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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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Cooperative Agreement Signed for Sand Creek Environmental Restoration Project

Agreement with Army Corps Keeps Project on Track for Construction Start in 2005

Sponsors of the Sand Creek Environmental Restoration Project had reason to celebrate this Earth Day, with the long-awaited signing of a Project Cooperative Agreement (PCA) with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The project, which includes Lake Wanahoo north of Wahoo, was approved by the Corps in late 2002. The PCA puts the Corps' final stamp of approval on the project, moving it up the priority list. This should help expedite funding and the final design and engineering process, said Mike Murren, Project Coordinator for the local sponsors (The City of Wahoo, Saunders County and the Lower Platte North Natural Resources District).

A signing ceremony was held at the Lower Platte North NRD office in Wahoo on April 22. Colonel Kurt Ubbelohde signed on behalf of the Corps and General Manager John Miyoshi signed for the NRD. In addition to Corps and NRD personnel, representatives from the Wahoo City Council, the Saunders County Board of Supervisors, and Congressman Doug Bereuter's staff attended.

"We've been waiting for this day for a long time," said NRD General Manager John Miyoshi. "It's particularly appropriate that it's Earth Day today. Back in 1998, many of the same people were in this room on Earth Day when we signed the interlocal agreement that started the project."

Final design and engineering for the project, which includes seven smaller upstream dams in addition to Lake Wanahoo, will be completed this fall. Project sponsors are working with congressional representatives to get \$8 million in construction funds to allow construction to begin on the Lake Wanahoo embankment in 2005. The embankment and the Highway 77 Expressway that will run along the top of it are expected to be completed in 2006. Completion of recreational facilities and paving of the expressway are scheduled for 2007.



Top:

L-R - Colonel Kurt Ubbelohde, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and John Miyoshi, NRD General Manager, sign the Project Cooperative Agreement for the Sand Creek Environmental Restoration Project.

Bottom:

L-R - Mike Murren (Project Coordinator), Dean Johnson (Chair, NRD Board of Directors), Colonel Kurt Ubbelohde (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers), John Miyoshi (NRD General Manager), Daryl Reitmajer (Wahoo Mayor), and Kenny Kuncel (Chairman, Saunders County Board of Supervisors).

Saunders County Well Permits for MUD Declared "Incomplete" by Lower Platte North NRD Board

Months of debate came to a head at the Lower Platte North NRD's May Board of Directors meeting, when permits for 18 proposed Metropolitan Utility District wells in Saunders County were declared incomplete by the NRD board in a 15-4 vote.

The decision will temporarily halt MUD's plans to drill wells in the Wann Basin in southeastern Saunders County. The NRD gave MUD 60 days to submit a groundwater model showing the well field's effects on area water tables and the contamination cleanup project at the former Mead Ordnance Plant.

The day after the meeting, MUD indicated that it was considering legal action against the NRD. The utilities district claims the NRD exceeded its authority under state law by not approving the permits.

Approximately 100 people attended the meeting on May 10 at the Saunders County Fairgrounds, many of them landowners in the Wann Basin. The well field has been a contentious issue among area landowners, who fear that the field could lower water tables and draw contamination from the nearby Ordnance Plant cleanup project.

The MUD Well Field, which is planned to include wells on both the Saunders and Douglas County sides of the Platte River, is intended to help meet future water needs for expanding areas in western Douglas and Sarpy counties. The Saunders County portion of the field would involve 26 wells spread over 1,111 acres. Plans call for an average of 52 million gallons to be pumped daily from the wellfield, increasing to 70 million gallons a day during summer months.

NRD Works With Area Landowners to Compile Groundwater Inventories

While the well permit situation between MUD and the Lower Platte North NRD plays out, the NRD will continue working with landowners in the Wann Basin to catalog their groundwater-related assets.

The district will meet with interested landowners one-on-one to compile an inventory of groundwater-related items that could be impacted by the MUD well field, including domestic and irrigation wells, septic tanks, subirrigated crops, and other assets.

