



CORRIDOR CONNECTIONS

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*Biannual Newsletter
of the Lower Platte
River Corridor Alliance*

**A cooperative partnership to
protect, enhance, and restore the
Lower Platte River Corridor**

LPRCA MEMBERS

**Lower Platte North NRD
Lower Platte South NRD
Papio-Missouri River NRD
NE Dept of Natural Resources
NE Dept of Environmental Quality
NE Health & Human Services
NE Game & Parks Commission
NE Military Dept
University of Nebraska -
Conservation &
Survey Division**



Rodney L. Verhoeff, Coordinator

**3125 Portia, P. O. Box 83581
Lincoln, NE 68501-3581
(402) 476-2729 * Fax (402) 476-6454
rverhoeff@lpsnrd.org
www.lowerplatte.org**

Corridor Residents Learn About Septic and Drinking Water Systems

By Rodney Verhoeff, LPRCA Coordinator

In conjunction with UNL Cooperative Extension and the USDA-NRCS, the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance (LPRCA) held a series of 8 "Water Wellness" meetings throughout the Corridor to help residents better understand their drinking water and septic systems. Meetings were held in May and June of this year in the following locations: Eastern Nebraska 4-H Center near Gretna, Cedar Creek, Papillion Gun Club near Papillion, Yutan, Valley, Fremont, North Bend, and Schuyler. Nearly 2,000 invitations were mailed out to residents of the Lower Platte River Corridor who had their own drinking water well and/or septic system and lived within two miles of the river. Over 60 residents attended the meetings and several more inquired by phone or e-mail.

The high percentage of sandy soils, high water tables, and increasing populations in the Lower Platte River Valley make it an area of high risk for both ground and surface water contamination. The majority of residents in the Corridor have individual septic systems and nearly two-thirds use a non-cased sandpoint well for drinking water supplies.

Building upon the first series of "Water Wellness" meetings held in 2000/2001, which focused on risk assessment, this series covered a broader perspective. New information presented at the meetings included ground and surface water basics, water contamina-



tion information, best management practices (BMPs) for septic and drinking water systems, and water treatment options.



Those who attended the meetings received a packet with NebGuides, research fact sheets, and other publications to help assess, maintain, protect, and treat their wastewater and drinking water systems. Water sampling kits were also available for attendees to take home. We were able to negotiate a substantially-reduced price for nitrate and coliform bacteria tests with Olsen's Lab out of McCook.

Presenters for the "Water Wellness" meetings included Sharon Skipton, UNL Cooperative Extension Educator; Jan Hygnstrom, UNL Project Manager; Wayne Woldt, UNL Professor in Biological Systems Engineering (BSE); Bruce Dvork, UNL Professor in BSE; Jim Harder, USDA-NRCS; and Rodney Verhoeff, Coordinator of the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance.

If you are interested in receiving the materials from the program, please contact Rodney Verhoeff at (402) 476-2729 or Sharon Skipton at (402) 472-3662. We also hope to have some of this information available online in the near future on the LPRCA website - www.lowerplatte.org.



Wellhead Protection Services Available for Area Communities

By Mike Sousek, Wellhead Protection Coordinator - LPNNRD

Approximately 85% of Nebraskans rely on groundwater as their source of drinking water. Because it's vital to protect this shared resource from contamination, the Lower Platte North Natural Resources District (LPNNRD) is offering Wellhead Protection services to communities along the Lower Platte River.

Wellhead Protection is a voluntary program that emphasizes community leadership and involvement. The goal of the program is to prevent contamination by minimizing potential polluting activities on land surrounding public supply wells.

The LPNNRD works closely with community leaders and groups to complete the six main steps of Wellhead Protection, which include:

- ✓ Delineate a Wellhead Protection Area map. A computer program will be used to determine the "capture zone" for the community's public supply wells – the area they draw water from. Contaminants within the capture zone could be drawn into the public water supply. Thus, the capture zone forms the boundaries for the Wellhead Protection Area.



- ✓ Perform a Contaminant Source Inventory. Within the Wellhead Protection Area, an inventory is conducted of potential contaminant sources or activities that could possibly pollute the public wells. The inventory can be conducted by LPNNRD staff in conjunction with local utility workers, high school students, or other interested parties.

- ✓ Manage potential contaminant sources. Based on the results of the Contaminant Source Inventory, the community can use several different options to deal with potential contaminant sources, including ordinances, zoning, education, and agreements with the county or LPNNRD.

