

MEMORANDUM

TO THE BOARD:

SUBJECT: General Manager Report

DATE: October 6, 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 September, 2008, is attached for your review.
- B. **MISCELLANEOUS/PERSONNEL ITEMS:**
1. The close out date for applications for the Stormwater Management Engineer and the Groundwater Manager Engineer positions was September 19, 2008. We received eight applications for the Stormwater Management Engineer and six applications for the Groundwater Management Engineer. Staff is in the process of reviewing the applications and interviews will be held in the near future.
- 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 September, 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 September 15, 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 September, 2008. Please review and if you have any questions, contact me. The next Partnership meeting will be held on October 30, 2008, at 10:00 a.m. at the NRC.
- F. **NEWS CLIPS:**
- ✓ September 8, 2008, Omaha World Herald Public Pulse Letter – Government spending, written by Doug Kagan
 - ✓ September 11, 2008, Omaha World Herald article – Pumping cutback urged to save creek
 - ✓ September 15, 2008, Omaha World Herald article – Dirt bikes crash; three teens injured
 - ✓ September 18, 2008, Omaha World Herald article – State sprays herbicide to kill unwanted plant

- ✓ September 22, 2008, Lincoln Journal Star article – MoPac East Trail extension plans to be unveiled at Murdock meeting
- ✓ September 23, 2008, Lincoln Journal Star article – Area landowners oppose MoPac East Trail extension
- ✓ September 24, 2008, Douglas County Post Gazette – NRD Board approves lower tax levy for 2nd year
- ✓ September 25, 2008, Gothenburg Times – Copter attempt at control. Crop-dusting company sprays noxious weeds along Platte River
- ✓ September 25, 2008, Omaha World Herald article – Need for dams among topics raised in 2 Papio NRD races
- ✓ September 28, 2008, Omaha World Herald Midlands Voices – Growing metro must improve flood control, written by Jim Thompson

/pt/Winkler/GM Reports/2008/October

September 2008

Information & Education Report

Information:

- Completed minor updates to Trails Brochure. Ordered 40,000 copies for distribution in Omaha and Council Bluffs
- Prepared ad for placement in the World-Herald Eco Living insert.
- Set up and attended News Conference on Phragmites spraying
- Began work on Pedestrian Bridge PSAs for Radio and TV
- Attended NARD Annual Conference
- Began update for NRD web site.
- Assisted with World O Water festival

Education:

- Presented Education Demo at Water Quality Open
- Met with Omaha World Herald Newspaper in the Classroom Coordinator
- Continued working on No Child Left Inside Initiative
- Attended Robin Moore Summit
- Coordinated Children's Area at World O! Water 2008 (~5000 in attendance)
- Printed and Mailed "Cultivation" Teacher Newsletter to teachers in the District
- Presented GPS programming to all Bellevue Middle Schools (3 presentations ~?? Students)
- Trained 12 pre-service teachers from College of St. Mary in Project Learning Tree, and Project WET
- Presented NRD overview to Millard South Environmental Studies Class
- Presented GPS program to Westside Middle School (50 Students)
- Presented to Sandoz Elementary Nature Club
- Coordinated Nature Club with Boys and Girls Club
- Water Festival at Two Rivers SRA – GPS program (150 6th-8th graders)
- Boys & Girls Club – animal program (120 k-8th grade)
- Boys & Girls club – owl pellets (50 kids)
- Lothrop Elem. Field Day @ Louisville SRA – water explore (60 3rd graders)
- Attended NARD conference in Kearney

September, 2008

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Updated: September 15, 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 agreement w/Douglas County (P)
- **Big Papio:** (Cleveland)
- **West Branch** (Cleveland):
 - Land Exchange with Sarpy Co. (96th St.) (P)
- **Western Sarpy Dike** (Cleveland):
 - ⊛ Robert Bundy ROW easement preparation (W)
- **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)
 - ✪ Cambridge Oaks/Estates interlocal agreement (Bowen) (W)
 - ✪ Crystal Creek interlocal agreement (Grint) (P)

MONTHLY UPDATE

SEPTEMBER 2008



The Partnership held a subcommittee meeting on September 17th and a full Partnership meeting on October 2nd. Meeting minutes and other materials are updated regularly on the Partnership's website: www.papiopartnership.org.

