

Lower Elkhorn NRD gives its OK to riverbank stabilization project



The Lower Elkhorn Riverbank Stabilization Interlocal Agreement cleared its final hurdle Thursday night.

Now comes the work of stabilizing the banks of the river to minimize the risk of the kind of damage that occurred in the 2010 flood of the Elkhorn River that caused a railroad bridge to collapse into the river, threatened Highway 81, negatively impacted numerous businesses and caused the death of railroad employee.

The Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District board of directors approved the agreement on a 12-1 vote at its monthly meeting Thursday evening at Northeast Community College. Roger Gustafson cast the lone dissenting vote, while board members Joel Hansen and Scott McHenry were absent.

The riverbank stabilization agreement involves a coalition of governmental entities — including the Lower Elkhorn NRD and the Madison County Railroad Transportation Safety District, which represents the City of Norfolk and Madison County — and private industries that are coming to pay for the cost of riverbank stabilization work. The industries participating are Nucor, Vulcraft, Elkhorn Valley Ethanol, Norfolk Iron & Metal and the Nebraska Central Railroad.

Shane Weidner, Norfolk city administrator, expects the project to be completed some time this year, possibly as early as the beginning of the summer.

“I’m thankful to the NRD board and all the players,” Weidner said. “This has truly been a team effort from our industrial partners, our major industries, the Railroad Transportation Safety District and the NRD.”

Weidner said the the damage caused by the 2010 flood made it obvious that action needed to be taken.

“(The participants) have been partnering from day one after 2010 and seeing the damage that flood had done to the Elkhorn River. This project (has) its final blessing, so we’re going to move forward and get this riverbank stabilized where it needs to be,” he said.

The project's goal is to correct and stabilize the Elkhorn River bank.

“It’s been a great collaborative effort between Madison County, the City of Norfolk, the industries and, of course, the Lower Elkhorn (NRD) here,” said Mike Sousek, NRD general manager. “I was happy that the board moved forward with this. It’s going to provide great protection for all of us in Northeast Nebraska. I’m looking forward to hopefully getting a contract in place now and getting the project built and done.”

In other action at Thursday’s meeting, the NRD elected new officers, including Dennis Schultz as the new chairman of the NRD board and Mike Krueger as vice chairman.

“I’ve come through the system like most of the other chairmen,” Schultz said. “I’ll listen to the public, I’ll listen to my manager and listen to my board members — then go from there.”

Mark Hall was chosen as board secretary, while Kurt Janke was selected as the Nebraska Association of Resource Districts delegate and Gary Loftis will be the alternate delegate. Robert Huntley remains as treasurer.

“It’s part of the process,” Sousek said. “I’m looking forward to working with these new guys. It’s providing them a chance to demonstrate their leadership skills and lead the board in the right direction on the various issues that we face.”

NRD board to mull standing policy on pumping caps

ALMA — The Lower Republican Natural Resources District may enact a standing policy imposing a 13-inch-per-acre “hard cap” on irrigation pumpage in any year when extra management is required to ensure Nebraska’s compliance with an interstate river compact.

Meeting in Alma Thursday, the NRD board of directors voted 8-2 to schedule a public hearing for March 9 to gather input on the idea. Action may be taken during the meeting to follow the hearing.

Directors Marlin Murdoch of Orleans, David Bartels of Riverton, Tim Kahrs of Franklin, Brad Wulf of Red Cloud, Matt Harrison of Naponee, Terry Hoyt of Red Cloud, Toby tenBensel of Holbrook and Nelson Trambly of Campbell voted in favor of the move. Directors Clark Andrews of Holbrook and Bill Bose of Orleans voted no. Roger Nelson of Superior was absent and excused.

The NRD rations groundwater pumpage districtwide, allocating 45 inches of water per certified irrigated acre for a five-year period — or an average of 9 inches per acre per year. In addition, the district has imposed a “hard cap” — or absolute one-year maximum — on pumpage each year since 2012.

