

## Range Management Tour - June 8

Join us on June 8<sup>th</sup> for a Range Management Tour hosted by the Central Platte NRD and the Central Platte Range Alliance.

The tour will include three sites in Gothenburg that have used tree cutting and prescribed fire as management and maintenance tools.

Following the tour, attendees will return to Mark Alberts farm for an evening catfish fry and social. Guest speakers will include a Range Management Specialist from Central Platte NRD and/or Oklahoma State University.



Cut and stuff practices increase fire intensity to creating longer flames that are needed to control larger trees, increasing the overall effectiveness of prescribed burns.

**Date:** Tuesday June 8, 2021 **Time:** 1:00 p.m.  
**Location:** Tour departs at Pizza Hut, 415 Platte River Road in Gothenburg, NE

**Interested in attending? Contact: David Carr (308) 385-6282 or carr@cpnrd.org RSVP by June 4<sup>th</sup>**

## NRDs to Host International Envirothon in July

High schoolers from across Nebraska – and a few pelicans – descended on Lake Wanahoo for the 29<sup>th</sup> annual Nebraska State Envirothon April 28. Ord High School took home the championship along with \$1,500 and will represent Nebraska at the National Conservation Foundation (NCF) Envirothon in July to compete for a top prize of \$15,000.

The international NCF-Envirothon will be hosted virtually by Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts and will include more than 40 teams from the U.S., Canada and China. Nebraska last hosted the national contest in 1996.

Envirothon is an environmental education program for high school students that combines classroom learning and outdoor activities that are designed to help students become environmentally-aware, action-oriented adults; but also exposes them to many exciting career opportunities. This year's competition was hosted at the Lower Platte North NRD's Lake Wanahoo near Wahoo.



Students work to identify a live snake during at the wildlife testing station during the State contest.

During the state competition, five-member teams were tested on their knowledge of aquatics, forestry, policy, range, soils and wildlife. They also prepared and delivered an oral presentation focusing on a the 2021 oral presentation theme *Water Resources Management: Local Control, Local Solutions*; which challenged teams to propose a solution on a complex problem before a panel of judges.

More than 75 teams competed in the regional contests between Feb. 3-5, and 14 teams qualified to participate at the state competition. The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD) Foundation awarded cash prizes to the top three winning teams at the state competition:

- First Place (\$1,500): Ord
- Second Place (\$1,000): Norris Team 2
- Third Place (\$500): Arthur County

Additional prizes were awarded to the top teams in each testing category: Aquatics: Norris Team 2; Forestry: Pender; Policy: 3-way tie between Arthur County, Norris Team 1 & St. Paul; Range: Ord; Soils: tie-Ord & St. Paul; Wildlife: Norris Team 2; Oral Presentation: Concordia

To learn more about the Nebraska Envirothon and find out how your high school can compete visit:  
[www.nrdnet.org/nebraska-envirothon](http://www.nrdnet.org/nebraska-envirothon).

## Important Dates

* January 1	Nitrogen Certification test due
* March 31	Crop Report forms due for Groundwater Management Program
* April 1-June 1	Nebraska Children's Groundwater Festival- Virtual Event
* April 15	CPNRD-Ron Bishop Memorial College Scholarship applications due
* June 1	Chemigation applications due
* Sept 1- March 1	Transfer applications for irrigated acres accepted
* September 15	Chemigation reinspections must be completed
* Nov 1 - April 1	Tree and weed barrier orders accepted

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Nebraska's NRDs: Protecting Lives | Protecting Property | Protecting Your Future

215 Kaufman Ave Grand Island NE (308) 385-6282 cpnrd.org

## Financial Incentives Offered Through Soil Carbon Project

Producers in the Central Platte NRD and Upper Big Blue NRD, the Nebraska Soil Carbon Project is ready to enroll your acres!



This project will provide greater financial incentives to producers in Nebraska who utilize key conservation practices. Farmers can adopt soil health practices including cover crops, no-till and diverse crop rotations - that store carbon in the soil.

The stored carbon can be utilized by private companies to help reach their goals around sustainability. Depending on the practices implemented, producers will earn up to \$45 per acre each year.

The goal is to have 100 producers install the soil health practices on 100,000 acres of farmland over the next five years.

For this first year, producers will enroll between May 1 - June 15. The expectation is to enroll 20,000 in the first year across the two NRDs.

The Project is a collaboration between the two NRDs, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), The Nature Conservancy, Ecosystem Services Market Consortium, Cargill, Target and McDonald's. The Nature Conservancy manages this new program and is investing \$8 million for farmers to implement the practices.