Stormwater Management Regulations

A workshop was held on September 25th to discuss and review the new City of Omaha storm water ordinance amendment which provides water quality control of the first ½ inch of stormwater runoff on all new and significant redevelopment sites. The City of Omaha and the Papio-Missouri River NRD presented information on the submittal and review process for Post Construction Stormwater Management Plans. Olsson Associates and Lamp Rynearson presented information on the design elements of low impact development. The workshop was well attended with approximately 125 individuals from the development and engineering community participating. Guidance documents for the Post Construction Stormwater Management Plan and the presentations from the workshop are posted on the Partnership's website.

The Partnership's other communities and counties are following Omaha's lead by presenting this ordinance amendment to their boards. Most reported they will be introducing this item in October or November to their Planning Commissions with a goal of having it adopted by the end of the year.

Watershed Management Plan Update

HDR presented a draft copy of the Stage IV report this month. The group discussed an implementation plan for the watershed that is modeled after the City of Omaha Sewer Master Plan. An overall conceptual Watershed Management Plan has been presented but the implementation would occur in smaller time increments allowing the conceptual plan to be reviewed and modified if necessary, as the watershed builds out. This model would identify priority projects for immediate implementation (within 3 years) and also identify near term projects that would be 3 to 10 years out.

Stage IV Contract Amendment and NPDES Permit Renewal

Throughout discussions it has become apparent that additional work needs to be completed to establish the Watershed Management Plan and finalize the implementation and financing portion of the Stage IV study. During the month of September the Partners reviewed and approved a contract amendment to the Stage IV study that would allow for additional professional services from HDR to complete the Stage IV study and adoption of Watershed Management Plan, including recommendations for an implementation and financing plan. HDR proposes to provide technical assistance to the Partnership for the additional milestones:

- 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

Events

World O! Water was held on September 14th and despite the wind, was a big success! Over a thousand people enjoyed the activities and participated in the event. Thanks to Jim Kee, City of Omaha, for organizing the event and all the volunteers!

October 16th from 10am-12pm, Douglas County will host a webcast from APWA on Porous Pavement. Please RSVP to Kent Holm or Karin Sorenson at Douglas County if you would like to attend.

Mark your calendars for the 2009 Sediment and Erosion Control Seminar. This year's event will be held on February 4th at the Holiday Inn, 72nd & Grover Streets. More details to follow.

Next Meeting: The next Partnership meeting is scheduled for October 30th at 10:00AM and the NRD office. Meeting dates and times are posted to the Partnership website.



BENNINGTON

Government spending

9/8/08

During an Aug. 14 public hearing in Omaha on their agency's fiscal 2008-09 budget, nine Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District board members voted to spend \$50,000 on the metropolitan Omaha Leave No Child Inside Initiative. The NRD's property-tax rate will be set on Thursday.

Upon questioning by taxpayers present, these elected officials defended this expenditure as necessary to encourage parents to send their children outside for exercise, as too many children are obese.

This egregious example of wasteful spending is typical of officials who must rack their brains to find ways to spend every tax dollar they can access on nanny government.

This expenditure is only one of many that scrutinizing taxpayer watchdogs can find in state and local annual budgets.

All these steadily escalating budgets provide prime reasons for overburdened taxpayers to become taxpayer watchdogs by attending and speaking at public budget hearings.

Doug Kagan, Omaha
Nebraska Taxpayers for Freedom

Pumping cutback urged to save creek

9-11-08

By DAVID HENDEE

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

A new report calls for drastically reducing groundwater pumping — more than 86 percent — in a slice of western Nebraska.

This steep restriction on pumping underground water is necessary to begin seeing water flow again in Pumpkin Creek near Bridgeport, according to an analysis conducted by a Colorado consulting company.

The study was performed at the request of the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, which relies on the North Platte River to fill Lake McConaughy. Pumpkin Creek is a tributary of the North Platte River.

Lake McConaughy is the state's largest reservoir and a popular recreation site. It has suffered several years of low levels as North Platte flows into the lake dwindled because of drought and reductions in excess water running off of irrigated

fields. The lake is currently at a third of its capacity.

Central received the final report Wednesday, on the eve of a meeting in Scottsbluff tonight at which the North Platte Natural Resources District board is expected to consider a 7 percent reduction — lowering a 14-inch annual allocation to 13 inches — in the amount of groundwater Pumpkin Creek irrigators may pump.

