



Compromise Near on Platte River Water Use and Endangered Species

Plan Should Have No Effect on Current Permit Holders in Platte River Basin

Stalled applications for water rights in the Lower Platte River basin may soon move forward thanks to a proposed compromise between state and local agencies.

Thirty-four applications for surface

water rights in the Lower Platte basin have been in limbo for months due to endangered species concerns. The basin, which includes the Loup, Elkhorn, and Lower Platte rivers, is considered a priority management area for the pallid sturgeon and the sturgeon chub.

The sturgeon is on the federal endangered species list and the chub is a candidate for the list. Under state law, any new requests for water from the rivers must be weighed against the needs of these species. Thus, new applications for water rights have been delayed as state agencies try to determine how much water is needed to protect the species.

Now, though, those applications

should have a chance to move forward under a proposed compromise plan between the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the Nebraska Department of Water Resources and the seven natural resources districts in the Lower Platte basin.

The plan would approve the 34 current applications, allowing a total of 2,750 acre-feet a year to be withdrawn from the rivers. An additional 2,250 acre-feet in new appropriations would be allowed over the next five years, for a total of 5,000 acre-feet.

Each acre-foot would be subject to a \$54 fee to help fund a five-year study of the pallid sturgeon and

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Road Delay Won't Affect Lake

Construction on the Highway 77 bypass around Wahoo has been delayed at least one year, but it should have little effect on the Lake Wanhoo project.

The bypass will run directly over the top of the planned Lake Wanhoo dam one mile north of Wahoo. Originally, the roadway was to be completed in 2002, but the Nebraska Department of Roads recently rescheduled the work for 2003.

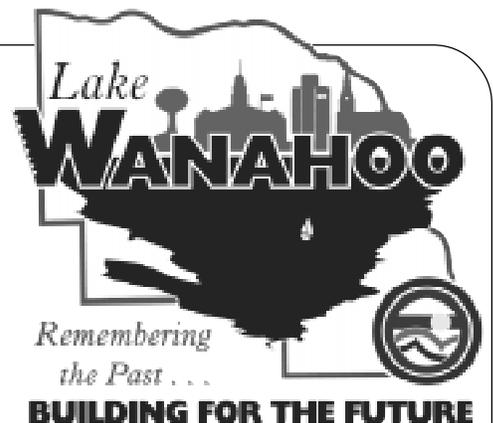
Despite the road delay, the lake project will stay on its original time-

table, said Mike Murren, Lake Wanhoo Coordinator.

"We have a February 2000 deadline to submit a report to Congress," Murren said. "These types of projects are only considered for federal funding every other year, so we need to stick to our original schedule."

If the project is approved, the dam will be constructed in 2002.

Currently, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is studying the lake project and several other options for flood control in the Sand and Wahoo Creek watersheds. Sometime this sum-



mer, they will make a decision on the best option to pursue, then begin the feasibility report that will be submitted to Congress.

Rainy Weather Can't Put a Damper on Spring Conservation Sensation

A wet, windy day couldn't stop the Spring Conservation Sensation from going forward on May 5.

Rainy conditions forced a last-minute move from Czechland Lake to the Saunders County Fairgrounds in Wahoo, but aside from a brief delay, the event went off as scheduled.

Nearly 300 fifth and sixth graders from 14 area schools attended the 1999 Sensation. Students rotated through a series of activities focusing on natural resources and the environment.

Throughout the day, students:

- ◆learned about knot tying and

fishing equipment;

- ◆took part in a casting contest;

- ◆built miniature wells in cups; learned how to read maps and use compasses;

- ◆fired off water-powered "rockets;"

- ◆learned how to plant trees;

- ◆played a game teaching them about the food chain;

- ◆discovered how lake ecosystems function; and

- ◆learned how water contaminants are measured.

The Spring Conservation Sensation is coordinated by the Lower Platte North NRD. Sponsors include the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Saunders County Extension, the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, EPA Region 7, the Lower Platte South, Lower



Well in a Cup

A student builds a miniature well at the Spring Conservation Sensation.

Elkhorn and Upper Big Blue NRDs, the Groundwater Foundation, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the Farm Service Agency. David City FFA students served as guides.

IN BRIEF

NRD Seeks to Prevent Operation of MUD Wells

Acting on a request from the Saunders County Attorney, the Lower Platte North NRD has interceded in a dispute between the county and Omaha's Metropolitan Utility District.

The County Attorney has filed 17 complaints alleging various violations of state law in the permitting and registration of wells at MUD's controversial Saunders County well field.

The NRD is seeking to prevent operations at the well field until the state Department of Water Resources can rule on the matter. The NRD will either issue a cease and desist order to MUD, or obtain a voluntary plan of action stating that no wells will be pumped until DWR's ruling. The ruling is expected sometime after August 1.

Area residents are concerned that the well field south of Yutan could lower groundwater levels in the Wann Basin, their primary source of drinking water. The Basin also supplies water for irrigation and subirrigation.



Open for Business

A new boat ramp providing public access to the Platte River is now open in Fremont's Hormel Park.

The Lower Platte North NRD cooperated on the project with the city of Fremont, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the Sport Fish Restoration Program.

The ramp provides 24-hour air boat access to the Platte River south of Fremont.

NRD Launches New Web Site

For regular updates on what the Lower Platte North NRD is doing, look no further than your computer.

The NRD's web site has been completely redesigned to bring you more information than ever about the district's activities.

