

MEMORANDUM

TO THE BOARD:

SUBJECT: General Manager Report

DATE: November 7, 2008

FROM: John Winkler, General Manager

A. **INFORMATION/EDUCATION REPORT:** A copy of the I&E Report detailing Information and Education activities for the month of October, 2008, is attached for your review.

B. **MISCELLANEOUS/PERSONNEL ITEMS:**

1. **Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance Coordinator Hired** - Meghan Sittler has been selected as the new Coordinator for the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance. She plans to begin the position on December 1. Meghan grew up on a farm near Crete, Nebraska which her family continues to operate. She received a BA in Environmental Studies and Anthropology and an MS in Natural Resources with minors in Community and Regional Planning and Political Science from the University of Nebraska Lincoln.

Most recently, she has been the Research and Outreach Specialist at the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska Lincoln. In this position she has served as the liaison between the Center and the public, the media, government officials and agencies, industry, Native American tribes, and organizations. Meghan previously worked for the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department as an Environmental Health Coordinator. She also served as an academic advisor for Environmental Studies and an Instructor at UNL. She has participated in numerous internships and in research on adaptive and collaborative management for the Missouri River.

- 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, 2008. 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 13, 2008. I would ask each Director to review this listing. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.
- E. **PAPILLION CREEK WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP REPORT:** Attached is the Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership Monthly Update for October, 2008. Please review and if you have any questions, contact me. The next Partnership meeting will be held on December 4, 2008, at 10:00 a.m. at the NRC.

F. **NEWS CLIPS:**

- ✓ October 2, 2008, Friday Message from Steve Chick, NRCS State Conservationist – Watershed Rehabilitation Program is Extending the Life of Our State's Critical Infrastructure
- ✓ October 7, 2008, Omaha World Herald article – Sarpy lake proposed in dam plan. Papillion supports the \$20 million idea, aimed at protecting 300 properties from flooding.
- ✓ October 7, 2008, Kearney Hub article – Senator will seek more green to turn weeds brown
- ✓ October 9, 2008, Omaha World Herald article – River conservation program eyes land. About 2,500 acres along the central Platte River may be purchased for restoration and habitat preservation.
- ✓ October 10, 2008, Omaha World Herald article – Plans for lake near Papillion advance. The Papio-Missouri River NRD board gives its approval for officials to seek design proposals.
- ✓ October 13, 2008, Omaha World Herald article – Papio NRD candidates split over borrowing
- ✓ October 14, 2008, Lincoln Journal Star article – NRD awards \$12.5m contract to build dam for Lake Wanahoo
- ✓ October 20, 2008, Omaha World Herald article – Creek's future is doubt. An utility calls for sharply lower limits on groundwater use to reverse a decline in flows.
- ✓ October 21, 2008, Omaha World Herald article – Boaters to gain access to Elkhorn River at West Dodge Road
- ✓ October 23, 2008, Omaha World Herald editorial – Flooding a key concern. Tesar, Jepsen, Kolowski and Bradley fit well into the mission of Papio NRD.
- ✓ October 24, 2008, Washington County Enterprise article – Papio-Missouri River NRD District 1
- ✓ October 28, 2008, Omaha World Herald article – Omaha unveils latest part of trail system
- ✓ October 28, 2008, Omaha World Herald article – Meeting tonight on Waterloo levee study.
- ✓ October 29, 2008, Omaha World Herald article – Waterloo levee upgrade may cost up to \$3 million
- ✓ October 30, 2008, Omaha World Herald article – Getting kids to play outside has broad appeal

October 2008

Information & Education Report

Information:

- Planned and attended ribbon cutting for Graske Crossing
- Began work on Missouri River Tribes Fact Sheet
- Completed P-MRNRD Fact Sheet
- Completed slogans contest
- Completed work on Pedestrian Bridge PSAs for Spring airing
- Continued work on Web site redesign
- Began work on Winter SPECTRUM

Education:

- Millard South Interview Project
- Boys and Girls Club Nature Club –
 - casting = 40 3rd – 5th grade students
 - Geocaching = 20 3rd – 5th grade students
 - Animal Adaptations = 40 k – 2nd grade students
 - Water Quality Game = 30 3rd – 5th grade students
- PSA for Pedestrian Bridge
- Millard South – geocaching = 8 high school students
- Health Expo at Papillion Junior High = 200 people
- Joslyn tree program = 50 4th grade students
- Summit Lake Field Day – NRD overview and Nature Hikes = 300 students
- Durham Education Night = 700 teachers
- Presented at Leopold Education Project State Coordinator's Meeting in MO, on GPS curriculum
- Lothrop Elem. – Butterfly & Ladybug prog. = 75 1st and 3rd graders
- Lothrop Water Quality at Gifford Farm = 85 4th graders
- Carriage Hill Elem. – Enviroscope = 66 3rd graders
- Sent out class sets of "Know Nebraska's Water" to area teachers
- Ordered GPS units for school programming
- Worked with Omaha Family Magazine to contract 6 NRD adds in their "Living Green" Section
- Worked with Julie Anderson at the OWH on a "Go Play Outside" Article
- Bellevue West – geocaching prog. = 300 high school students
- MORE Nature meeting
- Presented Geocaching Program for Sandoz Elementary Nature Club = 30 students
- Continued working with Sandoz on a Family Nature Night, and Outdoor Classroom
- Turned in Youth Garden Grant for MORE Nature
- Continued working with Junior League to help sponsor Family Nature Nights
- NACEE Conference in Ponca – attended and presented GPS program to members

- Millard South – water quality game = 8 high school students
- Liberty Elem. Science Night – scat and tracks = 300 people
- Continued working on revisions to GPS curriculum
- Worked with Boys and Girls Club to set up a Family Nature Night

Updated: October 13, 2008

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

- **Little Papio:** (Cleveland)
 - ⊛ Land transfer/cross easements agreement w/Douglas County and UNL Foundation (W)
- **Big Papio:** (Cleveland)
- **West Branch** (Cleveland):
 - Land Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96th St.) (P)
- **Western Sarpy Dike** (Cleveland):
 - ⊛ Robert Bundy ROW easement preparation (P)
- **Floodway Purchase Program** (Grint):
 - ⊛ Prepare revised purchase agreement with Parkway Properties for 69th and T St. (P)
 - Floodway Property purchase agreements as needed (F)
 - Engineering professional service contract with selected firms (F)
- **Trail Projects** (Bowen):
 - ⊛ Western Douglas County Trail – purchase agreements, deeds, easements, etc. (W)
- **Missouri River Corridor Project** (Becic):
 - Agreement for Omaha to maintain Missouri River Trail at N.P. Dodge North (P)
- **USDA P.L. 566 Projects, Silver Creek and Pigeon/Jones Watershed** (Puls/Cleveland):
 - Pigeon/Jones Creek Site Easements – as needed (F)
 - Silver Creek Site Easements– as needed (Site #11 and #9 ROW) (P)
 - Release of Site S-7 Easement (W)
 - Revise P/J Site 15 Agreement w/Dakota County (F)

- **Papio Watershed Dam Sites** (Grint/Petermann):
- **Papio Creek Watershed Partnership (Stormwater)** (Grint):
- **Rural Water Projects:** (Sklenar)
- **Elkhorn River Public Access Sites** (Sklenar):
- **Other:**
 - Kennard Wastewater Closing (Grint) (F)
 - ✱ Glacier Creek Heritage purchase agreement (Becic) (W)
 - ✱ Crystal Creek interlocal agreement (Grint) (W)

MONTHLY UPDATE

OCTOBER 2008



During the month of October the Partnership held meetings on October 2nd and October 30th. Meeting minutes and other materials are updated regularly on the Partnership's website:

www.papiopartnership.org.

