unrestricted access for everyone, and squabbling has broken out.

Legislative Bill 962, enacted by the Legislature and Gov. Mike Johanns this year, is designed to manage the situation. It came from the findings of a state water task force made up of irrigators, regulators, businesses and government officials, among others.

It set up the state's natural resources districts as the stewards of both underground water and surface water, with oversight by the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources.

The resources districts must manage watersheds to correct overallocations. Their tool is the restriction of new water uses until the shortfall is overcome.

Some irrigators see that as excessive regulation; they have, in the past, pretty much drilled and pumped from irrigation wells at will.

Another point of contention is state oversight. It would not be much of a factor if the resources districts do their jobs properly. If they don't, state officials can step in, and properly so. A renegade irrigator or an out-of-control resources district shouldn't be permitted to ride roughshod over the water interests of other Nebraskans — and the law.

Anti-regulation groups such as Nebraskans First have, we are told by people who attended meetings at which their members spoke, spread hysterical hyperbole and dire conspiracy theories.

The state government wants to

**Get the facts,
not the gossip;
then work with
state officials
to rectify
any inequities.**

take irrigators' water away. Or city senators want to stick it to rural people and take the water away. Or the settlement with Kansas over the amount of water in the Republican

River basin was just another link in the conspiracy to, yes, take the water away.

Phony arguments and misleading rhetoric — Nebraska is too dependent on its agricultural base to give credence to that kind of accusation.

Water regulators such as Roger Patterson, director of the state natural resources agency, and State Sen. Ed Schrock of Elm Creek, chairman of the Legislature's Natural Resources Committee, are trying their hardest to find solid and workable solutions to the water allocation difficulties the state faces.

They are taking far too much verbal abuse from people who don't understand the situation fully. Or perhaps some do understand but are so intent on protecting their interests that they will resort to such tactics.

LB 962 is only one focus of dissension. The Republican Valley settlement is another. And the three-state agreement on the Platte River, which must in theory provide water to benefit endangered species along the river in central Nebraska, is yet another.

Add the complicating factor of the drought, which cut levels in Lake McConaughy to an all-time low before the autumn rebound began.

If Nebraska is to have water for all the people into the future — irrigators, small-town businesses, municipalities and everyone else — the supply has to be managed so that no one user hogs it and legitimate users get a fair and proportionate share. That means that unregulated pumping has to give way to responsible stewardship.

Groups and individuals who have problems with LB 962 as a creative management tool first should find out the facts, not accept half-baked explanations from self-serving antagonists.

Second, they should work with Patterson, Schrock and others to resolve inequities that might exist. Hurling accusations of bad faith won't get anyone anywhere.

Outlook for water in West isn't good

10-19-04

By DAVID HENDEE

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

TORRINGTON, Wyo. — Severe water-shortage problems could continue in the West even if the drought breaks and heavy snowfall returns to the Rocky Mountains this winter.

Irrigators and natural resources officials from western Nebraska and eastern Wyoming heard that grim assessment Monday from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation manager who oversees the agency's North Platte River dam operations in Wyoming.

A sixth consecutive season of historic drought in the West would significantly deplete the seven mainstem reservoirs on the North Platte in southeastern Wyoming, said John Lawson, who manages the bureau's Wyoming Area Office near Casper.

For example, Pathfinder Reservoir — the largest of the seven impoundments and about 60 percent the size of Nebraska's Lake McConaughy — would probably be less than 10 percent full a year from now.

The Wyoming reservoir is now about 21 percent full.

"You kind of hate to get into these 'what ifs,' but if that were to happen another year ... we would be in a situation where we'd have a reservoir system

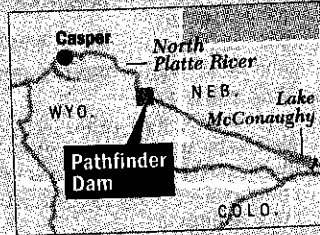
that's basically just a flow-through system," Lawson said. "It really wouldn't have any water in it at all."

That means it's critical that the mountains receive abundant snowfall this winter, that spring rains return to the High Plains and that people conserve water, Lawson said.

Irrigators in the Nebraska Panhandle have received roughly 55 percent to 60 percent of the normal water supply from the North Platte system for three consecutive years.

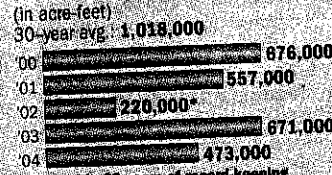
The bureau's scenarios for next year continue the drought pattern of seeing little, if any, recovery in the reservoirs.

