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Lower Platte North Natural Resources District
Winter 2023-2024

Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group: Student Monitoring And Availability of Cost Share

Students from the Shell Creek Student Monitoring Program recently presented their results to the LPNNRD Board of Directors at November's board meeting. The group consists of students from Newman Grove Public Schools, Lakeview Community Schools (Columbus), and Schuyler Community Schools. Throughout the summer, students collect samples and water levels from multiple locations along Shell Creek. Back in the classroom, they analyze the samples collected for nine parameters: dissolved oxygen, fecal coliform, pH, biological oxygen demand, temperature, total phosphate, nitrate, turbidity, and total solids. Results from these tests are used to calculate a



Shell Creek Watershed Student Monitoring Group taking water samples during their Summer break.

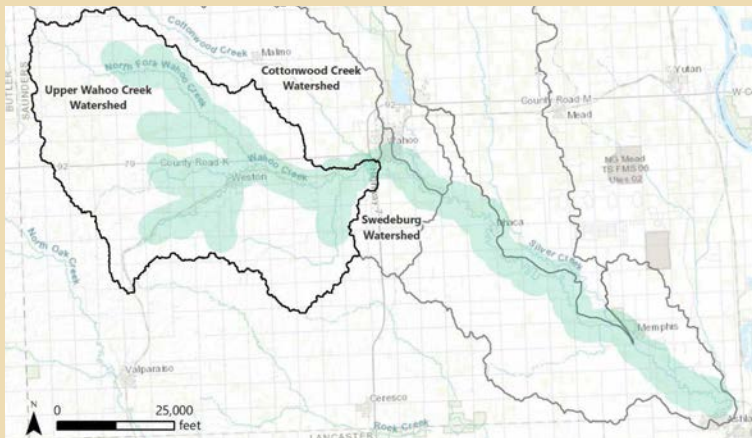
Water Quality Index that is a national standard to compare waterways. Students also calculate discharge from water

level measurements collected in the field. Data taken from the students creates public awareness and encourages the LPNNRD and Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group to make decisions on best management practices throughout the 304,873 acre watershed. The State also uses the data to make stream impairment determinations. Results and information can be found on the student's website: <https://sites.google.com/ngpublicschools.com/shellcreek/home>

The Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group (SCWIG) has been a functioning advisory committee to the LPNNRD for nearly 30 years. SCWIG is a local, non-governmental organization that follows a grass-roots approach to conservation implementation; SCWIG meets regularly to update members *continued on page 3*

Flood Reduction Structures Moving Forward in Wahoo Creek Watershed

Progress continues on up to ten dam structures in the Prague, Weston, Wahoo area. The \$19.7 million project has the potential to reduce flood damages to agriculture, county roads and bridges, urban land, improve water quality, and enhance wildlife and aquatic habitats. Construction for the first three structures located approximately three miles south of Prague is expected to begin this fall. Engineering and design for the rest of the structures is currently at 60% with construction projected to begin in 2025. Thanks to federal funding from NRCS and State funding from the Legislature, local NRD tax levy funds can be allocated to other NRD projects and programs.



Upper Wahoo Creek Watershed area of benefit highlighted in green.

Lower Platte North NRD
Board & Staff

Board Member.....	Subdistrict
Lon Olson, Fremont	1
Kelly Thompson, Fremont (Chairman).....	1
John Goldsberry, Fremont	2
Bill Saeger, Fremont.....	2
Dave Saalfeld, North Bend.....	3
Andrew Tonnies, North Bend	3
Chris Yosten, Schuyler.....	4
Matt Bailey, Schuyler	4
Mark Seier, Newman Grove (Treasurer).....	5
David Lawrence, Columbus.....	5
Joe Birkel, David City.....	6
Robert Hilger, David City	6
Ryan Engel, Fremont.....	7
Ryan Sabatka, Weston (Vice Chairman)	7
Jerry Johnson, Wahoo	8
Alex Kavan, Wahoo	8
Duane Johnson, Mead	9
Robert Meduna, Wahoo (Secretary)	9
Thomas McKnight, Fremont	at large