Stormwater Management Regulations

The storm water ordinance amendment which provides water quality control of the first ½ inch of stormwater runoff on all new and significant redevelopment sites has been approved by the City of Omaha and Boys Town. An update on the other communities' schedules for ordinance adoption is listed below:

Papillion – Planning Commission in October

Douglas County – Planning Commission in November

Sarpy County – Planning Commission in November

Bellevue – Planning Commission last meeting in November

Bennington – Expected approval at next Board meeting in November

Gretna – Planning Commission in November

La Vista – Planning Commission on November 18th

Ralston – Planning Commission in November

PMRNRD- Board was briefed in October

The goal of having the ordinance amendment adopted by the end of the year for most communities and early 2009 by the rest is well within reach.

Watershed Management Plan Update

On October 20th the Metropolitan Omaha Builders Association (MOBA) invited the Partnership to discuss the watershed plan and address their concerns. Several members of the Partnership subcommittee met with the group and presented the findings to date along with information regarding financing of the watershed plan and preliminary fees. The discussions were productive and gave MOBA an opportunity to ask specific questions and discuss impacts on development. In response to the meeting, MOBA provided a letter to the Partnership addressing their concerns on "maximum LID". MOBA cites costs, additional land requirements and disruption of growth pattern as large impacts to their

business. Members of MOBA, the engineering, development and financing communities have been participating in the Partnership and we expect more input in the future.

NPDES Permit Renewal

Partnership milestones for the next six months are to:

- Renew NPDES Phase II Stormwater Permits issued by NDEQ
- Adopt revised Stormwater Policies
- Establish and adopt a new Interlocal Agreement for continuation of the Partnership

With the help of HDR, whose contract was approved last month, the Partnership is returning to discussions on the stormwater policies and watershed plan. First steps were taken towards discussion on the financing policy and implementation at the MOBA meeting on October 20th. The next steps will occur at the November subcommittee meeting where the group will discuss the watershed plan, policies and get started on the Phase II stormwater permit renewal. A representative from the Department of Environmental Quality has been requested to meet with the group and give input on the permit process, watershed planning, and any specific questions that the group may have.

Events

Mark your calendars for the 2009 Sediment and Erosion Control Seminar, *Building for the Future*. This year's event will be held on February 4th at the Holiday Inn, 72nd & Grover Streets. Presentations this year will focus more on lot level implementation and permitting.

Next Meeting: The next full Partnership meeting is scheduled for December 4th at 10:00AM at the NRD office. The Partnership Subcommittee will meet on November 19th at 10:00AM also at the NRD office. Meeting dates and times are posted to the Partnership website.



2. Watershed Rehabilitation Program is Extending the Life of Our State's Critical Infrastructure -

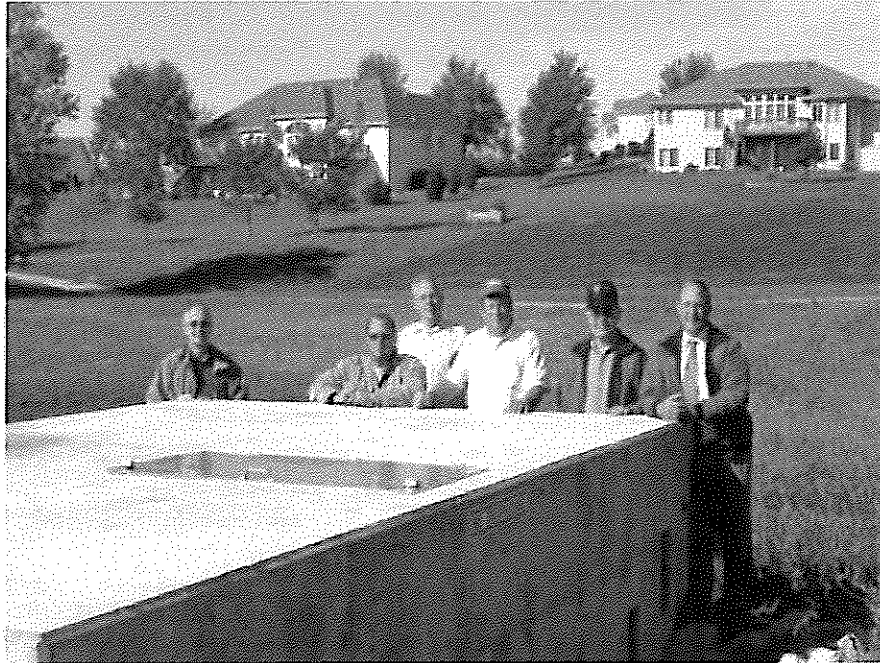
Thursday afternoon I visited the watershed rehabilitation construction sites for Dams 27, 31 and 32 within the Papillion Creek Watershed, which is about 2 miles south of Highway 370 and just west of 36th Street near Papillion. Flooding in the Papillion Creek Watershed in 1964 resulted in 7 people losing their lives. Those floodwaters damaged cropland, pastureland, roads, railroads, bridges and utility lines. In the early 1900's Papillion Creek had been straightened, which of course sped up runoff exacerbating the damages that would occur in the 1964 flood.

Following that flood, SCS provided watershed planning assistance to the watershed sponsor (local conservation district, which later became the Papio-Missouri River NRD) by developing a watershed plan that resulted in the installation of 27 grade stabilization structures. Those 27 dams were originally designed to pass a 100-year storm event and had a lifespan of 50 years. The tremendous urban growth that has occurred downstream from these dams has rightfully resulted in reclassifying them as high hazard dams. A high hazard dam possesses the potential for loss of human life in the event of dam failure. So, as these dams approached their original 50-year lifespan they became excellent candidates for the NRCS Watershed Rehabilitation Program. Using the authorities of this program we contracted with HDR to design dam rehabilitations that will allow for passage of the probable maximum precipitation storm event of 32.5 inches of rainfall in 24 hours. These dams are designed to avoid overtopping in the event of such a storm and they contain an intricate set of seepage drains to eliminate dam piping concerns. The restored dams will extend the lifespan of each structure for 100 years.

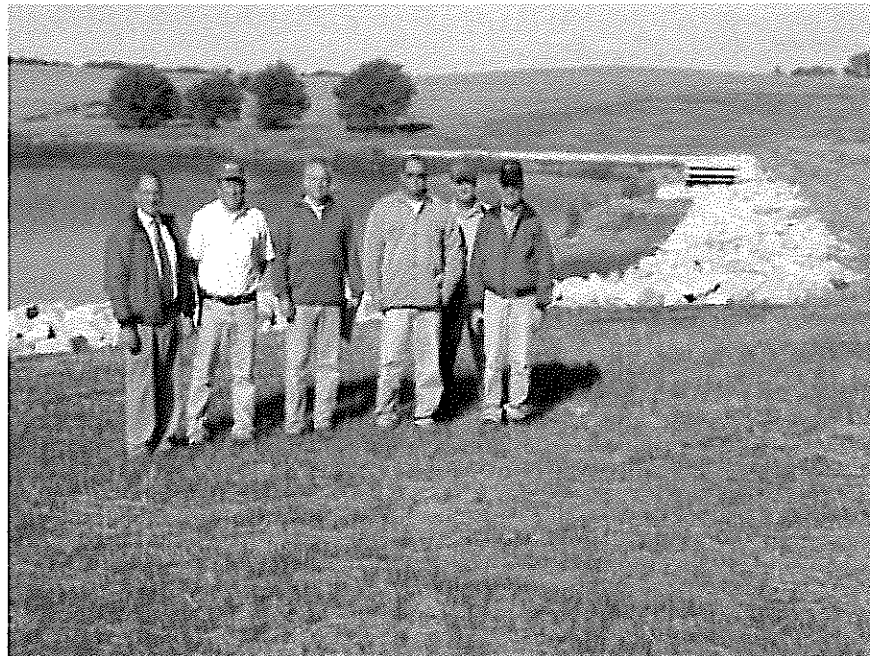


The nice homes in the background along Papio Creek provides an indication of the kinds of home and property that these rehabilitated dams are protecting downstream.

