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# the VIADUCT

Lower Platte North Natural Resources District  
Winter 2024-2025

## Disaster Declaration for May's Significant Rainfall Event

In late May, a record rainfall event brought significant flooding to Saunders and Butler Counties, causing water levels to rise throughout the Sand, Duck, Cottonwood, Wahoo, Skull and Bone Creek watersheds. Rainfall amounts ranging from 4 inches to over 10 inches brought high water levels landowners had never seen before. Lower Platte North Natural Resources District (LPNNRD) staff began checking dams throughout Saunders and Butler Counties early on May 21. As many as 7 of 44 structures assessed showed evidence of auxiliary spillways flowing.

The auxiliary spillway is an earthen portion of the dam used to pass additional water beyond the designed capacity to keep the structure from over-topping and potential failure. All the dams observed by LPNNRD and local USDA-NRCS did not indicate any over-topping at the time they were surveyed, and majority had reached peak levels

24 hours after the storm.

Water levels at Lake Wanhoo reached several feet higher than levels during the March 2019 flooding event, nearing three-feet from the edge of the Highway 77/92 Roadway.

Many portions of the Lake Wanhoo Recreation Area were under water for some time including multiple fishing jetties and the Breakwater Trail.

The Breakwater Trail is not only a pedestrian trail linking the East and West sides of the recreation area, but also designed to slow the flow of the incoming water and sediment. It was closed to the public since the flooding event up until mid-November after Federal Emergency Management Agency

(FEMA) and Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) officials were able to meet and review the damage. The approval of the disaster declaration will allow for funding of 75% cost-share assistance from FEMA and *continued on page 3*



*Lake Wanhoo's Breakwater Trail inundated with floodwaters on May 21, 2024.*

## 25 Years of Conservation Within Shell Creek

On September 12, 2024, the Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group (SCWIG) marked a significant achievement of 25 years in Nebraska's conservation efforts. Since its founding in 1999, SCWIG has led grassroots initiatives to improve water quality within the Shell Creek watershed, working with over 300 landowners to implement more than 350 conservation practices.

One of the group's most remarkable accomplishments was the removal of Shell Creek from the U.S. Environmental

Protection Agency's Impaired Waters list in 2018. This was a historic achievement, as Shell Creek became the first stream in the nation to be delisted after years of elevated levels of Atrazine—a herbicide that once impaired aquatic life in the creek.

"Shell Creek shows how multiple partners have come together to significantly improve water quality in Nebraska," said Matt Bailey, local landowner, SCWIG co-chair and Lower Platte North Natural Resources District (LPNNRD) director. *continued on page 3*



*Bill Bos (center) of Platte County NRCS discusses practices that have improved the Shell Creek Watershed.*

Lower Platte North NRD  
Board & Staff

Board Member.....	Subdistrict
Lon Olson, Fremont .....	1
Vacant, Fremont .....	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 (Chairman).....	7
Jerry Johnson, Wahoo .....	8
Roger Harders, 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
Kaitlyn Bargaen .....	Water Resources Specialist
Brandon Beethe.....	GIS/Grants Coordinator
Jill Breunig .....	Bookkeeping Dept. Head/ Admin. Assistant
Adam Brockmann....	NRD/NRCS Conservation Tech
Ryan Chapman.....	Assistant Manager
Sean Elliott.....	Projects/Rural Water Manager
Eric Gottschalk.....	General Manager
Bob Heimann .....	O & M Manager
Dave Moore .....	O & M Technician
Dave Odvody .....	Recreation Facilitator
Karen Rezac.....	Dept./Admin Assistant
Lacey Sabatka .....	Information Coordinator
Jon Speichinger ...	Lake Wanahoo Supervisor/O&M
Jacob Stover.....	Water Resources Specialist

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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[lpnrd@lpnrd.org](mailto:lpnrd@lpnrd.org)

# From the Desk of the General Manager

## Generations



Eric Gottschalk

December 1, 2023, my wife, brothers and I said goodbye to our Aunt Joann Gottschalk. Joann was an amazing woman...she was a kind and generous mother of 11, grandmother to 47 and Great-Grandmother to 22, she was married to our Dad's oldest brother Dale, for 69 years and yet, she was so much more...