"We'd hope that the North Platte NRD board sets a much lower allocation (for irrigators) and starts the process of recovery in the Pumpkin Creek basin. They need to bring it back to where the water uses are more in line with the available water supply," said Mike Drain, Central's natural resources manager.

Don Kraus, Central's general manager, said the analysis should provide important information to the NRD board as it considers lowering the Pumpkin Creek irrigation allocation.

Kraus and Drain plan to attend

tonight's NRD meeting.

Pumpkin Creek is also the source of an ongoing legal battle between owners of Spear T Ranch and neighboring farmers and ranchers over the effects of groundwater use on creek flows. The case is scheduled to return to trial in early 2010.

When irrigation wells pump underground water, they can suck down the surface water in nearby wetlands and lakes, rivers and creeks.

The North Platte NRD banned new wells in the Pumpkin Creek watershed in 2001 and set a 15-inch annual pumping allocation the next year. The limit was lowered to 14 inches in 2003.

There are an estimated 592 registered irrigation wells in the watershed. The wells provide water to about 37,400 acres.

The \$60,000 analysis was conducted by Lytle Water Solutions of Highlands Ranch, Colo., over the summer.

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

Dirt bikes crash; three teens injured

Three Bellevue teenagers were injured, one critically, in a dirt bike collision Sunday night near 25th Street and Nebraska Highway 370 in Bellevue, the Sarpy County Sheriff's Office said.

Three dirt bikes were involved, the Sheriff's Office said. The crash occurred about 8:55 p.m. along the south section of the Keystone Trail, which runs next to Papillion Creek.

Two of the bikes were on top of the levee — none had headlights, the Sheriff's Office said.

Two dirt bikes were headed south and one was headed north. One southbound bike collided with the northbound bike.

One of the bikes that collided was driven by Tyler McClain, 19. Brandee Spurlin, 18, was a passenger. The other bike was driven by Jared Rein, 18.

All three were taken to the Nebraska Medical Center. Spurlin and Rein were treated and released. McClain was admitted in critical condition.

—Susan Szalewski

9/15/08 OWH

Published Thursday September 18, 2008

State sprays herbicide to kill unwanted plant

BY LESLIE REED

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Helicopters such as this one upstream from Cozad, Neb., are being used this week to spray the 85-mile section of the Platte River between Hershey and Elm Creek to kill phragmites. The invasive grass prevents birds from nesting on sandbars and can narrow the streambed.

It's the Platte River's turn to be cleared of weeds choking the river's flow and crowding out wildlife, including threatened and endangered bird species.

Two helicopter crews on Tuesday began spraying an aquatic-safe herbicide along the 85-mile section of the Platte River from Hershey to Elm Creek, Neb.

The project to spray phragmites — an invasive grass that grows as tall as 10 feet — could be completed in six to 10 days, if weather conditions remain favorable, said Rich Walters, manager of the eastern half of the two-part project.

A similar effort earlier this year cleared Republican River channels for the first time in 10 years.

The work this week is being funded with two Nebraska Department of Agriculture grants totaling more than \$630,000.

Both the Platte River and Republican River weed-clearing efforts are being financed through 2007 legislation that set aside \$2 million per year for two years to clear vegetation from rivers in water-short areas. The Agriculture Department is charged with distributing the funds through a grant system.

During the past five years, phragmites have exploded along the Platte River, Walters said, likely encouraged by drought. The grass creates dense thickets on the river sandbars that prevent threatened piping plovers and endangered least terns from building nests. The phragmites also increase the risk of flooding by narrowing the river's flow.

It will take several years to loosen the weed's hold on the river, Walters said. With insufficient money available to spray the entire river, the strategy is to kill the plants upstream to stop their seeds and runners from spreading downstream.

The Legislature is expected to consider next year whether to continue the weed-control program.

The project is a partnership of numerous groups, including the Platte Valley and West Central Weed Management Areas; the Platte River Habitat Partnership, consisting of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Nature Conservancy; local natural resources districts; and area landowners.

The Central Platte Natural Resources District has contributed an additional \$100,000 to use machinery to remove the weeds at places where they choke the streambed, increasing the risk that water will back up and cause flooding, Walters said.

The state money is restricted to spraying areas where water rights exceed the water that is available.

Even though they don't qualify for state dollars, eastern Nebraska natural resources districts will begin their own spraying program next week, downstream in the Platte riverbed, to attack phragmites, purple loosestrife and other invasive weeds; cottonwood trees; and willow trees.