Site 27 (above) captures 152 acres of drainage area with a 54 feet high dam. The intake riser above is connected to a 36 inch reinforced concrete pipe, which outlets at the downstream toe of the dam. Site 27 was bid at \$470,693.



The group standing behind the riser on Site 27 provides a better idea of the size of this concrete intake. Left to right are Steve Chick, Cory Heitman (HDR Field Resident), John Cambridge (HDR Project Engineer), Chuck Leinen (NRCS Civil Engineer), Martin Cleveland (PMRNRD Construction Engineer) and Marlin Petermann (PMRNRD Assistant General Manager). Watershed rehabilitation is successful because it brings together the resources of private enterprise (design, construction inspection, earth movers, concrete specialists), a strong sponsor (PMRNRD) and Federal government resources (financial and technical assistance).



Site 32 dam captures 224 acres of drainage behind a 58 feet high dam. A 58 feet 30" reinforced concrete pipe leads from the intake riser to the plunge pool below the dam. This dam creates a 7 acre permanent pool, which is

an outstanding bass and catfish pond for the landowners. Marlin Petermann, Chuck Leinen, John Cambridge, Cory Heitman, Gus Gustafson (NRCS Assistant Conservation Engineer) and Martin Cleveland are pictured left to right. Site 32 was bid at \$395,150.



Site 31 dam is currently under construction. Please note the boost to the local economy of these large dam projects. It creates work for engineering design companies (HDR in this case), earthmoving contractors and concrete specialists. Site 31 will capture drainage from 249 acres behind a 54 feet high dam. A 30" reinforced concrete pipe will carry water through the dam. A 9 acre permanent pool of water will be created behind the dam. Site 31 was bid at \$445,583.



Steve French and brother Mike French (Packers hard hat) are building the forms for the concrete intake riser for Site 31. The French brothers work for Thompson Construction who specializes in concrete work. Chuck Leinen is discussing the work with the French brothers.

Sarpy lake proposed in dam plan

■ Papillion supports the \$20 million idea, aimed at protecting 300 properties from flooding.

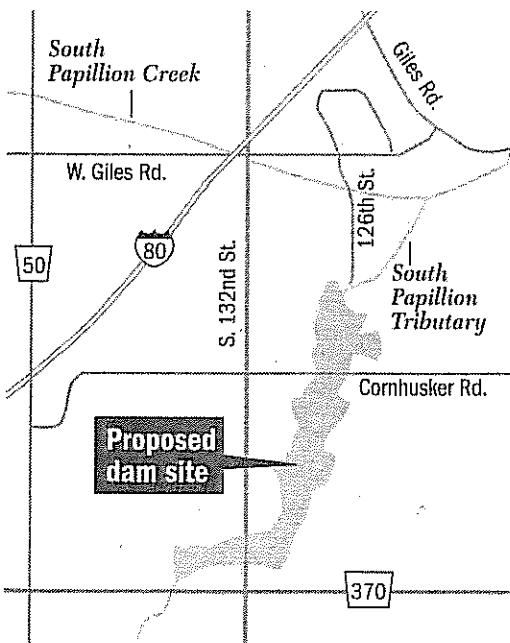
By NANCY GAARDER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

A \$20 million, 88-acre lake in Sarpy County could become the first in an ambitious plan to build dams in the metro area to reduce the threat of flooding.

The proposed lake, near 126th Street and Cornhusker Road, would help to protect about 300 properties in the City of Papillion. Areas downstream on the West Papio Creek also would be protected under an initiative led by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District.

Papillion Mayor James Blinn said the city backs the dam. "It is important," he said. "That is safe to say."

At this point, the only source of funding for the project is taxpayer money, said John Winkler, general manager for the NRD. Using taxpayer
See Dam: Page 2



THE WORLD-HERALD

Meetings

The Papio-NRD board will discuss the dam site today at 6:40 p.m. and Thursday at 8 p.m. at NRD headquarters, 8901 S. 154th St.

Dam: Sarpy lake proposed

Continued from Page 1

dollars would be a departure from the way other recent dams have been funded. With the others, private developers underwrote a portion of the cost.

So far, Winkler said, no developer has stepped forward to serve as a partner on the lake, but such partnerships remain "very much a part of the deal."

The district has purchased 11 of the approximately 400 acres needed for the dam site. Most of the land involved is rural. Only one home would be displaced. A portion of Cornhusker Road, and some utility lines, would have to be moved.

Marlin Petermann, assistant general manager at the NRD, said the district has the authority to use eminent domain to acquire property, "but right now, we're not planning to look at that."

The lake is one of six dams included in a larger, preliminary \$120 million proposal to reduce flooding along the West Papillion Creek and its tributaries. The proposal also would raise the height of bridges at 66th and 84th Streets and improve portions of the levee along the West Papio.

All of the dams, levees and bridges are either along the West Papio or its tributaries. The West Papio runs through Papillion, though the 126th and Cornhusker dam site is west of the city on a tributary of the West Papio Creek system.

Neither the lake nor the \$120 million proposal has been approved by any governmental agency. Tonight, an NRD board committee will discuss the dam site, and on Thursday, the entire board will be asked to approve sending out a request for proposals from engineering firms on the lake's design.

Petermann said the overall effort is needed to protect about 900 properties along the West Papio Creek system in Douglas and Sarpy Counties. The improvements would protect them from a 100-year flood and would

mean many of those property owners would no longer have to buy federal flood insurance.

A 100-year flood is one with a severity that gives it a 1 percent chance of occurring in any given year.

Winkler said the NRD plans to ask the City of Papillion to help fund the dam.

Blinn said the city doesn't have money in its budget for the lake but could end up shouldering some of the cost if the city eventually annexed any residential and commercial development that occurred at the dam site. The city would then take on the development's debt.

Petermann said this particular dam would reduce the creek's flows at Papillion during a 100-year flood by about 10 percent, "which is pretty significant."

However, the NRD does not know by how much and where flooding would be reduced in Papillion because that type of analysis has not been done.

What is known, Petermann and Winkler said, is that all six dams, plus the bridge and levee work, are needed to comprehensively address the flood threat along the West Papio system.

The lake would take a "couple, three years" to build, if the project moves forward like other dams have, Petermann said.

By next summer, the NRD anticipates having accumulated about \$12 million in property tax dollars that could be spent on this project, Winkler said.

Winkler said the district will continue to lobby the Nebraska Legislature for bonding authority, something a legislative committee has blocked in the past. Bonding authority would allow the NRD to issue large amounts of long-term debt to move forward more aggressively on its dam and levee proposal.

The six dams are among 29 that the NRD and local communities initially endorsed as flood control and water quality measures. That list of dams sparked controversy among landowners in the affected areas.

Officials say the longer list has since been abandoned, though hopes of building a number of those dams have not been.

■ Contact the writer:
644-1102, nancy.gaarder@owh.com

Senator will seek more green to turn weeds brown

By LORI POTTER, Hub Staff Writer

10/07/2008

Updated 10/07/2008 12:32:15 PM CDT

[Email to a friend](#) [Printer-friendly](#)

HOLDREGE — The 2009 Nebraska Legislature will be asked to allocate \$2 million each of the next two years to continue projects removing invasive vegetation from Platte and Republican river channels.

State Sen. Tom Carlson of Holdrege sponsored the “vegetative part” of LB701 in 2007. The bill provided \$2 million in 2007 and again in 2008 for the weed work. He said Monday he’ll seek two more years of funding in the 2009 legislative session and may introduce the bill again in 2011.

The initial focus was on Republican Basin work to remove saltcedars and other vegetation hindering river flows to Kansas for interstate compact compliance. “We’ve made a splash on the Platte River,” Carlson said at the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District board meeting, by spraying many miles of phragmites in the river channel.