Up to now, the board has been conducting a public hearing each year and enacting the cap for one year only. The 2016 cap was 13 inches per acre. The penalty for exceeding the hard cap is deduction of 3 inches from the irrigator's five-year allocation for each 1 inch of overuse.

At Thursday's meeting, Murdoch, the board chairman, said he would like to make caps as predictable as possible for district irrigators whenever the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources proclaims a Compact Call Year in the Republican River Basin.

With a standing hard cap policy in place, a new public hearing would not be each year.

"I'm just trying to get to where farmers have that knowledge as soon as possible," Murdoch said.

In Compact Call Years, extra management is deemed necessary to keep Nebraska in compliance with the Republican River Compact of 1943. This year is the basin's fifth consecutive Compact Call Year, based on hydrological conditions.

Compact Call Years are proclaimed by the state effective Dec. 31 of the previous year. If a Compact Call Year was not proclaimed, the policy would not apply.

Some other directors questioned the wisdom of adopting a specific "hard cap" amount, asserting that sometimes a tighter cap might be needed. In the past, the district has imposed caps ranging from 10-13 inches.

"Do we want to lock ourselves into this?" Wulf asked. "Every one of these years is different. We might need to have a cap of 11 inches."

Murdoch and district staff members said they believed the board would retain the option to enact a tighter cap if conditions required it, but that a public hearing then would be needed.

“This would basically be a starting point,” Murdoch said. “Under extreme conditions we could still change it.”

The LRNRD encompasses all of Furnas, Harlan and Franklin counties, plus most of Webster County and southern Nuckolls County.

In other business Thursday, the district board re-elected Murdoch as chairman and Bose as vice chairman for 2017. Kahrs will serve as secretary, and Bartels will be the district treasurer.

NRD books a ‘fix’ for Recharge Lake



News-Times/Steve Moseley - This stretch of Recharge Lake shoreline from the boat ramp (foreground) to the handicap-accessible pier in the background, then around the cedar point farther north out of the frame to the outdoor amphitheater, will be reinforced with limestone rock at the direction of the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District board of directors to control erosion.

YORK – Lapping waves can make for a lake environment both calming and serene, however when they kick up their heels those same waves can, with the help of Father Time, peel away great spans of unprotected shoreline.

The result is often gradual shallowing of the lake, turbidity of its water and an unstable, muddy shoreline that is not people friendly.

That is exactly what has happened on the east side of Recharge Lake located west of Hwy 81 and Fourth Street in north York.

Ken Feather, Parks Department manager for the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District, said wave action and subsequent erosion have created a problem. Not to worry, a solution has been approved by the NRD board to relieve the situation at the popular camping, swimming, hiking, biking, fishing and archery area.

During its January meeting the board gave its blessing to a \$17,000 contract with Gana Trucking & Excavating to reinforce the shoreline from the boat ramp north beyond the handicap fishing pier to adjacent with the outdoor amphitheater.

Asked if broken concrete would be dumped for rip-rap material, Feather answered, "No, it won't. It will be limestone rock."

The motion to approve the rehab project was unanimously passed.

At the same meeting the NRD board made payment of \$37,093 for seven completed Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Program land treatments applications.

In discussing what the NRD's position ought to be in terms of assisting Seward's hike/bike trail completion, the body turned down an amendment by John Miller of Aurora to raise the district's maximum out-of-pocket support from \$75,000 up to \$150,000.

The original motion explains the district would spend "up to 25 percent" of the cost to finish the trail so it encircles the city, up a limit of \$75,000.

Miller said based on realistic costs of the trail a contribution of 25 percent will fall far short of \$75,000. The higher amount of \$150,000, in other words, would come much closer to covering a quarter of the price.

Miller said the payout would take place over two fiscal years, “So I think we have time to budget for it.”

His amendment failed. The initial proposal at 25 percent up to \$75,000 passed easily.

Grants available for tree planting efforts



OMAHA, Neb. (WOWT) - Celebrate Trees is a Pappio-Missouri River Natural Resources District program that encourages and assists communities with tree planting projects. Celebrate Trees provides grants for planting trees on public land such as parks and street right-of-ways.

