

# Education Program Leaves Impact on Students

## Shell Creek Watershed Monitoring Program

Article By: Abigail Pohlen, Newman Grove High School Student

The Shell Creek Watershed runs right through the town of Newman Grove, NE. The creek is an important water source for this agricultural community, and in recent years, farmers and local conservationists had noticed an increase in flooding, pollution and eroding. To better understand and potentially reverse these harmful changes, the town of Newman Grove relies on an unlikely group: a team of wader-clad, science-loving students from Newman Grove High School.

In 2002, teachers Mark Seier and Gene Wissenburg took a group of students to the Shell Creek Watershed to collect macroinvertebrates as a way to study water quality in the creek. The combination of hands-on science learning and good old-fashioned playing in the mud kept the students engaged and wanting more. They went back to school and told their friends about the experience and suddenly more students wanted to get involved. The teachers realized that the project was the perfect way to expose teens to important issues in their community in a way that taught valuable lessons in science and responsibility.

The Shell Creek Watershed project has evolved into a summertime volunteer program during which high school students spend two days in May, June, July and August, wading through the creek and testing the water and soil for various factors that can

contribute to erosion and water quality degradation. Monitoring the creek annually allows conservationists and local farmers in the Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group (SCWIG) to take appropriate measures that helps protect the water source. The student scientists wanted to understand

how the Shell Creek results compared to other watersheds, so they ran the same tests on the same days at the nearby Beaver Creek watershed in the Olson Nature Preserve. They learned that due to different environmental and geological situations, Shell Creek's erosion pattern was unique to that particular watershed.

Participating in the Shell Creek Watershed has changed the lives of many students since the project was first started.

Former student, Audrey Wondercheck, who is a science teacher in Elgin, NE says "The Shell Creek Watershed was the spark that started the flame for my desire in discovering how the world works. I found it interesting to see how so many factors had relationships with one another. From the desire of discovering how the world works, I wanted to go deeper into science."

Without the project, so many

students wouldn't have found their true passion, not just for learning, but also a passion that they can turn into a lifelong career. The world is always in need of people with the gift of curiosity about the world around them and how the world works, the Shell Creek Project helps blossom this gift.

To give proof to this statement another former participant, Sean Farrier who is a fisheries technician at the North Platte State Fish Hatchery, says "While working on the Shell Creek Watershed Project as a teenager, my passion for conservation really developed. I am grateful that this opportunity was available to me and it is unlikely I would be working in the position I am today had it not been. I was really pleased to hear of all the progress that has been made since my time contributing. The level of improvement seen in the Shell

Creek serves as a great case study on what a small group of concerned citizens can do to reverse damage caused by human influence."

Without the Shell Creek Watershed Projects, we would not have some of these amazing individuals fighting for not only water conservation but also teaching the younger generations the importance of making our planet better and how much you can accomplish with a touch of curiosity, guidance and perseverance.




Program Participants & Advisors Attending the SCWIG Celebration




Water Quality Testing During the SCWIG Celebration

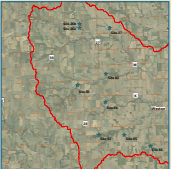
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Lower Platte North Natural Resources District  
Summer 2018

## Watershed Celebrates Historic Success

### Shell Creek Watershed De-listed for Atrazine

The Shell Creek Watershed is celebrating a monumental success, with the Shell Creek being de-listed for Atrazine from the Clean Water Act List of Impaired Waters by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This is the first successful example of a water source being removed from the impaired waters list for Atrazine not only in Nebraska, but across the nation. More than 19 years of local conservation efforts and the implementation of a comprehensive watershed management plan led to this historical celebration.

The Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group (SCWIG) was formed in 1999 by a group of local landowners to discuss flood reduction projects, which evolved into the importance of land treatment projects for improving water quality. For the last 19 years, SCWIG has led the grassroots efforts in conservation, working collaboratively with a variety of partners on the local, state, and federal level, including the Lower Platte North NRD. More than 240 landowners have participated in the program,

implementing more than 340 best management conservation practices. These practices have included no-till, buffer strips, cover crops, grade stabilization projects, terraces, sediment basins, and more.