Runoff and available water

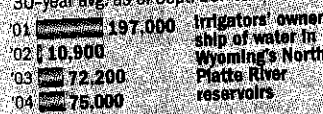


SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Rocky Mountain snowmelt runoff above Pathfinder Dam



Available water



Irrigators' ownership of water in Wyoming's North Platte River reservoirs

DAVE CROY/THE WORLD-HERALD

The seven reservoirs ended the 2004 water year on Sept. 30 with a total 787,700 acre-feet in storage. If expected projections hold, the system would end 2005 with 779,700 acre-feet in storage. A reasonable minimum scenario would put the reservoirs at 580,700 acre-feet.

The system's average September storage is 1.5 million acre-feet.

"This is kind of getting into an 'empty basket' situation," Lawson said.

The bureau is projecting total system inflows from snowmelt runoff and rain this season of 1.33 million acre-feet. Its low-end projection is for 668,200

acre-feet.

Lawson said long-term weather projections are not encouraging.

Lawson said he planned to continue meetings initiated last year with North Platte irrigators on the question of creating individual water accounts in the reservoir system for the region's 13 irrigation districts as a way to encourage saving water.

The challenge is working out the details so all districts are treated fairly, he said.

Problems arise, he said, in allocating water in the accounts because not all irrigation districts have equal rights to natural flows in the North Platte.

Districts with superior rights don't need as much supplemental water from the reservoirs.

Ann Salomon Bleed, deputy director of the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, said after the meeting that all water users need to focus on conservation to survive the dry years.

Bleed said she supports efforts to create ownership accounts in the Wyoming reservoirs. "I don't think anyone disagrees that it's the right thing to do; it's how to do it equitably."

"If you have ownership of a certain amount of water that you save — and it comes back to you — then there's an incentive to save. The devil is in the details."

The Republican basin just wants to survive

10/21/04

BY JENNIFER SMITH

The writer, of Imperial, Neb., farms irrigated land and is co-founder of WaterClaim, a nonprofit organization researching water solutions.

An Oct. 18 editorial spoke of hard feelings "among irrigators, regulators and others" in Nebraska.

Among the Republican River basin's irrigators are a small number who speak with some enmity toward regulators. There also are a few regulators who speak with hostility toward irrigators. The majority of irrigators simply desire to be heard, have questions answered and have less devastating solutions considered. All ideas should be discussed as a team.

We want to propose alternative solutions that not only comply with the Republican River settlement but also prevent agricultural and business sectors from experiencing significant harm.

A recent University of Nebraska-Lincoln study shows current plans for complying with the settlement causing a \$32.5 million economic loss each year. Perhaps that seems insignificant from a statewide or metropolitan standpoint, but it has a great impact on our rural communities.

Nebraska's natural resources districts are set up as stewards of groundwater. The Nebraska Department of Natural Resources is set up as a steward of surface water.

The NRDs are not subject to the department, nor is the department subject to the NRDs. Legislative Bill 962 does not change that. It does require them to create a joint plan, but one is not the controlling entity over the other.

The NRDs must restrict new water uses. However, they are under no obligation to further restrict water uses already in place. They may voluntarily do so in order to help shoulder Nebraska's burden.

I believe the editorial implies that all irrigators have drilled and pumped at will and without regard to others, leading readers to a bias against irrigation.

History shows that many irrigators have expended great efforts and money to conserve water for years. More than half of the water used in the Republican basin has been under strict controls for the past 25 years. We also are active in looking for ways to conserve even more.

What would it take for you to think the NRDs' jobs are done properly? What triggering factor should be the "just cause" for the state to "take over," as has been threatened?

What is wrong with the NRDs and irrigators asking for enough facts to make wise decisions? What is wrong with wanting the political process to slow down enough so that all

alternative solutions truly can be worked through?

We ask only for the democratic process of allowing those affected by the decisions to have a strong voice in making those decisions. Since that is what is being requested, using language such as "renegade irrigator or an out-of-control resources district" seems antagonistic and divisive.

Citizens of the Republican basin care more about water interests of other Nebraskans

and those in other states than I feel the editorial gives us credit for.

Have some faith in us. We are intelligent people, with all kinds of helpful ideas and thoughts. As a majority, we are not a selfish group. We

are conserving, law-abiding and sharing communities.

The settlement is not just a Republican Valley issue. The decisions and the settlement were agreed upon without formal input from our NRDs. Thus, our irrigators were not a party to that settlement. The state, as a whole, was a party to it. Thus, compliance is on the shoulders of the entire state, not just a portion of it.

Water regulators have done a lot in trying to find solid and workable solutions, and irrigators and other citizens have been part of the solution for years.

The irrigators, NRDs and citizens of the Republican basin are willing to take part in shouldering the burden, which is only right. We use aquifer water, too.