- ✓ Prepare for emergencies. What if the community's water supply falls short of demand due to mechanical problems or contaminated water? Is there a plan in place in case of emergency situations? Developing a contingency plan will help the community deal with unexpected water shortages or contamination problems.

- ✓ Plan for future needs. A well's lifetime is typically 20 years, and planning for new ones is necessary to address the demands of population growth and prevent water shortages.

- ✓ Keep public educated and involved! Community participation is essential to make the Wellhead Protection process a success. Public participation allows community residents to take pride in protecting their drinking water.

Throughout this process, the LPNNRD will offer assistance and guidance to communities. The LPNNRD will help:

- collect data to delineate the Wellhead Protection Area
- obtain a Wellhead Protection Area map
- perform a Contaminant Source Inventory of the Wellhead Protection Area
- prepare a plan that will manage the potential contaminant sources and help protect the city's public supply wells
- inform and educate the public about Wellhead Protection

By establishing a Wellhead Protection Area, a community can help safeguard its drinking water now and in the years ahead. For more information about Wellhead Protection and what the LPNNRD can offer your community, contact Mike Sousek at the Lower Platte North NRD, (402) 443-4675, or via e-mail at msousek@lpnnrd.org.



Photo courtesy of LPNNRD

Pallid Sturgeon Task Force Update

By Rodney Verhoeff, LPRCA Coordinator

The Pallid Sturgeon/Sturgeon Chub (PS/SC) Task Force met on July 14, 2004 at the Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium located in Schramm Park SRA near Gretna for a business meeting and tour. The meeting kicked off with a financial report and a new depletions/no new depletions report by Susan France with NDNR. New applications for water rights seem to be down while transfers are up since last year in our area.

There was a research update from Dr. Ed Peters with UNL. The PS/SC study is in its fifth and final year with all field work now completed. Fish studied were broken into two basic groups: (1) hatchery fish - tagged or



marked, and (2) fish presumed wild. Dr. Peters discussed the difference between the endangered pallid sturgeon and the more common shovelnose sturgeon. The pallid is generally more gray, tended to be bigger in the study, has a bowed barbel alignment, and the two center barbels are shorter than the outer two barbels.

Pallid sturgeon caught each year during the study are as follows: 2000 - none; 2001 - one (May); 2002 - one (May); 2003 - two (April & May); 2004 - nine caught (April & May) with two that got away - of these 3 were wild, 2 were hatchery fish, and 4 were small fish with tags. Tracking of fish show they are most abundant from the Hwy 50 bridge to the Hwy 75 bridge. Dr. Peters also went through the techniques used to catch fish including habitat preferences, types of nets, and tracking devices.

Dr. Jim Parham, also with UNL, discussed habitat preferences and hydraulic conditions necessary for survival and proliferation of pallid sturgeon. Pallids tend to be found in open water and deep pockets with a fast velocity. Dr. Parham also talked about an issue he is currently working on regarding wastewater discharges upstream from Hwy 75 and whether the discharges affect pallid sturgeon and their preferred conditions.

The meeting concluded with a tour to the Platte River and demonstrations of sampling techniques and identification procedures.

LPRCA PROJECT UPDATES

RIVER OBSTRUCTION REMOVAL PROJECT

We've started reviewing existing data and information including an inventory done in 2001. Our next step is to ground truth the data, prioritize the sites, determine what it would take to remove the obstructions, and then look for funding sources. Hwy 50 has been leading the vote tally to start the removal process. This location has several cement and rebar pilings left from a previous bridge. On our recent airboat tour, two boats hit the rebar near the NG&PC landing and scraped up the hulls of their boats.

LOWER PLATTE WEED MANAGEMENT AREA (LPWMA)

This group of county weed authorities and resource management entities continues to meet monthly to discuss noxious weeds in the Lower Platte River drainage. This year, the group received a \$54,000 grant to purchase equipment, chemicals, and get temporary assistance. An educational campaign is just beginning to help both landowners and governmental agencies become aware of the existing and foreseeable problems with noxious weeds particularly purple loosestrife, saltcedar, and phragmites (common reed). All have been found in the drainage. Approximately 105,000 acres or 3% of the 10-county Lower Platte River drainage area is infested with these three "Most Unwanted" and two other noxious weeds. In 2003, the LPWMA group started up a website and completed a survey and mapping project of existing noxious weed populations. This information and much more can be accessed at www.lowerplattewma.org.