On June 15th, members of SCWIG and various partnering agencies came together to celebrate the historical success. The celebration kicked-off with a press conference directly on the banks of Shell

Creek. Presenters included: Matt Bailey, Co-Chair of SCWIG, Scott Pruitt, former Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Jim Macy, Director of Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Jim Gulliford, Region 7 Administrator of the EPA, Craig Derickson, State Conservationist of the Nebraska Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Marilyn Tabor with Nebraska Environmental Trust

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Lower Platte North NRD  
Board & Staff

Board Member.....	Subdistrict
Lon Olson, Fremont .....	1
Kelly Thompson, Fremont .....	1
Frank Pollard, Fremont (Secretary) .....	2
Bill Saeger, Fremont .....	2
Dave Saalfeld, North Bend .....	3
Larry Fiala, North Bend .....	3
Terry Sobota, Schuyler .....	4
Matt Bailey, Schuyler .....	4
Mark Seier, Newman Grove .....	5
John Hannah, Columbus .....	5
Joe Birkel, David City (Chairman) .....	6
Robert Hilger, David City (Treasurer) .....	6
Donald Kavan, Morse Bluff .....	7
Ryan Sabatka, Weston .....	7
Jim McDermott, Colon .....	8
Alex Kavan, Wahoo .....	8
Don Veskerna, Ashland .....	9
Robert Meduna, Wahoo .....	9
Gene Ruzicka, North Bend (Vice-Chair) .....	at large

Staff Member.....	Position
Daryl Andersen .....	Water Resources Manager
Tyler Benal .....	Water Resources Specialist
Jill Breunig .....	Bookkeeping Dept. Head/Adm. Asst.
Will Brueggemann .....	Water Resources Technician
Duke Dokulil .....	O & M Technician
Sean Elliott .....	Projects/Rural Water Manager
Eric Gottschalk .....	General Manager
Bob Heimann .....	O & M Manager
Tom Mountford .....	Assistant Manager
Russell Oakland .....	Lead Water Resources Specialist
Dave Odvody .....	Recreation Facilitator
Chris Poole .....	Grants/GIS Dept. Head
Karen Rezac .....	Dept./Admin Assistant
Skye Sabatka .....	NRD/NRCS Technician
Bret Schomer .....	Wanahoo Recreation Supervisor/
	Water Resources Specialist
Desirae TePoel .....	I & E Dept. Head

NRD/NRCS Field Office Assistant.....	County
Kimberly Piitz .....	Butler County
Kristin Miller .....	Colfax County
Luz Schafersman .....	Dodge County
Marla Milliken.....	Saunders County

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Watershed Celebration

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(NET), William Kranz with Nebraska Extension, Eric Gottschalk, General Manager of the Lower Platte North NRD (LPNNRD), Tyler Kohl, a Schuyler Central High School student and participant in the Shell Creek Watershed Monitoring Program, and Payton Nelson and Abbie Pieke, Newman Grove High School Students and participants in the Shell Creek Watershed Monitoring Program.

Nebraska State Governor Pete Ricketts opened the press conference and made the official announcement of the de-listing efforts. Newman Grove High



SCWIG Discussion Panel

School Students participating in the Shell Creek Watershed Monitoring Program closed the press conference with demonstrations of their water quality monitoring and testing efforts. Nearly 300 attendees celebrated the significant accomplishment of SCWIG and the partnering organizations. Celebrating this success is not the end for SCWIG. It is merely a rest stop during the journey for producers and landowners in the Shell Creek Watershed as they continue their commitment to natural resources conservation for generations to come.

New Faces  
New Employees Join LPNNRD Staff

Three new employees have joined the Lower Platte North NRD staff since January 2018. These friendly faces have been an extraordinary addition to the district.

Kimberly Piitz joins the district as the NRD/NRCS Field Office Assistant at the Butler County NRCS Office in David City. Kim brings hands-on experience from previous experience with Nebraska



Kimberly Piitz

Game & Parks. Kim lives near Brainard on a family farm with her husband and four children. She stays extremely busy with farm chores and her children's busy schedules.

The Colfax County NRCS Office in Schuyler welcomes Kristin Miller as the NRD/NRCS Field Office Assistant. Prior to joining the LPNNRD staff, Kris led client engagement and social media efforts for an accounting firm and was employed by Columbus Public Schools for 18 years. Kris is very familiar with Colfax County

area, having grown up in North Bend and currently lives with her husband in Columbus. Kristin has two grown children and is a foster parent. Her hobbies include traveling, genealogy, and spending time with her family.