We want to see our state's habitats thrive with life. However, we are unwilling to let our farms and our communities dry up in the process. It is not good for us or for the state as a whole.

There are alternative solutions that not only comply with the settlement but also protect the state's agricultural and rural business sectors. Is anyone willing to listen to those alternatives or present their own plans that have minimal to no economic impact on our portion of the state?

We are in agreement that the water supply must be managed. We are not conspiring to "hog" the resource. I feel that the irrigators of the state are, in the main, fair and bright people who can take and have taken part in managing water wisely.

Nebraska's citizens can and should brainstorm together on how to solve the state's problem without causing economic harm to anyone. Perhaps, in the process, we'll figure out something that helps multiple states through the drought.

We want to see our state's habitats thrive with life. But we are unwilling to let our farms and our communities dry up in the process.

Big Mac forecasts continue to sink

11-2-04

By DAVID HENDEE

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

There is nothing on the dry horizon to float false hopes for Lake McConaughy after five consecutive years of drought in the West.

That was the message Jeremie Kerkman delivered Monday to the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District's board of directors in Holdrege.

Lake McConaughy, the state's largest reservoir, is at 24 per-

cent capacity and slowly filling from its irrigation-season drawdown to a historic low. However, the North Platte River's flows into the western Nebraska lake are a drought-stricken trickle.

Kerkman, the Central engineer who oversees McConaughy, projected that the reservoir would be at 8 percent of capacity at the end of September 2005. That represents 132,300 acre-feet remaining behind Kingsley Dam, or about a 26-foot decline from the reservoir's current level.

Flows into the reservoir from the North Platte are projected to be about 47 percent of normal between now and the end of next September, Kerkman said.

Meanwhile, releases from the dam throughout the water year — including irrigation releases, flows to maintain the Nebraska Public Power District's Sutherland Reservoir and water necessary to offset icing conditions in the Supply Canal — are projected to be 58 percent of normal.

McConaughy mirrors the sit-

uation at North Platte River reservoirs in Wyoming. Extended drought has depleted storage in Pathfinder, Seminole and other reservoirs to 28 percent of capacity.

"Our projections don't show any (extra water) from the Wyoming reservoirs this year, and that means we won't see high flows coming into McConaughy," Kerkman said.

Central informed its irrigation customers in September that they will receive about 6.8 inches of water next summer, less than half of normal.

A different vision for water use

■ An economist says recreation and other quality-of-life issues should receive more consideration.

By DAVID HENDEE

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

LINCOLN — Nebraska has prospered for decades by using water from Lake McConaughy for growing corn, generating electricity and, as an afterthought, luring tourists.

That mix, however, may not be the best use of the state's largest reservoir or be best for the future of Nebraska now that deep drought in the West highlights the fragility of water as a resource, an economist said Wednesday.

"Communities grow by attracting people, especially very productive, highly educated and skilled people who command high incomes," said Ernie Niemi of Eugene, Ore., an expert on the relationship between regional economies and the environment.

Economic policies that harm the environment or that deplete natural resources hurt the economy in the long run, Niemi said in an interview. That's because the quality-of-life benefits of

water, for example, are forceful influences in attracting people to live in a particular place, he said.

Don Gabelhouse, the fisheries division administrator at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, said that Nebraskans can ignore Niemi at their own economic peril.

"It comes down to, is Nebraska going to be a place where people want to live, or is it going to be a place they want to leave?" Gabelhouse said.

He said the state doesn't have to choose between agriculture or recreation in planning how water will be used.

"But if we had more reservoirs and streams that were full of water, and wildlife abounded on the Platte River basin, would more people want to live in the state and could we attract more from out of state who want to enjoy that form of recreation and the wide open spaces?" he said. "I think the answer is yes."

Niemi, vice president and project manager at ECONorthwest, an economics and consulting firm, was invited to Nebraska as part of a state study of drought and water issues requested by Rep. Tom Osborne, R-Neb. Niemi spoke to nearly 40 people from across the state at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's East Campus Student Union.

Niemi said he is not suggesting that Nebraskans — or Central Nebraska Public Power and

Irrigation District, which owns and operates McConaughy — stop using water from the reservoir for agriculture.

"I'm not saying that use is bad. I'm saying that there are tradeoffs, and the tradeoffs are different now than they were in the past," Niemi said. "Once people understand the tradeoffs, they can make their decisions."

Niemi was one of more than 100 economists who wrote letters last year to President Bush and to the governors of 11 Western states telling them that protecting and enhancing the quality of the region's natural environment would strengthen the ability of communities to generate more jobs and higher incomes.

The economists argued that the West's natural environment is, arguably, its greatest long-run economic strength. They said that nearly all communities of the West will find that they cannot have a healthy economy without a healthy environment.

