



Shell Creek  
Watershed  
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# the VIADUCT

Lower Platte North Natural Resources District  
Winter 2020

## Improvements Continue with the Shell Creek Watershed

### Union Pacific Railroad begins Bridge Project

The Lower Platte North Natural Resources District (LPNNRD) is partnering with the Shell Creek Watershed Group, Colfax County and the Union Pacific Railroad to make improvements along an area with many years of flood damages.

On County Road 15, east of Schuyler, the Shell Creek flows alongside railroad tracks just before taking a sharp turn South, under the Union Pacific railroad bridge, and then turning back East to continue its winding journey to the Platte River. This area has been a concern for dozens of years as the river flow has backed up and caused flood damages to communities and property.

The Union Pacific Railroad, under direction of Colfax County, will soon begin construction on a much larger bridge across Shell Creek that will not only help the railroad, but also has the ability to enhance the water flow and

reduce flood damages near the railroad tracks.

A larger bridge opening will help improve the water flow of Shell Creek. During the construction of the bridge, the LPNNRD plans to promote creek bank stabilization, vegetative practices and channel improvement through the recently awarded Shell Creek Water Quality Grant.

With the help of Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) and the Nebraska Environmental Trust, the Shell Creek Watershed will continue soil and water quality improvements to the creek and its tributaries. NDEE has awarded \$350,000, and over \$104,000 has been awarded by the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

Drastic erosion and poor water quality along the 110 miles of Shell Creek began to take a toll on agriculture production. In



Union Pacific Railroad bridge during March 2019 flooding

1999, a group of landowners and producers in the watershed recognized the need for change and took action to create the Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group (SCWIG) with goals to improve the watershed, identify and promote conservation practices, and improve public awareness.

Through the years, the SCWIG has received help from Newman Grove High School and Schuyler Central High School students to help with watershed monitoring. History was made in June 2018 when the Shell Creek was removed from the United States'

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## Lower Platte North NRD Board & Staff

### Board Member.....Subdistrict

Lon Olson, Fremont .....	1
Kelly Thompson, Fremont.....	1
Frank Pollard, Fremont (Vice-Chairperson).....	2
Bill Saeger, Fremont.....	2
Dave Saalfeld, North Bend.....	3
Larry Feala, North Bend (Secretary) .....	3
Chris Yosten, Schuyler.....	4
Matt Bailey, Schuyler .....	4
Mark Seier, Newman Grove .....	5
John Hannah, Columbus .....	5
Joe Birkel, David City.....	6
Robert Hilger, David City (Treasurer).....	6
Nancy Meyer, Cedar Bluffs.....	7
Ryan Sabatka, Weston .....	7
Jerry Johnson, Wahoo .....	8
Alex Kavan, Wahoo .....	8
Don Veskerna, Ashland.....	9
Robert Meduna, Wahoo .....	9
Gene Ruzicka, North Bend (Chairperson).....	at large

### Staff Member..... Position

Daryl Andersen.....	Water Resources Manager
Tyler Benal .....	Water Resources Specialist
Jill Breunig .....	Bookkeeping Dept. Head/ Admin. Assistant
Will Brueggemann .....	Water Resources Technician
Rob Christian .....	NRD/NRCS 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
Dave Moore .....	O & M Technician
Kara Nelson.....	Info & Ed Assistant/Receptionist
Russell Oaklund.....	Lead Water Resources Specialist
Dave Odvody .....	Recreation Facilitator
Chris Poole .....	Grants/GIS Dept. Head
Karen Rezac.....	Dept./Admin Assistant
Lacey Sabatka .....	Info & Ed Coordinator
Bret Schomer.....	Wanahoo Recreation Supervisor/ Water Resources Specialist

### NRD/NRCS Field Office Assistant.....County

Kimberly Piitz .....	Butler County
Kristin Miller .....	Colfax County
Ashley Keeler .....	Dodge County
Marla Milliken.....	Saunders County

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## LOWER PLATTE NORTH NRD

protecting lives | protecting property | protecting the future

402.443.4675 [www.lpnrd.org](http://www.lpnrd.org)

## From the Desk of the General Manager

### Much More Than Conservation



Eric Gottschalk

Within two weeks of starting my career with Lower Platte North NRD in 2000, I met with a group of landowners from the Shell Creek area of our district who had formed a new, locally-led effort called the Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group, SCWIG for short. During our first meeting I quickly realized this group of unique gentlemen shared an intense desire to lead conservation efforts in the watershed and to leave the Shell Creek better and healthier than its current state. Each of these men had stories of fishing, exploring and enjoying an "alive" Shell Creek as youth and were willing to do whatever it took to bring the stream back.