Helicopters will be used to spray as many as 1,000 acres of sandbars along the Platte from just downstream of U.S. Highway

77 to the Missouri River.

Continued

Three natural resources districts — Papio-Missouri River, Lower Platte South and Lower Platte North — are sharing costs with local landowners for the approximately \$200,000 project.

Rich Tesar, a board member for the Papio-Missouri River NRD, said the invasive weeds pose the "biggest crisis the Platte River has faced in modern times." He said he has urged officials along the lower Platte to act before they face as serious a vegetation problem as their upstream counterparts.

Not only do the weeds thwart birds from nesting and inhibit hunting, fishing and other recreational uses of the river, they create serious flooding concerns, Tesar said.

With their thick roots and runners, the weeds create a "huge biomass" that can block the water's flow and cause winter ice jams.

MoPac East Trail extension plans to be unveiled at Murdock meeting

ALGIS J. LAUKAITIS / Lincoln Journal Star

Monday, Sep 22, 2008 - 12:42:05 am CDT

Landowners and the public will get a chance Tuesday night to view proposals to extend the MoPac East Trail to the Lied Platte River Bridge near South Bend.

Several alternatives will be presented by The Schemmer Associates, Inc., an engineering firm based in Omaha, at an informational meeting at Murdock High School from 6 to 8 p.m.

The meeting is sponsored by the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, which owns and operates the 25-mile-long MoPac East Trail. The district wants to extend the trail — which now begins near 84th and O streets in Lincoln and ends at the unincorporated village of Wabash — to the Lied Platte River Bridge near South Bend.

Eventually, the MoPac East Trail will become part of a 50-mile-long trail linking the state's two largest cities, Omaha and Lincoln.

Dan Schulz, resources coordinator for the NRD, said the district would like to extend the MoPac East Trail along 334th Street, which is now a county road located one mile east of Wabash.

"The (334th Street) corridor runs straight up to the Lied Platte River Bridge," he said.

Landowners along the nine-mile long corridor have been invited to the Tuesday night meeting along with Cass County Commissioners and other stakeholders, Schulz said.

Representatives from Schemmer Associates have developed several options for placing a trail along 334th Street. Landowners will be able to ask questions, look at maps and discuss the alternatives after a 6 p.m. presentation. No decision has been made on where to put the trail.

"Any of them are interchangeable. It's wide open at this point," Schulz said.

After the meeting, Schemmer Associates will consider the information and come up with a "preferred alternative" that will be presented to the Cass County Board and eventually to an NRD subcommittee.

Schulz said Cass County commissioners were briefed on the options Tuesday because the NRD may have to use some of the right of way along 334th Street for the trail. He said that will minimize the need to acquire private land for the 30-foot-wide trail corridor.

The NRD will begin to acquire easements or land once its board of directors approves the project. The Lincoln-based district already has hired Midwest Right of Way Services,

Continued

Inc., from Omaha and a representative will be at the Tuesday night meeting to answer questions.

Total cost of the trail extension project is estimated at \$1.5 million to \$2.5 million, Schulz said. Most of the funds will come from federal and state sources. The official name of the project is: The MoPac East-Lied Platte River Bridge Connection.

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

Area landowners oppose MoPac East Trail extension

ALGIS J. LAUKAITIS / Lincoln Journal Star

Tuesday, Sep 23, 2008 - 09:23:24 pm CDT

MURDOCK — The message Tuesday night was unmistakable: We don't want a recreational trail in our front yards — or backyards.

Anyone attending a meeting on the proposed MoPac East Trail connection heard that vocal message from three dozen or so landowners who might have to give up their land for the project.

If anyone missed that message, there was also this: When landowners were asked to raise their hands in a show of support, none of them did. No one in the audience of about 100 people who gathered at the Elmwood-Murdock High School did so. Not even the bicyclists who were present and would use the trail, if it were built.

[+]EnlargeJoggers run on the MoPac Trail east of 84th Street in 2002. (LJS file)

Joggers run on the MoPac Trail east of 84th Street in 2002. (LJS file)

Related Link(s):

Graphic: Extension options for the MoPac East Trail "It will be a hard sell," said Ken Vice of Lincoln, who is president of the Great Plains Trails Network. "Certainly the people who are all here are against it. They hope they can stop it. I wouldn't put my hand up in favor of it."

The Lower Platte South Natural Resources District wants to extend the MoPac East Trail beyond the unincorporated village of Wabash to the Lied Platte River Bridge near South Bend.