They said, for example, that agriculture — and extractive industries such as logging and mining — now play a smaller economic role because their ability to generate new jobs and higher incomes has declined.

Subsidies to irrigation, for example, prop up activities that would not take place under efficient market conditions, they said.

The notion that what got an in-

dustry where it is today will carry it into the future is flawed, Niemi said.

"What you see in the past doesn't have a lot to do with the future," he said.

Niemi said that the new economic model evolved from experiences in the Pacific Northwest when federal judges suspended logging on millions of acres of federal forestland to protect habitat of the northern spotted owl.

The perception in the region was that the economy would be crippled, he said.

"There was palpable fear in those communities that jobs and entire communities would collapse, and the region would slip into the next version of a long-running Appalachian-style depression," he said.

It didn't happen.

Niemi said that the old economic model of "jobs vs. owls" isn't the only option. Now jobs follow people, who move to places with environmental amenities, he said.

Niemi tells a story that illustrates the tug that quality of life attractions give a region.

He asks people in the audience to raise their hands if they would like a 20 percent increase in income. Hands shoot into the air.

Then he asks how many people are willing to move to New York City to get that income. Most hands drop.

"That's the power of quality of life," he said.

Water system expected to spur growth

■ The new service promises higher quality of life for residents of the fast-growing southeast section of Washington County.

11-8-04
By MARION RHODES

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

A new water system being built in Washington County is expected to play a vital role in the area's future growth.

Promises of more and cleaner water, an emergency backup system and improved fire protection in some areas are expected to draw more homeowners into the countryside.

"It's definitely a selling factor," said Steve Huber, vice president of Curt Hofer Construction, whose affiliate is planning a 100-lot subdivision east of Highway 133.

After a two-year push by some residents, work has begun on the rural water project, which includes a water tower and pump station in Blair and a 35-mile distribution system in the southeastern part of the county.

The pipelines will supply water to about 270 households south of Blair and north of the Douglas County line, between Nebraska Highways 75 and 133.

Anticipated county growth was a driving force behind the

\$3.5-million project, County Planning Director Doug Cook said.

With 3,100 additional residents since 1990, based on U.S. Census estimates, Washington County is among the state's fastest-growing counties.

Its proximity to Omaha makes it attractive for commuters who want to spend their free time away from city life.

The area between Highway 133 and Fort Calhoun, in particular, is growing. In recent years, several subdivisions have sprung up, and Huber's new development is expected to join the corridor next year.

"That seems to be the place to be," Cook said.

For Huber's development, Cottonwood Creek, the water system means more houses can be built on smaller lots.

Without rural water, Huber said, homes probably would have been built on five-acre lots to avoid overextending local wells. Because the developer agreed to connect to the new system, most lot sizes have been scaled down to two or three acres.

Rural homes currently draw

water from community wells, which produce a limited quantity and often bad quality, said Dick Sklenar, special projects coordinator for the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District. The new system addresses those problems, which Sklenar said will increase the resale value of connected homes.

Hookups to a rural water system also provide a draw for people who are unfamiliar with wells, Huber said.

"People just feel better about that," he said.

The system will connect to 10 fire hydrants west and south of Fort Calhoun, covering about 50 percent of a district that now relies on tank trucks, Fire Chief Mike Smith said.

A connection to the Metropolitan Utilities District will ensure an emergency supply of water in case a natural disaster such as a tornado or earthquake disables Blair's water plant, which is the primary water source for the distribution system.

"It's a good thing for the existing people, and it's a good thing for the future people," Cook said.

Not everyone welcomes the changes expected, said Wayne Talbert, one of several residents who have pushed for the improvements.

"A lot of them moved out here to be in the country and have some privacy," Talbert said. For them, making the outlying areas more attractive to development wasn't one of the upsides of the project.

"Trying to convince some of these old-timers and old-towners was a battle. We got tarred and feathered," Talbert said.

As the planning progressed, however, it became clearer that the advantages of the new system will outweigh the disadvantages, Talbert said, and opposition quieted down.

"I don't think it's going to be like you're living right next door to your neighbor, as in Omaha," he said.

The system, which is a joint enterprise of Washington County, the City of Blair and Papio-Missouri NRD, is expected to be up and running by October 2005, Sklenar said.

Residents near the water lines will be able to decide whether to connect to the system, Sklenar said. Hookup fees are \$3,500 for a single-family residence. A private service line to the house can cost up to \$1,500.

Talbert said most residents now are excited about the system.

"They realized it wasn't going to change things," he said. "It's just going to make it bigger and better."