For nearly 20 years I have had the pleasure of watching these men do what they do best...work the land, install time-tested, and unique, conservation practices and spreading the word for the importance of Shell Creek Watershed improvement.



Students from Newman Grove take time out of their busy summer schedule to participate in Shell Creek watershed monitoring

During that first meeting, all members understood positive change would not happen overnight and some feared they may not see substantial improvement in their lifetime. While their work is not finished, in its first 20 years SCWIG has made amazing strides. SCWIG has expanded no-till farming to over 90% of the watershed; utilized over 5 million dollars of Federal, State and local funds on conservation practices and through their direct efforts; enabled the Shell Creek to be removed from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) national 'Impaired Waters' list for atrazine.

The Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group is a shining example of how a motivated, locally-led group can make amazing impacts on our environment. Original members Ralph Pieke, Gene Wissenburg, Ray Flood, Carl Grotzschluschen, Meryl Stone, Fred Fehringer, John Hannah, Tom Sprunk and Matt Bailey are incredible conservation leaders. I am honored to share their conservation spirit, proud of their efforts and blessed to consider each of them a personal friend.

Eric Gottschalk,  
General Manager  
Lower Platte North NRD



## Shell Creek Watershed continued from Page 1

Environmental Protection Agency's Impaired Waters list due to significant reduction in the amount of Atrazine.

The primary focus of the Shell Creek Water Quality Grant is now bacterial load (e. coli reduction).

Multiple land management practices will be implemented under the guidance of SCWIG, LPNNRD and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Technical and promotional assistance will be provided to upgrade and install septic

systems, creek bank stabilization for Shell Creek and its tributaries, establishment of buffer strips, cover crops plantings, and nutrient management plans in conjunction with NRCS for the numerous feeding operations in the area.

## Tree Orders Now Available!

### Don't Let the Winter Blues Keep You from Thinking Green

Trees provide numerous benefits, from improving air and water quality to protecting livestock and crops. Trees can reduce heating and cooling costs and can provide essential habitats for wildlife in our area.

The Lower Platte North NRD has over three dozen varieties of trees and shrubs to choose from. The LPNNRD offers handplants for \$1.00 per tree or shrub. Handplants must be purchased in multiples of 25 trees or shrubs per species. Species include: Eastern Red Cedar, Ponderosa Pine, Black Hills Spruce, Colorado Blue Spruce, Hackberry, Cottonwood, Red Maple, Red Oak, Kentucky Coffee Tree, Manchurian Apricot, Chokecherry, American Plum, American Hazelnut, and Elderberry.

There are many more species available to choose from. A complete list can be found on the LPNNRD website.

There are also two packages available for \$60 each. Each package includes ten of each species. The Small Acreage Package includes Ponderosa Pine, Colorado Blue Spruce, Swamp White Oak, Nanking Cherry Shrub, and Chokeberry Shrub. The Wildlife Package includes American Plum Shrub, Woods Rose Shrub, Nanking Cherry Shrub, Chokeberry Shrub, and Elderberry Shrub.

In addition to handplants, the Lower Platte North NRD offers machine plants for \$2.00 per tree or shrub. Machine plant requests



must include a minimum of 150 trees and shrubs.

Since the LPNNRD tree program began in 1973, more than 875,000 trees and shrubs have been planted throughout the district. Those looking to plant new trees or replace lost trees can access order forms online at [www.lpnrd.org](http://www.lpnrd.org) or by calling the LPNNRD Office at (402) 443-4675.

## Lower Platte North NRD Rural Water Districts Update

### Recent Rate Study Leads to Multi-Year Increase

The Lower Platte North NRD operates two Rural Water Districts (RWD) that supply drinking water under the regulations of the Nebraska Health and Human Services (DHHS).

The LPNNRD manages a five-mile transmission line north to the Village of Colon where we also act as the designated operator for the village. The second five-mile transmission line runs south to the

Village of Bruno.

As per DHHS regulations, all public water supply systems must be maintained to ensure highest quality and dependable quantity. Both systems are tested monthly for bacterial contamination. Routine testing for other contaminants (disinfectants, lead, copper) occur as required by DHHS policy.

All LPNNRD RWD must operate

financially independent from the NRD's general budget. In order to do this, we must ensure that our monthly rates are adequate to provide fiscal solvency.

