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LOWER PLATTE NORTH NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT
Dedicated to the conservation, preservation and wise use of our natural resources

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Bubble-ology

A student grins as he is encased in a giant bubble by Extension Educator Lance Cummins-Brown. The bubbles were made with a combination of water, dish soap and corn starch.



Water Rockets

A "water rocket" -- a 2-liter pop bottle propelled by water and pressurized air -- blasts off from its launching pad.



Gooley Garbage

A student proudly displays her home-made landfill, a "gooley" mixture of dogfood, ketchup, syrup, and other materials that represent common household wastes.



SPRING CONSERVATION SENSATION

Rainy weather couldn't dampen the enthusiasm of 330 elementary students at the "Spring Conservation Sensation" on May 2nd.

Students from nine area schools converged on the Saunders County Fairgrounds for the annual festival, which focuses on hands-on learning about natural resources and the environment. The event was originally scheduled for Czechland Lake near Prague, but was moved to the fairgrounds in Wahoo due to inclement weather.

Rotating through eight sessions, students were able to plant trees; practice casting, knotting and other fishing skills; stand inside giant bubbles; fire air-powered "Water Rockets;" examine fish, insects and other lake critters; participate in a food-chain game; explore the properties of soil; and build their own miniature landfills and wells.

Nearly 3,500 students have attended the Spring Conservation Sensation since its inception in 1991. The event is open to schools from Butler, Saunders, Platte, Colfax, and Dodge counties.

Schools attending the 2001 event were David City Elementary, District 23 (Colon), Mead Elementary, Prague Elementary, North Bend, Schuyler District 4-R, Schuyler Elementary, St. Mary's (David City), and St. Wenceslaus (Wahoo).

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First Place!

NRD Receives National Award for Wellhead Protection Campaign

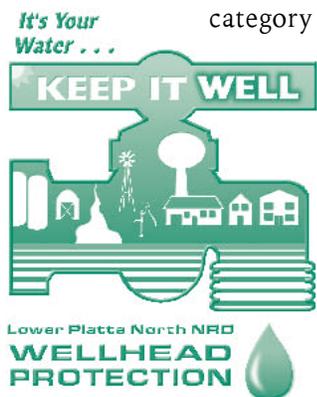
A public relations campaign for the Lower Platte North NRD's Wellhead Protection Program has received a first place award in a national contest for conservation districts.

The NRD won the Public Information category in the 2000 Outreach Awards, an annual contest sponsored by the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and EMI (the Equipment Manufacturer's Institute). The awards honor conservation districts across the nation for outstanding efforts in communication and public outreach. Awards are given in six categories: Public Information, Newsletter, Print Media, Special Publications, Website, and Broadcast Media.

The district received the award for a public relations campaign conducted in Schuyler for the Wellhead Protection Program. The district developed a logo and slogan ("It's Your Water . . . Keep It Well"), produced brochures and

fact sheets, and worked with area media, community leaders, and FFA students to get the word out about Wellhead Protection.

The award was presented at the NACD Annual Conference in Fort Worth on Feb. 7. This is the second year in a row that the district has received an Outreach Award. The NRD website, www.lpnnrd.org, won a first place award in 1 9 9 1 .



And the winners are . . .
NRD Wellhead Protection Coordinator McKenzie Barry (center) and NRD Assistant Manager Tom Mountford (right) receive the award for First Place Public Information Campaign from Darrin Drollinger, representing the Equipment Manufacturer's Institute.



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The event was sponsored by the Lower Platte North Natural Resources District and Saunders County Extension, with partial funding from the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality/EPA Region 7. Additional presenters came from Dodge County Extension, the Farm Service Agency, the Upper Big Blue NRD, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Members of the David City FFA chapter served as guides for the students. In-kind services were provided by Stock Seed Farms and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Name That Fish

At left: NRD manager John Miyoshi gives students tips on fish identification at the Spring Conservation Sensation.

Busy Tree Planting Season for NRD



Spring is always a hectic time for the Lower Platte North NRD's tree planting crews, but this year is even busier than usual.

The district will plant 37,000 trees in 2001, compared to 12,000-15,000 in a typical year.

"Our total tree sales went up quite a bit this year," said Bob Heimann, Operations & Maintenance Manager. "Not only that, but normally we only

plant about half of the trees we sell, and the purchasers plant the rest. This year, we're planting more than 65 percent of the total."

A new CRP incentive for planting shrubs accounts for most of the increase, Heimann said.

"We're also planting 10,000 trees to establish a nursery for the Lake Wanhoo project," he added. "We've got plenty to keep us busy."

Spring Rains Boost Homestead Lake

Flowers and crops aren't the only things to benefit from plenty of spring rain -- the newly-completed Homestead Lake got a jumpstart too.

The lake, located near Bruno, began filling over the winter, but water levels dropped with the spring thaw. Thanks to heavy rains in early May, though, the lake began refilling much sooner than anticipated.

By mid-May, the lake had filled to its "drawdown" level -- the lowest level to which it can be drained. While this is still nine to ten feet lower than the lake's estimated permanent water level, it is still higher than expected so soon after the dam's completion earlier this spring, said Eric Gottschalk, NRD Special Projects Coordinator.