MAPMAKER - INTERNET GIS MAPPING SYSTEM

The MapMaker site has been re-done and can assist you with a variety of mapping needs. The LPNDRD now hosts the site and can better serve users and address any glitches in a timely manner. Go to www.nrdmapmaker.org or visit the site through the LPRCA website at www.lowerplatte.org. Plans are in the works to expand the current coverage beyond the existing 5 eastern and southeastern Nebraska NRDs. Let us know how we can continue to serve you with this internet mapping service.

CORRIDOR LAND USE PLANNING

We've begun to work on the scope of this project. The first phase should begin shortly with data gathering including existing comprehensive plans, land use in the corridor, and past studies. The following steps are yet to be defined for the project, but early on, the public and local decision-makers will guide the process and assist in completing an assessment.

LPRCA BROCHURE A new brochure is completed and printed. We have 5,000 copies to distribute and hand out at meetings. If you would be willing to let us place some in your brochure rack, please let us know.

SAND AND GRAVEL WORKING GROUP-

P.A.C.E. The P.A.C.E. group met July 7th at UNL East Campus in Lincoln. A brochure has been developed and is ready for distribution. It gives a short synopsis of the group and its mission along with the primary areas of focus. The idea of having a demonstration site for remediation was discussed and members were going to approach potential cooperators near Grand Island. The group will look into funding sources to finance the demo site, possibly through grants. P.A.C.E. members have been involved in a variety of tours of mining operations and reclaimed sites recently.

INFRASTRUCTURE STUDY & THE LOWER PLATTE RIVER UTILITIES BOARD (LPRUB)

The infrastructure study that is looking at water supply and wastewater from Ashland to Louisville in Cass County continues to move forward. The final feasibility report showed that the project is feasible and recommended implementing in six phases: Phase I – Water system for the Louisville/South Bend area; Phase II – Wastewater treatment system for the Fountain Creek area near South Bend; Phase III – Wastewater treatment system for the Pawnee Creek area near the I-80/Platte River interchange (Horseshoe Lake); Phase IV – Wastewater treatment system for the Camp Joy Holling area; Phase V – Water supply system from South Bend to Exit 426 area; and Phase VI – Water supply system from Exit 426 to Ashland. Currently, a detailed engineering report is being completed for Phase I & II and rate studies will soon follow. LPRUB, the cooperative group that will oversee the project once completed, is finalizing cooperative agreement details and should be meeting later this year.

AGRO-ENVIRONMENTAL TRAIL (FORMERLY NATURE TRAIL PROJECT)

Recall that this project is a joint effort between the National Park Service (NPS), UNL, the LPRCA, and other partners to develop an educational nature trail and curriculum at the Ag Research Development Center (ARDC) near Ithaca. Unfortunately, some of the funding sources we were hoping to tap into did not come to fruition, but we are looking at other possibilities. The focus of the project has also shifted from a set project plan to a more open plan where project partners can suggest components to add to the overall project. This allows flexibility for all involved and leaves the door open to new ideas that may not come to mind presently, but would fit into the scope and enhance the project. The group is currently working on funding for a livestock management component.

Photo Album



Visit us online at:
www.lowerplatte.org

Water Tour Focuses on Lower Platte Region

By Rodney Verhoeff, LPRCA Coordinator



The annual UNL Water Tour was held on June 7-9, 2004, and focused on the Central and Lower Platte River areas. The tour itinerary is detailed below:

Day 1 - With a 6:00 a.m. departure from Lincoln on the 7th, the first day included stops at: Jeffery Island near Overton to see what Central Public Power and Irrigation District is doing to restore the area and conduct bird census activities; a sandpit near Lexington, which is managed for least tern and piping plover habitat; Rowe Sanctuary near Gibbon for a presentation on the sanctuary and its activities; the CPNRD for a presentation by USGS on recent drought events and groundwater level changes and a presentation by Gary Mader, Utilities Director for Grand Island, on their problem with industrial solvents moving towards Grand Island wells; and finally, an overnight stay in Columbus.

Day 2 - The second day began with a presentation the Alliance and upcoming stops in the Lower Platte River Corridor area. We next traveled to the Oak Ballroom in Schuyler for a presentation by the East-Central District Health Department on the changes in ethnic diversity of the community as a result of the influx of immigrants to fill employment opportunities. Our next stop was at Fremont Lakes SRA for a presentation on recent algae bloom issues and ways to treat the problem using "alum" to bind phosphorus. We then travelled to the Platte River Landing public access site near Fremont to hear presentations on geological exposures and building site hazards in the flood plain. Our last stop of the day was at the Joslyn Castle Institute in Omaha for an ice cream social and presentation on the 60-mile Radius Study -- a study looking at land use and growth

patterns between Omaha and Lincoln. That night we stayed in downtown Omaha.