“Community trees are a valuable asset with more than just aesthetic benefits. Trees provide many environmental and economic benefits to the community as a whole,” said Kelly Fravel, NRD Dakota County Field Office Programs Asst.

The Celebrate Trees program provides grants for up to \$2,500 per year to communities located within the six-county NRD area which includes all of Dakota, the eastern half of Thurston and Burt, as well as Washington, Douglas, and Sarpy Counties. No matching funds are required, but the applicant should plan to do mulching, staking and watering, and other care that will ensure a successful planting.

“This program encourages communities to plant a variety of native and well-adapted non-native tree species to improve diversity in the community forest,” said John Zaugg, field representative for the P-MRNRD in Omaha.

Applicants that have been approved for grant funding should purchase their trees from a local nursery. This ensures the trees will have been balled and burlapped or container grown which allows less roots being disturbed when transplanted. Applicants are encouraged (but not required) to utilize

the expertise of the nursery, a landscape architect, professional arborist, Tree Board, or District Forester with the Nebraska Forest Service to help with developing a plan for the selection of tree species as well as assist with the design of the planting and care for the trees.

“The selection of the tree species is important because many species are susceptible to serious disease and insect problems. For that reason, we recommend applicants to consult the experts for advice,” added Zaugg.

Grant funds are for trees and planting only, other materials such as mulching, staking and watering are not eligible for funding. Shrubs are also not eligible for funding. The maximum reimbursement per landscape tree is \$250, including the cost of planting. The deadline for submitting an application for spring planting is February 15, 2017.

For more information or to apply for the Celebrate Trees program contact your local Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District field office in Dakota City, Blair, Tekamah, Walthill or Omaha.

NRD Reports Progress On Duck Creek Recreation Area



TECUMSEH – The Nemaha Natural Resource District’s annual report for 2016 highlights progress on the Duck Creek recreational area.

Discussions on watershed controls to reduce flooding and sedimentation of the Peru Bottoms date back to the 1960s and the NRD completed its first dam on Buck Creek in 2012.

The dam on Duck Creek was completed in 2016 and the 62-acre reservoir is expected to fill to its normal level this spring.

Recreational components constructed this year include 7,600 feet of rocked park road and 28 RV pads.

Picnic shelters, playground equipment and restrooms will be installed by the fall of 2017. An official opening is planned for the 2018 recreation season.

The NRD report also shows an increase in use of its four public recreation areas. Annual permits issued rose by 300 since 2012 for a total of 1,161 last year.

Little Blue rules plan begins to take shape

DAVENPORT — If irrigators in the Little Blue Natural Resources District were to face groundwater pumpage rationing in the future, farmers on the west end of the district likely would be given a larger yearly allowance than those farther east.

That was just one tentative conclusion Thursday at the end of a three-hour meeting of the district's Groundwater Resources Committee, which lately has been discussing possible changes to district groundwater management rules and regulations.

Through a series of straw polls, committee members gathered in Davenport expressed their tentative preferences concerning a potential future allocation program to address concerns about declining groundwater levels.

Thursday's meeting was the first in which committee members have systematically tried to find common ground as to what an allocation program might look like. Beforehand, they had answered a survey questionnaire concerning their preferences.

On Thursday, most agreed that if all irrigators in the district were to face rationing, the district should be divided into three zones to account for increasing yearly rainfall from west to east. Historical records show that across Nebraska, average yearly rainfall increases by 1 inch every 25 miles.

Mike Onnen, LBNRD general manager, said in a three-zone allocation program, Adams and Webster counties might constitute the west zone, while Clay and Nuckolls counties would be the center zone and Fillmore, Thayer and Jefferson counties would be the east zone.

The board tentatively agreed that 1 inch difference in the average annual allocation would be appropriate from zone to zone — for example, 13, 12 and 11 inches from west to east. Some directors expressed a preference for 11, 10 and 9 inches.