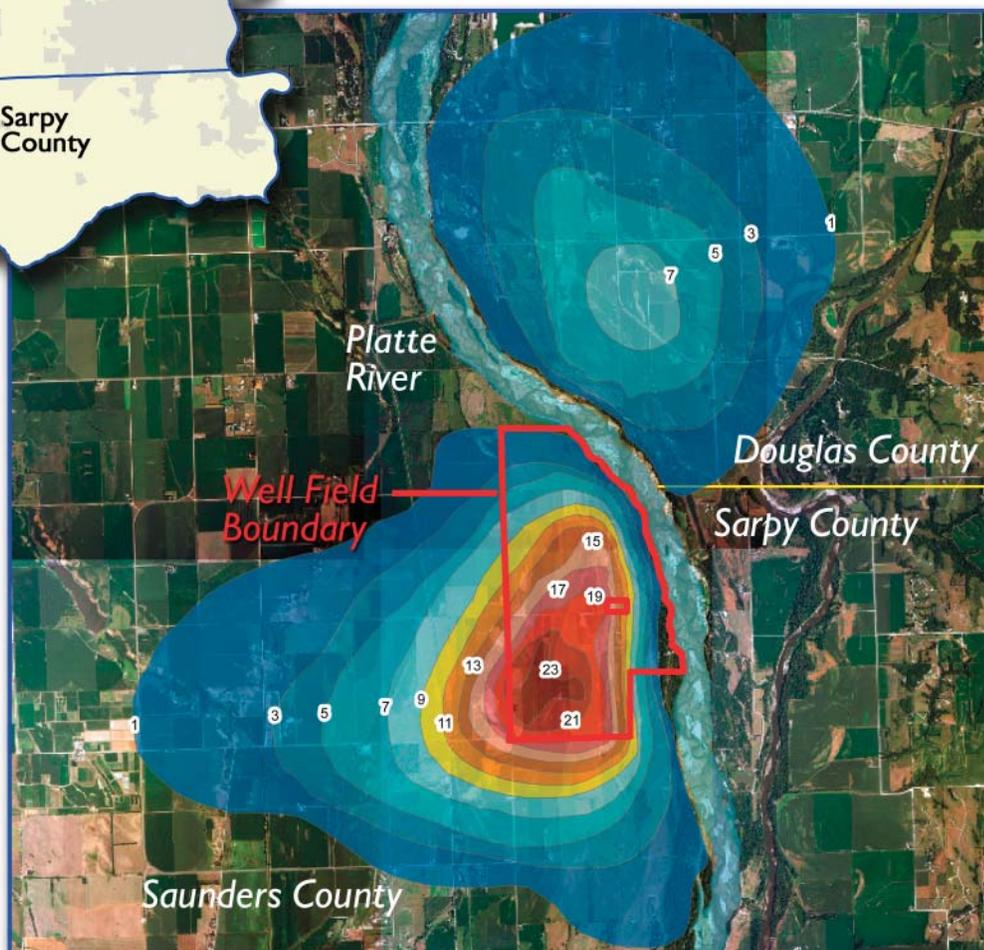
If these landowners experience negative impacts due to lowered water tables from the MUD well field, a detailed inventory will be vital to negotiate a fair damage settlement. The NRD will keep the inventories on file for reference by the landowner and/or MUD if negotiations for damages becomes necessary.

Landowners who have not yet spoken with NRD representatives are encouraged to contact the district at (402) 443-4675, or stop at the district offices in Wahoo at 511 Commercial Park Road 8-4:30 Monday-Friday.



Proposed MUD Platte West Well Field

Shown at right are the boundaries of the MUD well field in Saunders County (red outline), and projected groundwater declines caused by a steady state of pumping of 52 million gallons per day (colored contours). Numbers on the map show average water level declines in feet. (Map is LPNNRD interpretation of previously published data from several sources.)





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Students, NRD Benefit from Internships

Summer is a busy time at the Lower Platte North NRD, with a variety of field work - tree planting, water sampling, chemigation inspections, dam maintenance, and more.

To provide the manpower necessary to complete this work, the NRD hires several interns each summer. Generally, interns are college students majoring in an agricultural or natural resources field, although the program is open to anyone.

The internship program is mutually beneficial. The interns get a variety of vital hands-on experience that will help them later when they are looking for full-time employment.

Many of the NRD's former interns have gone on to careers relating to natural resources.

For the NRD, the interns are crucial to completing time-sensitive field work, but they're more than just an extra pair of hands - they can provide a fresh perspective and new ideas.