Day 3 - the final day - We traveled to the Papio-Missouri River NRD for a presentation on the NRD and its programs. We also heard a presentation on the infrastructure project underway along the Platte River from Ashland to Louisville. Next, we headed to Schramm SRA for a presentation on the Pallid Sturgeon Study currently in its fifth year on the Lower Platte River. Our next stop was at the recently opened Lyman-Richey sand and gravel mining operation near Linoma Beach and a reclaimed mine, which has been converted to a wetland area. Our final presentation was given by NPPD on the installation of large capacity wells for cooling at the Gerald Gentlemen Power Station. What a great tour and wonderful opportunity to showcase the Lower Platte River Corridor. Currently, the planning committee is looking at destinations for next year.

New Brochure Completed



The LPRCA just completed and printed a new brochure describing the Alliance, its history, and detailing the "8 Reasons to Protect the Lower Platte River." The concept behind the brochure has several ideas associated with it:

History We wanted a brief background on the LPRCA and its evolution for those unfamiliar.

Description It was important to give a general description of the Alliance and how it functions.

Logo To encourage "brand recognition," we emblazoned the new logo on the front and back covers.

Images To grab the readers attention, we used 10 images and other graphics. Also, the use of round ports for the images emphasizes interconnections of the Lower Platte River ecosystem(s).

Background Design We chose colors that would scream, "pick me" on a brochure rack. Also, we wanted to have representation of the river (blue color), the land and vegetation (green), while allowing enough "white space" for the message.

8 Reasons Early on, the Alliance prioritized eight reasons to protect the Lower Platte River. We wanted to make sure these were emphasized in the brochure.

Website We plan to redesign the website using the concept behind this brochure.

Weed Tour Shows Need for Continued Efforts

By Rodney Verhoeff, LPRCA Coordinator

The Lower Platte Weed Management Area (LPWMA) group held a weed management and identification tour on Tuesday, July 27, 2004 at Two Rivers State Recreation Area (SRA). The purpose of the tour was to help members of the public become aware of the spread of invasive plants in the area and allow for agency personnel to exchange ideas and share experiences.



Bob Ellis with Douglas County Weed Authority discusses equipment used in weed control

The LPWMA is a collaborative group comprised of public and private agencies and individuals concerned with controlling the spread of noxious weeds and invasive species in the Lower Platte River drainage area. The area of concern comprises 10 counties in eastern Nebraska and includes riparian areas, streams, creeks, ponds, and wetlands that drain into or impact the Platte River. Counties include: Butler, Cass, Colfax, Dodge, Douglas, Lancaster, Platte, Sarpy, Saunders, and Seward.



The LPWMA group uses displays to reach landowners regarding weed control

The tour began with an introduction of the LPWMA group efforts including a collaborative project with Boys and Girls Town to raise beetles to release in purple loosestrife infested areas and assistance from the Nebraska Airboaters Association to spray in hard to reach areas.

The LPWMA has also applied for several grants to continue these efforts and get the necessary help and equipment to carry out these projects. The group did receive a \$54,000 grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Foundation through their "Pulling Together Initiative" - a program offering assistance to cooperative weed management efforts. Some of this grant will be put to use directly on the ground through hiring of additional help and purchase of necessary supplies and equipment.

The tour continued with a discussion and presentation on three of the "Most Wanted" (or unwanted) noxious weeds: purple loosestrife (PLS), saltcedar, and phragmites (common reed).



View from Two Rivers SRA showing stands of PLS beginning to take hold along the Platte River

County weed superintendents each gave an update on the status of noxious weeds in their counties. The diagnosis is daunting with patches of PLS throughout the entire drainage area and more and more stands of saltcedar and phragmites showing up - all of which can choke out native vegetation.

The tour finished up with a demonstration on a new aquatic-safe herbicide called Habitat for use on PLS including the proper way to mix and apply the chemical.



A BASF representative demonstrates how to apply Habitat, a new aquatic-safe herbicide.