We are currently implementing a three-year phased rate increase on our Colon line. We have just completed a rate study for our Bruno line and are considering a similar multi-year phased increase.





# GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT

## Groundwater Management Updates

### 2020 Nitrogen Certification and Water Management Classes in Full Swing

Producers who operate irrigation, municipal, and industrial well systems and those who use fertilizer in production agriculture are required to have NRD Certification through the Lower Platte North NRD. NRD Certification must be renewed every 4 years by attending a Nitrogen Certification & Water Management Class.

In place of attending a Nitrogen Certification & Water Management Class, producers can take an online or take-home test for certification. Study materials and requests for online tests can be found on the LPNNRD website, at [www.lpnrd.org](http://www.lpnrd.org).

### NITROGEN CERTIFICATION AND WATER MANAGEMENT CLASSES

The Lower Platte North NRD has scheduled multiple Nitrogen Certification & Water Management Classes in 2020 for producers needing NRD Certification.

**February 25 in Lindsay**  
**February 26 in Schuyler**  
**March 17 in Columbus**  
**March 19 in Mead**

For a complete schedule please visit [www.lpnrd.org](http://www.lpnrd.org) or call the NRD at 402-443-4675

The Lower Platte North NRD encourages producers to attend certification classes when possible. During classes, LPNNRD staff provide the most current information on water quality and quantity issues in the area, as well as provide updates on rules and regulations. The Lower Platte North NRD also partners with Nebraska Extension to provide presentations and pesticide trainings during several classes each year.

NRD Certification is important for producers for several reasons. Without certification, well permits will be delayed, even on replacement wells. Variances will not be approved for a new well or an expansion of irrigated acres. Chemigation/Fertigation permits will not be approved, which could further delay fertilizer or chemical applications. Fertilizer dealers should not be selling or making deliveries of fertilizer for land application within the LPNNRD to any operator or producer who hasn't been nitrogen certified. The Lower Platte North NRD requires producers to have NRD certification to encourage

best management practices and to protect our groundwater resources.

Nitrogen Certification & Water Management Classes take place each year from January-March. The schedule varies each year, but typically follows a similar rotation of locations and times.

### Lower Platte River Basin Drought Contingency Plan Approved

The collaborative effort between the Lower Platte North NRD, Lower Platte South NRD, Papio-Missouri NRD, Metropolitan Utilities District, Lincoln Water System, and Nebraska Department of Natural Resources have developed a drought contingency plan for the Nebraska's Lower Platte River Basin.

The plan includes response actions for urban water use, groundwater management and reservoir releases; along with mitigation actions for surface water storage, canal recharge, water leasing and other actions.

A copy of the drought contingency plan can be viewed at [www.lpnrd.org](http://www.lpnrd.org) on the downloads page.







# Annual Report

2020

## NRD Welcomes New Employees

### George "Rob" Christian

In November of 2019, the Lower Platte North NRD welcomed Rob Christian as the NRD Conservation Technician. He is based in the Saunders County NRCS Office. Rob grew up in the Saunders County Area and graduated from Wahoo Public High School. Rob lives on an acreage near Cedar Bluffs with his high school sweetheart, Kim. They have three children and five grandchildren. Rob and his wife have around 100 grapevines and enjoy making wine on their acreage.



Rob Christian

and Education Assistant/ Receptionist. In addition to her NRD experience with the Lower Platte North NRD, Lacey worked for four years at the Upper Loup NRD in Thedford and has extensive experience in graphic design and marketing. Lacey, and her husband, T.J., live on the family farm near Ithaca along with their three horses, three dogs, and cow-calf herd.



Lacey Sabatka

### Lacey Sabatka

A familiar face stepped into the new role as the Information and Education Coordinator. Previously, Lacey Sabatka was the Information

### Kara Nelson

The LPNNRD welcomed Kara Nelson as the new Information and Education/ Receptionist in January of



Kara Nelson

### ABOUT THE LOWER PLATTE NORTH NRD

The Lower Platte North Natural Resources District, based in Wahoo, covers parts of seven counties in east-central Nebraska. There are 23 NRDs in Nebraska, charged with developing and protecting the state's natural resources.

In pursuing this mission, the districts often partner with landowners and other government agencies, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The Lower Platte North NRD is governed by 19 locally-elected directors from nine subdistricts, and employs 15 full-time staff members (see current listing of NRD directors and staff on page 2). The district is funded by a combination of property taxes and grants from local, State and Federal sources. Get more info on the NRD and our projects and programs at [www.lpnnrd.org](http://www.lpnnrd.org).