Nov. 9, 2004

Local

blairnebraska.com THE PILOT-TRIBUNE

3A

Rural water project progressing

By Keith Rydberg
Reporter

An upcoming meeting of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District's board of directors is expected to result in significant steps forward on a rural water system in Washington County.

At the Nov. 18 meeting of the NRD board, the directors are scheduled to consider awarding a contract for the construction of the 36-mile distribution system that will serve 265 rural customers living between U.S. Highway 75 and Nebraska Highway 133 south of Blair. Water will be distributed to the customers from Blair's water storage facility as part of an agreement between the city and the NRD.

Project Manager Dick Sklenar said BRB Contractors of Topeka, Kan., had the lowest bid of the seven construction firms interested in working on the project. BRB Contractors has bid the project at \$2.54 million, which is \$250,000 less than the engineering estimate. Work on the project is scheduled to begin in early December and is expected to be completed by July 31, 2005.

"We are very pleased with both the contractors and their bid," Sklenar said.

Sklenar said the bid also includes oversizing the main trunk line from the original specifications to a new width of 12 inches. The NRD and the city of Blair have agreed to share the cost involved with oversizing the main line although the total cost of the oversizing has not been determined.

The trunk line, which will run parallel to county roads 32 and P32, was enlarged mainly in order to allow for a connection between Blair's water supply and the Metropolitan Utilities District's water supply. The connection will allow the rural water lines to be switched from Blair's supply to the MUD supply if Blair's water was unavailable or became contaminated. Also, by oversizing the line now, Sklenar said the district is ensuring enough water and water pressure will be available for future development in the area.

Water lines running north and south from the main trunk line will also be oversized to a width of 8 inches. The county has agreed to loan \$200,000 to the NRD to cover the oversizing cost although the NRD estimates the total cost to oversize the lateral lines will be \$235,000. Sklenar said he is unsure how the additional \$35,000 will be raised but said it could mean some of the lines may not be enlarged to the full 8-inch width.

While this oversizing was also done in anticipation of future

New water tower taking shape along Hwy. 133

While the contracts involving a rural water distribution system are still being finalized, construction is continuing on the water tower that will be a key part of the system.

Construction on the water tower began shortly after Landmark Structures of Fort Worth, Texas, was awarded the \$1.38 million contract at the August 12 meeting of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District's board of directors. The watertower, which is located at the intersection of Nebraska Highway 133 and County Road 26, will provide storage for 1 million gallons of water for the distribution system and will also ensure that enough water pressure is available for rural residents and firefighters using the system.

Chris Koenig, who is the project manager for the HGM Associates consulting firm, is supervising the project on behalf of the NRD. Koenig said the project is still on schedule to be completed in September 2005 with workers hoping to complete the pedestal of the watertower by the end of the month. Once completed, workers will stop construction at the site for the winter but will continue to fabricate steel throughout the winter months so the steel can be ready for the dome once construction resumes in March.

Thus far, Koenig said the foundation of the watertower has been completed with workers pouring concrete at the site this week. An access road leading to the watertower has also been completed as well as some utility work. Additional utility work remains to be done along with constructing storm sewers in ditches along the sides of County Road 26 that will handle any overflows from the watertower.

When it is completed, the watertower will be 100 feet tall with the pedestal to be 4 feet wide. While the watertower is currently owned by the NRD, the city of Blair will gain ownership of the watertower in 10 years.

growth, Sklenar said the Kennard, Blair and Fort Calhoun fire departments have also requested fire hydrants be placed at the intersections of the main trunk line and the north-south lines. Eight to 10 hydrants have been requested by the Fort Calhoun Fire Department with the Blair Fire Department requesting three hydrants and the Kennard Fire Department requesting one fire hydrant. Installing the hydrants will cost \$2,800 with the district to be reimbursed by the fire departments making the request.

The NRD board is also scheduled to consider a \$257,646.90 contract with Pospichal Construction that would allow construction to begin on a pump station that will be located south of the cul-de-sac on 17th Avenue in Blair. Once completed, the pump station will provide water pressure to the watertower site and

Blair with the city paying all of the costs involved with the station's construction. Work on the pump station is also scheduled to begin in early December with the contractors expected to be given 180 calendar days to complete the project.

While Pospichal Construction's bid is more than the engineer's estimate of \$250,415, Blair City Administrator Rod Storm said the extra cost should not be a problem because of the lower-than-expected cost of the water distribution system.

Sugarplum Festival kicks off on Nov. 18

The Blair Area Chamber of Commerce and Cargill are planning for the second annual Sugarplum Festival. Events will kick off on Thursday, Nov. 18, with the Sugarplum Walk and Holiday Open Houses.