Joann's passing marked the sad end of a generation on our Dad's side of the family. A generation which helped rebuild after World War II, fought in the Korean War, survived the 60's and welcomed in microwaves, computers and cell phones. These strong, hard working men and women were instrumental as they planned and built for the future creating better lives and opportunities for those who followed. Their predecessors are described as the "Greatest Generation", while I don't dispute that fact, I believe their generation is a very close second. It's a strange feeling when you realize it's now YOUR generation's turn to be the wise and responsible one.

At the Lower Platte North NRD, we have multiple generations of professional conservationists working together to leave our land and our resources better than they are today. Every day, we collaborate with producers, landowners, and operators to promote irrigation efficiency, improve water quality, build healthy soils and reduce erosion, all while increasing production. We are also actively working throughout our district, building flood reduction structures to help reduce flood related damages and providing numerous outdoor recreation opportunities at our three public recreation areas. We are actively engaged in school districts, communities, and organizations, throughout our district, informing and educating learners of all ages on conservation opportunities and programs available to promote and increase wise use of our natural resources.



Lower Platte North Natural Resources District Education Coordinator, Sydney Abbott, presenting at a "Coffee, Lakeside" event.

I thank ALL the previous generations of Americans who have worked and sacrificed for us and I challenge, mine and the generations to come, to continue their dedication to doing good and doing right in order to provide a better tomorrow for all.

The Lower Platte North Natural Resources District, working today, conserving for future generations.

*Eric Gottschalk, LPNND General Manager*



LPNND office construction continues on the Southwest side of the Lake Wanahoo NRD Recreation Area property.

*Declaration, continued from page 1* an additional 12.5% from NEMA to repair the damages throughout the Lake Wanahoo property. Additionally, mitigation funding is available to create more robust structures and reduce future damage.

LPNNRD made an agreement with Houston Engineering to repair the additional damages at the Wanahoo Dam

Stilling Basin located below the dam and the Breakwater Trail. Agency coordination with FEMA and NEMA officials for modifications and any proposed dam modifications for mitigation will be reviewed with Nebraska Department of Natural Resources dam safety after a site investigation is completed.

*Shell Creek, continued from page 1* "Having a waterbody delisted is an extremely difficult and rare thing to accomplish, which resulted from the implementation of a comprehensive watershed management plan. Since then, we've continued our work with partners to provide safe, quality water for our state."

SCWIG's efforts have focused on promoting sustainable agricultural practices such as no-till farming, filter and buffer strips, cover crops, fencing livestock from streams, cross fencing, and solar livestock wells, which have helped reduce non-point source pollution. The group's partnerships with the LPNNRD, Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Nebraska Environmental Trust and other agencies have been crucial in addressing these conservation goals. Each year, the



*Elbert Traylor (left) of Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy, and Matt Bailey (right), local producer and LPNNRD board member, discuss successful projects within the Shell Creek Watershed over the years.*

Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group and its partners invest nearly \$500,000 in conservation practices, with about half of the funding provided by federal sources.

Educational outreach has been a cornerstone of SCWIG's success. Newman Grove and Schuyler Central High Schools have developed volunteer programs where students monitor Shell Creek's water, sediment, and aquatic life. These programs provide valuable data and give students hands-on experience in environmental science.

As SCWIG looks forward to its next chapter, the group remains dedicated to protecting Shell Creek and continuing its mission to promote sustainable land use and water quality practices across Nebraska.

## Protect Your Property with Trees and Shrubs

Winter is an excellent time to plan for a new windbreak or to replace existing trees. Trees not only provide protection for your property but also enhance wildlife habitats and add aesthetic value to the landscape. The Lower Platte North NRD (LPNNRD) offers a wide selection of tree species for purchase, including Ponderosa Pine, Black Hills Spruce, Hackberry, Amur Maple, Crab Apple, and dozens more. Hand-planted tree and shrub seedlings are available for just \$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 to rent. The 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 provides



*Large windbreak providing wildlife habitat and protection alongside cornfield.*

a machine planting service within the district's boundaries.