"We always enjoy having new interns each summer. They always bring a lot of energy and enthusiasm," said NRD Water Resources Specialist Russell Oaklund, one of the coordinators of the program. "And we like helping them get the kind of experience that will make them stand out if they decide to look for a job in the natural resources field."

Meet the LPNNRD's Summer Interns for 2004

Eric Whitney is a sophomore at Southeast Community College in Beatrice, majoring in Ag Business. A native of Milford, Eric would like to get a job as a Range Specialist when he graduates in December. In addition to hands-on experience in the natural resources field, Eric's internship at the NRD will give him the credit hours he needs to complete his degree.



Eric Whitney

Josh Johnson is a sophomore at Southeast Community College in Beatrice, majoring in Crop Production. Josh, originally from Holdrege, is interested in a career in soil conservation or wildlife biology when he graduates in spring 2005. In his internship at the NRD he is looking forward to working with water quality programs and Global Positioning System technology.



Josh Johnson

Nick Haack is a senior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln majoring in Grazing Livestock Systems. A native of Osceola, Nick would like to pursue a career as a Soil Conservationist or Range Specialist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service when he graduates in December. Nick is particularly interested in learning more about water quality issues and water policy during his internship at the NRD.



Nick Haack

More Info

For more information on the NRD's Summer Intern Program, contact Water Resources Specialist Russell Oaklund (roaklund@lpnnrd.org) or Operations & Maintenance Manager Bob Heimann (bheimann@lpnnrd.org) or call (402) 443-4675.

Regional Water System to Link David City, Bruno

9-mile Water Line Will Supply Water to Bruno and Up to 357 Rural Customers

By this time next year, Bruno residents will be able to stop worrying about their water supply drying up during the summer, thanks to a new water line linking them to David City.

Bruno's current water source, two wells located just west of town, have proved unable to keep up with demand during hot, dry Nebraska summers - a problem that's been made worse by the prolonged drought of the past few years.

Village leaders looked at various solutions, including drilling new wells, but the most cost-effective solution was to take advantage of a federal program promoting regional water systems.

Under the program, a USDA grant will cover \$492,000 of the \$656,000 cost to construct a water line between David City and Bruno. When the line is complete, the Lower Platte North NRD will take on Bruno's \$164,000 share, leaving the village with a new, stable water supply and no debt to repay.

The NRD will be responsible for operations and maintenance of the line, and will purchase water from David City for resale to Bruno. Residents living along the route be-

tween David City and Bruno will also be given the option to hook on to the water line.

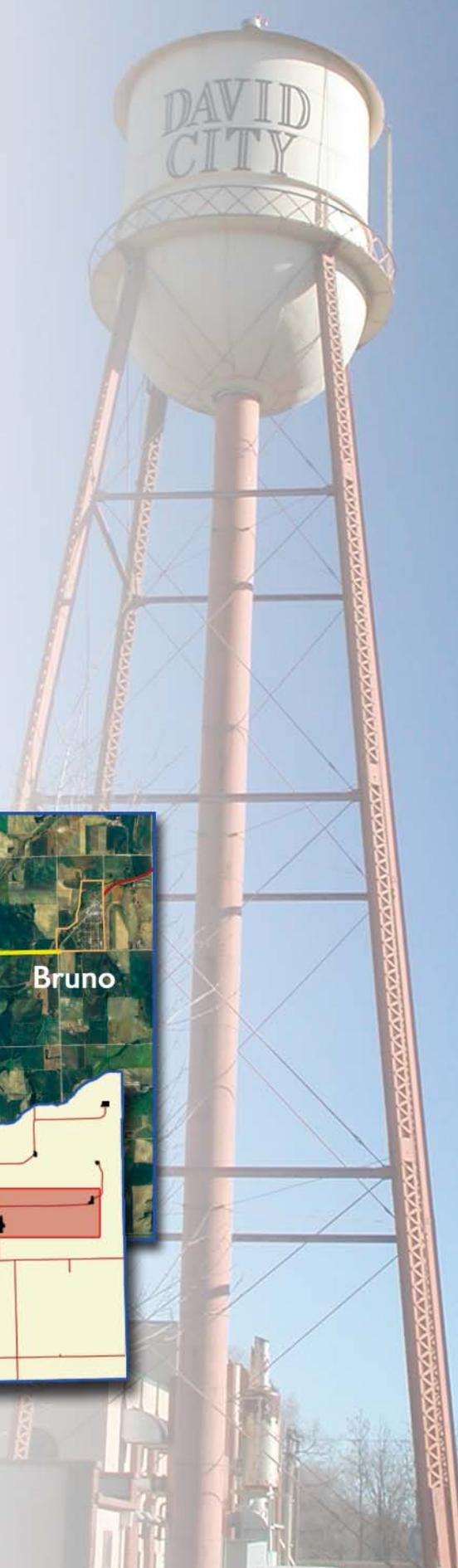
"This is a win-win situation," said Mike Sousek, NRD Water Resources Specialist. "Bruno will have a good supply of clean, low-cost water, and we will be able to help residents living along the line who are looking for a better water source than they currently have."

