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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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A lot can change in 30 years. In the case of the Lower Platte North NRD, those changes have helped make "The Good Life" even better.

For the past three decades, the NRD has worked with area residents to conserve and protect our natural resources. The result has been less soil erosion, fewer flood problems, more forest cover and wildlife habitat, and greater protection for water resources.

All of these accomplishments can be traced back to 1972, when Nebraska's Natural Resources District system was created. Nebraska's NRDs were -- and are -- unique in the nation.

Prior to the creation of the NRD system, responsibility for natural resources management was fragmented among more than 150 special-purpose districts. These districts suffered from funding problems and overlapping authority, and eventually it was decided that a consolidated system would be a more effective approach to conservation.

In 1972, the existing special-purpose districts were merged or eliminated, and 24 (now 23) NRDs were created in their place. The new multipurpose NRDs were based on the state's major river basins (instead of artificial political boundaries such as county lines) and controlled by locally-elected directors. This innovative idea,



## Nebraska's NRDs 1972-2002

.....  
thirty years of making  
the Good Life better

combining the flexibility of local government with a broader watershed approach to conservation, is widely admired across the nation.

As the Lower Platte North NRD celebrates its anniversary, we look back at some of the accomplishments of the past 30 years (pages 2 and 3) -- and look forward to another 30 years of conserving and protecting our natural resources.



# .....Thirty Years of

## Forestry & Wildlife

Over the past 30 years, the Lower Platte North NRD has done its part to make the district a greener place. Since 1972, more than 600,000 trees and shrubs have been planted through the NRD's Tree Planting Program. By planting new trees and replacing those lost to farming and urban development, the program helps protect topsoil from wind and water erosion, provides shelter for livestock and wildlife, and helps beautify communities and private residences.

The Tree Planting Program is open to all residents of the district. The NRD sells trees for windbreaks, shelterbelts, ornamental plantings, and other purposes. The district also cost-shares with communities for tree planting projects on public grounds (schools, parks, cemeteries, etc.).

Wildlife habitat is another component of the district's forestry efforts. The NRD cooperates with landowners and agencies such as the Game and Parks Commission to create new wildlife habitat on private land. In some cases, this land is then open to public hunting.



## Watershed Projects

In the past 30 years, the NRD has been involved in a number of watershed projects. Many of these projects have been multipurpose, providing some combination of flood control, drainage improvement, outdoor recreation, and environmental restoration. Components of the projects have included dams and grade stabilization structures, dikes and ditches, land treatment, and other measures. Thanks to these projects, millions of dollars in flood damage have been averted, wildlife habitat has been created or restored, and area residents have access to outdoor recreation sites such as Czechland Lake near Prague.

Projects have been completed in five of the district's 11 subwatersheds. The district is currently involved in two watershed projects -- Skull Creek, which includes Homestead Lake, and Sand/Duck Creek, which includes the planned Lake Wanahoo near Wahoo. The Skull Creek project focuses on flood control, with outdoor recreation at Homestead Lake as a secondary benefit. The Sand Creek Project is primarily designed for environmental restoration, and will also provide flood control and outdoor recreation.

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# of Conservation.....

## Water Management

As in most areas of Nebraska, residents of the Lower Platte North NRD rely almost exclusively on groundwater for their drinking water, household needs, irrigation, and livestock. Protecting this vital resource is one of the district's top priorities.

The NRD keeps a close eye on both groundwater quantity and quality. District staff measure groundwater levels across the district twice a year in an effort to head off shortages. Since 1985, the NRD also has been monitoring nitrate levels and other contaminants in groundwater.

That monitoring revealed a gradual upward trend in nitrate levels, so in 1997 the NRD adopted a district-wide Ground Water Management Area (GWMA). Producers in the GWMA are encouraged to use Best Management Practices and are required to become certified in nitrogen management. The district also cost-shares with producers to close abandoned wells and implement other practices that help protect groundwater.

In 1999, the NRD began a Wellhead Protection Program (WHP). Through the WHP, the district works with area communities to protect their public water supplies.



### Top Left:

Here are just a few of the more than 600,000 trees planted through the NRD's Tree Planting Program since 1973.

### Top Right:

The NRD monitors the quality and quantity of area groundwater supplies through the Ground Water Management Area.

### Bottom Left:

Czechland Lake near Prague is the result of one of the district's watershed projects.

### Bottom Right:

Terraces like these, along with many other conservation practices installed through the NRD's Land Treatment Program, help reduce soil erosion.

## Land Treatment

To reduce erosion and protect our soil and water resources, the NRD has worked with hundreds of landowners since 1972 to construct terraces, waterways, windbreaks, buffer strips, and many other conservation practices.

The district cost-shares with landowners to install these practices, using various combinations of federal, state and local funds. In high-priority areas -- for instance, where a watershed project is underway -- landowners can be eligible for up to 90 percent cost-share for certain practices.

# 400 Students Attend Spring Conservation Sensation

More than 400 elementary students had a Sensation-al day in Wahoo on May 1<sup>st</sup> learning about natural resources and the environment.

