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Lower Platte North Natural Resources District
Summer 2022

Natural Resources Districts Reflect on 50 Years

Adapted from an article provided by Megan Grimes, Public Relations Director for Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts.

Throughout 2022, Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) will celebrate 50 years of protecting lives, property and the future.

"In the past 50 years, NRDs have adapted while facing changes in technology, funding, legislation, agencies and society," said Jim Eschliman, Nebraska Association of Resources Districts president. "Nebraska's locally led conservation model has been a successful legacy because of our ability to adapt to the local needs of our communities." After the devastation of the Dust Bowl, special purpose districts were developed to solve local soil and water-related problems. But the puzzle of overlapping authorities and responsibilities provided confusion at best.

In 1969, Senator Maurice Kremer introduced legislative bill 1357 to combine Nebraska's 154 special purpose entities into 24 Natural Resources Districts by July 1972. In 1989, The Middle Missouri Tributaries NRD and the Papio NRD merged to become the Papio-Missouri River NRD resulting in today's 23 Natural Resources Districts.



NEBRASKA'S NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICTS

PROTECTING LIVES. PROTECTING PROPERTY. PROTECTING THE FUTURE.

Today, Nebraska's unique system of locally controlled, watershed-based conservation is widely admired throughout the nation. In recent years, at least 11 states have inquired about applying a similar system for natural resources management. Despite being the No. 1 irrigated state in the nation, Nebraska's statewide groundwater levels have been sustained at levels less than a foot below pre-irrigation development in the 1950s. In many areas, groundwater levels are higher.

"Many states are facing massive groundwater declines with almost depleted aquifers," Eschliman said. "NRDs work with irrigators to monitor water use, establish groundwater recharge projects, and implement water-wise programs. Depending on rainfall, Nebraska's *continued on page 3*

Land Improvement Project Along Shell Creek has helped with Streambank Stabilization and Unexpected Wildlife Benefit

Landowners in the Shell Creek Watershed are making land improvements to reduce soil erosion and boost the water quality. The Sprunks – Tom, Merline, and son Matthew – North of Columbus, have been working with the Lower Platte North Natural Resources District and the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to make improvements on



Toe wall structure. Standing in drainage area to Shell Creek, looking up towards meadow.

a wetland pasture on their property. The warm-season native grass area along the banks of Shell Creek was highly susceptible to erosion and the Sprunks were looking for a better way to preserve this area.

The grade stabilization project on the Sprunk family's land began with the design process in 2019. The drop spillway, also termed a steel toe wall structure, was created with pilon sheeting and half of a culvert in the middle of the wall to funnel the excess water from the wetland pasture. The structure was placed in an area along a slope that drains directly into the Shell Creek. The lower level *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
Bruce Williams, Morse Bluff.....	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
Ryan Chapman.....	Assistant Manager
Duke Dokulil	O&M Technician
Sean Elliott.....	Projects/Rural Water Manager
Noah Franzen.....	Water Resources Technician
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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Articles in this issue are written by Lower Platte North
Natural Resources District staff unless noted otherwise.



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Natural Resources District
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protecting lives | protecting property | protecting the future

From the Desk of the General Manager

Teams



Eric Gottschalk

November 18, 1995, 62-47...This date and score will remain with me like a painful scar till the day I die...More on this to come...

Prague Panther Football of the 1990's and early 2000's were among the best teams I have ever been associated. Year in and year out, those 6-man and 8-man teams proved to be as competitive and physical as any in the state and I had the privilege to help coach them. To this day the names Stanislav, Holtorf, Kuncil, Paseka, Havlovic, Rhynalds, Smaus, Vanek and countless others represent individuals willing to accept and execute whatever it took, not only be a successful team but amazingly successful young men. I have a special place in my heart for each one of them and while not nearly often enough, I have gotten to see many of them periodically over the years.

Being part of a team, any team, is something special anyone can benefit. Together, sharing responsibility, recognizing success and overcoming failures. Our Lower Platte North NRD team is a unique blend of talented professionals working together for the conservation, preservation, and restoration of our natural resources. Our team works shoulder to shoulder with landowners and operators in our district, doing what it takes to help them succeed while working to accomplish our shared conservation goals and objectives. If you're interested in teaming with us and our conservation efforts, please give us a call today.