The new site has been expanded to include information on almost all of our projects and programs. There are sections for water management, forestry and wildlife, flood control, land treatment, outdoor recreation, education, publications, and our Geographic Information System. The front page of each section is updated regularly to bring you the latest news.

You can also learn more about

how the district operates, see who your directors are, contact our staff via e-mail, and view committee and board meeting minutes.

To check out the site, point your web browser to:

<http://lpnnrd.nrc.state.ne.us>



Bookmark Us!

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Platte River Water Use

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sturgeon chub. The NRDs would split the \$270,000 cost (\$54,000 annually), possibly with help from the Nebraska Environmental Trust. Game and Parks would contribute \$100,000 a year. The results of the study will help determine how much water will be available for future water rights applications.

"We feel this is a good way to allow continued development of our water resources, while still protecting endangered species," said John Miyoshi, Lower Platte North NRD General Manager. "And once the study is complete, we'll have a much clearer picture of how much water will be available for future appropriations."

An interlocal agreement is being prepared to formalize the plan. None of the NRDs are under an obligation to participate, but interest seems high. The seven districts are the Lower Platte North, Lower Platte South, Upper Elkhorn, Lower Elkhorn, Upper Loup,

Lower Loup, and Papio-Missouri River.

The new plan and study should have no impact on current water right holders, Miyoshi emphasized.

Some permit holders were alarmed by a recent notice from the Department of Water Resources that warned them not to exceed their water rights allocations, Miyoshi said. However, that notice was simply intended as a reminder, and permit holders are in no jeopardy as long as they don't use more water than they have been allocated.

DWR tries hard to be flexible if irrigators need to change their allocation, Miyoshi added. For instance, a permit holder may have a pivot that requires 800 gallons a minute, but their surface water permit only allows them to pump 200 gallons a minute. In those cases, they may be able to change their allocation to allow greater gallons per minute for shorter daily pumping times, Miyoshi said.

VIADUCT

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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Groundwater Levels Rise From Previous Year

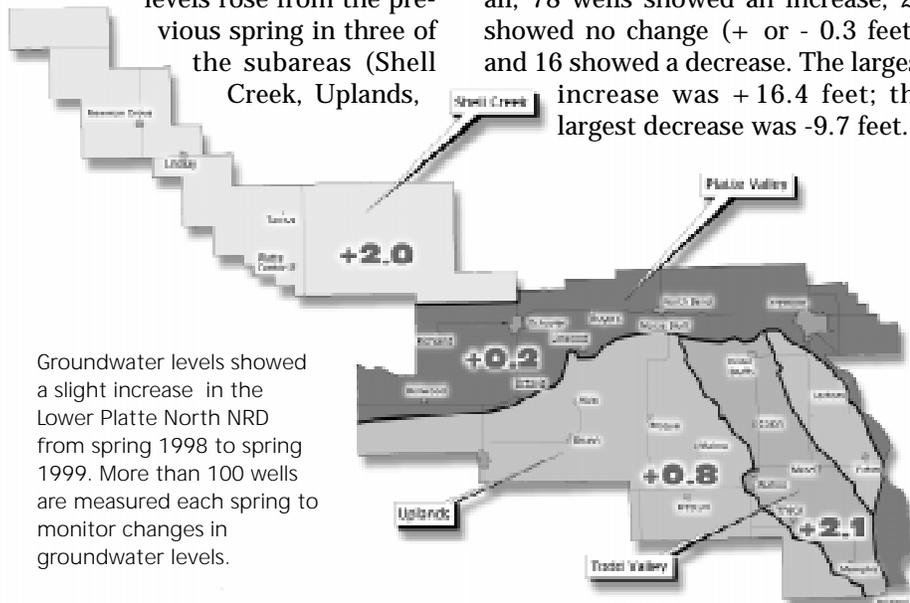
Groundwater levels were up slightly across the Lower Platte North NRD from spring 1998 to spring 1999.

Wells are measured each spring to monitor fluctuations in groundwater levels. For this purpose, the NRD is divided into four subareas with similar aquifer conditions. Groundwater levels rose from the previous spring in three of the subareas (Shell Creek, Uplands,

and Todd Valley), while the Platte Valley subarea remained relatively unchanged.

The median change in feet was: Shell Creek, +2.0; Platte Valley, +0.2; Uplands, +0.8; and Todd Valley, +2.1.

One hundred and twenty wells were measured in spring 1999. Overall, 78 wells showed an increase, 26 showed no change (+ or - 0.3 feet), and 16 showed a decrease. The largest increase was +16.4 feet; the largest decrease was -9.7 feet.



Groundwater levels showed a slight increase in the Lower Platte North NRD from spring 1998 to spring 1999. More than 100 wells are measured each spring to monitor changes in groundwater levels.

WATER BRIEFS

Water Sampling Underway in Platte and Todd Valleys

NRD water crews began taking groundwater samples from the Platte and Todd valleys in June. Almost 300 samples will be taken and analyzed for nitrate levels. Approximately 10-15 percent of the samples will also be analyzed for pesticides.

The groundwater sampling is part of the NRD's ongoing effort to track nitrate levels in the district.

367 Producers Certified in Nitrogen Management

Three hundred and sixty-seven producers were certified in nitrogen management at training sessions held last winter.

Producers in the Lower Platte North NRD are required to attend the training at least once every four years under the district's Ground Water Management Area regulations.

Since the training began two years ago, more than 1,000 producers have been certified. More training sessions will be held in winter 2000.