“There are few times when you propose legislation when there are virtually no losers,” he said. “This is one of them.”

Continued state funding isn’t a sure thing, Carlson cautioned. Because so much of the state budget goes to state aid to education and Medicaid, there’s a small amount left for everything else.

He’s using the success already seen, but not yet scientifically quantified, to encourage other grant providers to participate. Whether it’s flood control or flow improvements, wildlife habitat enhancements, or benefits for recreation, fishing and hunting, “everybody wins,” Carlson said.

One example of success came July 4th weekend when for the first time in years, thousands of people rafted or canoed down the Republican River below Harlan County Dam. He said that was made possible by conditions provided by God and by 2007 channel clearing.

A lot of invasive remain in both basins. “Quitting now ... that doesn’t make any sense,” Carlson said.

The non-native plants — saltcedar, Russian olives, phragmites — consume massive amounts of water from the rivers and lakes. Carlson said CNPPID Assistant Real Estate Administrator Kent Aden estimated that stands of saltcedars at Lake McConaughy have involved 2,600 plants per acre over 2,000 acres.

Carlson said a mature saltcedar can use 150 to 180 gallons of water per day.

Weed removal specialist Lane Kugler of Lexington told Carlson there were about 1.1 million phragmites plants per acre in 7.75 miles of Platte River channel sprayed from Lexington to Darr. Even if each plant used a cup of water per day, “it’s staggering.”

Carlson said positive results of removing invasives can be clearly seen. However, documenting the actual results with scientific measurements is difficult because so many factors affect water use.

In a related Republican Basin issue, he was asked about a lawsuit before the Nebraska Supreme Court. Several landowners are challenging taxing authority in LB701 for the Upper, Middle and Lower Republican natural resources districts to fund purchases of surface water to enhance river flows to Kansas for compact compliance.

The landowners say the special property tax is unconstitutional because it's collected for a state purpose, interstate compact compliance.

Carlson said a court ruling for the plaintiffs would diminish local control on water issues because, "if the state pays it all, the state is going to want control." He said the NRDs' use of LB701's property and occupation taxes is a tool for Republican River Compact compliance in dry years.

"At least the surface water purchase runs the money back into the hands of people (irrigators) in the basin," he said.

That wouldn't be the case if Nebraska is ordered by the U.S. Supreme Court to pay Kansas for compact noncompliance in 2005 and 2006. "It will be state money, so it will

be income tax and sales tax ...," Carlson said. "Whatever the amount, it would be money you hate to pay because it goes straight from Lincoln to Kansas, with nobody's hands in between."

He said the 2009 Legislature will have at least 14 new senators. At least 37 of the 49 members will have two years or less experience, as a result of term limits.

That means Carlson and others elected in 2006 already are seeking roles as committee leaders. He's in competition with Fullerton Sen. Annette Dubas to chair the Agriculture Committee.

e-mail to:
lori.potter@kearneyhub.com

River conservation program eyes land

■ About 2,500 acres along the central Platte River may be purchased for restoration and habitat preservation.

By Lori Potter
THE KEARNEY HUB

KEARNEY, Neb. — Approximately 2,500 acres along the central Platte River are being evaluated for inclusion in the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, which aims to restore or preserve animal habitats along the river and better manage river flows.

The program's governance committee, which includes representatives of water interests from Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming and the U.S. Department

of Interior, met Tuesday and Wednesday in Kearney.

Program Executive Director Jerry Kenny of Kearney said six tracts being considered total about 1,500 acres. The committee was expected to approve an appraisal of the land. Another 1,000 acres was approved for appraisal in August.

Kenny said it's hoped that some deals — land purchases, leases or easements — can be concluded by early next year. He added that there are considerably more acres coming up in the review system.

Most sites reviewed so far were identified because landowners in the habitat target area between Lexington and Chapman contacted the program office in Kearney.

Kenny said most of those landowners are interested in selling their properties.

The holding entity for program lands is the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program Foundation, which was established through the Nebraska Community Foundation.

The program's Land Advisory Committee does initial site evaluations. If it's determined that a tract has potential, a team looks more closely at its biology, habitat, restoration potential and other qualities.

Kenny said the Land Advisory

Committee then reconsiders the property and decides whether to seek approval for an appraisal.

Not all of the tracts studied will become part of the 10,000 acres of habitat needed for the program's first 12-year increment, 2007 through 2019.

"Conservatively, it might be one out of three of the deals that actually comes through," Kenny said.

Also being considered are 3,100 acres in two habitat segments owned by Wyoming and by Nebraska Public Power District, which has the Cottonwood Ranch between Elm Creek and Overton.

The next Land Advisory Committee meeting is Nov. 4 at the program office in Kearney.

Plans for lake near Papillion advance

■ The Papio-Missouri NRD board gives its approval for officials to seek design proposals.

BY NANCY GAARDER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Construction of a \$20 million lake west of Papillion took a step closer to reality Thursday night, despite some objections that the lake's flood-control benefits have not been fully proved.

The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District board, with a 7-1 vote, told its administration to request proposals from engineering firms for the design of the lake.

The 88-acre lake would be open to the public for fishing and have a hiking and biking trail, NRD officials said. However, most of the rest of the land around the lake likely would be private and thus open to housing and commercial development.

10-10-08

Steven Shultz, director of the University of Nebraska at Omaha Real Estate Research Center, told the board that an adequate cost-benefit analysis had not been done—a problem he said exists with other NRD projects. It might be less expensive, he said, to buy out affected properties.

The HDR Inc. study notes that it did not evaluate the cost of relocating properties in the option that excludes dams. That option would improve the levees and raise bridges but would require some businesses in downtown Papillion to move. Absent relocation costs, that option could be the least expensive.

The NRD board's chairman, Jim Thompson, said Shultz had "some valid points."

"We should think about that in the back of our minds, if not the forefront," Thompson said. "This proposal is for getting things going."

Doug Kagan, chairman of Nebraska Taxpayers for Freedom, also objected, saying the district appeared to be selecting the costliest solution.

The proposed lake at 126th Street and Cornhusker Road would control runoff from about five square miles of the Papillion Creek watershed. It would reduce the West Papio Creek's flow by about 10 percent at downtown

See Lake: Page 2

Lake: So far, no developers have expressed interest

Continued from Page 1
Papillion during a 100-year flood, NRD Assistant General Manager Marlin Petermann said.

Where flooding would be reduced in Papillion and by how much is not known, but Petermann has described the potential flow reduction as significant.

Board member Dorothy Lanphier, who voted against the dam, questioned whether focusing on the levees might not be a better use of tax dollars and provide Papillion more protection. The lake by itself controls runoff from a small fraction of the watershed

and rains elsewhere could flood the community.

However, the lake is a top priority of the NRD and a coalition of local governments.

"This is an affirmative first step toward building some much needed flood control in the district," board member Rich Tesar said.

The proposed lake is part of what could end up being a \$120 million effort to reduce flooding along the watershed, and Petermann said this larger solution is what is needed. Decades-old floodplain maps have been up-

dated, and as a result, hundreds of properties that were thought to be outside of the 100-year floodplain are inside it. The \$120 million solution includes improving a smaller portion of the levees, some bridges and building up to six dams.

For now, funding for the proposed lake would come from property tax revenues. By next summer, the district expects to have \$12 million in reserves that could be used for the lake.

In recent years, the NRD has shared the cost of lake construction with local developers, but no

such plans have emerged with this lake.

Papillion Mayor James Blinn has said the flood control provided by the lake is important but said money was not in the city's budget at this time to share in the cost.

Petermann told board members at committee meetings on Tuesday that a developer "may come out of woodwork in the couple of years it will take to get this done."

