

NRD's Celebrate 35 years of State Service

In July 1972, the state of Nebraska established the concept of 23 Natural Resources Districts to consolidate 154 special purpose districts for a more efficient method of local government. Soil and water conservation districts, watershed districts, irrigation and drainage districts and sanitary districts were combined, not without controversy, into today's NRD's. 35 years later, NRDs have become a strong force of natural resources management at the local level. Like the Unicameral legislative system in Nebraska is unique in this country so are the Natural Resources Districts, no other state has them.

Originally called the Upper Missouri River Tributary NRD, the name was changed to Lewis & Clark NRD by the original board of directors to better reflect the location and historical importance of the area. The boundaries of all 23 districts were set up to reflect the hydrology of the streams and rivers in the state because of their related resource issues. The Lewis & Clark NRD was one of the smallest districts created with 956,300 acres and a population of, at last census, 16,377, and includes the eastern half of Knox County and the northern $\frac{3}{4}$ of Cedar and Dixon County with the community of Hartington selected to be the headquarters community.



The mission of the NRD includes soil and water conservation, water supply, flood control, erosion prevention and groundwater management. Decisions are made by eleven locally elected board of directors who serve to represent their sub-districts. The current directors are; Jack Fuchtman, Danny Schaefer, Marcel Kramer, Mary Ann Wortmann, Gary Howey, Curtis Armstrong, Dan Kollars, Bill Christensen, Mark Fehringer, Leroy Hoelsing and Ron Wortmann. The NRD office has a staff of three people; General Manager Tom Moser, Administrative Secretary Marilyn Schumacher and Resource Technician Terry Julesgard. They work closely with the federal agency of Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) which provides technical guidance on conservation programs. The district also provides clerical support to the three county offices in the district with NRCS Field Office Clerks; Jeanne Koenig, Knox County, Diane Wieseler Cedar County and Barb Meyers Dixon County.

Projects and programs of the Lewis & Clark NRD have facilitated grand benefits to the tax payers in the district over the past 35 years. In partnership with other agencies, especially the NRCS, the NRD provides the following services through federal, state and local coordination:



Cedar-Knox Rural Water Project; Started in 1981 the project provides over 100 million gallons per year of soft quality drinking water to farms and communities. The project in 2007 now serves Crofton, Fordyce, St. Helena and Obert along with 753 rural users. At a value of nearly 7 million dollars, the system is guided by an advisory committee of users and four

employees; Project Manager Gene Schroeder, Field Technician Galen Jueden, Water Plant Operator Gary Eckmann and Bookkeeper Marla Wortmann.

Aowa Creek Watershed; This Dixon County flood and erosion control project features 50 dams built to protect the Newcastle and Ponca areas and also provide recreation opportunities. Total cost for land rights and construction upon completion totaled over 8.8 million dollars. The district also maintains these structures.

Conservation Cost-Share; Incentive programs to encourage conservation practices including dams, terraces, grass seeding, tree planting and planned grazing systems on individual farms have totaled 3.8 million dollars from state and local funding.

Community Assistance Program; The program provides financial aide to the communities in the NRD which need conservation practices such as tree planting, outdoor classrooms, rural fire hydrants protection or other qualifying project. Eight communities have utilized the program.

Groundwater Management; The NRD has approximately 503,540 acres of cropland with 20% or 192,000 acres irrigated. Monitoring of groundwater quantity shows static water levels in the district have remained stable and in some areas have increased even with the increasing number of irrigated acres. With bi-annual monitoring, the district is continually watching for changes in static water level which may indicate signs of decline. District concerns in the Creighton area are groundwater quality. This has lead to studies, regulations and programs to reduce the nitrate nitrogen levels in the groundwater of the area. Almost \$300,000 has been spent on the Deep Soil Sampling program alone. The NRD also provides other programs to improve nitrogen management and application.

Missouri River Bank Protection; The NRD served as local sponsor for 2.6 million dollars of river bank protection at 5 sites along the Missouri River in the late 70's and 80's. Currently the district remains involved in the management advisory capacity to federal agencies which control river activities.

Tree Planting and Conservation Mulch; Annually, the district provides services necessary to install more trees to benefit farm, livestock, fields and wildlife. The NRD has sold 1,580,500 trees and provided over 450 miles of conservation mulch to residents in the three county area.

Sealed Well Abandonment Program; Old and unused wells present a risk to the groundwater and landowners, and are illegal. The NRD reimburses landowners 75% of the cost to seal these wells and over 550 wells have been properly abandoned so far within the district.

Nebraska Wild; Lewis & Clark NRD was the 1st NRD to offer this program in 1978 as Land for Wildlife. Currently the set aside program offers annual payments for leaving grass or woodland to wildlife and has paid out \$861,000. In 2007 there are nearly 2000 acres on 57 farms enrolled.



This is just some of the highlight of the past 35 years for your local NRD. The director and staff look forward for serving the residents of the Lewis & Clark NRD for generations to come.