The water line will be just over 9 miles long when completed, and will be able to service up to 357 rural customers in addition to Bruno. The system will be managed by a Water Entity Board, with members appointed by David City and the NRD.

A tap-on committee will also be formed to determine the price to rural customers for hooking on to the system, and to allocate the amount of water permitted per customer. That committee will be appointed by David City, the NRD and Bruno.

Construction of the system is scheduled to begin this fall and should be completed by May 2005.

Landowners who are interested in more information about hooking on to the water line should contact Mike Sousek at the NRD, (402) 443-4675 or msousek@lpnnrd.org.



Proposed Route for David City-Bruno Water Line

More Info

Contact Water Resources Specialist Mike Sousek, (402) 443-4675 or msousek@lpnnrd.org

Education the Outdoor Way

285 Area Students Attend 2004 Spring Conservation Sensation

On a windy but warm May Wednesday at Czechland Lake near Prague, area elementary students got to take their education outdoors at the 14th annual Spring Conservation Sensation.

Two hundred and eighty-five 5th and 6th graders from 11 area schools attended the 2004 Conservation Sensation on May 5. The event features fun, hands-on activities designed to teach students about the importance of conserving natural resources. The students rotated through eight 25-minute sessions focusing on a variety of topics relating to natural resources.

At the "Geo-Hunt" activity, students participated in a high-tech scavenger hunt, using Global Positioning System units to find hidden objects.

"Bubble-ology" gave students the chance to create giant bubbles — with other students inside. The bubbles are made using a mixture of water, dish soap, and corn starch.

In "Migration Headache," students took on the roles of predators and prey for a fun tag-style game that taught them about the hazards migrating birds face on their journeys.

At other stations, students got to plant trees; practice casting, knot-tying and other fishing skills; examine the parts of a lake ecosystem; and learn about water conservation by spinning the "Water Wheel of Fortune."

More than 4,000 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.

Attending the 2004 event were classes from Abie Public School, Ashland/Greenwood Elementary, District 23 (Colon), East Butler (Brainard and Dwight), LBS-Logan View, Mead Elementary, North Bend Elementary, St. John Nepomucene (Weston), St. Mary's (David City), and St. Wenceslaus (Wahoo).

The Conservation Sensation is sponsored by the Lower Platte North Natural Resources District and Saunders County Cooperative Extension, with partial funding from the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality/EPA Region 7. Additional presenters came from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Farm Service Agency, the Lower Platte South NRD, the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts, and the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance. High school students from Mead served as group leaders and activity assistants. In-kind services were provided by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



Spring Conservation Sensation Activities, 2004

Bubble-ology - Using a mixture of water, dish soap, and corn starch, students create giant bubbles and learn about surface tension.

Fishing - Students learn knot-tying, fish identification, and casting skills.

Geo-Hunt - Students go on a high-tech scavenger hunt, using Global Positioning System units to locate hidden objects.