Staff Member.....	Position
Sydney Abbott.....	Education Coordinator
Daryl Andersen.....	Water Resources Manager
Jill Breunig	Bookkeeping Dept. Head/ Admin. Assistant
Will Brueggemann	Water Resources Specialist
Ryan Chapman.....	Assistant Manager
Duke Dokulil	O & M Technician
Sean Elliott.....	Projects/Rural Water Manager
Kaityln Fehlhafer	O & M Technician
Eric Gottschalk.....	General Manager
Bob Heimann	O & M Manager
Dave Moore	O & M Technician
Russell Oaklund....	Lead Water Resources Specialist
Dave Odvody	Recreation Facilitator
Karen Rezac.....	Dept./Admin Assistant
Lacey Sabatka	Information Coordinator
Drew ten Bensel	GIS/Grants Coordinator

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

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in your inbox?
Sign up at lpnrd.org or send an email to
lpnrd@lpnrd.org

From the Desk of
the General Manager
Nebraska's NRDs



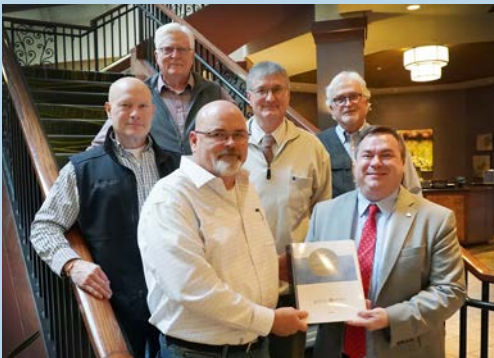
Eric Gottschalk

In 1972, the Nebraska legislature made a bold, foresightful decision to become a natural resources leader and the only state in the country to empower locally elected leaders to Conserve, Preserve and Restore our natural resources on a watershed basis. For the past 51 years, Nebraska's 23 NRDs have actively worked throughout our river basins to develop local programs and policies to best serve our local issues.

Each NRD is charged with 12 areas of responsibility including: soil erosion, flood damage protection, flood reduction, soil conservation, water supply for beneficial uses, groundwater and surface water management/development/conservation, pollution control, solid waste disposal and drainage, drainage improvement/channel rectification, fish & wildlife habitat development, outdoor recreation & parks and forestry/range management. While this is a daunting list of challenges, each NRD works with local, state and federal partners to assume these responsibilities in a manner their district best sees fit.

While Nebraska's 23 NRDs are working locally, we also collectively belong to and guide the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts, (NARD) giving us a strong, unified voice within the state and nationally. Our association speaks, on our behalf, to state leaders, federal agencies and congressional representatives, trumpeting our important issues and fundamental goals.

Today, your Lower Platte North NRD is working on multiple conservation projects and programs throughout our district: We have worked with federal and state agencies to secure nearly \$30 million for our Wahoo Creek Watershed project which will build up to 10 flood reduction dams throughout the watershed; We are planning to move into the Skull and Bone Creek watersheds in Butler County to assist in future flood reduction projects; We are updating our district's groundwater management plan to insure our groundwater quality and quantity remains protected for years to come; We continue to work with Fremont and Dodge County officials



From left, LPNNRD General Manager Eric Gottschalk, LPNNRD Director Robert Hilger (David City), LPNNRD Director Kelly Thompson (Fremont), LPNNRD Lead Water Specialist Russell Oakland, LPNNRD Director Bill Saeger (Fremont), and NRCS State Conservationist Rob Lawson commemorate the approval on the Wahoo Creek Watershed Plan.

to improve drainage both east and west of Fremont and we work with and support the Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group addressing issues throughout the Shell Creek watershed as it remains one of our priority watersheds.

