



# Insight



Spring 2020

## COVID-19 & NNRD Parks

Covid-19 has and will have a major impact to NRD parks this year. We have already seen large crowds this spring and expect that to continue. While many other areas were closed to camping, the District decided to keep campgrounds open. Our parks saw record use in April and May which created some challenges for staff. To protect the public and staff, gathering areas such as picnic shelters and playgrounds are closed. All the concrete vault restrooms were opened on May 8. They will be cleaned on the usual Monday and Friday schedule. No additional cleaning or disinfecting will be done between those times. The NRD is following directives from the Governor's office and watching the spread of the virus to make decisions moving forward. Decisions on facilities are made on a week-to-week basis, so the public should check our website and Facebook page for the latest information. As we move into summer, it is hoped that more facilities can be opened without compromising the safety of the public and NRD staff. Here are some additional things to keep in mind when using parks:



**Playground equipment at Kirkman's Cove closed until further notice.**

- Limit your groups, boats, and camping parties to under 10 persons.
- Don't invite outside guests to your campsites.
- Use the sanitary facilities in your RV versus the public restrooms.
- When tenting, fishing, hiking, and doing other activities, spread out well beyond the 6-foot social distancing rule.

The NRD is making every effort to provide the public access to our parks. We hope if everyone follows the rules and takes the necessary precautions, everyone can enjoy the parks in a safe environment. If rules are not followed and public safety is being compromised, the only option the NRD has is to close facilities or entire parks.

## Positive Points Despite the Pandemic

- Even though both the State and National Envirothon competitions were cancelled, the Norris High School Envirothon team had competed in their regional contest. Their score was the third highest score of all regional competitors across the state this spring.
- Thirteen of the 15 schools that requested trees for third graders this spring were able to find a way to distribute the trees despite schools dismissing in mid-March. Teachers, volunteers, and administrators made sure 470 trees got into the hands of youth to plant at their homes.
- Though tree sales were down again this year, NRD crews successfully planted 7,000 trees this spring; another 4,000 trees were safely picked up by customers who would plant their own.

## Office Operations during COVID

Like many places of business, the sudden approach of COVID-19 forced changes to the daily operation of the NRD. The District office was closed to the public, except for the front entry area which is open for deliveries and drop-offs. Everyone on staff is reporting to work as usual; however, every effort is made to adhere to the social distancing requirements. We have also continued with most field work activities except for limiting contact with the public when possible. For example, we opted not to measure domestic wells as part of our

normal spring water level measuring process. Persons needing to meet with NRD staff are encouraged to do so on the phone; however, appointments can be scheduled if necessary. It is expected that we will continue with the present limitations into the near future. A plan of operations has been developed in the event the virus threat increases in the area. The NRD website and Facebook should be utilized to get the latest information on NRD office and staff procedures.

Nebraska Governor Ricketts has allowed

some exceptions to the open meetings law to allow for the use of telecommunications to hold NRD board meetings. The April meeting was held with an abbreviated agenda via teleconference, and May's meeting was held via the Zoom platform. It is hoped that regular board meetings can resume as early as June, but it is dependent on how many people are allowed at public gatherings. Information regarding future meetings and public access to telecommunication meetings can be found on the District's website.

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# Water Department News

The District's updated Groundwater Quantity Rules and Regulations became effective March 13, 2020. Here is a summary of some of the changes that were made:

- Testholes drilled as part of the well permit requirement are to be drilled to bedrock, when possible, and indicated on geologic log submitted
- Construction of an approved well must be within 50 feet of the testhole location
- Well permit applications must be accompanied with a detailed site plan and/

or map from a qualified irrigation specialist or sales technician depicting the number and location of acres of land to be irrigated

- Well permit applicants will have two years from the date the well construction is completed to develop the acres indicated on the detailed site plan
- Active well permits will be included in the well density portion of the well permit ranking system
- A well permit applicant is required to obtain a written agreement with any adjacent

landowners that are shown to have acres irrigated on the irrigation site plan

- The minimum thickness of principle aquifer shown on a testhole geologic log must be greater than or equal to 10 feet, and the minimum transmissivity calculated must be greater than or equal to 10,000 gallons per day per foot
- Approved well permit applications have a one-year expiration date – if a permit expires there is now a 90-day waiting period before reapplication can be made



Construction continues on the concrete work at UBN 25-C.