The trail now begins just south of 84th and O Streets and runs for 25 miles through Eagle and Elmwood. Trail groups view the MoPac East Trail as a key piece to a 50-plus mile trail between Lincoln and Omaha.

Lincoln-based NRD and its design firm, Schemmer Associates, say the 10-mile extension from Wabash to the bridge will provide trail users a safe route. No construction date has been scheduled.

The Tuesday meeting was for information purposes only. NRD staff and the 13 board members in attendance wanted to hear what local residents thought about the several alternatives presented by Schemmer Associates — all of which follow 334th Street.

Those who spoke after a presentation by Schemmer project manager Jennifer Thompson questioned the need to spend anywhere from \$1.5 million to \$2.5 million in these hard economic times. Some worried about how the trail would affect their property values and who would take care of the weeds and pick up dog waste.

Continued

“Don’t want it,” said Duane Derby, who lives near South Bend. “What purpose does it serve? The bike trail you got now — there’s hardly anybody using it.”

Jim Panska, who lives along 334th Street, echoed a similar sentiment: “They’re going to have a 50-mile trail for families. No family is going to use a trail 50 miles long.”

After Thompson’s presentation, Panska was talking to landowners about organizing a group to oppose the project and hire an attorney. He said one of the landowners already has an attorney and the others should meet with him.

“There’s not a single landowner that will want to give them an easement — you can hear that tonight,” Panska said

The NRD is trying to use as much public right of way as possible along 334th Street, a gravel road in Cass County, but may need easements to meet federal safety guidelines for trails. About 50 landowners could be affected.

Glenn Johnson, general manager for the NRD, said the district is well aware of landowner concerns.

“The adjoining landowners don’t see a need for it,” he said. “They just want it to go away. That’s not unusual for a trail project. It’s a difficult issue.”

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

NRD Board approves lower tax levy for 2nd year

The Papio-Missouri River NRD's Board of Directors met September 11, 2008 in Dakota City and set its FY 2009 levy at .033753. The FY 2008 levy was .03485. The FY 2007 levy was .03844.

"The Papio NRD has lowered its levy two consecutive years," said John Winkler, NRD General Manager. "We have an efficient, financially responsible operation here. Our citizens can be assured that the NRD is fulfilling our mission to protect life and property, and enhance

our quality of life by locally managing our natural resources programs or projects," he said.

The .033753 levy would mean that the owner of property valued at \$100,000 would pay a total of \$33.75 in property taxes this year to support NRD projects and programs. This amount is roughly one to two percent of an average property tax bill. The levy is based on a projected overall 4.18 percent increase in valuations across the District. The Papio-Missouri River NRD area includes all

of Sarpy, Douglas, Washington and Dakota Counties plus the eastern 60 percent of Burt and Thurston Counties.

The budget also calls for total estimated expenditures of \$39.47 million, compared to \$44.19 million in FY 2008. An estimated \$16.59 million in revenue would come from property taxes, compared to \$16.44 million in FY 2008. The remainder of revenue would be received through State of Nebraska and federal funding for projects, and special assessments.