Directors also expressed a tentative preference for a five-year allocation period and tentatively agreed the program should be triggered by declines in average spring static water levels from a 2016 baseline — perhaps 2 feet, for example. Their vision is that irrigators to be able to carry over a portion of any unused five-year allocation to the follow-on allocation period, but that irrigators could not borrow against future allocations and would be assessed a penalty for overuse

Most board members said they were not interested in placing a moratorium on well drilling or development of net new irrigated acres, but that future development should be limited through appropriate controls.

Nothing was cast in stone Thursday, however — far from it, as Thursday's meeting was just the beginning of what is likely to be a lengthy process formulating a package of proposed rule changes and then debating its overall merit. Any proposed changes eventually would go to a public hearing before the full NRD board, which would need to approve them.

"We've probably got enough here to start doing some writing here ... to give you something to tear apart next time," Onnen told the board near the end of the evening.

Warren Brakhahn of Hastings, Water Resources Committee chairman, assured the public that all details now being discussed are subject to change.

"This is just temporary," Brakhahn said, addressing about 15 people in the audience Thursday and referring to a list of tentative decisions displayed on the wall. "It isn't the Bible."

The Little Blue district currently is working with the neighboring Tri-Basin NRD and the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources to develop a voluntary integrated water resources management plan, or IMP, for the Little Blue River Basin as a whole, with the aim of perpetuating the resource.

Onnen has said the IMP should be a more general document and that specifics should be contained in the rules and regulations, which are contained within the district's Groundwater Management Plan.

In 2014, the district amended its rules and regulations to require that all high-capacity wells in the district be outfitted with flowmeters by March 31 of this year.

The district also has mandated the certification of all irrigated acres as such. According to the current schedule, the certification process is to be complete by April 1. But Onnen said Thursday that the district staff is running behind and will not be able to meet that deadline.

Thursday's discussion started off slow and contentious, with directors rehashing past arguments about the need for revamping the rules and regulations at this time, before the district even has reached its final deadline for installing flowmeters or has gotten all its irrigated acres certified.

"What has happened that it is all of a sudden a panic?" asked Kevin Kissinger, a director from Glenvil.

Meanwhile, other directors cited a 42-year downward trend in spring static water levels, with a few wells showing drops of nearly 30 feet from predevelopment levels. The Little Blue NRD first started recording spring static levels on its own in 1974.

"I don't see how you can sit here and say there's not a problem," said Lyle Schroer, a director from the Lawrence area. "That's absurd."

Under current allocation triggers written into the district's rules, the water level beneath parts of the district would need to drop an additional 10-15 feet before allocation would begin. Onnen said the district would be irresponsible to sit by idly while the aquifer diminished to that extent.

If the board eventually settles on an allocation trigger of 2 feet of decline in the spring static level from a 2016 baseline, Onnen noted, allocation still may be a number of years in the future.

“I don’t think its an urgent matter,” Onnen said. “But if we’re willing to give up 10-15 feet, we’re not doing our job.”

Board Chairman Randy Uhrmacher of rural Hastings said the committee needed to move off dead center Thursday and start making some progress on a tentative rules package.

“I’m tired of no progress, coming down here and bickering back and forth,” Uhrmacher said.

Brakhahn agreed.

“I can tell you now the last five meetings have been worthless,” he said.

By the end of the evening, several directors seemed to be feeling better about the committee’s direction. Even patrons said the progress was welcome.

Kerwin Elting of Oak, a member of a districtwide stakeholder committee that has developed recommendations for the IMP, commended the group for moving its debate forward.

“I really appreciate the board accomplishing something,” Elting said.

LRNRD looks at policy for set compact-call year irrigation use cap



Mike Clements

ALMA — The Lower Republican Natural Resources District Board will consider at its March 9 meeting whether to add to NRD policies a standard irrigation cap of 13 inches per acre whenever the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources designates a compact-call year.

The designation means that extra steps are required for groundwater and surface water use to ensure the state's compliance with the Republican River Compact.

There was a lengthy discussion at Thursday's board meeting in Alma about whether such a policy would help ag producers plan for a new crop year or if the cap still should be a year-to-year decision that requires a public hearing.