■ Contact the writer:
444-1102, nancy.gaarder@owh.com

Papio NRD candidates split over borrowing

16-13-08

By NANCY GAARDER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Voters have a noticeable choice in the two races involving incumbents seeking re-election to the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District board.

Current officeholders Rich Tesar and Rick Kolowski say the district needs bonding authority to build dams, improve levees and undertake other projects to reduce the threat of flooding and improve water quality.

Challengers Shawn Melotz and Gene Siadek both oppose bonding authority, saying the district has less expensive options for preventing flood damage. Local governments could, for example, place greater restrictions on floodplain development or require that developments do a better job of controlling stormwater runoff.

While the district has not settled on a specific flood control plan, existing proposals for dams range in cost up to about \$400 million. Other costly proposals on the table include improving levees and raising bridges. The metro area flood threat comes largely from the numerous creeks that wind through neighborhoods.

Bonding authority enables government to borrow the money for projects it could not otherwise afford. A state legislative committee has blocked awarding the NRD bonding authority, but the district plans to pursue the issue in the Legislature in 2009.

Tesar and Melotz are vying to represent residents of Subdistrict 5, which covers much of northern and western Douglas County. Tesar is seeking a fifth term on the board.

Kolowski and Siadek are seeking to represent Subdistrict 9, the area that covers portions of south-central Douglas County. Kolowski, who is also running

for the metropolitan area's learning community council, is seeking a second term on the NRD board.

Tesar said he understands better than most just how destructive floods can be because his home along the Platte River has been flooded.

"Flooding is truly one of the most devastating of natural disasters," he said, "yet it probably is one of the most underrated."

Tesar said he wouldn't mind if the Legislature made the NRD's bonding authority contingent on approval by local voters. And he said he would accept voters' deciding on individual flood-control projects.

Melotz opposes bonding authority, saying it's not necessary. She takes issue with the district's property tax-based savings account for dam construction.

By next summer, that account should have \$12 million in it.

"Bonding authority increases taxes," she said. "In these times where money is getting tighter and tighter, people need it to feed their families ... not to build a (government) cash reserve."

A fourth-generation Douglas County dairy farmer, she said flooding can be reduced through less intrusive measures that don't cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

Kolowski said the criticisms of the district are unjustified.

"We've done a very good job on ... all the things we're trying to take care of in this most heavily populated part of Nebraska."

Dam sites are needed, he said, to reduce the risk of flooding and improve quality of life.

"We came very, very close to having a catastrophe this summer," he said, recalling how heavy rains pushed creeks out of their banks.

Siadek, who is making his second bid for the NRD board, said

bonding authority isn't necessary. There are cheaper ways to reduce the flood risk, he said, adding that the district is amassing too much money.

Siadek said he isn't opposed to dams. And he said his expertise as a water supply engineer provides him "a well-informed opinion."

Contact the writer:
444-1102, nancy.gaarder@owh.com

SUBDISTRICT 5

Shawn Mohr Melotz



Age: 48
Party affiliation: Republican
Address: 10404 N. 132nd St.
Occupation: Managing partner, Melotz & Wilson, LLC

Education: Bachelor's degree in business administration with a major in accounting, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; certified public accountant

Family: Married, one child

Rich Tesar (incumbent)



Age: 59
Party affiliation: Republican
Address: 28700 Platte River Plaza, Waterloo
Occupation: Owner, Rich Tesar Outdoors (hunting and fishing outfitter)

Education: Attended University of Nebraska at Omaha and Bellevue College

Family: Married, two children

SUBDISTRICT 9

Rick Kolowski (incumbent)



Age: 63
Party affiliation: Democrat
Address: 4815 S. 158th Circle
Occupation: Retired educator/education consultant
Education:

Bachelor's degree in political science, Lake Forest College, Ill.; master's degree in secondary education/history, University of Nebraska at Omaha; doctorate in secondary education, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Family: Married, two children

Gene Siadek



Age: 44
Party affiliation: Independent
Address: 1629 N. 160th St.
Occupation: Water supply engineer, Metropolitan Utilities District

Education: Bachelor's degree in civil engineering, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; master's degree in business administration, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Family: Married, two children

NRD awards \$12.5M contract to build dam for Lake Wanahoo

By ALGIS J. LAUKAITIS / Lincoln Journal Star
Tuesday, Oct 14, 2008 - 03:52:20 pm CDT

The Lake Wanahoo dam northeast of Wahoo in Saunders County is a go.

After two months of scrambling to find more money, the Lower Platte North Natural Resources District Board on Monday accepted a low bid of about \$12.5 million from Commercial Contractors Inc. of Lincoln to build the dam, which will create Lake Wanahoo. The 637-acre lake will be built about one mile north of Wahoo by damming up Sand Creek, the main tributary of Wahoo Creek.

Construction of the long-awaited dam will start soon and is scheduled to be completed by the summer of 2010, said project manager Mike Murren.

[\[+\]Enlarge](#)

This area just north of Wahoo, photographed here in 2001, will become Lake Wanahoo. (LJS File)

 **CLOSE** **Lake Wanahoo**

***What, where:** Lake Wanahoo will be built one mile north of Wahoo, on the west side of Nebraska 109. The dam will be built as part of the U.S. 77 bypass, which will skirt the west and north sides of Wahoo. The four-lane bypass will run along the side of the dam directly west of the Nebraska 92 junction, which will remain at its current location.

*** How big?:** The dam will create a 637-surface-acre lake, approximately seven times as large as nearby Czechland Lake at Prague. The lake will be situated on 1,600 acres of land, and will be open to the public for fishing, hunting, camping, picnicking, day use, and no-wake boating.

*** What else?:** Seven smaller dams will be built upstream on Sand and Duck creeks, along with large wetlands at the north end of Lake Wanahoo. These measures will help trap sediment and nutrients before they reach the lake, preserving the water quality, creating wetlands, and extending the life of the lake. Funding for these projects is being provided by the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

Source: Lower Platte North Natural Resources District

Commercial Contractors was one of three earlier bidders for the project but the NRD in August put all the bids on hold because they came in higher than expected. Murren blamed the higher bids on the rising cost of fuel to operate earth movers and other

construction equipment. Contractors would have to move about 1.25 million cubic yards of soil for the earthen dam.

The Wahoo-based NRD then went back to its major sponsors and asked them for more funds. Murren said the City of Wahoo increased its contribution by \$300,000, bringing its total to \$1 million, and the State of Nebraska, through its Natural Resources Development Fund, added another \$2.8 million. With that money in place, the board voted 17-0 to award the contract to build the dam.

“The old saying is good things take time and in this case it did take time,” said Murren, who was hired by the NRD in 1998 to work on the project.

Lake Wanahoo will be a flood-control and recreational lake on Sand Creek. The lake will cover about 640 acres, and a four-lane expressway — a four-lane bypass of U.S. 77-Nebraska 92 — will run across the front of the dam.

Murren said district officials are also asking the state Department of Roads to increase its contribution to the project. He said the Roads Department will be saving money by placing the highway on the dam.

Murren said the Lake Wanahoo Project is the largest ever undertaken by the district. He said area residents will be proud of the project once it is completed.

The main purpose of the dam and lake is to control flooding in the 87-square-mile watershed and protect the City of Wahoo and county roads downstream from the dam. Recreational amenities will be added later.

Construction is already under way on two features of Lake Wanahoo. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is building a soil trap to keep sediment from entering the lake. That project is costing about \$2 million and should be completed in about two months, Murren said.

The corps is also building a \$1.4 million “breakwater” feature that will divide the two-mile-long lake. The purpose of the structure will be to reduce waves caused by strong north-south winds. A recreational trail will be built on top of the structure. There also will be a pedestrian bridge and fishing access on both sides, Murren said.

The project's name — Wanahoo — comes from a local lake and dance pavilion that was buried in silt during a 1963 flood. The old lake was much smaller and included a bridge to an island with a big dance floor.