~~###~~ 9-24-08
Post Gazette

Copter attempt at control

Crop-dusting company sprays noxious weeds along Platte River

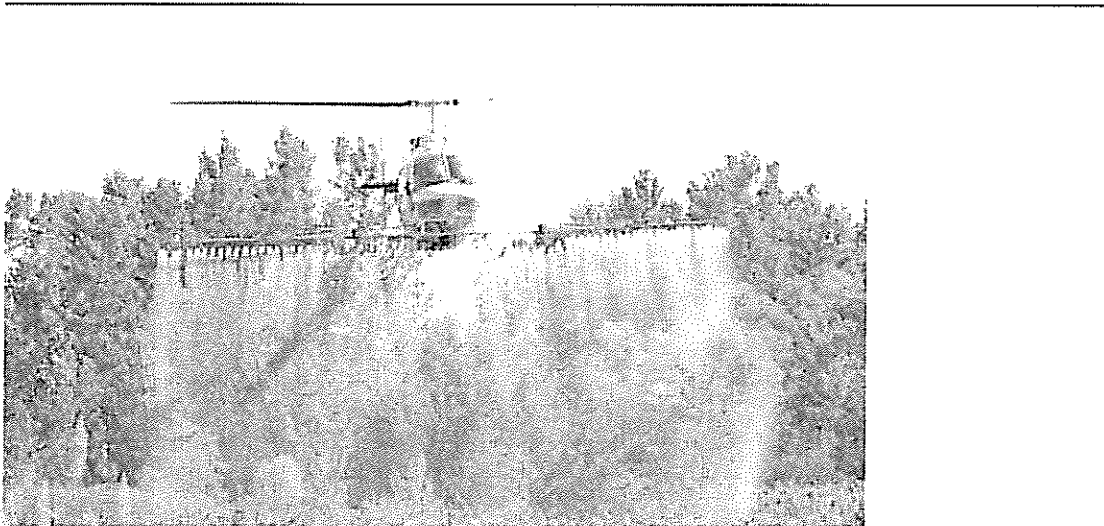
by Elizabeth Barrett – Gothenburg Times

September 25, 2008

Phragmites that proliferate along the banks and sandbars of the Platte and other rivers have no natural enemies.

But officials hope a man-made adversary and application process will annihilate the tall, reedy grass.

Last week, a helicopter spray company from Texas showered the Platte and its channels with the chemical Habitat to kill the newest of Nebraska's noxious weeds.



INVASIVE WEED ANNIHILATOR: Randy Lee, a pilot for Northstar Helicopters of Jasper, TX, sprayed phragmites, saltcedar and purple loosestrife along the Platte River and its channels south of Gothenburg Sept. 16. The company sprayed noxious weeds from Hershey to Elm Creek as part of grants received by the Platte Valley and West Central Weed Management Areas.

"It will eradicate it," said Dan Little, a crew leader/pilot of Northstar Helicopters which specializes in invasive species control.

Continued

Platte Valley Weed and West Central Weed Management Areas hired the service to rid the river of primarily phragmites but also saltcedar and purple loosestrife.

A span of river from Hershey to Elm Creek is the battleground with one helicopter spraying west of the Dawson-Lincoln County line and another applying chemical to the east.

The weed agencies are armored with two grants— \$300,000 for the PVWMA and \$330,000 for WCVMA.

The money was appropriated to the agencies through LB701 to pay for the Platte and other projects.

As the helicopter—with nozzles attached to a boom hanging from the aircraft—hovered above, Little said Habitat is mixed with water and methylated seed oil and fed into a 100-gallon tank on the chopper.

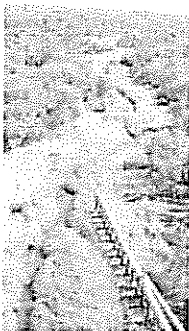
The mixture in the tank can treat about 6.67 acres.

Little said the seed oil helps the chemical stick to the plants which pull and store the poison in their root systems.

“Over the winter, it kills the root system,” he explained.

This fall and winter, Little said some of the perennial's leaves will brown. But in the spring, treated phragmites will be dead.

“Now is the ideal time to spray before a killing frost,” he noted.



CHOKED CHANNEL: An aerial shot of the Platte Rivers shows how phragmites have taken over.

Continued

Brought in from Eurasia, Dawson County weed superintendent Marty Craig said the invasive plant creates a monoculture by competing with native grasses.

The weed also channelizes the river so when it floods, Craig said the water has no place to go.

Phragmites also suck up water as does saltcedar—another invasive plant that came to the United States in the 1800s to stabilize river banks. Saltcedar was also used in wind breaks and as an ornamental plant.

Little said saltcedar was also used to fight erosion during the Dust Bowl.

Although water studies on phragmites are still being done, Craig said saltcedar slurps “a lot of water.”

In fact, some studies show an infested river bank can use nine-acre feet of water per year while large trees can absorb 200 gallons of water daily.

Little said saltcedar seems to be more of problem in the southwestern states such as Texas, New Mexico and Arizona.

“Like phragmites are here,” Craig said.

Little said this is the first time his company has sprayed phragmites in Nebraska.

Although the helicopter can apply chemicals in areas traditional crop dusters cannot, Craig said there are still places the aircraft cannot reach.

Landowners will be responsible for spraying any missed or new invasive plants, he said, noting that state law requires property owners to eliminate noxious weeds.

In addition to fighting saltcedar in southwestern states along with prickly pear and mesquite, Little and his company also spray for saltcedar in Wyoming and do site preparation for forests in Arkansas and Georgia.