Over 50 years ago Nebraska set itself apart from other states by establishing our NRD system. We are now the envy of other states and are contacted regularly to explain our system, how it works and the benefits to our resources. Nebraska NRDs have become an extraordinary example how local control and local decision making can benefit our future. Also, you,

the constituents of Lower Platte North NRD, have guided us in our local efforts, allowing us to continue our goal of conservation, restoration, and preservation of our natural resources for generations to come.

Eric Gottschalk, LPNNRD General Manager

continued from page 1 of ongoing projects within the watershed, focus planning on future projects, and convey the message throughout the watershed via the various avenues of SCWIG members. SCWIG is made up of residents throughout the 110 mile corridor of Shell Creek, multiple government agencies, and a part-time watershed technician. The continued success and improvement of the entire Shell Creek Watershed is due to the consistent, steadfast approach of the SCWIG members.

Best management practice efforts continue throughout the Shell Creek Watershed thanks to partnerships and grant funding from the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy 319 Program, Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nebraska Department of Agriculture Buffer Strip Program, Colfax County, and USDA-NRCS EQIP Program. The primary focus of grant funds are

reducing bacteria loading (E. coli). Stream bank stabilization projects have also shown great benefits along Shell Creek to help improve water quality and wildlife habitat. Over the next few years, technical and financial assistance will

be focused on: grassed waterways, filter/buffer strips, cover crops, irrigation management, well decommissioning, grade control structures, streambank stabilization, practices to remove livestock from waterways (alternative water supply, exclusion fencing, cross fencing) vegetative treatment systems, and upgrading under performing septic systems. Landowners and producers along Shell Creek or its tributaries are

encouraged to contact Bill Bos at the Columbus USDA-NRCS Office at 402-564-0506 to see what programs may be available to you.



Shell Creek Watershed Student Monitoring Group presenting to the LPNNRD Board of Directors.

Dozens of Trees and Shrubs Available for Purchase

Winter is a great time to plan a new windbreak or replace old trees in current windbreaks. Trees provide protection for property, create wildlife habitats, and add beauty to the landscape. The Lower Platte North NRD has dozens of species available for purchase such as Ponderosa Pine, Black Hills Spruce, Hackberry, Red Maple, Crab Apple and more!

With the help of the NRD's conservation tree program, there have been over a million trees and shrubs planted across the state. The hand-plant tree and shrub seedlings are available at \$1.25 each, and must be purchased in bundles of 25.

For larger tree plantings or windbreaks, the LPNNRD offers a two-man tree planter available to rent. Rental cost is \$10 for the first day and \$50 for each additional day. For tree and shrub plantings of 150 or more, the district also offers a machine planting service.

The tree planting crew is capable of planting up to 1,000 seedlings a day, but the planting site must be within the district boundaries.

Landowners can work with the LPNNRD and county Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices to help develop a tree planting plan free of charge. This includes determining how many trees and shrubs you will need, the best location for your planting and which species can fit your specific needs. Cost-share assistance is available for this program.

For more information about the tree planting programs available with the Lower Platte North NRD, please visit

lpnnrd.org/projects-and-programs/forestry or call the office at 402-443-4675. Orders can be placed online and in office, but please call ahead to check species availability.



Blue Spruce seedlings packaged for education event.

LPNNRD Assisting in Water Sampling for NDEE Grant

The Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) continues to offer an opportunity for private well owners to obtain a reverse osmosis water treatment system if their domestic water has high nitrate concentrations. The rebate program will cover treatment systems and installation up to \$4,000. Grant applications will close June 23, 2024 or when funding runs out.

Eligible treatment systems must be certified by the American National Standards Institute and installed by a licensed plumber or an entity that has a history of similar successful installations. Owners must submit a water quality test above 10 parts per million (ppm) nitrate, analyzed by the State Laboratory, and dated after January 1, 2022. A cost estimate for the system and installation must also be submitted and the well must be registered.

If your request is pre-approved by NDEE you will need to submit all required documentation to receive the rebate. For the full program information, please view the online publication at <http://dee.ne.gov/Publica.nsf/pages/22-051> or contact NDEE at (402) 471-2186.