"Do we want to lock ourselves into that?" said Director Brad Wulf of Red Cloud.

LRNRD Assistant Manager Scott Dicke said the board still could change the cap if there were conditions such as drought that might warrant a lower amount.

Director Bill Bose of Orleans said the opposite issue could arise going into a new year. "We know we could have way above precipitation that would change things entirely," he said.

"What I like about this is the number is out there. ... We can change it," General Manager Mike Clements said. "Again, we would have to have a public hearing to do that."

He also noted that the way current policies are written, if there is no compact-call designation, there is no cap in irrigation use for the year.

The use must remain within the five-year allocation of 45 inches. The current five years ends in 2017, and a new five-year allocation probably will be set next fall, Clements said.

In his assistant manager's report, Dicke said the overall average irrigation water use in the LRNRD for 2016 was about 8 inches per acre, which is slightly more than the 2005-2015 average of about 7.5 inches.

The board scheduled a public hearing just ahead of the regular board meeting March 9 on a policy that would set a 13-inch cap in compact-call years.

Clements said the 2017 cap won't be set until the policy issue is resolved.

Related to the designation of 2017 as a compact-call year, Clements reported that the Nebraska Cooperative Republican Platte Enhancement project, also known as N-CORPE, is pumping 26,000 gallons per minute, which is 65 percent of capacity.

Current pumping started in November and likely will continue into March, he said.

In December 2012, the Lower, Middle and Upper Republican NRDs and Twin-Platte NRD purchased a 19,500-acre Lincoln County farm and uses the irrigation water for streamflow augmentation. The Republican Basin part of the system is operational, with water pumped into Medicine Creek and transported to the Republican River for compact compliance.

Clements told the Hub that 3,800 acre-feet of the N-CORPE water needed by June 1 is credited to the LRNRD, which must make up a 7,100 a-f deficit in river flows to Kansas for 2016 and 2017. The balance of 3,300 a-f in augmentation water needed will be pumped next fall.

Deficits to be made up by the other two NRDs are 11,200 a-f, Middle Republican, and 18,700 a-f, Upper Republican, he said.

In other business, the board:

- Was told by Dicke that the feasibility study report for a Platte-Republican diversion project proposed with Holdrege-based Tri-Basin NRD is expected to be ready by the Feb. 9 LRNRD board meeting.
- Authorized the staff to upgrade audio-video equipment in the board room. One interest is saving money by being able to video conference with people such as the district's legal counsel.
- Elected as officers, Chairman Marlin Murdoch of Orleans, Vice-Chairman Bill Bose of Orleans, Secretary Tim Kahrs of Bloomington and Treasurer Dave Bartels of Riverton.

Natural Resource District's 2017 Legislative Conference begins in Lincoln



The Natural Resource District's Legislative Conference kicked off with opening remarks from Governor Pete Ricketts on Tuesday.

The conference will continue on Wednesday and takes place at the Embassy Suites in downtown Lincoln.

Some of the topics discussed will include water and soil conservation, pollution control and an update on the latest status of Emerald Ash Borer in Nebraska.

Dozens of Nebraska senators are confirmed they'll be attending the conference.

A few important topics that affect all Nebraskans include:

- An opportunity to learn how water is not only the number one priority in Nebraska but is also the top priority of our National and International Security. Discussion on worldwide natural resource challenges and how it impacts immigration, migration and food security.
- An update on the latest status of the Emerald Ash Borer in Nebraska, and activities underway at Nebraska Forest Service to help battle the beetle. The presentation will also outline the details of legislation introduced for the Tree Recovery Act.

- Nebraska's Bazile Groundwater Management Area (BGMA) Project is the first federally recognized groundwater-focused plan to address pollution in the nation. Learn what the project has accomplished in just the last few months and the big plans for making a positive difference in our conservation efforts in the future.

NRD photo contest winners receive cash prizes

Posted: Sunday, January 22, 2017 12:00 am

STEVE FREDERICK Special Projects Editor sfrederick@starherald.com

Four photographers won \$150 apiece in prize money in a photo contest sponsored by the North Platte Natural Resources District.