The lake will be maintained at the drawdown level at least through the summer to allow grass and other vegetation to become established along the banks for erosion control and fish habitat. Assuming the vegetation is well-established, the NRD will allow the lake to begin filling past its drawdown level

beginning in the fall. With adequate precipitation, the lake possibly could be full or nearly full by next spring, Gottschalk said.

Recreational facilities are scheduled to be installed this summer along the lake's northwest shore. The lake will be developed for day use, with picnic tables, a picnic shelter, restrooms, a boat ramp, and a fishing dock. Once the recreation facilities are completed, a dedication ceremony will be held and the area will open to public use.

The lake will also provide fishing, but pickings will be slim for a few years. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission plans to stock the reservoir this fall and next spring with bass, bluegill, and catfish, but it will take at least three years for a fishery to become established.



Before and After

The top photo shows the Homestead Lake site during construction, while the bottom shows the lake as it fills in early May. The excavator in the top photo is working on the outlet structure, seen completed in the foreground of the bottom photo.



Sponsors Fine-tune Benefits of Lake Wanahoo/Sand Creek Project

As the Sand Creek Watershed Project moves into its design and engineering phase, local sponsors are working to ensure that the project's environmental restoration benefits are optimized.

The project, which includes the planned Lake Wanahoo near Wahoo and seven smaller upstream dams, is designed for environmental restoration, with flood control and public recreation as additional benefits. The environmental benefits of the project include new and/or restored wetlands, grasslands, and hardwood forest areas, as well as improved water quality in the Sand Creek watershed.

Last November, Congress approved \$17 million in federal funds for the project, with the Corps of Engineers administering the funds. In late December, the Corps' Washington D.C. headquarters gave the project conditional approval.

To receive final approval, local project sponsors (the Omaha Corps office, the Lower Platte North NRD, the City of Wahoo, and Saunders County) need to respond to seven conditions set by Corps headquarters. The conditions seek to ensure that the project will provide the optimum environmental restoration benefits.

"We think we have answers to the questions the Washington Corps office is asking," said Mike Murren, Lake Wanahoo Coordinator. "We just need to go back to the work we did for our feasibility study and pull out more details."

The project sponsors were also directed to solicit input from other



federal resource agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency and the Fish and Wildlife Service, and to perform a separate Federal appraisal on land purchased for the project.

"We've already met with the EPA and Fish and Wildlife, and they have no objections to the project," said Murren.

While the local sponsors were anticipating final approval in December, not conditional approval, it should prove to be a relatively minor delay, Murren said. The local sponsors will present their response to the Corps' conditions in mid-June. Assuming those conditions are satisfied, preliminary construction will still begin in 2002, with completion of Lake Wanahoo and the other dams in 2003. Preliminary design and engineering work is already underway.

"This process has slowed us down some," Murren said, "but we think there's enough room in our schedule to allow for it."

IN BRIEF

New GIS Specialist Joins NRD

Ryan Axmann has joined the Lower Platte North NRD as the new GIS Specialist. Ryan takes over for Cam Conrad, who accepted a new job out of state.



Ryan has a degree in Geography from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and was previously employed at the university's Center for Advanced Land Management Technologies (CALMIT).

For questions regarding GIS, contact Ryan at raxmann@linux3.nrc.state.ne.us, or call (402) 443-4675.

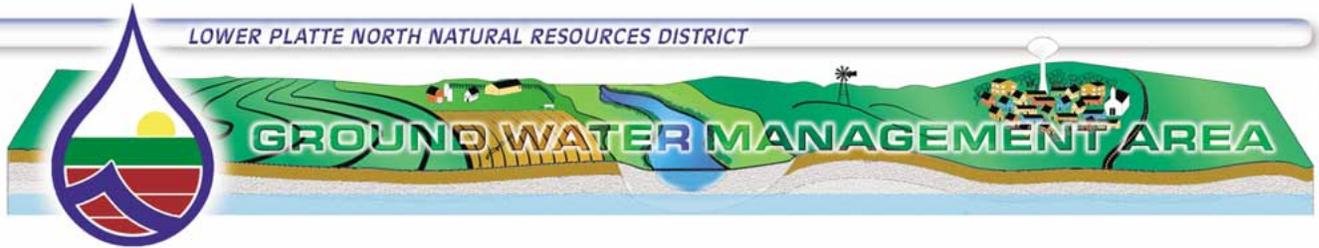
366 Producers Attend Nitrogen Management Training

The Lower Platte North NRD certified 366 producers in nitrogen management at training sessions held across the district in February and March. All producers who apply fertilizer in the NRD are required to attend the training at least once every four years.