The Lower Platte North NRD is available to assist with sample collection, sample analysis costs, and well registration paperwork. Contact the NRD at 402-443-4675 for assistance.



Groundwater Management

Public Interest Requested in Groundwater Management

In 1985, the Lower Platte North NRD developed a Groundwater Management Plan. At that time, little water quality or water quantity data existed. The most recent Groundwater Management plan's last update was in 1995. The plan provides and defines goals, objectives, policy statements, and program commitments. The plan was prepared by the LPNNRD staff, LPNNRD Board of Directors, and with the assistance of consultants.

The Lower Platte North NRD is in the process of updating the Groundwater Management Plan as outlined in Nebraska State Statute 46-709. At the time of the last updated plan, Water Quantity Level 1 and Water Quality Phase 1 were implemented District-wide. The Groundwater Management Plan along with Groundwater Rules and Regulations are documents that provide guidance on implementing groundwater management strategies within the district. The State of Nebraska has 23 Natural Resource Districts which elect a Board of Directors within the District to determine how the district should manage groundwater for its citizens.

Nebraska State Statute 46-709 specifies, "Each district's ground water management plan shall also identify, to the

extent possible, the levels and sources of ground water contamination within the district, ground water quality goals, long-term solutions necessary to prevent the levels

of ground water contaminants from becoming too high and to reduce high levels sufficiently to eliminate health hazards, and practices recommended to stabilize, reduce, and prevent the occurrence, increase, or spread of ground water contamination." The statute also includes groundwater management objectives, including a proposed groundwater reservoir life goal for the district.

Since 1995, the advancement of technology throughout the

district and the help of partnering agencies has provided pivotal information to consider implementing into the plan. An important part of the process is public participation. The NRD invites all citizens to participate in the management plan process and to stay abreast when public meetings are being held. The information provided at these meetings will assist the NRD and other agencies in making important decisions for future generations. If you have any interest in becoming an involved stakeholder, please contact staff at the NRD office for further information.



LPNNRD Water Resources Specialist Will Brueggemann measuring Fall water levels. These levels are measured in the Spring and Fall each year.

Nitrogen Certification & Water Management Classes for 2024

As a requirement of the LPNNRD's Groundwater Management Rules and Regulations, all operators of irrigation, municipal, and industrial well systems, along with operators who use any type of fertilizer (commercial or organic) in production agriculture, are required to obtain LPNNRD Nitrogen certification. The LPNNRD holds certification classes throughout the District each winter. The class covers several topics including Nitrogen management and application, water quality, water conservation and more. The classes are free to attend. If you are not able to attend a class, there are online and take-home test options available. Visit lpnnrd.org or call the NRD at 402-443-4675.

Date	Time	Location
February 1	1:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.	ENREEC, 1071 County Road G, Ithaca
February 8	1:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.	Lindsay Town Hall, 121 Pine St., Lindsay
February 16	9:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.	Platte County Ag Park, 822 15th St., Columbus
February 22	9:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.	Butler County Event Center, 62 L St., David City
March 14	6:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	ENREEC, 1071 County Road G, Ithaca



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2023

New Faces Join the LPNNRD

Two employees joined the staff at the Lower Platte North Natural Resources District in 2023.

Drew ten Bensel joined LPNNRD as GIS/Grants Coordinator in May 2023. He previously worked as a



Drew ten Bensel

water resources technician at Upper Big Blue NRD in York from 2018-2022. He is an alumnus of Concordia University-

Nebraska and University of Wisconsin-Madison. Drew is a Seward native and has family from Newman Grove. He currently resides in Wahoo.

Kaitlyn Fehlhafer joined the LPNNRD in October as an Operations and Maintenance Technician. Kaitlyn recently graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a degree



Kaitlyn Fehlhafer

in Fisheries and Wildlife and a minor in Grassland Ecology. Previously she interned at Lower Platte South NRD as

a summer technician. She loves everything outdoors from biking to fishing and spending time with her family.