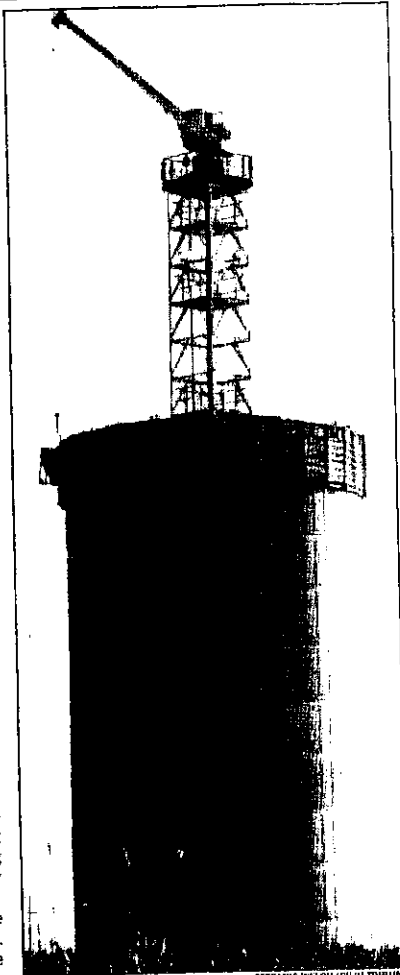
This year the evening will begin with a chili feed at the

Storm also said while the city is assisting the district with the costs involved with the overall project, it is doing so because the citizens of Blair will benefit as much as the residents living in rural Washington County.

"The only reason Blair is participating in this project is because of the benefits the project has for the residents of Blair," Storm said. "It offers additional water storage, provides better water pressure and it allows for a connection with the Metropolitan Utilities District."

Eagles Club, followed by the city tree lighting at city hall and the Sugarplum Walk.

The chamber of commerce is also looking for folks to make gingerbread houses. For rules and registration forms, call Harriet Waite at the Chamber at 533-4455.



STEFANIE WELCH/PILOT-TRIBUNE

The new water tower is scheduled to open in September 2005.

11-10-04

The specter of Micro Mac

People in the Midlands might understandably wish that the Rocky Mountain birthplace of the North Platte River, from Walden, Colo., to Saratoga, Wyo., would be buried in snow this winter — and for a couple of winters after that.

Normal or above-normal precipitation for the next few years would go a long way toward keeping Lake McConaughy on the map.

After a fifth summer of drought on the western Plains, Big Mac, as feared, is a watery shadow of itself.

From its federally permitted peak elevation of 3,265 feet in 1999, the tourist mecca near Ogallala shrank to 3,197.6 feet in September, breaking a 48-year-old record low since Kingsley Dam was finished in 1941.

The lake has recovered before. It will gain a few feet this winter. And there's encouragement in the season's first reports of Colorado snow-pack — 129 percent of normal.

But McConaughy may need three unusually wet winters or more to recover, according to its owner and operator, the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District.

It seems more likely that Little Mac, by this time next year, will be Mini Mac or even Micro Mac — especially if Central and the lake's other users take everything Mother Nature will let them.

At a Nov. 1 board meeting, Central engineer Jeremie Kerkman said current trends could drain McConaughy by next September to 8 percent of capacity — just 132,300 acre-feet, compared with about 1.7 million acre-feet at the federal limit.

That almost certainly would spell misfortune for the Ogallala/Keith County tourism industry, long based on one of Nebraska's top attractions.

It's not hard to understand why people there were dismayed when Central's board of directors voted 12-3 in September to halve 2005 water deliveries — but not suspend them — to the district's 1,500 irrigation accounts, all but a few in the Tri-County area (Gosper, Phelps and Kearney Counties) for which McConaughy was developed.

**Those who use
McConaughy
must conserve
shrinking lake
for well-being
of the region.**

Already, McConaughy has been replaced by the North Platte River, itself a trickle; about as far east as Lake View and Lemoyne. Residents of Lemoyne can look south and see the foundations that once anchored their town before the lake flooded it and drove it onto the Sand Hills.

These milestones lie ahead:

■ A drop to elevation 3,170 feet — 27 feet below the Sept. 14 low — likely would leave too little water to run Central's Kingsley Hydro Plant.

■ McConaughy would be effectively dry at 3,130 feet, the bottom of Kingsley's "morning glory" outlet, which releases water downstream. The only water left would be near the dam's midpoint, in a slightly lower region that covers about 250 acres — smaller than Glenn Cunningham Lake in Omaha.

■ Long before then, Big Mac's prized fish population would have perished. Nebraska Game and Parks Commission officials at the lake can't say when, but they say they have seen signs of stress in fish.

Central's directors, in voting to deliver up to 6.7 inches of water next summer, decided they lacked firm legal ground in terms of water rights to simply turn the faucet off.