Bud Gillespie (wildlife), Ce Merrigan (people, family and pets), Lacey Cross-Lobner (plants) and Lindsey Keller (landscapes) won in the adult amateur category.

The contest includes Professional, Amateur and Youth divisions, with categories for landscapes, wildlife and plants as well as a fourth catch-all category for people, family and pets. Subjects can include birds, flowers, insects, animals, landscapes and outdoor recreation. One winner is selected per category by a panel of judges. Another winner is chosen through the subsequent vote on Facebook. Although any photographer is welcome to enter, photos must be taken within the NRD boundary, which includes roughly the North Platte River drainage in Scotts Bluff, Banner, Morrill, Garden and southern Sioux counties.



No professional or youth photographers entered the contest during the July-December period. Photos taken from Jan. 1 through June 30 will be eligible for the next phase of the contest. Rules remain the same, but the Vote of the People category will be eliminated.

If you took an outstanding photo of a western Nebraska landscape, wild animal or even your pet, you could have won cash for a winning entry. The nine

photographers who entered submitted 31 photos. Under contest rules, contestants could win only one prize.



“We had \$2,000, and we’re not going to spend anywhere near the amount,” said contest organizer Dave Wolf.

A fifth winner will be awarded in a “vote of the people” category. The entries will be chosen from among remaining eligible images, located on the NRD’s Facebook page. They will be posted Monday. Voting will be based on how many “likes” each image gets by midnight on Feb. 10.

The purpose of the contest is help publicize the wild beauty of western Nebraska, said Wolf, the NRD’s information and education coordinator. Images will be used to promote the district’s online recreational map program that guides users to a variety of public lands in the area and tells them what they can expect to see and do. (You can preview the program here: <http://www.nprnd.org/recreation-maps>).



Images entered in the contest, whether they win a prize or not, will be viewable on the NRD’s Facebook page and will also be made available to the Scotts Bluff County Visitors Bureau and Platte River Basin Environments for tourism promotion and similar uses. Photographers will retain all other rights to their work.



The awards are \$200 for professionals, \$150 for amateurs, and \$50 for youth. To qualify for the youth category, the participant must be under the age of 18, and must not turn 18 years old by the end of the contest period.

- Landscapes: Illustrates the beauty of our natural spaces.
- Wildlife: Depicts any of the native wild animals in their natural habitat. Animals may not be domesticated.
- Plants: Depicts any of the flora that populates our natural spaces. Plants must be found at the site but could be either alive or dead.
- Family, People, Pets: Depicts people enjoying our natural spaces.

To view a copy of the official rules, visit the North Platte NRD web page.

Bank stabilization project will provide protection along Elkhorn River

NORFOLK – Since the flood of 2010, a unique local partnership has been building to protect northeast Nebraska from future flood events.

At their January meeting, the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District (LENRD) board voted 12 to 1 to approve the Interlocal Agreement to move forward with the bank stabilization project that will protect the railroad and Highway 81 from future flood events on the Elkhorn River. The flooding in 2010 caused significant damage, including the collapse of a railroad bridge, which negatively impacted area businesses and industry. A railroad employee was killed when the bridge collapsed into the river.

The bank stabilization project brings together public and private partners, including: the Madison County Railroad Transportation Safety District, Nebraska Central Railroad, Nucor, Vulcraft, Elkhorn Valley Ethanol, Norfolk Iron & Metal, and the LENRD.

Norfolk City Administrator, Shane Weidner, said, “I’m thankful to the LENRD board and all the partners. This has truly been a team effort from our industrial partners, our major industries, the Railroad Transportation Safety District and the LENRD.”

LENRD General Manager, Mike Sousek, said, “This has been a great collaborative effort between Madison County, the City of Norfolk, the industries, and the LENRD. I’m happy the board moved forward with this. It’s going to provide great protection for all of us in Northeast Nebraska. I’m looking forward to getting the contract in place and getting the project built.”