FISCAL YEAR 2023 - IN BRIEF

SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION

In partnership with the Nebraska Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, the NRD's Soil & Water Conservation Program continued to provide cost-share funds to landowners to construct terraces, waterways, and a variety of other conservation practices. The LPNNRD allocated \$83,652 for conservation work under the NeDNR Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Program, as well as \$28,880 in Lands for Conservation land set aside funding, for FY23. We have also utilized grant funds and local funds in partnership with the Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group for a number of special projects; multiple grade stabilization structures have been installed along Shell Creek, and tributaries, to protect the integrity of a variety of wetlands, county road/bridge infrastructure and working lands.

WATER QUALITY & QUANTITY

The NRD continued its efforts to safeguard vital groundwater resources through quality and quantity monitoring programs, irrigated acre certification, NRD certification classes, abandoned well plugging, chemigation system inspections, and more. The district continues extensive soil and water sampling to help in the management of contaminants in groundwater. Measuring water levels along with real-time equipment on monitoring wells assist the district in managing groundwater quantity. With the help of grant funding, the district is developing a district-wide groundwater model, age dating of the groundwater and offering cost-share for best management practices in a nitrogen management area. Additional program information will be discussed during the NRD certification classes.

RURAL WATER SYSTEMS

The NRD's rural water systems -one connecting Bruno and David City and the other connecting Colon and Wahoo - finished their 17th year of operation in FY2023, providing Bruno and Colon residents with safe, clean drinking water. The RWDs continue to provide stable water service to our two systems. Along with dealing with aging infrastructure, the big challenge is keeping the utility service economically feasible for both customer and utility. The Bruno RWD upgraded the communication system between the village's water tower and our meter pit to allow for a more seamless operation. We have recently been in contact with representatives from another village about potential of connecting to either the Colon or Bruno RWD and are working through the preliminary feasibility analysis.

TREE PLANTING

The LPNNRD's tree planting program is one of the most visible and popular programs of the NRD. The NRD ordered 10,475 trees last year, with 3,600 of those planted by the district. The NRD also donated 925 trees for educational events throughout the district. Since 1972, more than 932,450 trees have been planted through this program.

continued on page 6

FY2023 – IN BRIEF

continued

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

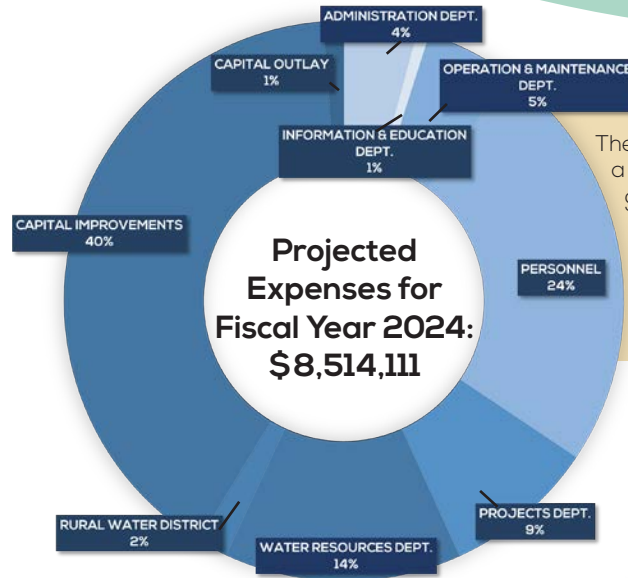
The Lower Platte North NRD offers a variety of hands-on activities, classroom presentations, field trip opportunities, career exploration and more for students to learn more about the environment and our natural resources. Over 2,774 youth, from preschool to college-level age and nearly 300 adults have participated in educational activities and programs during FY2023. Activities included classroom presentations, the annual Spring Conservation Sensation, outdoor activities, land and range judging competitions and more.