Increasing cropland soil carbon has multiple benefits for the producer and the environment including more stable yields, improved nutrient availability and water holding capacity, and climate stabilization. Now is a great time to invest in soil health practices that increase soil carbon, as markets are emerging to link soil carbon buyers and suppliers. Private companies are looking for ways to decrease their carbon footprint and Nebraska's growers can provide these benefits by improving their farming operations as they implement soil health practices.

It's a win-win situation, giving companies a way to meet part of their greenhouse gas reduction goals while supporting farmers who are implementing conservation practices.

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## Nebraska Soil Carbon Project *(continued)*

The payments producers will receive are tied to practices implemented on the acres, not the carbon outcomes, to reduce the amount of risk involved for producers. Colorado State University is providing scientific support through this project; which is estimated to store the equivalent of 150,000 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> while enhancing Nebraska's soil and linking producers to new carbon payment opportunities.



Beyond the financial incentives and soil health improvements, involved producers will have the opportunity to:

- Attend training events with local and national leaders in soil health, agronomy and related topics.
- Receive a report on the new practice's soil carbon and water quality outcomes. Those that are interested in going deeper may also opt-in for a detailed report on the practice's financial return on investment.
- Year-round assistance from the NRDs, NRCS, and The Nature Conservancy staff who will provide support for paperwork/application processes and soil health practice management.
- Share conservation stories with a larger audience via field days, media spots, and short videos relating to the project.

There is no gross income or acre enrollment cap for NRCS payments, but producers are encouraged to enroll a reasonable number of acres given their operation size and soil health experience. More acres can be submitted for enrollment in subsequent years of the program. Payments are for new soil health acres only; however, a measurable improvement of an existing practice could count (such as moving from strip till to no-till) if it aligns with the NRCS's standards.

*If you miss the June 15<sup>th</sup> enrollment date for year one of the program, you can still apply for the following year.* Applications will be considered on an ongoing basis. Producers will have the opportunity to be admitted to year two of the program starting November of 2021.

### Interested in adding conservation practices to your acres?

Visit <https://www.cpnrd.org/land-management/soil-health> to get started today or contact: **Courtney Widup (308) 385-6282** or [widup@cpnrd.org](mailto:widup@cpnrd.org)

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## Staff Spotlight: Jesse Mintken



Jesse Mintken, Assistant Manager, (left) visits with Director Ed Kyes at the Orchard Alfalfa Canal Rededication Tour in 2015. Mintken supervised the rehabilitation of the Dawson County irrigation canals.

Jesse Mintken, CPNRD assistant manager, started his career at the Upper Niobrara White NRD in Chadron, NE in 2006. In 2007, he was hired as resource technician for the Central Platte NRD, and later moved on to GIS coordinator and project manager positions. In 2014, he became the assistant manager under Lyndon Vogt.

Jesse assists the general manager with day-to-day responsibilities, overseeing staff and providing stable leadership to the district. He manages existing flood risk reduction and drainage improvement projects and maintains a close relationship with the district's partners at the local, state, and federal levels. Jesse also oversees technology and planning efforts for the district as well as providing construction oversight for new projects.

Jesse received his Bachelor of Science Degree, in Environmental Science and a Minor in Geology from Chadron State College in 2002.

## Chemigation Permits Due June 1<sup>st</sup>

Irrigators - be sure to send your Chemigation permits in by June 1<sup>st</sup>. Chemigation is the practice of applying agrichemicals to cropland using an irrigation system to distribute both the water and chemical. It's an efficient and economical means of applying fertilizer and pesticides that are necessary for crops, saving up to 40% or more in chemical application costs. Timely fertilizer applications can also increase crop yields.



The Nebraska Chemigation Act requires a person directly involved in applying these agrichemicals to be certified by the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) through training and passing a written exam. The goal of the Nebraska Chemigation Act is to protect the groundwater and surface waters of Nebraska from contamination by fertilizers or pesticides. Irrigators must also purchase one of the following permits from the Central Platte NRD each year:

**\*Renewal Permit** \$20 annual renewal fee.

**\*New Permit** \$60 for new irrigation systems. Applications received after June 1st must comply with new permits requirements, including an inspection before the permit is issued.

**\*Special Permit** \$60 for systems where the NRD determines by inspection that a chemigation system does not need all of the safety equipment specified in the regulations and the NDEE concurs.