## Watershed Construction Continues

Dixon Construction has continued work on the Upper Big Nemaha 25-C project near Adams over the past several months. The work involves installation of a large concrete chute through the middle of the dam in an effort to provide increased flood protection. Cost of this federal rehabilitation project is \$2.5 million with the NRD providing 35% of the cost. Work is about 50% complete with a December, 2020, deadline.

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## Monitoring Well Project

One of the key components of the NRD's groundwater management program is measuring and documenting water levels in the different aquifers that serve the District. Most of the measurements are done in the spring and the fall by hand. This process has provided a snapshot of what happens to groundwater levels over time but fails to provide a day-to-day record of what happens particularly during irrigation periods in the summer. In 2018 the NRD received a \$169,000 grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust to help install 18 dedicated monitoring wells with transducers which will continually record groundwater level changes. Dedicated monitoring wells

were installed in several key aquifers around the NRD. Changes in groundwater levels can be recorded on daily or even hourly intervals. Installation of the wells and transducers has been completed, and they have started collecting data. NRD staff will download data collected on a periodic basis. It is hoped that eventually telemetry can be incorporated into the system allowing some or all the wells to be read directly from the NRD office.

Several entities assisted in getting this project completed including Eastern Nebraska Water Resources Assessment Project (ENWRA), Rieschick Well Drilling, Auburn Board of Public Works, and LBG Consulting.

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## Chemigation Inspections amid COVID-19

- Maintain social distancing at all time (6' rule, no physical contact)
- Carry a mask in case the landowner/tenant or NRD staff person does not feel comfortable with social distancing alone
- Do not allow the landowner/tenant in NRD vehicle or on ATV/UTV
- Meet landowner/tenant at the inspection site

- Wear latex gloves when handling any commonly touched equipment (check valve, vacuum relief valve, hose, etc.)
- If the landowner/tenant or NRD staff is not feeling well, reschedule the inspection
- Chemigation inspection applications are due by June 1 for renewals

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## Steamboat Trace Remains Closed

Unfortunately, it appears the Steamboat Trace trail will remain closed in 2020. Because of damage to the trail and levees that protect the trail, it is not possible to open a usable portion of the 22-mile long trail. Sections of the trail are washed out, lost their surface, or are subject to regular flooding. FEMA has approved funding to clean up and repair the trail; however, no schedule has been set for repair. A considerable amount of debris was

left on the trail after the 2019 flood, and much of that has been cleaned up. It is hoped that the balance of the cleanup work can be completed by summer. To reopen the trail, a segment must be usable that has access on both ends (i.e., Peru to Brownville). Currently there is not a stretch of trail available that meets the access criteria. Until repairs can be made, the public is asked to stay off the trail due to the many hazards.

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# Park Rules Still Apply

Every year several questions come up regarding park rules, and we also get many suggestions on potential improvements. The following are some of the more common questions and suggestions.

## **Are Game and Parks vehicle permits valid at the NRD parks and vice versa?**

No for both.

## **How long can we camp in the NRD parks?**

There is a 14-day limit at all NRD parks. Campers must leave the park after the 14-day limit is reached. You cannot simply move to a different location in the same park. Our parks are designed for recreational camping, and persons needing a place to stay longer than that should opt for private RV parks that are designed for extended stays.

## **Can I reserve a campsite?**

The Nemaha NRD does not take reservations, and everything is on a first-come, first-served basis. Most public use campgrounds that take reservations typically have both reserved and non-reserved areas available. Our campgrounds are too small to accommodate both, so we have opted not to offer reservations.

## **Can we save campsites for friends or neighbors?**

No; if a campsite is not occupied with a recreational vehicle, it is considered open even if camping fees have been paid. Signs, tents, lawn chairs, vehicles, trailers, etc., cannot be used to save a spot. This is one of the biggest complaints the NRD receives every year.

## **How many RVs are allowed on a camping pad?**

One RV per camping pad is allowed. Plugging in multiple RVs on electric sites could overload the system and trip circuit breakers that may impact several camping pads.

## **Does the NRD have dump stations in our parks?**

Unfortunately, no, this is something we have looked into in the past. Dump stations are practical if you have access to a sewage treatment system, but constructing a stand-alone station has space and design challenges.