(However, should McConaughy get more water than expected next spring, Central won't send that extra water to irrigators next summer, spokesman Tim Anderson said.)

The tourism hit will be shared by towns near several smaller lakes in McConaughy's system, all the way to Johnson Lake near Lexington.

None can lure anglers, boaters, campers, sunbathers and beach homes like Big Mac. But this past summer's 600,000-some visitations were down by one-fourth from 2002, said Mitch Gerstenkorn, the lake's Game and Parks superintendent.

Central's vote was a reminder of an indisputable fact that University of Nebraska-Lincoln water-law specialist J. David Aiken reiterates on the More Commentary page.

No matter the economic importance of recreation, McConaughy was created 70 years ago to grow crops in three central Nebraska counties. Recreation has no legal right to the water. (And it's unlikely that recreation interests could afford the multimillion-dollar price tag Aiken estimates to lease water

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and keep it in the lake.)

Even so, it's not as simple as blaming Central or its irrigators. One also must consider four other groups that claim portions of the water.

■ First call on Big Mac historically has belonged not to Central but to the Nebraska Public Power District, which gets the first 125,000 acre-feet each year.

About 700 central Nebraska irrigators benefit from NPPD's share after it has been used (along with diverted South Platte River water) to cool the Gerald Gentleman coal plants near Sutherland.

NPPD officials say Gerald Gentleman could not operate at full power without the cooling water. Those plants generate *half* of all power provided by NPPD, which in turn supplies much of Nebraska. NPPD has drilled backup wells near the plants, but they can't entirely replace Big Mac water.

■ Next comes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which gained the right to release water from a McConaughy "environmental account" in 1998 under a three-state agreement that helped secure Kingsley's relicensing. The accord aims to help stressed central Platte wildlife.

The agency has held onto its share (currently less than NPPD's) since 2002, largely because little water was reaching wildlife due to the drought but also in part to minimize the recreational impact on Keith County, says environmental account manager Sharon Whitmore.

But if conditions are scientifically right, Whitmore says, Fish and Wildlife must release water next spring to scour overgrowth from the Platte's river bed. It would be up to her superiors to rule otherwise.

■ Central, NPPD and Fish and Wildlife must take a back seat to the series of seven dams and lakes on the North Platte from Seminoe Reservoir near Rawlins, Wyo., to Lake Minatare east of Scottsbluff.

The century-old North Platte River Project returns water not used by sugar beets, dry beans and such to the river above McConaughy. Ditch irrigators have gotten only half their usual supply for three years, says John Lawson, project manager for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation

Seminoe, Pathfinder and Glendo Reservoirs, all in Wyoming, are at one-fourth or less of capacity. They must refill before Big Mac can.

■ The newest players are Panhandle irrigators who drilled some 700 wells from 1995 until the North Platte Natural Resources District blocked new wells in 2002. Central contends, as do some of these irrigators' neighbors, that their wells are slurping water that is linked to the North Platte system. In turn, that affects Big Mac inflows.

So thousands of people in Nebraska's western half, plus NPPD ratepayers across the state, depend on the water that flows into Big Mac, then to its downstream users.

But they cannot all take all the water they're used to. That should be clear. So does McConaughy just drain until *no one* has any water?

Gov. Mike Johanns has said he would side with irrigators for the sake of Nebraska's economy. That's also how the water rights work.

However, Tri-County irrigators are getting less Big Mac water from Central next year only because there's less water to be had. If they took all they could, and if NPPD, Fish and Wildlife and those Panhandle wells took all they could, would any water be left to take in 2006?

It would make more sense to conserve more of McConaughy's shrinking pool, buy time for affected farmers to adjust their operations — and aid Keith County's recreation interests in the process.

Some of the other parties have taken admirable conservation steps. Let's build on that. Let's bring all the parties together, from southeast Wyoming to central Nebraska, to conserve the water and help farmers cope with the financial pain headed their way sooner or later. (A state bid for federal aid for irrigators who don't irrigate could help.)

It could be left to the courts, but we doubt there's time. We're all neighbors. Let's figure something out before Big Mac is gone.

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Big Mac water rights leave recreation out

BY J. DAVID AIKEN

The writer, of Lincoln, is a water-law specialist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This piece was first published in the November edition of Nebraska Farmer magazine.

Nebraska is in a drought of historic proportions. Because of this, water levels in Lake McConaughy near Ogallala are falling to record lows.

This has led to an active debate regarding how water in McConaughy should be managed and unfair criticism of how the lake has been managed.

This column takes a quick look at the water-rights dimension of McConaughy water levels.

