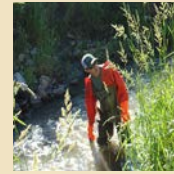




Building
Dedication
Page 3



LPNNRD
Internship
Page 3



Rising Nitrate
Issue
Page 4

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Lower Platte North Natural Resources District
Summer 2021

Decorative Native Grass or Noxious Weed?

The ecological health of our wetlands is being threatened by the noxious weed, *Phragmites Australis*! These tall plants are broad on the surface, with a dense root system underneath – posing a threat to wetlands, waterways and riparian areas.

Phragmites Australis, also known as common reed, is a warm-season perennial grass. With blueish hued leaves, the tall stems can reach 20 feet in height. Underneath the surface, the plant's dense root system leads to a concern for waterways, wetlands and wildlife habitats.

Native *Phragmites* have smooth, shiny, and often purplish stems. The leaves have a yellowish hue, and the ligule (part of the stem) is not as hairy or as thin as the invasive *Phragmites*.

Why is the non-native *Phragmites* a problem? The root system can grow between three to nine feet, disrupting the growth of native wetland plants, reducing wildlife habitats, and interrupting natural water flow. The invasive *Phragmites* plants also pose a risk of safety for transportation and recreation due to the height of the reeds.

Managing well-established stands can be hard to control without the proper treatment. *Phragmites* can spread by seed dispersal and reproduction through rhizomes (part of the root structure). The spreading of rhizomes can be caused by natural water movement or man-made actions, such as disking or dredging. A combination of herbicide treatment along with mechanical methods – burning, grazing, cutting, mowing, etc. – can be effective in controlling invasive *Phragmites*. A follow-up treatment of herbicide may be necessary later in the year. When using herbicide to treat near water or in a wetlands area, be sure to use caution for the safety of the water quality and wildlife habitats. According to the Lancaster County Weed Authority, imazapyr and aquatic glyphosate can be used in and around water.

In Nebraska, some of the most problematic infestations are visible along the Niobrara River, Platte River, and Republican River. Monitoring is key in controlling invasive *Phragmites*, and well-established stands will require annual maintenance for long-term management.

Local Students Enjoy Environmental Education Programs

Area schools were able to venture out of the classrooms and explore nature this spring at Lake Wanahoo. Loosened health department restrictions allowed for more in-person events for the Information and Education department at the Lower Platte North NRD.



St. Wenceslaus students on a nature hike with LPNNRD Education Coordinator, Sydney Abbott

Over 400 students and teachers from Bishop Neumann and Wahoo Public Schools have utilized Lake Wanahoo for the multiple outdoor recreation and education programs throughout April and May. Students were

given the chance to explore the outdoors during nature hikes, fishing, playing a round of disc golf, creating nature journals and a pontoon ride from the Live Well Go Fish program.

The LPNNRD hosted the 30th Spring Conservation Sensation on May 5th at the lake. A total of 217 students from Logan View Elementary, St. Mary's Elementary and Wahoo Public Elementary attended the event. The LPNNRD staff provided sessions focusing on water, forestry and wildlife. Guest presenters focused on conservation strategies, predators, amphibians and reptiles. The day concluded with a presentation by Wildlife Encounters where students were able to closely meet

continued on page 3

Lower Platte North NRD
Board & Staff

Board Member	Subdistrict
Lon Olson, Fremont	1
Kelly Thompson, Fremont (Vice-Chairperson).....	1
Frank Pollard, Fremont (Chairperson)	2
Bill Saeger, Fremont.....	2
Dave Saalfeld, North Bend.....	3
Mike McGinn, North Bend	3
Chris Yosten, Schuyler.....	4
Matt Bailey, Schuyler	4
Mark Seier, Newman Grove	5
David Lawrence, 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 Jr., Wahoo (Secretary)	9
Gene Ruzicka, North Bend.....	at large

Staff Member	Position
Sydney Abbott.....	Education Coordinator
Daryl Andersen.....	Water Resources Manager
Tyler Benal	Water Resources Specialist
Jill Breunig	Bookkeeping Dept. Head/ Admin. Assistant
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
Dave Moore	O & M Technician
Russell Oaklund.....	Lead Water Resources Specialist
Dave Odvody	Recreation Facilitator
Chris Poole	Grants/GIS Dept. Head
Karen Rezac.....	Dept./Admin Assistant
Lacey Sabatka	Information Coordinator
Bret Schomer	Wanahoo Recreation Supervisor/ Water Resources Specialist

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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From the Desk of the General Manager



Eric Gottschalk

Hello Old Friend...

My family moved to Wahoo, Nebraska in August 1972. I was entering 2nd grade that Fall and I remember the anxiety this shy kid from Hampton, Iowa was feeling as I walked into West Ward Elementary and Mrs. Vyboril’s classroom. Little did I know, I was about to meet and spend the next 11 years with some of the greatest friends anyone could ask for.