... It was the Nebraska Class D-3 State Football Championship game between 11-0 Prague and 11-0 Wolbach and...we lost...we lost with tears, we lost with honor, we lost with dignity but most importantly, we lost as a team. I believe shared goals, shared burdens and shared suffering always lead to shared respect...I will never be able to express the amount of respect I have for the Prague teams of the past but I am confident each of those young men are better today, in part, because of the role each played on their particular team.

Eric Gottschalk, LPNNRD General Manager

Scholarships Awarded to Local Graduates

Congratulations to the graduating seniors who have participated in at least one year of the Shell Creek Watershed Monitoring Program and plan to pursue higher education relating to science or natural resources.

- Elyssa Cuevas, graduate of Newman Grove Public School, plans to attend Wayne State and major in Pre-Pharmacy.
- Isaac Potmesil, also a graduate from Newman Grove Public School, plans to attend Wayne State College and major in Science Education.
- Emma Jedlicka, graduate from Schuyler Central High School, plans to attend Northeast Community College and major in nursing.

The Lower Platte North NRD would like to congratulate Elyssa, Isaac and Emma. We wish them all the best of luck on their future endeavors!

50 Years, continued from page 1 ground-water levels often rise above pre-development levels.”

Across the state, NRDs construct projects, implement programs and offer a major source of assistance to landowners in conservation and natural resources management. When necessary, they enact regulations to protect our resources.

Shell Creek, continued from page 1 of the structure features a concrete pad and a large rock apron to help stabilize the soil. The area around the structure was reseeded with native grass near the time of the project completion. The flow of the excess water from the wetland pasture through the structure has already shown improvements in the short amount of time it has been completed.

The structure was unique to this particular site based on the size of the ditch and how the water flowed into the Shell Creek. With the lack of snow this winter, the Sprunk Family didn't realize this site would turn into a great benefit for wildlife to easily access water. The design plan included trees to be planted around the site, but the Sprunks felt this could introduce predators to some of the wildlife just passing through for a drink.

The Lower Platte North NRD received a grant in 2019 from the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy to use towards landowner conservation projects – such as this one – in the Shell Creek Watershed.

Construction with contractor, Jim Wemhoff, wrapped

While all NRDs share the 12 main responsibilities, each district sets its own priorities and develops its own programs to best serve and protect Nebraska's natural resources.

Eschliman noted that Nebraska's NRDs will continue to build upon, refine, and adapt as they look to the future.

up towards the end of 2021 with a few changes to the original design. Tom Sprunk said, “we really want to preserve this area for the future.” The Sprunk Family has already seen benefits from the project and is in the process of preparing another project on their property. Each project is created with a structure that is designed to fit the specific needs of the area.

Stream bank stabilization projects have shown great benefits along the Shell Creek to help improve the water quality, and sometimes unexpectedly lead to wildlife habitats as the Sprunks have seen. Landowners who have property along the 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.



Toe wall structure nearly completed looking towards the drainage area into Shell Creek.

Mountford Closing 36 Year Chapter With Nebraska's NRDs

After 36 years of natural resources conservation, the Lower Platte North NRD Assistant Manager, Tom Mountford, will retire in July.

Tom started his natural resources career working at the Little Blue Natural Resources District (NRD) in Davenport as the Programs and Information Coordinator in 1986. During his time in Davenport, he administered the State and local Soil and Water Conservation programs and a small dams program. Another large part of his duties included writing newspaper articles, organizing events for school students and adults, and speaking on a monthly television program.

After working at the Little Blue NRD, Tom was hired as the Assistant Manager for the

Nemaha NRD in Tecumseh. While under General Manager Paul Rohrbaugh, Tom was exposed to many diverse projects and programs related to flood reduction, soil and water conservation, water quality, water quantity, wildlife habitat, and watershed enhancement. His time there was enjoyable, and also prepared him for the opportunity to be hired as the Assistant Manager at the Lower Platte North NRD in March of 1994.

The conservation efforts from Tom at the Lower Platte North NRD have been momentous. He has provided leadership for the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy's 319 Program in multiple areas across the district to prevent soil erosion and improve water quality. Tom has also played a

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Tom Mountford (middle) discusses Shell Creek with Governor Pete Ricketts (left) and former Public Relations Director of the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts, Erika Hill (right), at the 2019 Shell Creek Celebration.