LITTLE



CRAIG



LEE

Continued

"That's when we spray clear cuts before they plant new trees," he said. "We spray the competitive species so the plant has all the resources available."

Little said the traveling helicopter company usually starts treating prickly pear and mesquite in March in the Southwest and finishes up in the forests in the South by November.

"I enjoy getting to see the different areas of the country," he said. "But it's a challenge in Texas working around the huge wind farms."

Pilot Randy Lee said he liked being out in the open air and the challenges that go along with helicopter piloting.

Lee piloted the helicopter to the east of the Dawson-Lincoln County line.

"The one constant in the business is that everything changes," Lee said. "And every element is controlled by the weather."

For more information about noxious weeds or control of invasive species, contact Craig at 308-324-3771.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com 308-537-3636

Continued

Need for dams among topics raised in 2 Papio NRD races

By NANCY GAARDER

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Discontent with the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District is fueling some of the competition in this fall's board election.

Washington County homebuilder Scott Japp and veteran Dakota County Planning Board member Jim Jepsen are squaring off to represent voters in the sprawling, rural Subdistrict 1 that extends from Washington to Dakota Counties.

Self-described environmental and community activist Larry Bradley and school teacher-librarian Michael Schawang are vying for Subdistrict 3, which represents Omaha's downtown and midtown core.

They will replace veteran NRD member Dick Connealy and an interim appointee, Rick Patterson. Both are leaving the board.

Three other seats are up for election, and incumbents face challengers in two of those. One incumbent is running, unopposed.

The Papio-Missouri NRD handles flood control and recreational and habitat projects in six counties along the Missouri River, including the Omaha metropolitan area. It is funded primarily through property taxes and state and federal dollars.

In Subdistrict 1, the candidates seeking to replace Connealy differ over the NRD board's decisions.

Jepsen said he is running because he likes the work of the NRD, while Japp says "nothing is aboveboard" in the board's actions.

As a 20-year member of the Dakota County Planning Commission, Jepsen said he is used to making difficult decisions.

He said he supports dam construction and recreational areas and will make decisions on a case-by-case basis.

"If it costs me a vote, it costs me a vote," he said of his support of dam construction. "Everybody has to believe in something."

Jepsen said one of the reasons he's running is to be sure the district's farthest reaches are well-represented.

Jepsen's home in the Hubbard, Neb., area is closer to South Dakota than Omaha, and is more than 100 miles from the NRD's headquarters.

Japp's home in Washington County places him nearer the metro area and at the center of intense discontent over the NRD's proposal to build about 30 dams. The largest would flood significant stretches of the Big Papillion Creek Valley in Washington County.

Japp said the proposed dams have exacerbated the complaints he has heard about the NRD.

The district, he said, uses its relative political obscurity, its

authority to condemn land and financial reserves to undertake projects that other governmental agencies wouldn't do on their own.

Among the examples he cited were the Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuge and the reservoir for a new city park and residential development at 192nd Street and West Dodge Road.

The NRD and other governmental agencies have said such partnerships are essential to completing these projects and that eminent domain authority is not being misused.

In Subdistrict 3, Schawang, who works at Adams Elementary School in Omaha, said he is running for office because he wants to give something back to the community, while Bradley, who was appointed by Gov. Dave Heineman to the Nebraska Environmental Quality Council, sees the board's emphasis on natural resources as an extension of his current work.

Both Schawang and Bradley cite the integration of urban and rural resources as a key balancing act of the NRD.

Schawang said he sees the proposed dams as "a very positive thing," in particular because they could help prevent flooding.

"I'm not going to say I'm an expert," he said. "The intention for the dams is to save lives and enrich lives and extend natural resources."

Both Bradley and Schawang questioned the need for the number of dams that the NRD initially suggested. The district has said it probably will not build all that are on the drawing board.

Said Schawang: "I don't want to see money wasted and taxpayers footing bills for things that aren't needed."

Urban growth, Bradley said, requires the district to undertake flood control projects that deal with the increases in storm water runoff washing off the additional rooftops and pavement.

He was critical of the NRD's handling of the proposed dams. "They definitely need to listen to people more," he said.

Bradley said he opposes partnerships with the private sector that result in dam sites with limited public access.