Landowners can work with the LPNNRD and county Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices to develop a tree planting plan. Cost-share assistance is available for this program which includes guidance on how many trees and shrubs to plant, where to place them, and which species best meet your needs.

For more details about the tree planting programs offered by the LPNNRD, visit [lpnnrd.org/projects-and-programs/forestry](http://lpnnrd.org/projects-and-programs/forestry) or call 402-443-4675. Orders can be placed both online and in the office, but please call ahead to confirm species availability.

## Three Wahoo Creek Watershed Sites Under Construction

The LPNNRD Board of Directors awarded Thompson Construction the contract for the first three sites (26A, 26B, and 27) of the Wahoo Creek Watershed dams on November 11, 2024. Site preparation, including earthwork, access development, and tree removal, will begin immediately, with construction continuing through October 2026.

Additionally, the NRD is moving into Phase 2 of the Wahoo Creek Watershed Flood Reduction Plan by acquiring

land rights and easements which will take place over the winter. The plan includes six more flood reduction dams to be built over the next several years in the same manner as the first three sites – all will remain on private property with no public access required. The NRD will operate and maintain the embankments and spillways for this project. Once all structures are completed, the dams are expected to reduce flood damage in the watershed by up to 30%.



# Groundwater Management

## Satellite Imagery Used for Nitrogen Management

Crops, like humans, need proper nourishment to thrive. They require the proper balance of nutrients and water to grow effectively. A crucial nutrient for growing crops is nitrogen, which plays a vital role in maximizing crop potential, improving yields, and increasing profits. However, applying the right amount of nitrogen at the right time is key to achieving these goals without harming water quality and the environment.

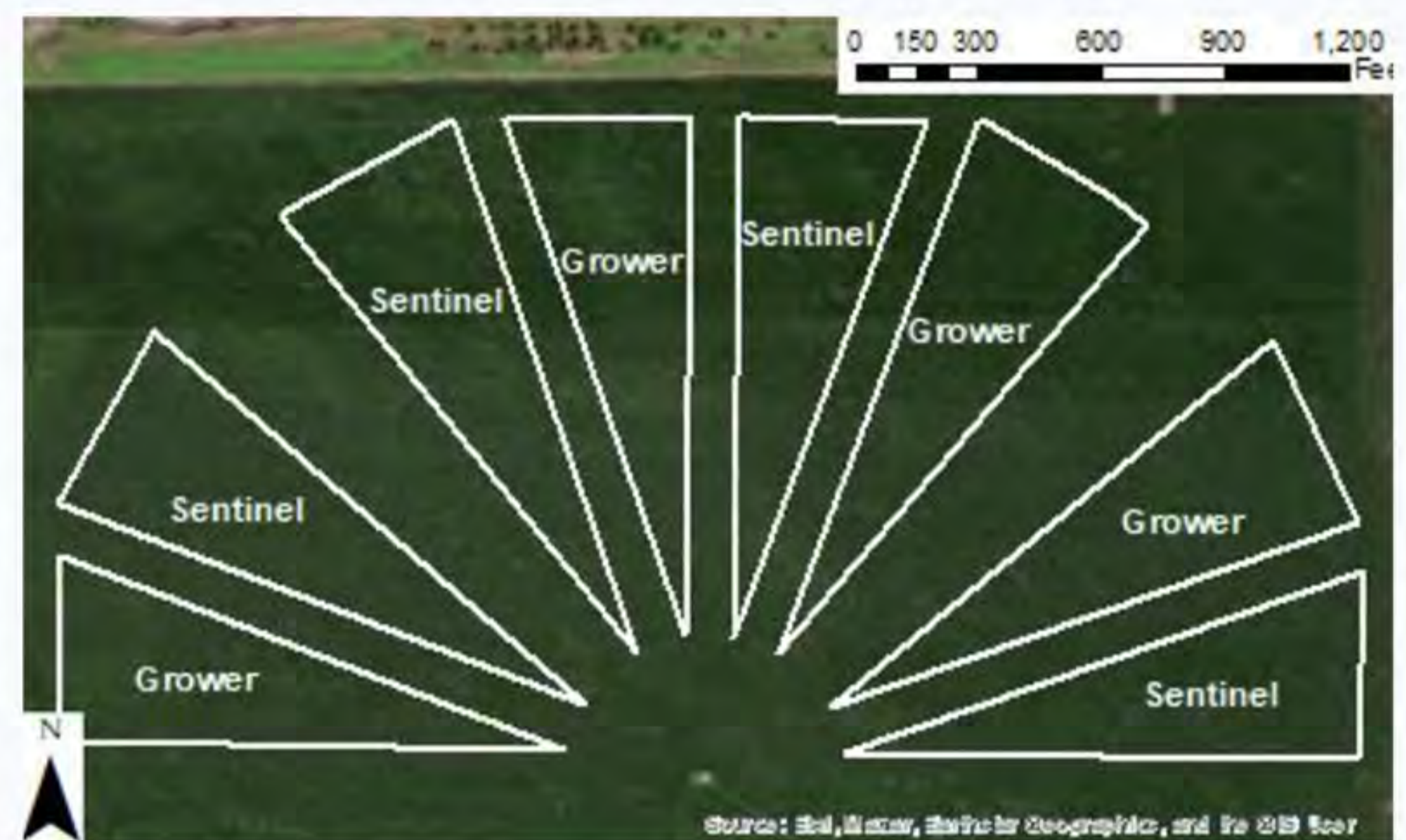
Effective nitrogen management planning is an important task for producers that often come with uncertainty of when, where and how much. The Lower Platte North Natural Resources District (LPNNRD) is collaborating with producers across the district to reduce Nitrogen usage to improve soil health and protect water quality.