## **Is alcohol allowed in the NRD parks?**

Alcohol is not allowed at the District's parks.

## **Are UTVs, ATVs and golf carts allowed in the parks.**

A motorized vehicle must be licensed to be driven in the parks. Electric wheelchairs and scooters used because of disabilities are allowed.

## **Do state fishing regulations apply at NRD recreation areas?**

Yes, and they are enforced by Game and Parks conservation officers.

We hope everybody has a chance to use and enjoy our parks. The NRD strives to provide the public with the best possible experience. Rules are posted at all the parks and on our website, so please take the time to read and follow them. District staff is present in the parks as much as possible during the recreation season. Unfortunately, since our 3 largest parks are more than 25 miles from the Tecumseh office, it is not possible to have staff on-site at all times. We depend on and appreciate users who follow the rules and use common sense when visiting the parks.

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# Duck Creek Sediment Basin

For the past several years, the NRD has been finalizing plans for the construction of a sediment basin above the Duck Creek Recreation Area on the main channel of Duck Creek. All the design, permitting, and land rights acquisition is nearing completion; and construction should begin in late summer. The project consists of a 500-foot-long earthen structure that will create a 6-acre basin. It is estimated that it will take 35 years to fill the basin with sediment. This will help extend quality and overall length of the recreation capacity of the Duck Creek reservoir. The sediment basin is located on private land, and there will be no public access. Construction

cost is estimated at \$350,000. Funding for the project is being provided by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service through the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program.

Historically, sedimentation is one of the biggest problems the NRD faces maintaining reservoirs for recreation in southeast Nebraska. Investing money upfront to extend the life of a reservoir is far more cost effective than waiting until a portion of the reservoir has already been lost to sedimentation. Construction is expected to take 2 to 3 months, and during construction the water level in Duck Creek reservoir may have to be lowered up to 4 feet.

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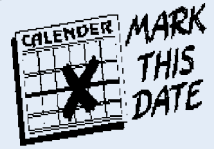
# Changes in Health Alerts for Blue-Green Algae

District staff regularly monitors blue-green algae in our recreation lakes. This year weekly sampling will begin on May 18 and continue through September. Samples are collected on Mondays by NRD staff and sent to the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy lab for analysis. Results are usually known by Friday of that week. Prior to 2020, if the blue-green algae level exceeded 20 milligrams per liter, that lake was placed on health alert until the algae level fell below 20 milligrams/liter for two consecutive weeks. Beginning in 2020, EPA has decreased the health alert level to 8 milligrams/liter; however, the two-week waiting period has been



dropped; so the waterbody can be removed from the alert level once it tests below 8 milligrams/liter. It is unclear how the NRD lakes will be impacted by this change. Elimination of the waiting period should help balance out the impact of the lower health alert level. As noted above water samples are collected on Monday, and the analysis is representative of blue-green algae levels when the sample was taken. Levels can change quickly, so discretion should always be used. If a lake is placed on health alert, it will be posted on the NRD website and Facebook page. The NDEE website lists all the lakes in Nebraska that have been placed on health alert.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS



### May

25 Memorial Day Holiday,  
NNRD Office Closed

### June

11 NNRD Board Meeting,  
Tecumseh

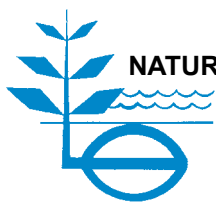
### July

3 Independence Day Holiday,  
NNRD Office Closed

9 NNRD Board Meeting,  
Tecumseh

### August

13 NNRD Board Meeting,  
Tecumseh



**nemaha**

NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT

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## Stories This Issue:

- COVID-19 & NNRD Parks
- Positive Points Despite the Pandemic
- Office Operations during COVID
- Water Department News
- Watershed Construction Continues
- Monitoring Well Project
- Steamboat Trace Remains Closed
- Park Rules Still Apply
- Duck Creek Sediment Basin
- NEMAHA NRD STAFF
- Changes in Health Alerts for Blue-Green Algae
- Calendar Of Events

The Nemaha NRD's *Insight* is a publication of the Nemaha Natural Resources District. Requests to be placed on the *Insight* mailing list and/or comments regarding information in this publication should be directed to Jane Kuhl, Administrative Assistant, 62161 Hwy 136, Tecumseh, NE 68450. Phone (402) 335-3325