Fifth and sixth graders from 14 area schools converged on the Saunders County Fairgrounds for a day of hands-on learning at the Spring Conservation Sensation. The annual event uses fun, hands-on activities to teach students the importance of conserving natural resources.

Students rotated through eight 25-minute activities focusing on a wide variety of topics. At the "Geo-Hunt" activity, for instance, students participated in a scavenger hunt – with a twist. Working in teams, students had to find various points around the fairgrounds using modern methods (Global Positioning System units) and the old-fashioned way (with compasses).

"Bubble-ology" gave students the chance to create giant bubbles – with other students inside. In "Migration Headache," a fast-paced outdoor game, students became migratory birds, trying to make it to their nesting grounds while avoiding hunters, predators, and disease.

At other stations, students got to plant trees, practice casting, knot-tying and other fishing skills, examine fish, insects and other lake critters, spin the "Water Wheel of Fortune," and build their own miniature landfills and wells.

Nearly 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.

The event was 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 Dodge County Extension, the Farm Service Agency, the Lower Platte South and Upper Big Blue NRDs, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Nebraska Rural Water Association. High school students from David City and Prague served as group leaders and helpers. In-kind services were provided by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.



## High-Tech Scavenger Hunt

Students at the Spring Conservation Sensation learned to use Global Positioning System (GPS) units in the "Geo-Hunt" activity.

## IN BRIEF

### New GIS Specialist Joins NRD

Steve Cacioppo has joined the Lower Platte North NRD as the new GIS specialist.



Cacioppo

Steve, a native of Omaha, received a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies and a Master's in Geography from the University of Nebraska-Omaha. He will be heading the NRD's Geographic Information System (GIS) programs. Steve will also be responsible for the NRD MapMaker website and computer maintenance for the NRD office.

Steve and his wife Megan live in Omaha.

### 2002 Farm Bill Details Announced

The 2002 Farm Bill will mean changes to existing conservation programs, as well as new programs scheduled to begin in October. You can get the details from the USDA website at: [www.usda.gov/farmbill](http://www.usda.gov/farmbill)

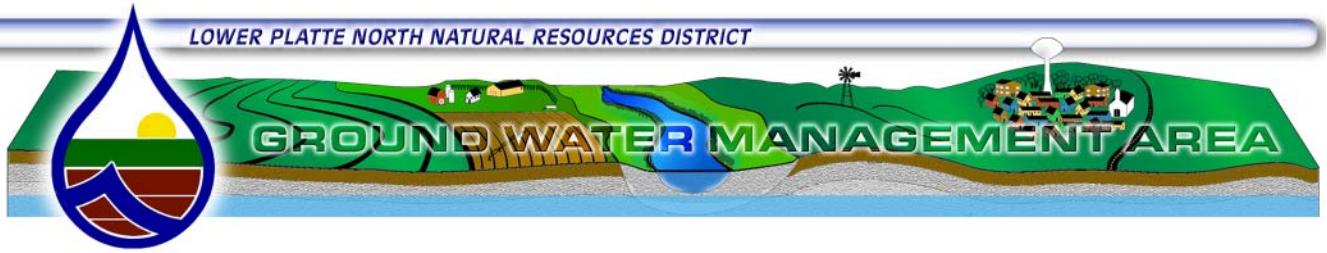


It's Here!

Get all the info at:  
[www.usda.gov/farmbill](http://www.usda.gov/farmbill)

### 533 Producers Attend Nitrogen Training

Nitrogen certification training sessions were well-attended in spring 2002, with 533 producers receiving or renewing their nitrogen certification. Fifteen training sessions were held throughout the NRD in February and March. Producers are required to attend the training at least once every four years.



## NRD Looks at Potential Phase II Areas

### Bellwood, Richland, Schuyler Areas Could Be Affected

Areas near Bellwood, Richland and Schuyler could be entering “Phase II Management Areas” for groundwater in the next year due to high levels of nitrate.

Recent water sampling in these areas have shown nitrate levels averaging above 8 parts per million — the trigger level for entering Phase II of the district’s Groundwater Management Area (GWMA).

The NRD is doing more testing this summer to confirm earlier results and better define the boundaries of the potential Phase II areas. The district expects to decide which, if either, of the areas enters Phase II by the end of this year.

Currently, the entire NRD is in Phase I of the GWMA. Producers are required to become certified in nitrogen management once every four years; nitrate samples are required for irrigation, municipal, and industrial wells at least once every four years; and spring and fall fertilizer applications are restricted until after certain dates.