We need your help to continue the efforts to control the spread of noxious weeds and invasive species or they will choke out native species, reduce desirable habitat and food sources for wildlife, and in the case of saltcedar, potentially create water quantity and quality problems. Contact the Lower Platte Weed Management Area group at (402) 367-0510 (Great Plains RC&D) or via the web at www.lowerplattewma.org.



phragmites



purple loosestrife



saltcedar

MOST UN-WANTED

Purple Loosestrife Rapidly and aggressively spreading non-native species that can choke out native species and offers little value for food or habitat. It is a perennial forb that was brought over from Eurasia and Africa as an ornamental. PLS reproduces by seeds and spreads by rhizomes. It has rose-purple flowers which bloom from July to Sept. Currently, PLS infests 13,000 acres in Nebraska and it is found in wet meadows, wetlands, marshes, along stream and river banks, irrigation canals and recreational lakes. Each plant can produce millions of seed, which can lay dormant for years.

Saltcedar Perennial scrub or small tree brought over from Eurasia as an ornamental. The plant can grow from 3 to 20 feet high and the leaves resemble evergreen leaves. A large saltcedar can use up to 200 gpd of water. Stems and leaves secrete salt and inhibit other plant growth. The taproot can descend into soil 50 feet to find water. Colonizes in variety of environments forming monoculture and provides little food or habitat benefit. Saltcedar can be found on the Platte, Missouri, and Republican Rivers in Nebraska.

Phragmites Also known as common reed, this is a very tall perennial grass found on all continents but Antarctica. It can grow up to 14 feet tall with stiff leaves and hollow stems. Purplish flowers bloom from July to October. This aggressively spreading plant can form a monoculture and choke out native vegetation. Phragmites spreads by rhizomes and can reproduce from just a few seeds or broken pieces. It can thrive in harsh environments including brackish and salty water where other plants cannot.

MOST UN-WANTED

UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS

LPRCA Quarterly Meeting - Tues, August 17th, 2004 * 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon. PMRNRD at Chalco Hills Recreation Area near Omaha. Agenda items include: Grants, Nebraska Community Foundation affiliation, Environmental Carrying Capacity Study, River Obstruction Removal project, Update on 2004 Airboat Tour, Golf Tourney, Water Wellness Meetings, and updates on other activities. Next quarterly meeting will be sometime in November or December 2004.

LPRCA Water Quality Open Golf Tournament - Wed, September 1st, 2004 * 11:00 a.m. presentation - 1:00 p.m. tee off - 5:30 p.m. dinner/awards presentation. Arbor Links Golf Club near Nebraska City. Learn a little about water quality and conservation issues while enjoying a day of golfing at a challenging Arnold Palmer-designed course. Arbor Links is located near the beautiful Lied Lodge and offers a natural setting with mature trees, native grasses, a winding creek, and conservation tips on each hole. This 300-acre course showcases how golf courses can utilize eco-friendly design and management practices and even benefit from them. Registration is \$55/person which includes all green fees, cart use, range balls, t-shirt, and dinner. Format is a scramble with 4-person teams. Make a splash and become a sponsor. Go to www.lowerplatte.org to print the registration form or contact the LPRCA at (402) 476-2729.

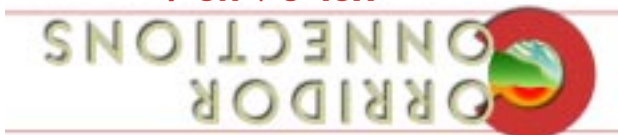


Flatwater Metroplex Conference - Thurs, Sept 9th, 2004 * 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Scott Conference Center - 6450 Pine Street in Omaha. The Joslyn Castle Institute for Sustainable Communities is holding a conference as a part of the 60-Mile Radius study to present the final report for the project. There will be a discussion of land-use/growth issues and alternatives that will shape the quality of life for 120+ communities in the Omaha-Lincoln metroplex region. Registration cost is \$10.00 including lunch and beverages. Please RSVP and register at www.ecospheres.com or at (402) 595-1902. This conference is funded in part with a grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund, with additional support from the Cities of Council Bluffs, Lincoln and Omaha as well as the Lower Platte South and Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources Districts. If you have an interest in land use & growth patterns between Lincoln and Omaha including the Lower Platte River area, this conference will be of interest.

Cumulative Impact Study Meeting - Tues, August 17th, 2004 * 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. PMRNRD at Chalco Hills Recreation Area near Omaha. The CIS group will be meeting following the Alliance quarterly meeting at the PMRNRD office. Topics will include grant opportunities, data acquisition, and GIS development. Call the Alliance at (402) 476-2729 or Frank Albrecht with the NG&PC at (402) 471-5422.

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Lower Platte River
CORRIDOR ALLIANCE
P.O. Box 83581
Lincoln, NE 68501