The project has seen a decrease in cost from \$2.4 million to the current estimate of \$750,000. The LENRD will share \$250,000 of the cost as a partner in this project.

In other action, the board elected new officers for 2017.

The board elected Dennis Schultz of Wisner as their new chairman. Mike Krueger of Pierce was voted in as vice-chairman, Mark Hall of Norfolk as secretary, and Bob Huntley of Norfolk as treasurer. Other positions filled were Kurt Janke of Wayne as the voting delegate of the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts, and Gary Loftis of Craig as the alternate NARD delegate.

Sousek, said, "I'm looking forward to working with the new officers. This gives them a chance to demonstrate their leadership skills as we work through various issues and challenges together."

The next board meeting will be held on Thursday, February 23rd at 7:30 p.m.

The LENRD serves all or parts of 15-counties in northeast Nebraska. Visit the LENRD website to sign up for emails from the district. Like us on Facebook, and follow us on Twitter. Protecting Lives, Protecting Property, Protecting the Future - www.lenrd.org

NEWS RELEASE

Water Purchase Credits Available to Producers Following Central Platte NRD's

Approval to Proceed With Conservation Easement

(GRAND ISLAND, NE) – Producers in the Central Platte Natural Resources District's (CPNRD) may soon have more options to purchase water credits following the board's approval on Thursday to proceed with a 320-acre conservation easement to implement a wetland mitigation bank in Buffalo County. Westervelt Ecological Services is the entity who will implement the wetland; while working closely with the CPNRD, Nebraska Resources Conservation Service and the Nebraska Audubon, who owns property that surrounds the potential wetland. James Huntwork, regional liaison for NRCS, reported that there is a need for a wetland mitigation bank in central Nebraska to restore, create or enhance wetlands. The Wetland Mitigation Program provides the opportunity for farmers and ranchers to purchase credits from wetlands mitigation banks to compensate for the impact of lost wetlands; while maintaining eligibility for other USDA programs.

The Nebraska Board of Education Lands & Funds (BELF) serves in the dual capacity of both land owner and manager of the property. In Nebraska, rents are collected on 3,200 agricultural leases and 250 mineral leases. BELF was established by the Nebraska Constitution to serve as Trustee of lands contributed to the State in 1867 by the federal government. As Trustee of these lands, the Board is bound by fiduciary duty to its beneficiaries---Nebraska's K-12 public schools. The net income from the Trust is deposited in the Temporary School Trust Fund, which is distributed annually to the K-12 public schools statewide on a per-pupil basis.

OTHER ACTION/AGENDA ITEMS

-Election The board elected Jim Bendfeldt, Kearney, as the new chairman of the board. Mick Reynolds, Wood River, was elected vice-chairman. Former chairman, Ed Kyes of Central City, and vice-chairman, Jim Bendfeldt, had both served the maximum two consecutive, two-year terms. Board members also selected committees to serve on this year. The following committee chairmen were selected: Jerry Wiese-Eastern Projects, Marvion Reichert-Western Projects, Bob Schanou-Programs and Jay Richeson-Water Resources.

-Erosion & Sediment Control Program The board approved proposed changes to the NRD's Erosion and Sediment Control Program, following a public hearing held prior to the board meeting. The new plan includes changes made to the Erosion and Sediment Control Act in May 2015 that adds sheet and rill erosion, ephemeral gully erosion, changes governing authority, allows NRDs to petition the District Court for a Cease and Desist Order, removes 90 percent cost share previously required for NRDs to provide for erosion control practices, and updates soils within the District.

-Cease & Desist Hearings The board set three public hearing dates for producers in Phases II/III who have not submitted their Groundwater Quality Management forms for the 2015-2016 crop year; and are now out of compliance with the Program. Approximately ten percent of the NRD's 800 producers in the Phase II/III areas are out of compliance. The hearings will be held on February 13, 16 and 17 starting at 9:00 a.m. at the CPNRD office in Grand Island. Non-compliance with a Cease & Desist Order would result in a lawsuit filed in District Court with a maximum penalty of \$1,000-\$5,000 per day.