RECREATION ACTIVITIES

Czechland and Homestead Lakes had their typical amount of use during 2023. At Czechland Lake, the District provides 11 RV pads with electricity at \$18/night and 3 pads without electricity free of charge. The District upgraded 4 electrical pads, creating 9 of the 11 pads to have 50/30 amp service available. The Nebraska Game & Parks Fishery Division stocked Czechland with Yellow Perch, Walleye and Channel Catfish. Lake Wanahoo continues to be a valuable asset to the District and recreation enthusiasts around the region. The recreation area has hosted numerous outdoor education events and athletic events. As always, the property provides a wonderful habitat for youth mentor hunting administered through Nebraska Game and Parks' PATH program (Passing Along the Heritage). An archery range was added near the boat ramp parking lot with the assistance of the Big Game Conservation Association and area Boy Scouts. With the continued dry conditions, all of our lakes are experiencing lower than normal water levels.

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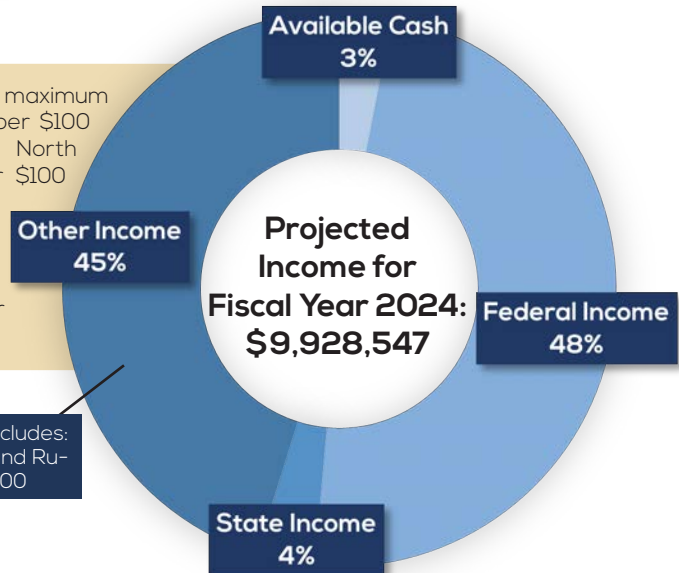
2023



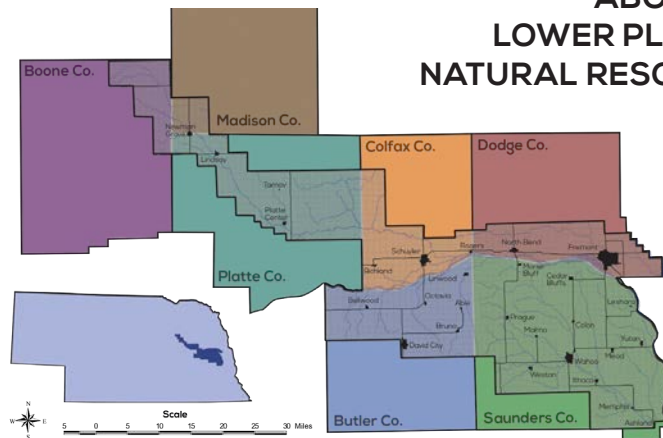
The Lower Platte North NRD is funded by a combination of property taxes and grants from local, State and Federal sources. For fiscal year 2024 (July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024), the district's projected budget is \$8,761,805 of which \$3,480,715 is required from the district's local tax levy.

State statute allows NRDs a maximum property tax rate of 5.5 cents per \$100 of valuation. The Lower Platte North tax levy is 0.028652 cents per \$100 valuation for FY24, which equates to approximately \$42.98 in property tax for a \$150,000 home. An owner of farm land valued at \$7,000 per acre will pay \$2.00/acre.

Other Income section includes: Local Income of \$118,940, and Rural Water Income of \$134,000



ABOUT THE LOWER PLATTE NORTH NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT



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 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.