Over the years, some of us became even closer, some found others to bring along for the ride but we were all true friends. As we grew, we did some dumb things, some REALLY dumb things and we did some amazing things as well...most importantly, we spent time together.

To this day, nearly 50 years later, my fondest memories of youth are those of time spent with John Hansen, Bill Hancock, Al Shanahan, Dan Brown, Kevin Carlson, Curt Malousek and many more...Some, I have the pleasure of seeing frequently while others I haven’t seen in years but each time I get the opportunity to spend time with these “old friends”, the years simply fade away and I am instantly comforted by the sense of connection long time friendships provide.

Nature, the amazing outdoors, is just like those old friends from school. We all have a history, a past with nature and memories of time spent outside...This relationship is waiting to be reacquainted. Our busy lives tend to keep us indoors more than ever but just a few minutes or hours in that neighborhood park, fishing spot, pasture, or quiet outdoor place from your past, can bring a sense of comfort and connection we all can benefit from.

At the Lower Platte North NRD, we want to help you reconnect with your “Old Friend”. We offer educational opportunities to learn about and experience nature in our district as well as providing recreation areas which promote hiking, camping, fishing, biking and just relaxing with the best old friend any of us can have...Mother Nature. Better yet, plan a reunion or get together and enjoy the best of both worlds...a beautiful lakeside sunset with your friends, both past and present, on the patio of our Wanahoo Education Building.

Until we meet again my friend...

Eric Gottschalk, LPNRRD General Manager

Scholarship Awarded to Local Graduate

Congratulations to Emma Montoya of Newman Grove High School who was recently awarded the Shell Creek Watershed Monitoring Program Scholarship.

This scholarship is awarded to a graduating senior who has participated in at least one year of the Shell Creek Watershed Monitoring Program and plans to pursue higher education relating to science or natural resources.

Emma plans to attend Northeast Community College and pursue a degree in nursing. The Lower Platte North NRD would like to congratulate Emma and wish her the best of luck on her future endeavors!



Emma Montoya

Education, continued from page 1 an armadillo, a parrot, a joey and a few other reptiles and animals!

During the months of May and June, the LPNNRD partnered with UNL Extension, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and other environmental enthusiasts to bring youth events and adult education activities to Lake Wanahoo this summer. Youth events included the Outdoor Recreation Workshop and the Kids Summer Institute.

The monthly "Coffee, Lakeside" learning series – which began in April – continues to offer a new educational topic and informal discussion with free coffee and donuts from local cafes and bakeries. Previous sessions included gardening, migratory birds, and fish of Nebraska.

Environmental education is one of the many programs

that the LPNNRD continues to offer. Activities are developed from environmental education curriculum and customized to fit various age levels and grades. The Lower Platte North NRD provides education opportunities to public and private schools, 4-H clubs, FFA chapters, Boy Scout troops, Girl Scout troops and other programs outside of school. For more information about the LPNNRD Environmental Education Programs, please visit our website at lpnnrd.org.



St. Mary's Elementary Students testing turbidity with LPNNRD Assistant Manager, Tom Mountford

Building to Honor Influential LPNNRD Director

The *Clint Johannes Education Building at Lake Wanahoo* will be the new name of the building, housed on the East side of Lake Wanahoo. The building was recently renamed to honor former LPNNRD Director, Clint Johannes.

Clint began his 25 years of service and leadership with the LPNNRD Board of Directors in January of 1991, serving for Subdistrict 4 which covers South and Southwest parts of Colfax County. During his tenure he served as Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary; along with participation in the Water, Personnel, and Executive Committees. Johannes was also a strong supporter of the Lake Wanahoo/Sand Creek Environmental Restoration Project, the Wester Sarpy/Clear Creek Project, and the Shell Creek Levee Project in Schuyler. Clint also served as the Chairman on the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts, Chairman of the Nebraska Natural Resources Commission and as the Nebraska representation on the National Association of Conservation Districts Board.

In addition to these duties, Clint was actively involved with Nebraska's Envirothon contests. The Envirothon is an environmental education program for high school students where teams of five compete to prove their knowledge of

environmental policy, forestry, range, soils, water and wildlife. This year, the Nebraska State Envirothon Contest was held at Lake Wanahoo.

Clint worked for the Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) for 36 years as a district field engineer. After his time at NPPD, Clint worked at Nebraska Generation & Transmission, and later formed his own consulting company – Johannes & Associates.



Clint Johannes

"Clint was widely recognized throughout Nebraska for his selfless contributions toward preservation and sustainable use of our soil and water resources," said Tom Mountford, LPNNRD Assistant Manager. The recommendation to rename the building after the former LPNNRD Director was made at a Board of Directors meeting earlier in the year. A dedication ceremony and open house was held at the building on Friday, August 20th. The LPNNRD holds environmental education events for all ages at the building and looks forward to new events in the near future.