-Outdoor Classroom Program **The board approved an application from the Success Academy to create an outdoor classroom for butterfly monarch habitat at Dodge Elementary in Grand Island in the amount of \$1,666.75. Students from Grand Island Senior High's Success Academy, Dodge Elementary, Skills Academy Elementary, and the Roots & Shoots Program will partner in the project. They will use the scientific method to conduct real world observation and data collection in the monarch butterfly habitat. Vlcek Gardens, Chapman, will provide project design and construction. Pheasants Forever will present lessons for students to apply their knowledge in field observations by participating in national Monarch Butterfly field studies. The outdoor classroom will cover approximately 800 square feet, with implementation to be completed this spring. CPNRD has provided funding towards 14 outdoor classrooms since 2001.**

-Variance Request The board denied a variance request from Platte County.

-Groundwater Recharge/Water Quality Project John Engel, HDR of Omaha, presented an update on the feasibility study in the Wood River and South Loup drainage systems to enhance recharge and/or augment stream flows in northern Buffalo County. Engel said despite recharge gains in other areas of the state, the study area has historically had declines and has been declared impaired by the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality. The study focused on alternatives to add 10,000 acre-feet of water annually to the area, located in Ground Water Management Area (GWMA) 8 of the Lower Loup NRD and GWMA 9 of the Central Platte NRD. Engel presented six screened alternatives which included options to implement augmentation wells, diversions, allocations, intentional recharge, delivering storage water, and diversion pumping. The study included alternatives for groundwater, irrigation

canals, the Wood River, South Loup River, Middle Loup River, and the Platte River. Engel will present his findings to the Lower Loup NRD in February.

-Upper Prairie/Silver/Moores FCP Jesse Mintken, assistant manager, gave a progress report on the flood control project located in northwest Grand Island. Mintken reported that 70,000 cubic yards of dirt have been removed for the channel and detention cells; and tree removal has been completed. Construction on this phase is expected to be completed in May 2017; with the entire project scheduled for completion in 2018.

-Legislative Report Mark Czaplewski, biologist, reported that the 2017 Legislative session convened on January 4th and is set to close on June 2nd. There are 17 new senators with 70 percent of the Unicameral's 49 members with two years of experience or less. Czaplewski reported that 40 bills were reviewed at the Nebraska Association of Resource's Districts Legislative Session this week. Bills of particular interest to CPNRD include: LB 22 recommends a \$330,000 reduction to the Water Sustainability Fund; LB 98 would extend levy authority for NRDs, general manager Lyndon Vogt will testify in support of this bill; LB 646 would create an extreme weather preparedness task force and strategic action plan; LB 664 would prohibit a political subdivision from using taxes to employ a lobbyist.

-Nebraska Natural Resources Commission Mick Reynolds, was elected as the Middle Platte River Basin representative on January 6, 2017. Reynolds has served as representative since 2013 and will serve another four-year term.

-Cost Share The board approved 19 applications for brush management, center pivot incentive, tree planting, grassland conservation, grazing deferment, flow meters and well decommissioning through the Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation and CPNRD cost share programs in the amount of \$68,760.34.

-Upcoming Events

February 7: Prescribed Burn Training, Callaway NE. RSVP (308) 872-6831

February 8: Prescribed Burn Training, Brady NE. RSVP (308) 535-8080

February 9: Prescribed Burn Training, Eustis NE. RSVP (308) 324-5501

February 10: Prescribed Burn Training, Wood River NE. RSVP (308) 385-6282

February 9: CPNRD Water Programs Conference, Buffalo County Fairgrounds
9:30-3:00 p.m. No cost, lunch provided. RSVP (308) 385-6282 or lee@cpnrd.org.

February 13, 16, 17: Cease & Desist Hearings starting at 9:00 a.m., CPNRD office

February 23: CPNRD Board of Directors meeting

March 20: Presidents Day observed. CPNRD office closed.

March 30: CPNRD Board of Directors meeting