Contact the writer:
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Continued

SUBDISTRICT 1

Scott Japp



Age: 52

Party affiliation:
Republican

Religious affiliation:
Lutheran

Military service:
None

Address: 4752

County Road 15, Arlington

Occupation: Homebuilder

Education: Bachelor's degree in agriculture, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Previous offices held, sought: None

Family: Single

Jim Jepsen



Age: 58

Party affiliation:
Republican

Religious affiliation:
Lutheran

Military service:
U.S. Army

Address: 415

Walnut St., Hubbard

Occupation: Mechanic, Nebraska Roads Department

Education: Graduate, Emerson-Hubbard High School; farming and mechanics classes

Previous offices held, sought: None

Family: Married, six children

SUBDISTRICT 3

Larry Bradley



Age: 44

Party affiliation:
Democrat

Religious affiliation:
Lutheran

Military service:
U.S. Army

Address: 6068

Country Club Oaks Place

Occupation: Doctoral student, geography department, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Education: Bachelor's and master's degrees in biology, University of Nebraska at Omaha

Previous elected office sought, held: 2006 bid for University of Nebraska Board of Regents

Family: Married, two children

Web site: www.bradley2008.com

Michael Schawang



Age: 59

Party affiliation:
Republican

Religious affiliation:
Catholic

Military service:
None

Address: 3417

N. 81st St.

Occupation: Librarian-teacher, Adams Elementary School, Omaha Public Schools

Education: Bachelor's degree in education, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; master's degree in education, University of Nebraska at Omaha; postgraduate student, UNO

Previous elected office sought, held: None

Family: Married, one child

Midlands Voices

Growing metro must improve flood control

BY JIM THOMPSON

The writer, of Omaha, is chairman of the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District board.

Television reporting in recent weeks had us watching Hurricanes Gustav and Ike introducing themselves to the United States. Sitting comfortably in my dry home, I could hardly fathom the idea of owning property or living on the downside of those levees and seawalls. The waves kept sweeping over the land, challenging the strength of the concrete and earth.

So far, we have been extremely fortunate here in eastern Nebraska. We watched our fellow Americans in Iowa, Ohio, Florida, Louisiana, Texas, etc., cope with natural disasters and their subsequent flooding and water-quality problems.

Do not get too complacent, fellow Nebraskans, for Mother Nature does not know where the borders lie.

The University of Iowa alone suffered \$248 million in damage from the recent rains. A flood relief bill for more than \$1 billion — just for Iowa — is being discussed in Congress. And, of course, the economic prognosticators estimate billions more in damages in other parts of the country.

Wow! What could these states have done to minimize these damages? I cannot speak for these disaster-stricken states, but I know that Nebraska's natural resources districts are trying their best to study, evaluate and determine what can be done to minimize our continuing risks of flooding.

New federal standards are proposed to increase the size of our levees as a result of Gustav's and Ike's ugly cousin, Katrina. You should know that no federal dollars will be automatically coming with these changes.

In the Omaha metropolitan area, flood-plain maps are being redrawn as a result of urbanization. When the revised, redrawn maps are approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, properties once considered safe will no longer be deemed safe. And insurance premiums will rise.

Consequently, more water-quantity structures are needed to absorb the runoff of torrential rains and to minimize the disasters of flooding. Our Omaha-area system of creeks and lakes (Zorinsky, Standing Bear, Cunningham, Wehrspann and Walnut Creek) is no match when that 100-year rain event (meaning a 1 percent probability of having a 6-inch rain in 24 hours) occurs. If you thought we had such an event in June, we were not even close.

Since these flood-prevention structures were built, urbanization in metropolitan Omaha has covered thousands of acres of dirt with concrete and asphalt. We need to take action now to prevent a catastrophe. In addition, we are facing federal requirements to build water-quality structures to help clean stormwater runoff.

The Papio-Missouri River NRD has commissioned studies to show where we can build water-quantity and water-quality structures. These essential studies are supplemental to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' previous studies, which were undertaken considerably before the current level of urbanization.

We must do more, and we must act now. We cannot do this alone. We will require the cooperation and vision of the Legislature to allow us to proceed with more intensity in our mission of flood prevention and protection.

Current water conservation and on-site retention efforts, such as rain barrels, grassy swales, rain gardens, green roofs, etc., are positive supplemental efforts. But studies show that these low-impact efforts simply will not stop a deluge when the fateful rains pounce and pour.

The people of Nebraska, and particularly the residents of the Omaha area, deserve the best flood control and the best in water quality. Necessary infrastructure investments made today will minimize losses and save dollars, property and lives in the future.