College Interns Gain Experience at Lower Platte North NRD

Summer at the Lower Platte North NRD can get a little hectic with District maintenance, water sampling, chemigation inspections, verifying flow meters and other activities. This year, the Lower Platte North NRD hired two interns to help with duties in the Operations and Maintenance Department and the Water Department.



Mackenze Origer, Intern, collecting a water sample

"Coming from Alaska, I have absolutely no agricultural background, so it was great to learn the basics," said Mackenze Origer of Seward, Alaska. Mackenze is studying Environmental Science

and Geography at Concordia University in Seward, Nebraska. When asked what the most valuable thing he has learned so far, he responded, "how much care and work goes in to maintaining and protecting ground water."



Tate Hartley, Intern, and Russell Oakland, Lead Water Resources Specialist, testing Cottonwood Creek

Tate Hartley of Maywood, Nebraska, is studying Agribusiness at the University of Nebraska *continued on page 4*



Groundwater Management

Rising Nitrate Issue Leads to Collaboration with UNMC

We all need water – for drinking, cooking, brushing our teeth and showering. We need water for the garden and crops to grow and for our cattle to drink. We cannot live without water and we are working to do a better job at protecting one of the world’s most precious natural resources.

This summer, the Lower Platte North NRD began a collaboration with the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) to conduct groundwater quality studies on domestic wells. The first year will focus on collecting water samples and searching for new and innovative ideas to help suppress the rising nitrate issues in the areas of Schuyler, Richland and Bellwood.



Collecting water sample

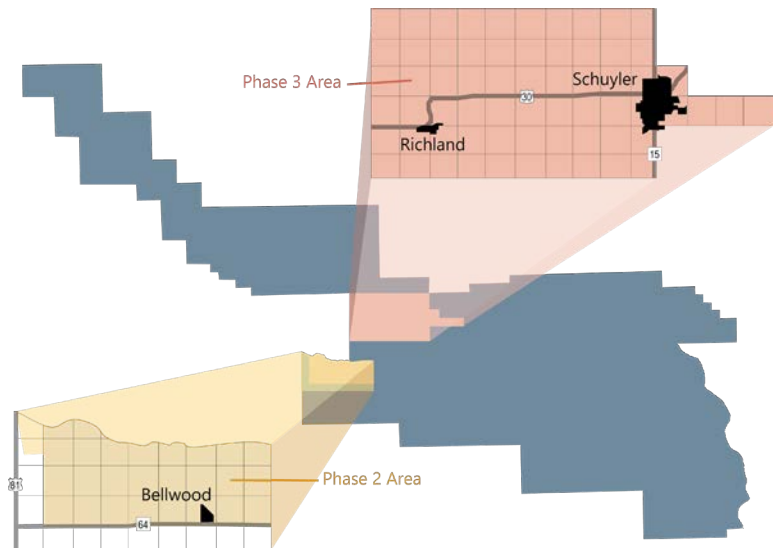
Last fall, after a generous donation to the University of Nebraska, a new program – Water, Health, Climate Program – was created to address public health issues in Nebraska associated with water. Meghan Langel, Program Manager, said “Nebraska has the seventh highest rate of pediatric cancer in the United States.” One of the research topics of this program is the potential link between pediatric cancer and water quality.

“Our intention is to increase education for everyone,” stated Daryl Andersen, LPNNRD Water Resources Manager. “We are wanting the public to be aware of the situation.”

The LPNNRD is working with schools throughout the District to conduct classroom presentations and “Test Your Well” events. These events not only benefit the LPNNRD, but the FFA students gain experience in water quality by doing the water testing. Samples are also sent to a local lab for further testing after the events.

Starting in November, LPNNRD staff will be conducting local coffee shop meetings in the Nitrate Management

Areas. The main objectives of these meetings are to inform producers about local issues, discuss water quality testing results, and give producers the opportunity to talk with staff individually about their Nitrogen application reports. These meetings will give producers the opportunity to visit with staff individually and help streamline the NRD’s online reporting process.



LPNNRD Ground Water Management Phase 2 and Phase 3 Areas

“Everybody needs to work as a team toward the goal of reducing nitrate contamination and protecting drinking water for future generations,” added Daryl. Producers will be contacted later in the year with times and locations for the coffee shop meetings.

The Lower Platte North Natural Resources District continues to protect and preserve the natural resources throughout our district, if you have any questions or recommendations please contact the Lower Platte North’s office at 402-443-4675.

Interns, continued from page 3 in Lincoln. He said the job description online caught his attention, “I saw I was going to be outside and said, great let’s make it happen.”

Tate and Mackenze have both jumped in head first with all of the activities the Operation and Maintenance Department and Water Department has thrown at them. The full time staff enjoy the extra help throughout the busy

summer months.

The LPNNRD offers summer internships to college students who are studying natural resources, water resources, environmental science or a related major. The internships typically begin in May and end in August. For more information about internships and other programs, please visit lpnnrd.org.