2020. Kara has a background in Forestry Fisheries and Wildlife/ Environmental Education and most recently has worked in the Raymond Central School District. Kara and her husband Ritch live near Davey and have two daughters who graduated from Raymond Central High School and now attend college.

## Working Together for Water Management Solutions

### LPNNRD Enters Interlocal Cooperation Act Agreement

Water management solutions are one thing all parties involved can agree on.

As a result of the 2019 flooding, the Lower Platte North Natural Resources District (LPNNRD) joined the Joint Water Management Advisory Board with other Dodge County entities to work together to create a long-term strategy to

improve drainage, particularly east of Fremont, and to find solutions for reducing flood damages.

"One of the first steps with this agreement was to hire JEO Consulting Group Inc. to seek outside funding and grants to assist and complete a flood mitigation and resiliency plan," stated Tom Mountford, LPNNRD

Assistant Manager. Currently there are twelve parties involved, but Mountford said they anticipate other parties joining in the future to continue this cooperation.

The area of discussion includes approximately 30% of the southern portion of Dodge County.



## FY2019 – IN BRIEF

### SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION

In partnership with the Nebraska Natural Resources Conservation Service, the NRD's Soil & Water Conservation Program provided cost-share funds to landowners to construct terraces, waterways, and a variety of other conservation measures.

### WATER QUALITY & QUANTITY

The NRD continued its efforts to safeguard vital groundwater resources through quality and quantity monitoring programs, irrigated acre certification, nitrogen certification and water management classes, abandoned well plugging, chemigation system inspections, and more. In FY2019, the district obtained two grants to assist NRD staff in obtaining water monitoring information in real time along with continuing efforts to protect the water from contamination. The district is working directly with producers to provide information timely and efficiently through the reporting process along with getting the information back to them.

### RURAL WATER SYSTEMS

The NRD's rural water systems—one connecting Bruno and David City and the other connecting Colon and Wahoo—finished their fourteenth year of operation in FY2019, providing Bruno and Colon residents with safe, clean drinking water.

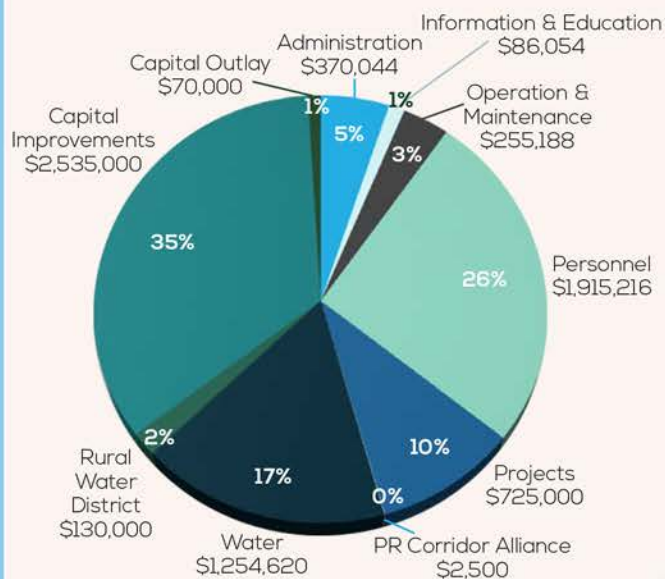
### TREE PLANTING

The NRD sold approximately 12,700 trees to cooperators across the district in FY2019. The district also donated tree seedlings to students at the NRD's Spring Conservation Sensation and for Arbor Day. Since 1972, more than 892,700 trees have been planted through this program.

### EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Over 2,450 youth, from preschool to college level age have participated in NRD educational activities and programs during FY2019—including Spring Conservation Sensation, summer workshops, and classroom presentations and programs.

# Annual Report 2019



### Lower Platte North NRD Projected Expenses, Fiscal Year 2020: \$7,343,623

The Lower Platte North NRD is funded by a combination of property taxes and grants from local, State and Federal sources.

For fiscal year 2020 (July 1, 2019-June 30, 2020), the district's projected budget is \$7,343,623.

### Lower Platte North NRD Projected Income, Fiscal Year 2020 - \$8,046,804

State statute allows NRDs a maximum property tax rate of 5.5 cents per \$100 of valuation. The Lower Platte North tax levy is 3.6212 cents for FY20, which equates to approximately \$54 in property tax for a \$150,000 home or farm, or \$2.90/acre for farm land valued at \$8,000/acre.