Kristin Miller

Skye Sabatka joins district staff as the Conservation Technician in the Saunders County NRCS Field Office in Wahoo. Skye has a bachelor's degree in Agronomy from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Before coming to the

LPNNRD, she was a Conservation Technician with the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Butler County. Skye and her fiancé currently live near Touhy. She is a Saunders County native, growing up near Weston with continued involvement in her family's row crop and cow-calf operation. Skye is excited for the opportunity to work for the NRD in the county where she grew up and to assist producers in achieving sustainable agriculture practices for generations to come!



Skye Sabatka

Learn More!

Learn more about the Lower Platte North NRD by visiting the newly re-designed website: [www.lpnrd.org](http://www.lpnrd.org).

Like us on Facebook and Follow us on Twitter to keep up with upcoming events and programs.

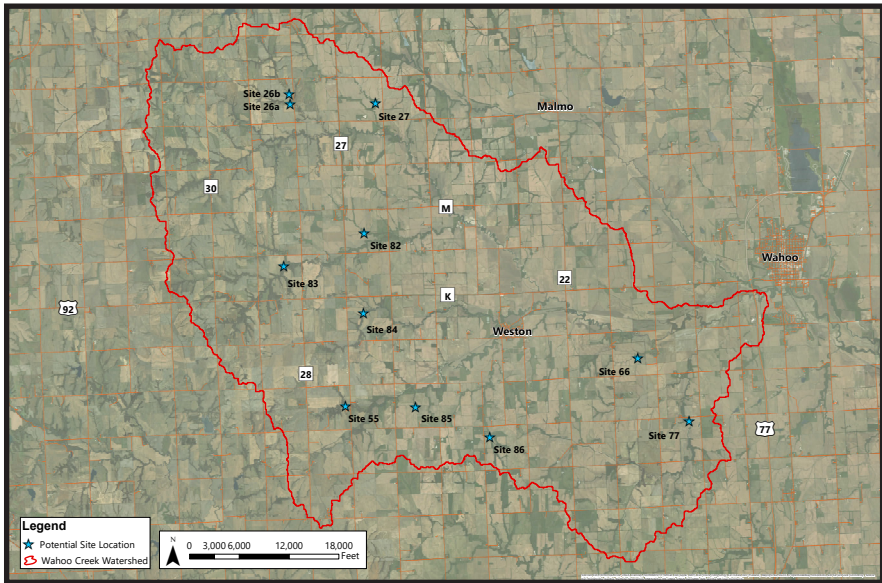


Progress Continues on Watershed

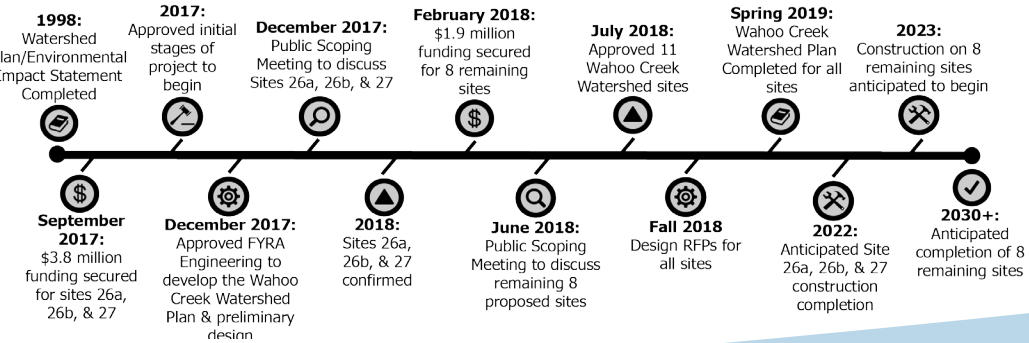
Wahoo Creek Watershed Project

The Lower Platte North NRD is making progress on the Wahoo Creek Watershed Project. This collaborative project includes the planning, design, and construction of sites 26a, 26b, & 27. The project also includes the planning and design of 8 additional dam structures in the watershed.

Sites 26a, 26b, & 27 have been confirmed in the northern part of the watershed. These three sites in Saunders County are proposed future floodwater reduction dam structures to protect a county road and bridge. Site 27 is a proposed floodwater reduction dam approximately one and three quarters of a mile to the east of site 26a & 26b. The NRD is continuing to work with FYRA Engineering and NRCS to establish the proposed remaining 8 sites.



A public scoping meeting was held on June 12, 2018 to discuss the Wahoo Creek Watershed Plan-Environmental Assessment and the potential 8 additional sites that are currently being considered.



The Wahoo Creek Watershed Project began in September 2017 and construction completion on 26a & 26b are anticipated by 2022.