**\*Emergency Permit** \$500 for when chemigating is necessary on short notice.

The Nebraska Chemigation Act protects groundwater and surface water by providing legal requirements for the use and application of these chemicals. New chemigation systems must be inspected by Central Platte NRD prior to any chemical applications. Once a system has been inspected and a renewal application is sent in, the system needs to be inspected every three years. If changes are made to any part of the system, for example, a new pump or a new pivot, reinspection of that system is also required.

Although in-person training sessions were limited this year due to COVID-19 restrictions, the online training program covers the information presented at the in-person training events and uses the same test. It consists of a series of modules which contain text, video clips and calculators to provide chemigators with the necessary information to employ chemigation in an effective, efficient and environmentally safe manner while safeguarding farm workers involved in chemigation. Online training is available at: <https://water.unl.edu/article/agricultural-irrigation/chemigation>.

For more information, contact Tricia Dudley at the Central Platte NRD (308) 385-6282 or visit [cpnrd.org](http://cpnrd.org).

## College Scholarship Awardees

Congratulations to the following recipients of the CPNRD-Ron Bishop Memorial College Scholarship Program for the 2021-2022 academic year: Joshua Wiese, Shelton; Sydnie Reeves, Archer; Kelton Baxter, Doniphan and Kendrick Baxter, Doniphan.

Applicants must be a college junior, college senior, or 5<sup>th</sup>+ year student seeking a natural resources degree. Up to five scholarships are awarded annually at \$1,000 per student. Return applicants and recipients are eligible to apply. Applicants or their parent(s) must reside within CPNRD.

## Wetlands Provide Needed Habitat for Whooping Cranes

Most people associate the Central Platte NRD with surface and groundwater management, but another important aspect of CPNRD's mission is to help conserve and protect wildlife habitat. In recent years, we have partnered with the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture (RWBJV) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to help fund conservation easement positions and conservation projects in our district and across the state. Some of those projects include prescribed fires, wetland restoration projects, communication and outreach.



*Whooping Cranes at Atlanta Marsh National Wildlife Management Area south of Holdrege, NE this spring. Photo taken by David Baasch - Crane Trust*

Recently, the combined efforts of all three organizations payed off in a big way, as four Whooping Cranes stopped over at the Trumbull Basin wetland in Adams County during their migration north. The Whooping Crane is one of the world's most endangered species with just over 800 of these birds left on earth.

Trumbull Basin, the wetland where these rare birds called home for several days, is one of the largest privately owned wetlands in the Rainwater Basin (RWB). The complexity of wetlands that make up the RWB play a critical role for migrating waterfowl. The RWB area is the narrowest portion of the migration route known as the Central Flyway. In the spring, birds that have wintered on the Gulf Coast and across Texas and Mexico funnel into this 150-mile-wide area over central Nebraska that contain thousands of playa wetlands. The wetlands within the RWB provide habitat for migrating birds, but despite being critical to many wildlife species, the RWB wetlands have been greatly reduced from their historic numbers.

With help and funding from all three organizations, the Trumbull Basin wetland was restored through the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). The restoration was an incremental process with different tracts being enrolled at different times from 1999 to 2006. It required the removal of 66,000 cubic yards of sediment and nearly 1.5 miles of berms surrounding the wetland. A large concentration pit was also filled. The wetland now functions as originally developed; allowing water to flow back into the wetland where it provides habitat, prevents flooding, improves water quality and recharges the groundwater. Additional steps taken to maintain this site as ideal wetland habitat include grazing, prescribed burns, herbicide treatments and tree cutting.



Andy Bishop  
RWBJV Coordinator

RWBJV Coordinator Andy Bishop said, "Seeing Whooping Cranes use one of the wetlands that a group of Nebraska landowners worked so hard to restore is extremely exciting and also really gratifying."

Most Whooping Crane mortality (60-80%) occurs during migration. With so few Whooping Cranes in existence, the species cannot afford to lose a single bird, therefore, strategic conservation of habitat along the Whooping Crane's migration corridor is essential to the survival of the species. The birds using Trumbull Basin represent nearly 1% of the world's population.

"This project has been great for an extremely endangered bird and has also provided habitat for Nebraska's wildlife and helped ensure Nebraskans have clean and abundant drinking water," Bishop said.

The CPNRD, NRCS, and RWBJV continue to partner together in new and creative ways to help ensure that our mission of protecting wildlife and their habitat continues for years to come.



**What is WRP?** The Wetland Reserve Program is a voluntary conservation program available through NRCS that helps landowners who want to protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property. More than 11,000 of America's private landowners have voluntarily enrolled over 2.3 million acres into the WRP in the last 20 years.

**Interested in signing up? Contact your local NRCS office or visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps)**