Reach Algis J. Laukaitis at 402-473-7243 or alaukaitis@journalstar.com

e-mail to: lori.potter@kearneyhub.com

Creek's future in doubt

■ **An utility calls for sharply lower limits on groundwater use to reverse a decline in flows.**

By David Hendee

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Water will never flow again in western Nebraska's Pumpkin Creek unless pumping limits imposed on the watershed's irrigators are significantly reduced.

"It's time to take action," said Tim Anderson, a spokesman for Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District.

The North Platte Natural Resources District held a public hearing Thursday night at Banner County High School in Harrisburg on a proposal to limit Pumpkin Creek irrigators to pumping 12 inches of underground water per acre annually. The current limit is 14 inches per acre.

In Anderson's prepared remarks, he said Pumpkin Creek irrigators should be limited to pumping 8,000 acre-feet. That computes to 2.5 inches of water per acre on cropland now irrigated. An acre-foot of water is the amount necessary to cover one acre to a depth of 12 inches.

Central says setting pumping limits at 7.95 inches to 11.6 inches — based on recent use by watershed irrigators — would not reverse declines in creek flows recorded since 1970 when groundwater irrigation boomed in the area.

Anderson said new engineering studies predict there would be 38 percent recovery of creek flows in two years and 48 percent recovery in five years if the NRD limited Pumpkin Creek irrigators to pumping 8,000 acre-feet.

Central and the North Platte NRD have sparred over the issue for several years.

Central is Nebraska's largest irrigation district. It operates a system of canals that delivers North Platte River water stored in Lake McConaughy to farmers in south-central Nebraska who use it to irrigate more than 111,000 acres of cropland.

Pumpkin Creek is a largely dry North Platte River tributary upstream from Lake McConaughy. Central says groundwater pumping in the Pumpkin Creek watershed robs 20,800 acre-feet of water annually that otherwise would flow into Lake McConaughy. The reservoir is suffering from historic low inflows and water levels.

"Part of the cause ... is drought," Anderson said. "But part is unlimited groundwater pumping in the North Platte NRD."

There are nearly 600 irrigation wells in the little watershed up-stream from Bridgeport. The creek drains 1,011 square miles, or about 20 percent of the North Platte drainage in Nebraska up-stream of Lake McConaughy.

Central has restricted its south-central Nebraska irrigators to as little as 6.7 inches of canal water annually for five years because of reduced North Platte River flows into Lake McConaughy.

In a legal petition Anderson planned to present to NRD directors, Central said the Pumpkin Creek depletions are “unreasonably causing harm.”

The North Platte NRD first imposed pumping restrictions on Pumpkin Creek irrigators five years ago. The limit was 14 inches per acre. The basin has received an average of 10 inches of annual precipitation since 2001.

The NRD board voted 5-4 a month ago to seek a 12-inch limit in the watershed. Directors praised Pumpkin Creek irrigators for management and crop rotation practices that helped them adapt to pumping limits and drought. They also said they needed to protect the Banner County tax base, which depends almost solely on agriculture production.

“We need to remember small-town Nebraska,” said Pete Lapaseotes of Bridgeport, an NRD director and Pumpkin Creek irrigator. “The tax base on land that is converted to dryland crops would be cut. Harrisburg would go bankrupt, and other small towns all along the valley would dry up as well.”

The board plans to vote on the 12-inch limit at its November meeting. If approved, it could be effective in December.

■ Contact the writer: 444-1127, david.hendee@owh.com

Powered by TECNAVIA Copyright (c) 2008 Omaha World-Herald 10/17/2008

Published Tuesday October 21, 2008

Boaters to gain access to Elkhorn River at West Dodge Road

BY NANCY GAARDER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Lazy canoe rides along the Elkhorn River near Omaha are getting easier.

On Friday, the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District will open a new access site — Graske Crossing on the southeast corner of West Dodge Road and the Elkhorn River.

This is the third NRD-built access site on the river. Eventually the district hopes to open a fourth. G&G Manufacturing of Omaha, owned by the Graske family, donated the land for the project. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission helped pay for Graske Crossing.

Boaters can launch from the farthest upstream site, 252nd Street and Bennington Road, and float for about three hours to an access site at West Maple Road, according to John Winkler, general manager for the district.

From there, another two hours of floating will take boaters to Graske Crossing. The NRD operates the other two.

The fourth access that the NRD hopes to build is near Q Street.

Contact the Omaha World-Herald newsroom

Copyright ©2008 Omaha World-Herald®. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, displayed or redistributed for any purpose without permission from the Omaha World-Herald.

Flooding a key concern

The Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District has hard times behind it and hard times ahead. The district is point man for the 23-government partnership dealing with federally mandated flood-control issues in the Papio watershed, and its request for bonding power faces a skeptical Legislature early next year.

Despite missteps, the board seems to have done the best job it could with what it has been handed. Voters should consider electing fair- and open-minded candidates motivated to help, not hinder, the NRD in pursuing a practical-minded approach to its mission.

The strongest candidates are Jim Jepsen of Hubbard, Neb., in District 1; Omahan Larry Bradley in District 3; Rich Tesar of Waterloo, Neb., in District 5; and Rick Kolowski of Omaha in District 9.

Incumbent Tesar, owner of a guiding service, is an active, enthusiastic board member. He works hard not only at the usual board and committee meetings but also in the initiation of projects and programs and overseeing their planning and execution.

For instance, canoe access to the Elkhorn River, protected by an NRD dike, was nonexistent until Tesar got the ball rolling six years ago. Tomorrow, the NRD will open its third access point, Graskie Crossing, on the river at West Dodge Road. Canoeists already have made the Elkhorn a popular recreational waterway.

Tesar has spent 16 years on the board and works to coordinate decision-making and projects among smaller governments in the NRD area. His view of the NRD and its responsibilities is broad, taking in not only practical matters but also residents' concerns and wishes.

Kolowski, vice president of the board, is asking for a second term from voters. This well-informed board member demonstrates a deep-seated concern about flood prevention, concentrating in recent times on the potential for disaster in the Papio Creek watershed. He sees the NRD's present course on that project — planning for construction of a number of dams plus consideration of low-impact flood control methods — as the proper way to approach the problem.

Douglas County, this retired Millard educator suggested, will see urban development from river to river. The NRD has to stay ahead of growth in all of its responsibilities, such as flooding, parks, recreation

Tesar, Jepsen, Kolowski and Bradley fit well into the mission of Papio NRD.

and biking and hiking trails. Kolowski sees it as a quality-of-life issue that will help attract new residents, businesses and industries and keep the area expanding and prospering.

Jepsen, a longtime Dakota County farmer and 20-year planning board member there, displays a sound knowledge of flood and erosion control. He describes the need for dams to control flooding and says he would decide on individual projects on a case-by-case basis after seeing the evidence and weighing it.

His farming background and detailed knowledge of the district stretching between Washington and Dakota Counties, as well as its people, are a major plus.

Bradley has both bachelor's and master's degrees in biology from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and is working on a doctorate in geography at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He emphasizes his environmental awareness. Gov. Dave Heineman appointed him to the state Environmental Quality Council, a regulatory body.

Bradley is a supporter of bonding authority with voter approval, advocating for some flood-control dams but wanting low-impact alternatives, too. Urban growth and the additional runoff it brings from roofs and pavement, he said, require that the partnership and the NRD initiate such projects.

The NRD has had a communications problem in the past with some people affected by its proposals. Bradley recognizes that shortcoming and would try to change it.

The Papio-Missouri NRD, both board and staff, has plenty of work in its future. Rich Tesar, Rick Kolowski, Jim Jepsen and Larry Bradley would handle their shares well.