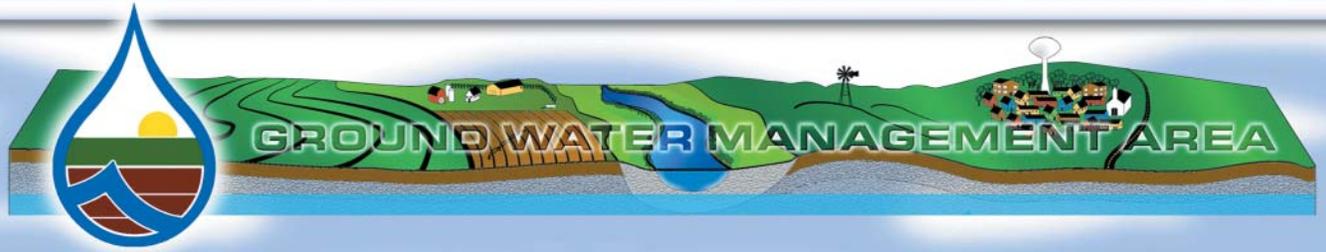
Migration Headache - Students take on the roles of predators and prey in a fast-paced game about the hazards birds face on their long migrations.

Water Wheel of Fortune - Students compete in teams to answer water trivia questions and spin the Wheel of Fortune.

Birds & Worms - Students hunt for colored macaroni hidden in the grass, as they learn how insects use protective coloration.

Lake Ecosystems - Students see and search for various fish, insects, and other creatures that make up a lake ecosystem.

Tree Planting - Students learn about the importance of forestry and get to try out the district's tree planter.



Groundwater Level Declines Continue in Most of District

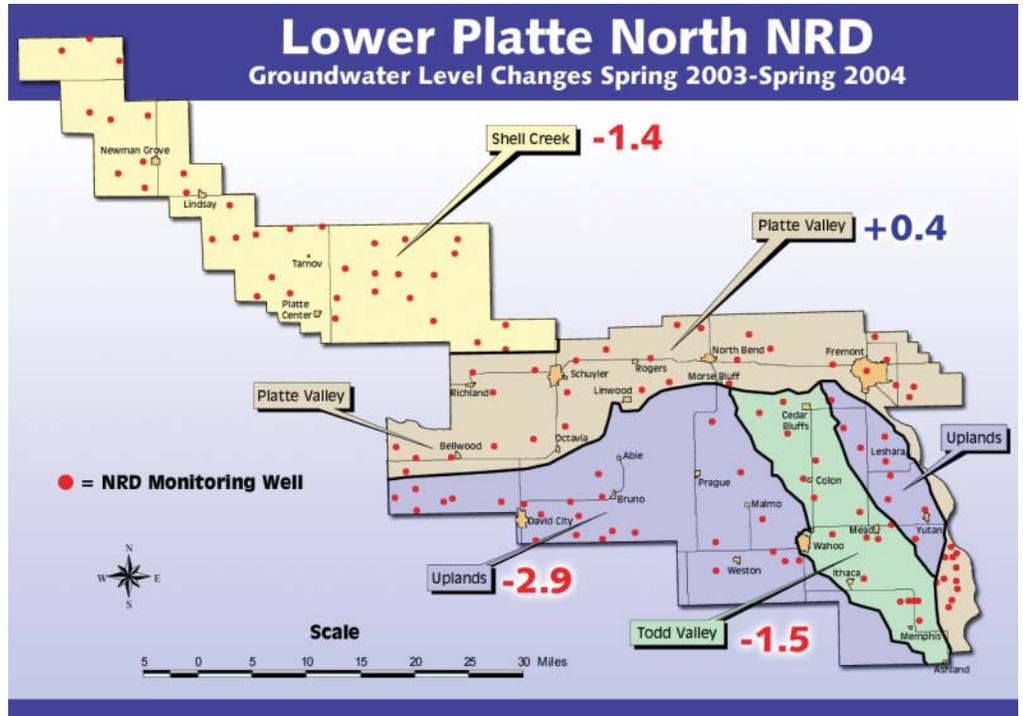
For the third year in a row, groundwater levels declined throughout most of the Lower Platte North NRD.

The NRD measures groundwater levels twice a year (once in the fall and once in the spring). Currently there are 133 wells in the NRD's monitoring network, most of which are owned by private cooperators.

The comparison of results from spring 2003 and spring 2004 shows the ongoing effects of drought on the district's groundwater supply. Median groundwater levels dropped by more than a foot in three of the district's four aquifer regions.

The Uplands region showed the biggest decline, dropping 2.9 feet. The Platte Valley region showed a slight increase of 0.4 feet. (Results are given as the median change in feet.)

Throughout much of the district, levels are at their lowest point since the NRD began tracking them in 1987. Even with normal or above-normal precipitation, it could take several years for levels to rebound.



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