News Briefs

- Lower Platte North NRD's Director At Large and Board Chairman, Gene Ruzicka, resigns after 12 years. We commend him for his contributions and dedication to preserving Nebraska's natural resources.
- On May 4, the Lower Platte North NRD held the 31st Spring Conservation Sensation. 230 5th and 6th grader students from Logan View Elementary, St. Mary's Elementary (David City), East Butler Elementary (Brainard), and Wahoo Public Elementary attended the annual event to learn about natural resources.
- In June, the Lower Platte North NRD welcomed Ryan Chapman as the new Assistant Manager. His previous experience at the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy will be a great asset to the District.



Former Board Chairman, Gene Ruzicka, with current Board Chairman, Frank Pollard.



Groundwater Management

Creating a Water-Conscious Yard

As populations rise, new houses are being built daily, businesses are expanding, and the need for residential, industrial, and agricultural water usage increases.

With the continued drought in the Western United States, a recent news story discussed non-functional grass. While outdoor landscaping and a nice green lawn is something that many residents take pride in, have you considered how functional your landscaping is? Are you being conscious

about how much water you are using? Have you considered other landscaping options besides grass if water becomes scarce?

There are multiple ways to conserve water around your yard now!



Morning dew on grass

- **For new lawns or an improved lawn, choose a grass species that is best for the Great Plains region.** Choosing the proper grass species will lower the maintenance and watering costs. According to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Turfgrass Science Program, cool-season Kentucky bluegrass or tall fescue and warm-season buffalograss are good options.

- **Choose the right time to water.** Watering the lawn in the early morning hours is beneficial because of less evaporation and low wind speed. Whereas, watering the lawn in the evening causes the lawn to stay wet all night which encourages disease development in the roots.

- **In addition to choosing the right time to water, check sprinkler heads.** Make sure sprinklers aren't watering pavement to eliminate unnecessary water usage and the possibility of pollution runoff. Shut off sprinklers if it is raining

and let Mother Nature do the work.

- **Invest in a rain barrel.** The collected rainwater can be used to water outdoor and indoor plants. This can help you save water during the prime growing season, reduce rainwater runoff and prevent soil erosion depending on the placement of the rain barrel.

- **Add native plants to your yard.** This is a great way to create pollinator habitats, decrease landscaping maintenance and conserve water in your yard.

Grant Available for Domestic Well Owners Battling High Nitrates

The Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) will make available a grant for private well owners to obtain a reverse osmosis system if their domestic well tests positive for high nitrates (10+ parts per million). Grant applications open January 1, 2023 and close June 30, 2024. All systems must be installed by September 30, 2024, to be eligible for reimbursement.

Landowners must submit a water quality test, performed by the State Laboratory, dated after January 1, 2022. In addition, landowners must obtain a cost estimate from a licensed plumber for the cost of the installation of an American National Standards Institute certified reverse osmosis system. If your request is pre-approved by NDEE you will need to submit all required documentation to receive the rebate. The rebate will cover 100% of the device purchase and up to \$4000 for installation.

Water quality tests can be obtained from Department of Health and Human Services at <https://www.nebraska.gov/dhhs/water-test-kits/private.html>. LPNNRD staff are available to help through every step of the grant process, please call our office at (402) 443-4675 for assistance.

For complete program information, please visit <http://dee.ne.gov/Publications/pages/22-051> or contact NDEE at (402) 471-2186.

Mountford, continued from page 3 significant role in the conservation efforts of the Shell Creek Watershed. The implementation of conservation practices resulted in the presence of mussels and clams and led to the Shell Creek being officially de-listed for Atrazine from the Environmental Protection Agency's List of Impaired Waters in 2018.

Working closely with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on the local, state and federal levels, Tom has helped to secure funding for numerous conservation projects, including flood damage reduction and water quality structures, across the district. Tom also managed the hiring and evaluations of the NRD/NRCS clerks in the NRCS field

offices of Butler County, Colfax County, Dodge County and Saunders County.

As Tom was reflecting on his time at the NRDs, he said, "there have been countless rewarding projects and memories for sure, but what I have enjoyed the most has been working with and becoming friends with so many talented and dedicated people." Tom credits his family's strong support over the years, and stated his only regret is it has all seemed to have come and gone too fast. The Lower Platte NRD would like to commend Tom for his many accomplishments and 35 years of working towards conserving and preserving Nebraska's natural resources.