For the past three years, producer demonstration fields have been a part of a research project using satellite imagery to identify what sections of the field require different amounts of nitrogen. Part of the research is being supported by a USDA-NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant for On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials. The project uses sensors and imagery to detect and respond to the nitrogen needs of corn throughout the growing season. Nitrogen is then applied precisely using variable-rate pumps. Additionally, soil samples were collected at 24 inches depth following the 2023 harvest to analyze the soil's nitrogen levels.

From a grower's perspective, local producer Joe Birkel who has been involved with the project commented, "there is a growing array of new technologies on the horizon that can better read crops and monitor nitrogen needs

throughout the growing season. This provides growers with the opportunity to incorporate these advancements and make more accurate predictions about their crops' in-season needs." By participating in this emerging technology, Birkel hopes to encourage more growers to embrace these tools. These innovations will allow for real-time monitoring of nitrogen levels, enabling growers to detect their crops' nitrogen requirements during the season, rather than relying solely on soil samples and applying a fixed amount of nitrogen. Additionally, LPNNRD and other NRD's across the state can be provided with valuable information to assist in working with producers to achieve water quality and soil health for future generations.

If you are interested in participating in the producer trials or have questions about this program, please contact the LPNNRD at 402-443-4675 for more information.



Source: 2023 Nebraska On-Farm Research Network Results of irrigated cornfield.

## Nitrogen Certification & Water Management Classes for 2025

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](http://lpnnrd.org) or call the NRD at 402-443-4675.

Date	Time	Location
February 6	1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.	ENREEC, 1071 County Road G, Ithaca
February 13	10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.	Lindsay Community Center, 121 Pine Street, Lindsay
February 18	6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.	Dodge County Nebraska Extension Office, 1206 W 23rd Street, Fremont
March 18	7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.	ENREEC, 1071 County Road G, Ithaca



# Annual Report

2024

## New Faces Join LPNNRD

**Jon Speichinger** has recently been named Recreation Supervisor for the Lower Platte North NRD.

Jon, a Malmo native, started in March as an Operation and Maintenance Technician. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in Horticulture from the University of Nebraska - Lincoln, Jon was the Park's Supervisor for the City of Ralston, NE for 16 years.



