



Lower Platte River CORRIDOR ALLIANCE

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The Coordinator's Corner...

Quarterly Report from the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance * Rodney L. Verhoeff, Coordinator

For the period of April 28th through August 17th, 2004

New Brochure

The new LPRCA brochure is here and looks great! The "8 Reasons to Protect the Platte River" are highlighted in the brochure along with a brief background on the LPRCA and the Corridor. The look is quite a departure from the previous version with a swoosh of green representing the land and a swoosh of blue representing the river. If you would be willing to let us put a few in your brochure rack, please let us know and we'll send some over.



Corridor Connections Newsletter The spring/summer edition of *Corridor Connections* has been sent to the printers. I had hoped to have them distributed earlier, but we are experiencing some "technical difficulties" in printing the file. Hopefully, within the next week, the newsletter will be ready and mailed out. I am accepting submissions for the fall/winter edition. Contact me to discuss your ideas.

Cumulative Impact Study The CIS group will be meeting on August 17th, 2004 at 1:30 p.m. following the LPRCA quarterly meeting. The meeting will be held at the Papio-Missouri NRD office located at the Chalco Hills Recreation Area. Take the Sapp Brothers exit on I-80 and go north to Giles Road. Take a left (west) and continue until you see the entrance gate to the recreation area (top of hill). The group has defined the boundary area for the study - - the Lower Platte River area that includes the 100-year flood plain (1-meter resolution) or 5 miles (2.5 miles on each side from the center of the river), whichever is greater. Also, where the floodplain is very wide near the Elkhorn River confluence, it was agreed upon that north of the Douglas County line, only the Platte River drainage would be included. Grant opportunities, development of an internet-based GIS mapping system, and which time step (aerial photos) to acquire will be discussed at the August 17th meeting. We did just receive word that the grant from EPA we submitted was not funded. They had tremendous response to the call for applications and ended up having much less money to give out than originally thought.

Affiliation with the Nebraska Community Foundation (NCF) At the last LPRCA quarterly meeting, the group voted to affiliate with the NCF to create a "Lower Platte River Corridor Fund." This would allow the Alliance, which is not officially designated as a 501 (c)(3) - nonprofit organization by the IRS, to accept donations and grants. All 3 NRD boards on the LPRCA have also given their approval to proceed. We are finalizing the affiliated fund agreement and hope to have it in place soon.

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 brief background 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. A subcommittee of PACE members recently got together to draft up an outline for a Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund (NETF) grant for the demonstration site. We are considering constructing viewing platforms on nearby properties along with educational kiosks on mining. In other news, P.A.C.E. members have been involved in a variety of tours of mining operations and reclaimed sites recently including the recent UNL Water Tour.

2004 Airboat Tour Highlights Wow! What an event. It all turned out great for this year's tour including the weather. The event was held on Friday, July 23rd, 2004 and covered the area of the Lower Platte River from South Bend to Plattsmouth. With nearly 60 people in attendance and 23 airboats, the tour commenced at 9 a.m. at the Hwy 50 landing north of Louisville. The tour headed upstream to the Lied Bridge for a presentation on the Platte River Connection, housing developments, the Lower Platte River Utilities Board (LPRUB) infrastructure project, and trails projects. The tour then headed downstream to the Omaha Fish & Wildlife Club to talk about their operations and levee systems. The members of the club were very accommodating and provided a very nice tent set-up for our stop. Our third stop was at the confluence of the Platte and Missouri Rivers at the Schilling WMA. There we heard from NG&PC representatives Frank Albrecht and Mark Brohman on the wildlife management area and a river chute restoration project. Bob Diffendal, a retired UNL Conservation & Survey Division Professor Emeritus, gave an interesting presentation on Lewis & Clark and the geology of the area. Following a great BBQ lunch, we headed to the Hanson Lakes area for several presentations including one by John Lund of NDEQ, Kyle Hoagland of UNL, and Jim Sitrick of Cass/Sarpy County Health Department on recent algae bloom problems in area lakes. The second presentation was given by Jeff Kohn of the Metropolitan Utilities District (MUD) on their operations and proposed wellfield near Ashland. Rene Nelson wastewater operator for Hanson Lakes, spoke on the wetland wastewater treatment plant for the Hanson Lakes area. Following this last presentation, we loaded up and headed back to Hwy 50 for departure. Thanks to everyone who helped and those who attended. Here are a few photos:



60-mile Radius Committee The 60-mile Radius Project is in its 3rd and final year. As a part of the project, there will be a "Flatwater Metroplex Conference" on September 9th to discuss the results of the project survey on land use and public perception/attitudes along with a summary of land use planning issues and alternatives. The conference is \$10/person including lunch and will be held at the Scott Conference Center located at 6450 Pine Street in Omaha. You can sign up by calling (402) 595-1902 or download the registration form at www.ecospheres.com. If you are interested in development issues between Lincoln and Omaha including the Lower Platte River area, you will find this conference very interesting.

