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LPSNRD Public Survey Gives Guidance

Lincoln (NE) April 18, 2019 – The proper sealing or decommissioning of water wells that are no longer in use helps preserve the quality of water in the aquifer and the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District (LPSNRD) recently decommissioned the 1,000th well under a program it started in 1990. The 1,000th decommissioning was recognized by the LPSNRD Board of Directors when it met Wednesday night.

The LPSNRD program reimburses landowners after a well has been decommissioned by a licensed contractor. The amount of reimbursements varies, depending on the location, depth and diameter of the well and what materials and procedures were necessary to decommission the well properly. The 1,000th well, a domestic well that was four inches in diameter, was on property owned by Tim and Dawn Powell, of Powell Properties and Management LLC, of Malcolm, and, since the well was within the designated community water system protection area for Malcolm, LPSNRD's reimbursement was for 100% of the cost.

If an unused well is not properly decommissioned, any contaminants that get into the well go directly into the aquifer. Decommissioning also includes cutting well casings off below ground level, protecting people and animals from injuries. LPSNRD cost-shares annually with an average of 37 landowners who have wells decommissioned

The LPSNRD Board of Directors was also briefed on results of its recent public awareness survey when it met Wednesday evening. Ground water quality and quantity are the biggest natural resource concerns in the district, according to the results. The online survey was completed by 827 people from all six counties included within the district. Natalie McClure, project director and Casey Wurst, creative strategist for the Lincoln public relations firm Red Thread, told the board, after ground water quality and quantity, respondents concerns turned to preserving wetlands and wildlife, flood control, protecting soil and managing stormwater.

Asked to indicate which in a list of LPSNRD projects they had heard of, 80 percent indicated they had heard of the MoPac East Trail and the Antelope Valley Project. The Salt Creek Levee, Deadmans Run

Flood Reduction Project and LPSNRD's annual sale of tree and shrub seedlings were also recognized by more than 50 percent of respondents. The survey also generated data on respondent's use of social and traditional media. Results of the survey will help guide LPSNRD's program and project activities in the future.

A draft of LPSNRD's 2018 Ground Water Management Plan Annual Report was presented to the board. The report is available at LPSNRD.org; click on programs, then ground water. Water Resources Specialist Dick Ehrman told the board LPSNRD:

- Collected 222 samples from wells and tested them for quality. None of the district's recognized ground water reservoirs averaged above Phase II trigger levels for ground water management due to elevated nitrate concentrations.
- Recorded 273 water levels to monitor quantity. Compared to levels measured in the spring of 2017, 2018 levels decreased in 81 wells and increased in 53 wells. The largest decline measured 10.5 feet and the largest increase was nearly 8 feet, but the majority of level changes are much less. Spring 2019 measurements are pending.
- Cost-shared on the decommissioning of 10 wells in 2018, increasing the total number of wells to 997, since 1990. LPSNRD reached the 1,000 mark in decommissioned wells in February.
- Continued studies of the vadose zone (above the water table) at about 20 sites throughout the district
- Received reports of water usage in the district totaling 3.4 billion gallons, with 59% of that used for irrigation.

Other actions by the LPSNRD Board included:

- Approved a request by the Omaha Fish & Wildlife Club for LPSNRD to serve as the local sponsor for the Cedar Creek Omaha rehabilitation project
- Approved a request by the City of Ashland to develop a Drinking Water Protection Management Plan
- Amended an agreement with Phoenix WebGroup, adding ground water database services
- Approved five cost-sharing requests from landowners for water quality improvement practices totaling \$65,000
- Modified administration procedures for the Blue Heron Marsh Mitigation Bank
- Approved staffing and salary adjustments for Fiscal Year 2020, which begins July 1
- Renewed an annual operation agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA
- Approved bank stabilization and drainage ditch projects requested by the City of Ashland, near the Silver Street Bridge
- Approved a seeding proposal from Prairie Plains Resource Institute for a property along the Prairie Corridor on Haines Branch, known as the Petersen tract
- Approved two pasture lease agreements for the Allen Saline Wetland and for the Warner Wetland
- Approved advertising and newsletter agreements with the Lincoln Journal Star

- Approved appraisals and negotiations for landrights for a rehabilitation project at Upper Salt Watershed Dam 3-A, one mile southeast of Sprague.