Jon Speichinger

**Jacob Stover** began working as the district's new Water Resources Specialist in March. Jacob

graduated from the University of Nebraska - Lincoln with a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Engineering and an emphasis in Soil and Water Resources.

Jacob and his wife, Savannah, reside on a farm near Waterloo. They enjoy hiking, gardening, morel mushroom hunting, producing maple syrup, and being heavily involved in their Church.



Jacob Stover

**Brandon Beethe** started his role as the GIS/Grants Coordinator in August. Brandon has worked

in various natural resources roles for more than 10 years from the Nemaha NRD to the Upper Elkhorn NRD as well as with the Department of Natural Resources, Game and Parks Commission, and the Department of Environment and Energy. Brandon enjoys spending his free time exploring National Parks, and taking landscape and wildlife photos.



Brandon Beethe

## FISCAL YEAR 2024 - IN BRIEF

### SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION

In partnership with the Nebraska Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, the NRD's Soil and Water Conservation Program continued to provide cost-share funds to landowners to construct terraces, waterways, tree planting and a variety of other conservation practices. The NRD allocated \$65,653 for conservation work under the NeDNR Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Program for FY2024. The NRD also utilized local funding for special projects, grade stabilization structures, and more. Grant funds and local funds were also utilized in partnership with the Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group for a number of special projects such as grade stabilization structures 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 soil and water sampling across the district to help in the management of contaminants in groundwater. Measuring water levels along with real-time equipment on monitoring wells assist 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 nitrogen management areas. The NRD continues progress on updating its Groundwater Management Plan with current data and information.

### RURAL WATER SYSTEMS

The NRD's rural water systems - one connecting Bruno and David City and the other connecting Colon and Wahoo - finished their 18th year of operation in FY2024, providing Bruno and Colon residents with a stable water service with safe, clean drinking water. Along with dealing with aging infrastructure, the big challenge is keeping the utility service economically feasible for both customer and utility. The rural water district upgraded their meter reading hardware and billing software to better help with overall efficiency. Additionally, the NRD has been in contact with representatives from another village about potentially connecting to either the Colon or Bruno RWD and are working through the preliminary feasibility analysis.

### TREE PLANTING

The NRD's tree planting program is one of the most visible and popular programs. 16,875 trees were ordered last year, with 9,886 of those planted by the district. The NRD also donated 925 trees for educational events throughout the district. Since 1972, more than 949,325 trees have been planted through this program.