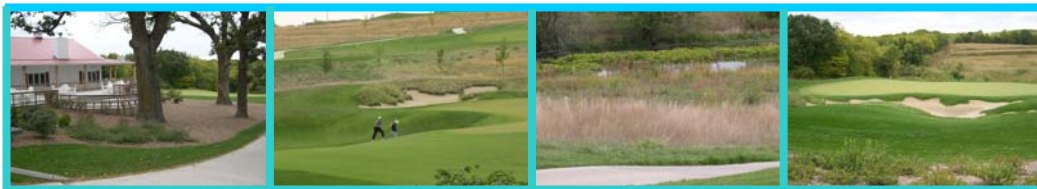
Agro-Environmental Trail Project (formerly Nature Trail Project) The group just received notice that they have been awarded a 5-star EPA grant to implement a Grazing Wetland Project. I don't have all of the details yet, but it sounds as though an educational program will also be developed in conjunction with design of the grazing wetlands system. The grants committee will be convening soon to work evaluate the project and hammer out more details.

Water Wellness Meetings 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 range of topics. New information presented at the meetings included ground and surface water basics, water contamination 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.

Lower Platte Weed Management Area (LPWMA) 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. 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). 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.



2004 Water Quality Open Don't forget - - Wednesday, September 1st, 2004 is the date for the 2004 LPRCA "Water Quality Open" golf tournament. This date is coming up fast. The tournament will be held at Arbor Links golf club in Nebraska City. To register, contact the LPRCA at (402) 476-2729 or go on-line and download the registration form. We still have space, but it fills up fast. The event starts off at 11:00 a.m. with a presentation by Steve Merkel, who is the Manager of Agronomy for all courses constructed by Landscapes Unlimited - - the organization that built Arbor Links. Cost for registration is \$55/person and includes all green fees, cart use, range balls, prizes, t-shirt, and dinner. The tournament is a four-person team scramble with a shotgun start. We have several activities and displays planned. Single golfers are welcome - - we can find you a team to play on. Deadline for sign-up is August 30th. See you there.

UNL Water Tour This year's UNL Water tour was held on June 7-9, 2004 and focused on the Central and Lower Platte River areas. I had the privilege to help plan this year's tour and several of our projects and interests were featured this time around. With a 6:00 a.m. departure from Lincoln on the 7th, the tour made its way to Kearney to pick up other tour participants. The first stop was 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. We then headed to a sandpit near Lexington, which is managed by NPPD and other partners for least tern and piping plover habitat. Next, we traveled to Rowe Sanctuary near Gibbon for a catered lunch and a presentation on the sanctuary and its activities. After lunch, we headed to the CPNRD for a presentation by USGS on recent drought events and groundwater level changes. We also had a great presentation by Gary Mader, Utilities Director for GI, on their problem with industrial solvents moving towards GI wells and what efforts they have taken to remediate the situation. Several GI wells have already been shut-off, particularly those in the heart of the city and many monitoring wells have been constructed to identify the extent of the contamination plumes. Grand Island gets most of its water from a series of wells on an island in the central Platte River south of the city. Following a quick tour of the impacted GI wells, we headed to Columbus for an overnight stay at the New World Inn.



Day 2 began with a presentation on the Alliance and upcoming stops in the Lower Platte River Corridor area. We then 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 for the nearby packing plants. Adjusting to a new culture is one of the greatest challenges for most immigrants. Next, we traveled to Fremont State Recreation Area for a presentation by Kyle Hoagland with UNL on algae issues and recent control research. One of the substances they use to control the algae is called alum, which binds to the phosphorus, the primary nutrient responsible for algae blooms, and settle to the bottom of the lakes. We also heard from the park superintendent at the lakes on recreation activities. Following a BBQ lunch, we headed to the LPNRRD/City of Fremont - Platte River Landing for two presentations: (1) Matt Joekel with UNL Conservation & Survey talked about geological exposures and the surrounding bluffs; and (2) NDNR presented information on flooding and building site exposures. We then headed to the Joslyn Castle Institute (JCI) in Omaha for an ice cream social and a presentation by Cecil Steward on the 60-mile Radius Study and other land-use planning issues. He discussed current development trends in the "Metroplex" - the area between Omaha and Lincoln. By 2025, Omaha will run out of land to develop if they continue to use current land use patterns. JCI did a survey of area residents and many don't like the concept behind acreage development, yet they would love to live on one. The day was capped off with a stay at the Double Tree Hotel in Omaha.

Day 3 - the final day - Started off at the PMRNRD for a presentation by Steve Oltmans on PMRNRD programs. We also heard from HDR on the infrastructure project underway along the Platte River from Ashland to Louisville. The next stop on the tour was Schramm State Recreational Area for a presentation on the Pallid Sturgeon Study, which is currently in its fifth year on the lower Platte River. Dr. Ed Peters gave an interesting presentation and indicated they have found several more pallid sturgeon in the area this year. Our next stop was at the recently opened Lyman-Richey sand and gravel mining operation near Linoma Beach. Carl Roberts talked about the mining operation and the recently formed group - P.A.C.E. We headed out to a reclaimed mine, which has been converted a wetland area and serves as nesting habitat for piping plover and least terns. This area known as Jansen's Pit was part of the W. Sarpy/Clear Creek project undertaken by the COE and the 3 NRDs, with the PMRNRD taking the lead. During lunch at the Linoma Beach Lobster Inn, we had our final presentation by Frank Kwapnioski with NPPD on the installation of large capacity wells for cooling at the Gerald Gentlemen Power Station.