Under Phase II of the GWMA, additional requirements come into play:

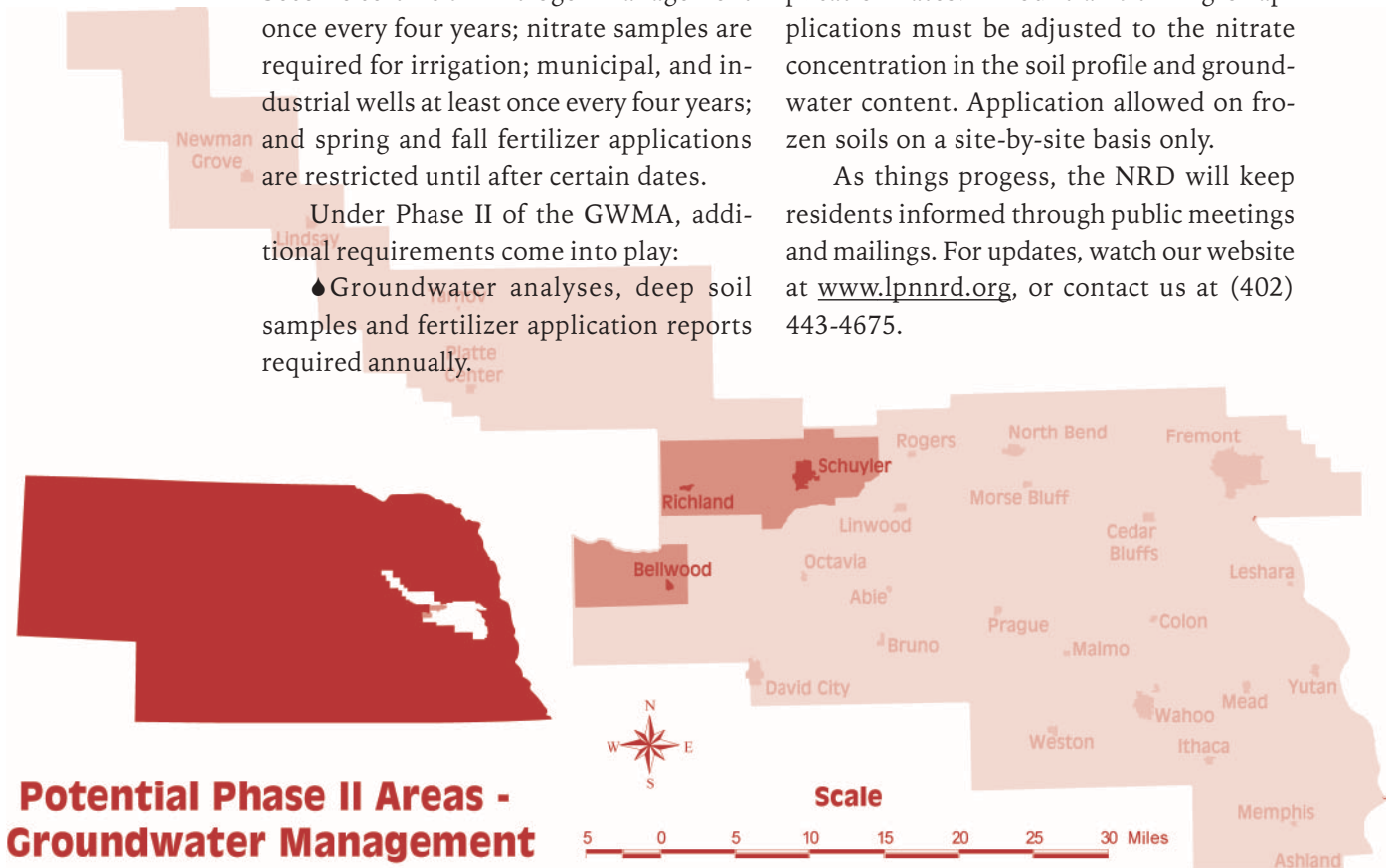
- ◆ Groundwater analyses, deep soil samples and fertilizer application reports required annually.

- ◆ Commercial nitrogen fertilizer permitted on non-sandy soils from Nov. 1 to March 1 only if an approved inhibitor is used at recommended rates (operators must furnish certification from their dealer that an approved inhibitor was used).

- ◆ Water applications must be monitored to allow for better management of fertilizer application and to control leaching of nitrate (phased in over 6 years).

- ◆ Amount of organic fertilizer (liquid or dried manure, sludge, or composted organic waste) allowed per acre per year will be based on: the method of collection and storage; land application method; types of crops or cover crop; soil types; landscape features; source of manure; and previous manure application rates. Amount and timing of applications must be adjusted to the nitrate concentration in the soil profile and groundwater content. Application allowed on frozen soils on a site-by-site basis only.

As things progress, the NRD will keep residents informed through public meetings and mailings. For updates, watch our website at [www.lpnnrd.org](http://www.lpnnrd.org), or contact us at (402) 443-4675.



**Potential Phase II Areas - Groundwater Management**



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# Wanahoo Awaiting Final Approval

The Sand Creek Environmental Restoration Project is awaiting a final go-ahead from its federal sponsors, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

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.

In late 2000, the project received conditional approval from the Corps of Engineers. To receive final approval and \$17 million in federal funds, the project sponsors were required to complete a "limited reevaluation report" to ensure that the project provides the optimum environmental restoration benefits. That report was finished in late 2001.

A decision from the national Corps headquarters was expected earlier this year but was pushed back by delays in the review process.

"The report is at the highest level of review right now," said Mike Murren, the project coordinator. "We're hoping to have a final decision very soon."

If the project receives its final approval this summer, design and engineering work would begin immediately, with construction expected in summer/fall 2003.

**LOWER PLATTE NORTH  
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