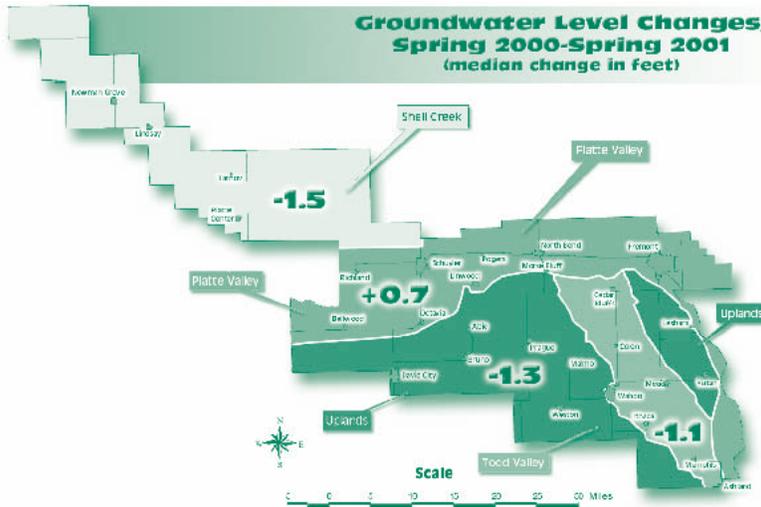
Since the training began four years ago, the district has certified a total of 1,350 producers.

Water Sampling Set for Platte Valley

Lower Platte North NRD water crews will be sampling in the Platte Valley region again this summer. The sampling will focus on areas of the Platte Valley in Butler and Colfax counties. Samples will be analyzed for nitrate content and nitrogen isotopes, and a smaller percentage will also be checked for pesticides.



Groundwater Levels Drop Across Most of LPNNRD



Groundwater levels dropped across most areas of the Lower Platte North NRD from spring 2000 to spring 2001, according to results from the district’s monitoring well network.

Three of the NRD’s four major aquifer regions showed a decrease in water levels. The Platte Valley was the only region to record an increase, showing a median change of +0.7 feet.

The results show the influence of dry conditions last year, said Larry Angle, Water Resources Manager. Groundwater levels may rebound if we receive normal precipitation this year, he said.

For the 2000-2001 comparison, 130 wells were gauged in the NRD’s monitoring network. The wells are owned by private cooperators; the NRD would like to thank them for their participation.

Well Permit Applications Available Online

If you are planning to drill a new well within the Lower Platte North NRD, you need to obtain the proper permits. For your convenience, permit applications are now available for download over the web.

Visit the district’s web site at www.lpnnrd.org and go to the “Water” section to download a permit application. The application can be printed and sent to the NRD with the \$17.50 permit fee.

A well permit from the NRD is needed prior to the construction of all new and replacement wells, except for:

- test holes
- temporary dewatering wells (used less than 90 days)
- water wells designed to pump 50 gallons per minute or less

If construction of a well (other than the exempt types listed above) begins prior to obtaining an approved permit, a late permit must be completed with a \$250 fee.

In addition to the NRD permit, all wells must be registered with the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The NRD permit **does not** register your well with the state. If you would like to check to see if your wells are registered, visit the DNR well registration database at:

<http://nrcnt2.nrc.state.ne.us/cgi-win/wells.exe>

Other county or city permits may be needed if you are within city limits or areas with zoning restrictions, so please check with your local county and/or city agencies. Special permits may also be required from DNR if the location does not meet spacing requirements in relation to existing wells or for distance from streams.

For more information about well permits or registration, please contact Shaula Ross, Water Resources Specialist, via e-mail (ross@linux3.nrc.state.ne.us), or call the NRD office at (402) 443-4675.



is the quarterly publication of the Lower Platte North Natural Resources District and is edited by Troy Thompson, Information & Education Specialist.

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NRD Honors Area Conservationists

The Lower Platte North NRD held its annual Recognition Banquet in December to honor area conservationists. The district gives awards for outstanding efforts in conservation, tree planting, water resources management, education, and volunteerism.

Award winners were: **Robert C. Dvorak Family** (Schuyler), *Outstanding Conservationist*; **Sjuts Family** (Humphrey), *Tree Planter of the Year*; **Carroll Krivanek** (Village of Abie Water Superintendent), *Water Resources Cooperator of the Year*; **Dian Talbott** (David City Aquinas) and **Todd Carmichael** (David City Public), *Educators of the Year*; **Skull/Bone Creek Landowners Watershed Committee**, *Volunteer of the Year*.

Staff and director awards were presented to: **Mike Murren** (Lake Wanahoo Coordinator), *Employee of the Year*; **LeRoy Nelson** (Director, Mead), *Director of the Year*; **William Bos** (Soil Conservation Technician, Platte County), *NRCS Employee of the Year*; **Scott Nelson** (Water Resources Technician), *Customer Service Award*; **Cam Conrad** (GIS Specialist), **Roger Woita** (Recreation Facilitator), and **Bob Heimann** (Operations & Maintenance Manager), *Circle of Excellence Awards*; **Marla Milliken** (Conservation Technician), *Five Years of Service*; **Dean Johnson** (Director, Fremont), **Clint Johannes** (Director, Richland), and **Jane Daufeldt** (Director, Wahoo), *10 Years of Service*; **Joe Sabata** (Operations & Maintenance Specialist), *15 Years of Service*.

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