Papio-Missouri River NRD, District 1

Scott Japp

Age: 53

Address: 4752 County Road 15,
Arlington

Occupation: Home Builder

Family: Single

Current and previous offices:
None

Major issues:



Scott Japp

I believe the present NRD is not living up to the original intent of the Nebraska Legislature. The original intent is to wisely conserve our natural resources. The present NRD wastes money on projects not mandated by the State legislature by supporting projects such as the walking bridge over the Missouri River, the art project in Bellevue, selling property to governmental agencies for little or no money after they have used eminent domain to condemn land and spending millions of dollars of taxpayer monies to development of such projects. Examples of the NRD donating such projects include Walnut Creek Lake to the City of Papillion and Boyer Chute to the US Government.

The NRD has been buying and trading land with the state of Iowa, and has also been competing with farmers for land acquisition.

The NRD has not developed a flood management plan according to the 1976 Review of the Flood Problems and Proposed Flood Control Project. The NRD has allowed developments into the Papio Valley flood plain which increases the threat to life and property. The present NRD board's remedy to the past board's mismanagement is to spend \$500 million taxpayers dollars to build a series of dams. The largest of these proposed dams are located in the northern portion of the water shed were it would provide the least amount of flood protection to the City of Omaha according to the 1975 Federal court case Papio Valley Preservation Association vs. Army

Corp of Engineering. The present NRD has allowed the development of our floodplains causing a greater threat to flood damage. An example of allowing development into floodways is the Hampton's Development on West Q Street near the Elkhorn River.

I believe the present NRD maybe overstating its authority. I do not agree with the NRD buying land to assist developers in land acquisition. In documents from the Douglas County Assessor's office, I have great concerns about the management of the NRD. On Nov. 21, 2005, the NRD bought .4 acres from Lyman-Richey Corp. for \$1,264,056. On Mar. 10, 2006 they sold the .4 acres parcel of land to Dial Realty. It is not good business to lose \$600,000 in 5 months. The NRD is allowing itself to be a financial funding source for developers and governmental agencies to balance their budgets.

I have been a life long resident of Washington County. I received a BS degree from the University of Nebraska. After graduating from UNL I worked 12 years with a company that built soil conservation projects mainly in Washington and Douglas County. I worked many years with the local NRD and SCS field crews. In 1991 to 2005 I was a project manager for residential and resort development projects throughout the world. 2005 to 2007 I worked for a civil engineering firm in Lincoln as a construction inspector. Since the first of the year I have been working with a home builder in the Lincoln area. My hobby includes my interest in feeding cattle.

My policy regarding the way the NRD is being operated is to Vote NO on funding projects that are not required by State of Nebraska. We should only fund projects which are required by the mission of the NRD. I do not believe the NRD should be funding the tourism, parks and recreational, and City of Omaha budgets. There are other governmental agencies that already have this reasonability. I know with policy rules we can develop a sufficient flood plain management plan with little tax payer money involved. Flooding is an act of nature, however flood damage is man made.

Jim Jepsen

Age: 59

Address: Box 169,
Hubbard, NE 68741

Office Sought: Papio-Missouri
Natural Resources District Board

Occupation: I am a mechanic for the State of Nebraska Department of Roads. I have worked in the South Sioux City district for 5 years. My previous occupations were in farming and business operations for the last 30 years.

Family: Wife, Trudy. We have six children and four grandchildren.



Jim Jepsen

Current and previous elected offices:
None.

Church, clubs, civic organizations, etc.: I have been on the Planning and Zoning Board

for Dakota County for 20 years. I have also been on the Pigeon/Jones Creek Advisory Committee for the NRD since it was first initiated. I am the chairman of the park landscape & equipment committee for the Hubbard Betterment group in Hubbard, Nebraska.

Major issues

Some of the major issues facing the NRD are:

1. To preserve our natural resources.
2. To utilize the funds allotted the NRD to best serve the taxpayers.

I feel each proposed project needs to be reviewed on its own merits to see whether it is feasible and necessary. There are many factors to consider and choices to be made when making these decisions. These include but are not limited to terraces, waterways, dams and strip farming. I feel strongly that when money is being spent, we need to get the most out of each and every dollar of taxpayers' money. Getting more than one use out of a project is an ideal situation, such as flood control and recreation.

The biggest challenge that I foresee is to weigh the differences between protecting our environment and protecting the rights of people who live there, then making a decision that best serves both whenever possible.

Published Tuesday October 28, 2008

Omaha unveils latest part of trail system

BY TOM SHAW

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Although cold, blustery weather rarely inspires bikers and joggers, Omaha on Monday morning unveiled the latest part of its trail system.

Mayor Mike Fahey officially opened the Turner Boulevard Trail during a brief ceremony at Dewey Park.

The trail mostly follows Turner Boulevard south from Harney Street before turning west to 36th and Pacific Streets. Users can then follow city sidewalks to connect with the Field Club Trail.

The northernmost portion of the trail, linking Turner Boulevard with Dodge Street, will not be finished until 2009 because of the ongoing Midtown Crossing development.

The concrete trail is 1.2 miles long and 8 feet wide. The project cost \$593,000, with about \$474,000 coming from the Nebraska Roads Department and \$59,300 each from the city and the **Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District**.

"It (the trail) makes it even more enjoyable to live here in midtown," said NRD board chairman Jim Thompson.

Thompson said the Turner Boulevard Trail is the second of the city's new urban trails. The first was the Happy Hollow Trail, which opened a few years ago.

Thompson was joined by City Councilman Jim Vokal and neighborhood leaders at the trail's opening.

Carol Haas of the Leavenworth Neighborhood Association said it's important to link the city's green spaces.

"We couldn't be more excited," she said.

Published Tuesday October 28, 2008

Meetings tonight on Waterloo levee study

Public meetings will be held tonight to provide an update on the Waterloo levee certification study.

JEO Consulting Group is scheduled to give a presentation about the \$400,000 study at two meetings at Douglas County West Middle School, 801 Front St. The meetings will begin at 5:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Representatives from the **Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District** and the Federal Emergency Management Agency also will be on hand.

Last year, residents of Waterloo were informed that FEMA was preparing to examine their 40-year-old levee as part of a nationwide survey. The agency plans to decertify levees that aren't tall enough or strong enough to meet U.S. Army Corps of Engineers standards for a once-in-a century flood.

If the levee needs to be redesigned, Waterloo has until January 2010 to bring it up to standards. Flood insurance would be necessary in Waterloo if the levee were decertified.

— Chip Olsen

Published Wednesday October 29, 2008

Waterloo levee upgrade may cost up to \$3 million

BY CHIP OLSEN

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

It could cost as much as \$3 million for the Village of Waterloo to bring its levee up to accreditation standards, residents learned Tuesday night.

John Callen, with JEO Consulting Group, told nearly 50 people during a public information meeting that elevation improvements are needed to Waterloo's levee, which is more than 40 years old and surrounds the village.

Waterloo has until January 2010 to bring the levee up to standards. If the village doesn't meet the new levee standards, Waterloo could be redrawn into a flood plain, meaning some homeowners would need flood insurance.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, a new national accreditation system was designed to ensure levees would hold in a worst-case scenario storm or flood.

Last year, residents of Waterloo were informed that the Federal Emergency Management Agency was preparing to examine their levee as part of a nationwide survey. The agency plans to decertify levees that aren't tall enough or strong enough to meet U.S. Army Corps of Engineers standards for once-in-a-century floods, which are defined as severe floods that statistically happen about once every 100 years.

Levees must pass a height check - or meet freeboard requirements - to remain accredited. (Freeboard is the elevation above flood level.)

"Unfortunately," Callen told the audience, "the levee does not provide enough freeboard to meet FEMA standards."

Certain areas may need anywhere from 3 to 4 additional feet of elevation.

Village officials say the levee improvements would help ensure public safety and property security, as well as encourage economic growth. Bonds likely would be needed to cover the costs of the project. Residents could be asked to vote sometime next year for bond approval.

Village Trustee Garry Lee said the bonds would one day be paid off, but flood insurance would be a permanent requirement.