# FY2024 – IN BRIEF

continued

# Annual Report

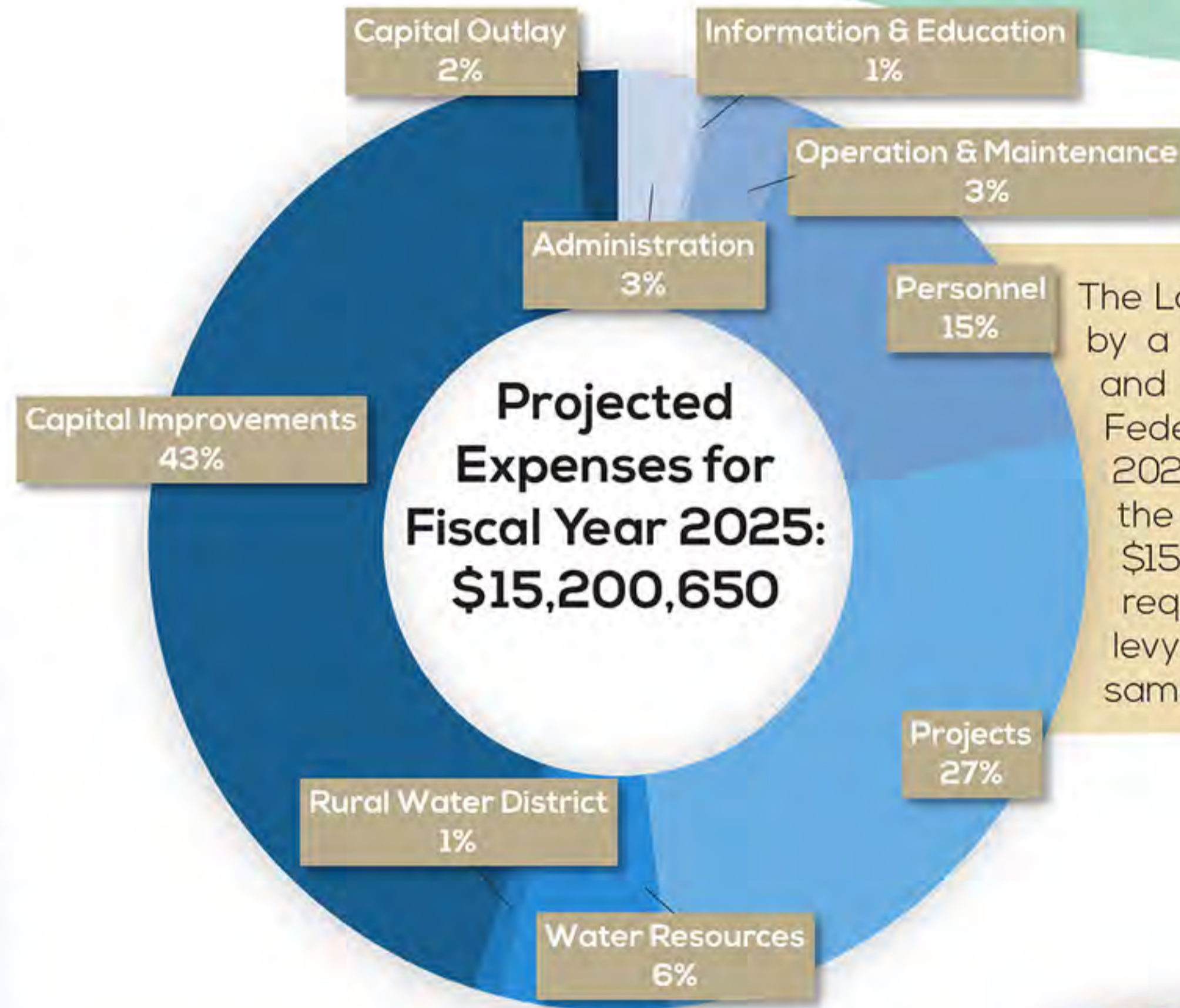
## 2024

### EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The NRD offers a variety of hands-on activities, classroom presentations, field trip opportunities, and more for students to learn about the environment and natural resources. Over 3,504 youth, from preschool to college-level age and nearly 326 adults have participated in educational activities and programs during FY2024. Activities included classroom presentations, the annual Spring Conservation Sensation, outdoor activities, night events, land judging competitions, monthly ongoing presentations, and more.