■ **Who owns Lake McConaughy?** Lake McConaughy is owned and operated by the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District. Lake McConaughy is not a natural lake and does not belong to the State of Nebraska, as many seem to think.

■ **Who owns the water in Lake McConaughy?** The State of Nebraska has granted storage appropriations to Central and to the Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) to store water in McConaughy.

Both Central and NPPD use this stored water to supply their irrigation customers. Central and NPPD also generate hydroelectric power with water from McConaughy. The water stored in McConaughy does not belong to the State of Nebraska.

■ **For what water uses are the McConaughy water rights authorized?** Irrigation and power production. The McConaughy water rights are not for recreation, as many people seem to think.

■ **Well, shouldn't there always be plenty of water in Lake McConaughy for recreation?** Up to this point, recreation has been a "free rider." In other words, people have been able to enjoy the water in the lake for recreational purposes for free when the water was there.

However, McConaughy is not legally required to be managed for recreational purposes. In fact, managing McConaughy for recreation instead of for irrigation likely would violate the water supply contracts that Central and NPPD have with their irrigation customers.

■ **What about endangered species water?** Central allocates up to 50,000 acre-feet of water each year for endangered-species protection. The water stored in this environmental account is released at the direction of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The annual water deposits into the environmental account vary

based on how much water flows into McConaughy each year.

■ **Well, can't this environmental-account water be used for recreation?** That depends upon decisions made by Fish and Wildlife. However, in dry years, there is likely to be little water available for endangered species.

■ **Well, we need more water in Lake McConaughy for recreation!** Historically, there usually has been plenty of water in the lake for recreation. But in dry years, that won't be the case. So if recreational interests want a full or nearly full lake in dry years, they are going to have to buy the water from Central and NPPD irrigators.

■ **You mean someone would have to pay irrigators not to irrigate in order to leave more water in the lake?** That is correct.

■ **Is that legal?** It has always been legal to buy and sell stored water, and irrigators commonly sell water to each other within irrigation districts. However, 2004 legislation makes it legal to lease "direct-flow" irrigation water rights for other uses. This may lead to a more active water-rights market in Nebraska.

■ **Well, if we have to buy the water from irrigators to keep the lake fuller; how much might that cost?** Hard to say. For leasing water rights, one place to start would be to compare the difference between cash rental rates for irrigated and dryland farms.

Based on 2003 cash rental rates in central Nebraska reported to UNL, the difference between irrigated land and dryland was about \$70 per acre. If we can assume that would lease about 1.5 acre-feet of water, the cost of water per acre-foot would be about \$47.

Lake McConaughy is designed to hold a maximum of about 1.95 million acre-feet. So, for example, if you wanted to keep 500,000 acre-feet (about 25 percent) of additional water in Lake McConaughy, that could cost about \$23.5 million for one year.

■ **Wow! That is really expensive!** Yes, it is. Now, we don't know precisely what irrigators would be willing to lease their water for. But this gives us at least a rough estimate of what it might cost to keep more water in McConaughy.

■ **Isn't there a cheaper way to do this?** Pray for rain and lots of it.

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Nature teaches lessons

Common wisdom long has said that the amount of water in the Platte River and Missouri River systems depends directly on the amount of snow that falls in the Rocky Mountains each winter.

Little snowpack? Low flow and potential water shortages downstream. Heavy snowpack? More water and possible abundance.

New research has arisen to cast doubt on the directness of that relationship and to emphasize once again the complex interconnections of the groundwater and surface-water systems.

The theory suggested that snowmelt each spring was the source of 80 percent of Colorado's surface water. But studies by Mark Williams of the University of Colorado have indicated that is not the case.

Rather, much of the snowmelt seeps into aquifers hidden in subterranean mountain catchments, he said, where it can be held for years or decades.

At some point, he said, the underground water is squeezed out and does indeed flow into the river systems as surface water.

Less than half of the annual snowmelt in one region of the high moun-

**Intricate
relationship of
surface water,
groundwater
is even knottier.**

tains near Boulder reaches a watershed treatment facility within a year, he reported.

The implications of the findings may change the way Nebraska irrigators, water experts and regulators look at the integration of surface water and groundwater. This is particularly significant because of water shortages in parts of western Nebraska.

Some observers had expressed the hope that a few years of heavy snow in the mountains would go far toward alleviating the drought and would help raise the level of the Platte and Lake McConaughy. If Williams is correct, the snowmelt will replenish underground mountain reservoirs first.

The best water users can hope for from the cycle he has outlined is that a big snowmelt would push more water out of the underground aquifer and into the surface streams.

Whatever the outcome, though, nature seems to have given Nebraskans another lesson in the intricacies of the relationship between surface water and groundwater — and the folly of assuming there's nothing new to learn.