If the upgrades are not made, new construction would need to be built above the flood elevation, and flood insurance would be required for homeowners with federally backed loans.

Early estimates, Callen said, indicate flood insurance could cost between \$800 and \$1,300 a year for Waterloo homes.

Many residents at the meeting favored the improvements.

"I'd rather pay for bonds than I would for flood insurance," said Betty Brengelman, who has lived in Waterloo for nearly 50 years.

Two additional public meetings have yet to be scheduled.

Published Thursday October 30, 2008
Getting kids to play outside has broad appeal
BY JULIE ANDERSON
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Back in the mid-1990s, Ken Finch dug up a 10-foot-square patch in the yard of his west Omaha home and turned it over to his two children.

For days, they just dug. After a week, they figured out they could bury things and then unearth their "discoveries." Then neighbor children began asking if they could dig, too.

"It was such a simple thing," Finch said. "It was a patch where they could dig and it was theirs."

That unstructured, everyday experience of playing and exploring in nature is something conservationists, educators and researchers say today's children are missing.

Author Richard Louv gave it a formal diagnosis in his 2005 book, "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder."

But even before the book, some of those same conservationists, educators and researchers had begun searching for a cure.

An international collaborative held forums on nature education in 2006 and 2008 at Arbor Day Farm in Nebraska City. Nationally, outdoor education advocates have backed a bill - the No Child Left Inside Act, approved by the U.S. House in September - that would add funding and standards for outdoor education. Educators have begun working to establish outdoor classrooms and in Nebraska have added a nature component to early learning standards.

At the same time, dozens of regional and local community groups aimed at reconnecting kids with nature have sprouted across the country, including in Nebraska and Iowa.

One of the newest is Metro Omaha Resources for Exploring Nature, or MORE Nature, formed in April after a gathering of more than a dozen local conservation and civic organizations.

Christine Jacobsen, education specialist with the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, said she began thinking that Omaha area groups needed to do more after hearing Louv speak in Lincoln last spring and seeing what a Lincoln group, Healthy Families Play Outside, was doing.

"Working in this profession, I really see a lack of knowledge among today's youth," she said. "They don't understand their natural resources. They don't understand where their food comes from. That's a scary thought when we look at our future."

Among MORE Nature's goals are teaching people the value of nature-based play and

expanding opportunities for it.

Already, the group has launched nature clubs at several metropolitan area schools and partnered with Countryside Community Church and others to arrange for Louv to speak there.

In the planning stages are a community forum this winter and a late spring nature scavenger hunt in partnership with the Junior League of Omaha. The hunt would be organized along the lines of a similar program in Lincoln.

Other plans include workshops for parents, developing model backyards and schoolyards for nature play and hosting gardening workshops for kids.

Getting kids outside to play has broad appeal because it brings together those interested in child development and those interested in conservation, from parents and educators concerned about fighting childhood obesity and building analytical skills to conservationists interested in raising a new generation to care for wildlife and the land.

"They fit together well," said Finch, a member of MORE Nature's steering committee and president of the Green Hearts Institute for Nature in Childhood, an Omaha-based nonprofit organization.

Simply giving kids more time outside probably is the first aim, said Finch, former executive director of the Fontenelle Nature Association.

A 1999 University of Michigan study found that children ages 3 to 12 spend 1 percent of their time outdoors and 27 percent with electronic media.

But research also indicates that frequent contact with nature is important, Finch said. Most adults of a certain age remember going outside to play almost every day after school.

The key to frequency is proximity, Finch said, meaning somewhere close to home. That place doesn't have to be elaborate, just a small space where kids can dig and collect bugs, what another author calls "rough ground."

"We really need to find a way to do it in yards, in parks and in schoolyards," Finch said.

That's where the local groups are stepping in.

One aim of an event called the Lincoln Safari was to connect families with outdoor areas they could go back and visit later, said McKenzie Barry, environmental education specialist at the Lower Platte South NRD.

The free outdoor scavenger hunt, a project of the Lincoln Children's Zoo in conjunction with Healthy Families Play Outside, took participants to 35 stops

throughout Lincoln, half or more of them on a city bus line. About 5,000 families signed up, Barry said, which equals about 20,000 people.

"We've been getting calls from New York, Pennsylvania and California from people who want to model (the safari) in their state," she said.

The Lincoln program also operates six after-school nature clubs, which typically include a family nature night. The Lower Platte South NRD, in conjunction with Healthy Families, in September hosted a workshop and design session with Robin Moore, a landscape architect who touts the need for natural, unstructured play areas.

Such efforts also extend beyond metropolitan areas.

Last January, educational and outdoor groups in the Gering, Neb., area, including the National Park Service and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, organized Children and Nature in Our Parks.

Ken Mabery, superintendent of the Scotts Bluff National Monument, said that forming the group with representatives from several other entities has allowed the initiative to expand events and bring in more money to fund them.

Through the initiative, for example, organizers of a geology program at the monument added several new activity stations for students, and educators worked a local museum's fall harvest festival into the middle school curriculum.

A big goal of the group is to grow a new generation of conservationists, he said. But there are plenty of other benefits.

"We haven't been able to find a 'lose' side to this yet," Mabery said.

Get connected

Five ways to connect kids with nature in their own backyard:

Create rough ground. Choose a corner of your yard and allow grass to grow tall. New plants will move in, along with an expanded variety of insects and maybe even a garter snake.

Make a discovery board. Place a scrap piece of plywood flat in a quiet corner of your yard. The shade, coolness and moisture under the board will create a micro-habitat for daddy longlegs, worms, millipedes, snails, beetles and more. Take your child out to check for new discoveries every day or two.

Hang a bird feeder. Make a chart and track avian visitors. For younger children, count brown birds and red birds. For older children, get a guide and try to identify them.

Make nature art. Make leaf rubbings in the fall. Make pictures by gluing seeds and leaves to paper. Or try a nature bracelet: Wrap a bubble of tape around a child's wrist, sticky side out. Walk around the block and collect seeds, stones and other "gems."

Plant a garden or a few potted plants. Help kids track the plant life cycles, see what insects they attract and harvest vegetables or flowers.

More activities, information

National Wildlife Federation's Green Hour site. Get a list of activities for parents and kids and sign up for e-mail alerts on new activities and features. See www.greenhour.org.

Nature Explore, a collaboration of the Dimensions Educational Research Foundation in Lincoln and the National Arbor Day Foundation. It helps people design outdoor play spaces and provides workshops for educators and resources for families. See www.arborday.org.

Children & Nature Network, founded by Richard Louv: www.childrenandnature.org/.

Nebraska Nature Action Collaborative for Children, ectc.nde.ne.gov.

More on MORE Nature

The group's steering committee is made up of representatives from the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District, the Green Hearts Institute for Nature in Childhood, the Omaha Children's Museum, the Henry Doorly Zoo, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Schramm Park State Recreation Area and the Pottawattamie County Conservation Board's Hitchcock Nature Center. The NRD has contributed \$50,000 toward the effort, and the group is seeking additional contributions and grants. Sponsors are being sought for a late spring nature scavenger hunt. Contact the Junior League of Omaha, 493-8818.

Places to go

Places in the Omaha metropolitan area to take kids to connect with nature:

Acorn Acres, a new outdoor play area at Fontenelle Forest that offers kids room for unstructured play and outdoor learning. The area uses natural elements and concealed fencing to keep children in a defined space.

State and county parks, such as Schramm Park near Gretna, home of the Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium; and the Hitchcock Nature Center near Crescent, Iowa.

NRDs' natural areas.

Neighborhood parks.

Sources: Ken Finch, Green Hearts Newsletter; Christine Jacobsen, Papio-Missouri NRD; McKenzie Barry, Lower Platte South NRD.

• **Contact the writer:** 444-1223, julie.anderson@owh.com