### RECREATION ACTIVITIES

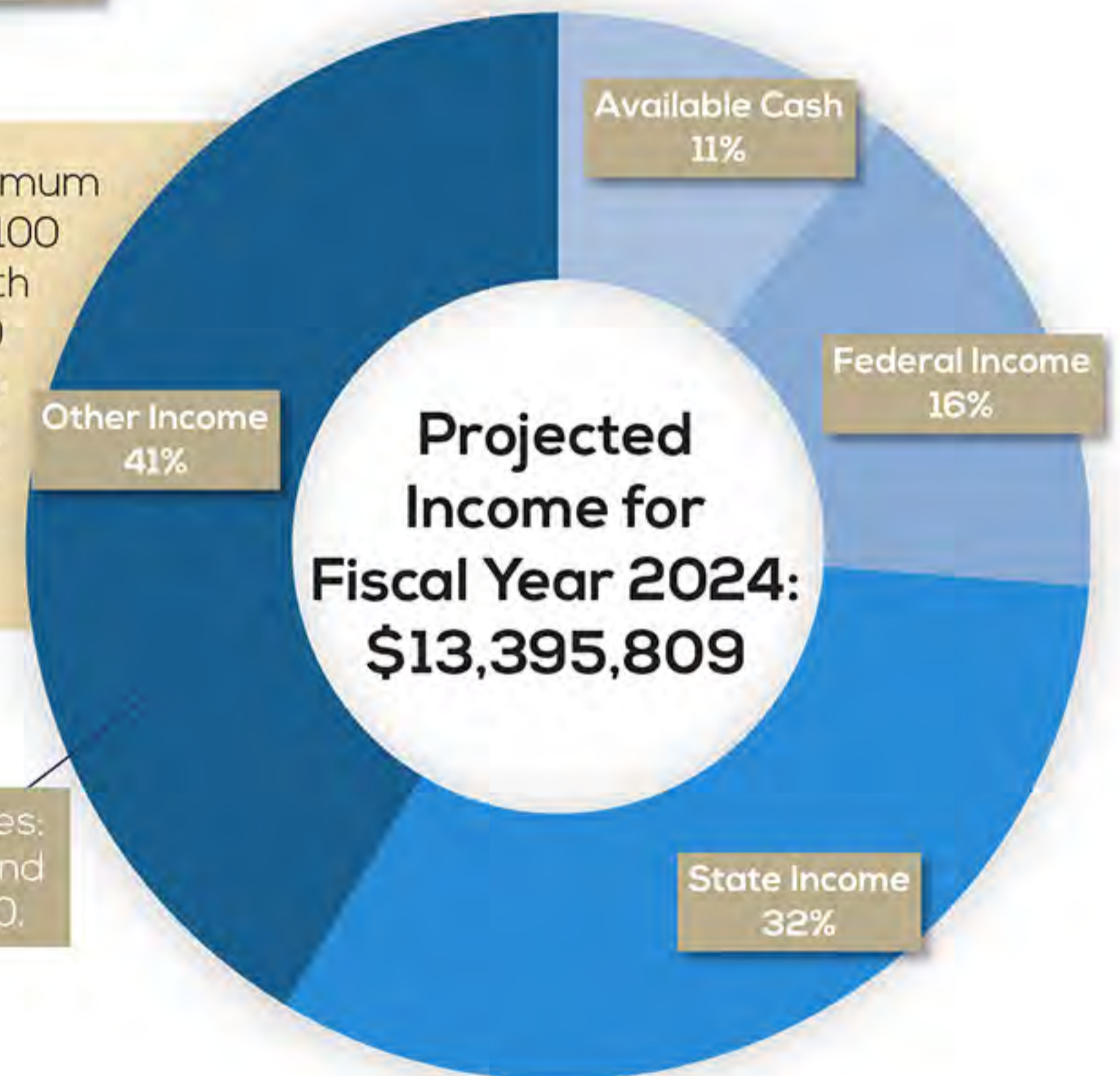
Czechland and Homestead Lakes continued with a similar amount of use during FY2024. At Czechland Lake, the District provides 11 RV pads with electricity and 3 pads without electricity. Nine of the 11 pads have 50/30 amp service available. The Nebraska Game & Parks Fishery Division stocked Czechland with Yellow Perch and Walleye in 2024. Czechland and Lake Wanahoo have incorporated a new pay app called "Set Your Sites" if you rather not pay by check or cash. 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. The property provides a wonderful habitat for youth mentor hunting administered through Nebraska Game and Parks' PATH program (Passing Along the Heritage). A third deer blind was set up by the Big Game Conservation Association in 2024 with assistance from the NRD.



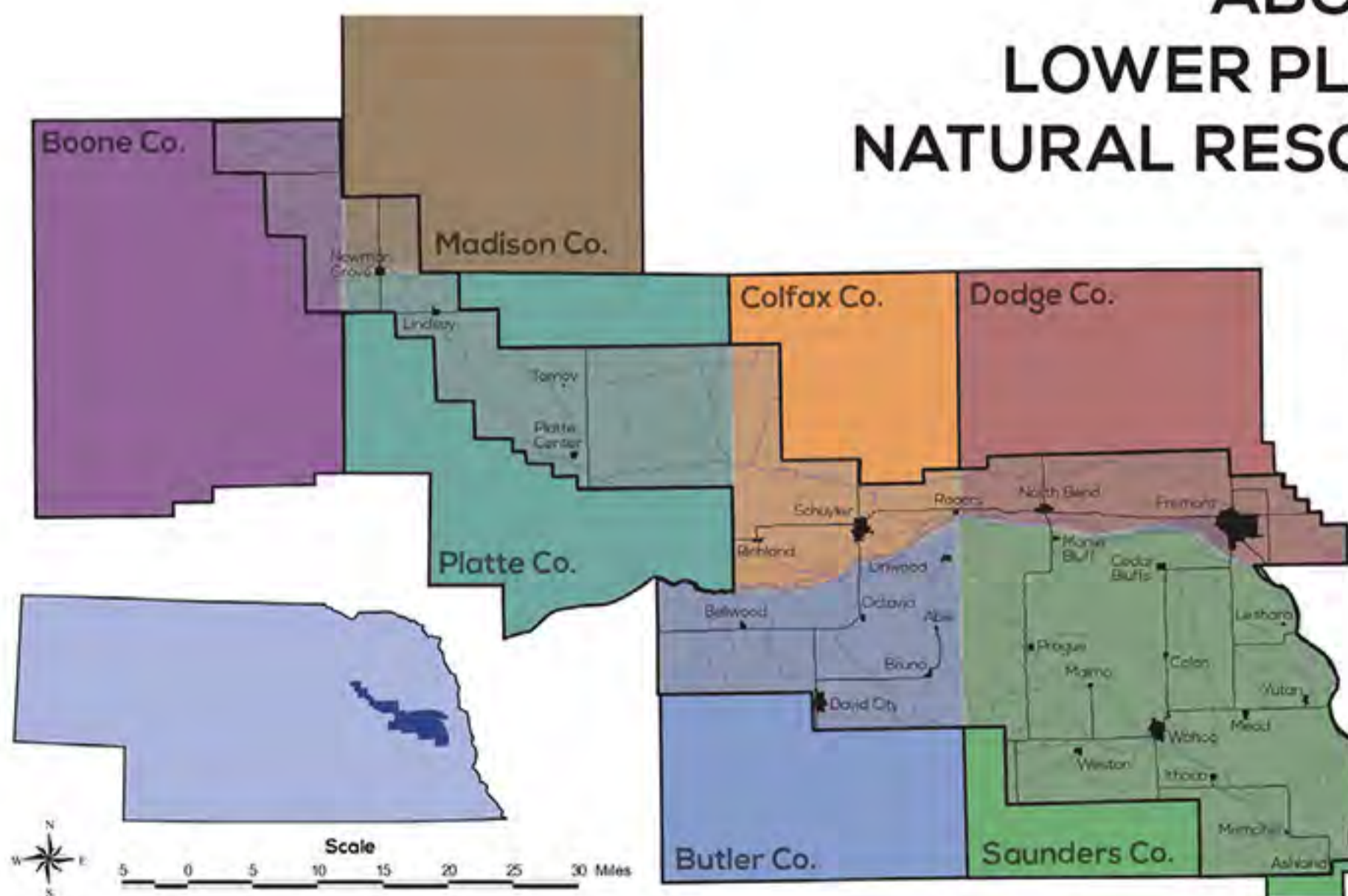
The Lower Platte North NRD is funded by a combination of property taxes and grants from local, State and Federal sources. For fiscal year 2024 (July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025), the district's projected budget is \$15,200,650 of which \$3,480,715 is required from the district's local tax levy. FY25 asking has been the exact same for 9 years.

State statute allows NRDs a maximum property tax rate of 5.5 cents per \$100 of valuation. The Lower Platte North tax levy is 0.025767 cents per \$100 valuation for FY24, which equates to approximately \$38.65 in property tax for a \$150,000 home. An owner of farm land valued at \$7,000 per acre will pay \$1.79/acre.

Other Income section includes: Local Income of \$1,244,250 and Rural Water Income of \$148,000.



### 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.