



from the coordinator...

Monthly Report from the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance for the period of SEPT 1 through OCT 1, 2004

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PACE (Planning – Aggregates – Community – Environment) The PACE group met on Wednesday, September 29th, 2004 at Crane Meadows Nature Center in Alda, Nebraska. Initially, the group discussed modifying state statute language in Title 125 (pertaining to mining) to include a definition of reclamation to go along with the existing definition of restoration. Originally, NDEQ was going to request a change, but they feel that the request needs to come from the mining industry. The group felt that the request needs to be made from all areas of the mining industry including uranium and limestone. Mining interests involved with PACE will contact members of those mining areas and see if we can have a unified request. We will then need to find a state senator to carry our request. A Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund (NETF) grant was submitted for development of a demo site where a start-up sand/gravel mining operation can be observed from inception to reclamation (approximately 2-3 years). If received, the grant will be used to build a viewing platform with a viewing scope and to develop educational and outreach materials on mining and reclamation. A mock-up of the new brochure was distributed. UN-K students are assisting with the design and layout. They also helped develop the PACE logo. A speaker's bureau is available from PACE where groups can request to have one of several PACE members talk about the group and its efforts. The administrative history of the PACE group should be completed soon and available for distribution. TNC will be featuring PACE in an upcoming article to be published in the international TNC magazine. This should give the group good publicity and showcase how collaborative efforts can work.

NARD Conference

The annual fall NARD Conference was held on September 26-28th, 2004 at the Kearney Holiday Inn Conference Center. Topics covered the gamut from proposed legislation to toxic algae to conflict resolution. Of particular interest to me were presentations on LB 962 (Integrated Water Resources Management), Public Water Supply issues/conflicts, and holistic management, which looks at being proactive in addressing management issues rather than reactive. We had quite a list of dignitaries at the conference including Governor Johanns, Roger Patterson - Director of NDNR, Steve Chick - State Conservationist for NRCS, Mike Linder - Director of NDEQ, State Senator Ed Schrock, Krysta Harden, new CEO of NARD, and a host of other people who really work hard for our natural resources.

Agro-Environmental Trail Project (formerly Nature Trail Project) An education subcommittee was formed to begin the process of developing curriculum and outreach materials for this project. Representatives from the LPNNRD, UNL ARDC, UNL Cooperative Extension, NPS, LPRCA, and the NRCS met to hash out ideas. The idea of a backpack kit with different modules on specific topics received favor from the group. The idea is to have materials that can be tailored to different ages and interests and allow for self-guided experiences at the site. Originally, we thought there would be someone from UNL to help part-time with this project, but due to budget cuts and changes in focus, this is not the case now. Thus, we need to find ways to deliver programs without staff. We also discussed the creation of a website that would allow educators and others to look through various modules on topics to tailor their program and then set-up a date to use the site. The LPNNRD will be assisting with the website including hosting the site.

WRDA 2004 The LPRCA and 3 NRDs in the area have been working on language for a Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) amendment to include authorization for comprehensive watershed management projects in the Corridor. These projects would include infrastructure issues such as water supply/wastewater, water quality & quantity monitoring across the entire Corridor, river access, river obstruction removal, land-use planning, cumulative impact studies, and floodplain management. With the reform of the Corps of Engineers (COE) and their mission to address comprehensive watershed management and planning, these projects fit well with the new direction of the COE.

I-80 Economic Summit On Friday, October 1, along with Glenn Johnson and LPRCA/LPSNRD intern Craig Wacker, I attended an I-80 Corridor Economic Summit at the SAC Museum. This is the second summit focusing on economic development and growth in the corridor from Omaha to Lincoln along I-80. Recent studies and projections indicate that this area is considered a prime location for future economic development. With a wealth of attributes including good transportation, location, natural resources, scenic qualities, and recreation/tourism opportunities, the area is being eyed for a variety of ideas. The purpose of the summit was

I-80 Economic Summit –continued- to get all stakeholders together to start working together as a region and to plan for the future of the corridor. It was also to raise awareness of the many interests to consider. Steve Oltmans served on one of the discussion panels and did a great job of pointing out environmental considerations and the significance of the Platte River area. Attendees included business leaders from Omaha and Lincoln, state senators, agency heads, natural resources entities, economic development representatives, private business, NGO's, consulting/engineering firms, community leaders, public utilities, and UNL representatives to name a few. All in all, well over 200 people were in attendance. J.B. Miliken, the new President of UNL gave the opening address. He discussed his most recent experience in North Carolina where the University of North Carolina along with private business partners established a research triangle between the communities of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill. This institution marries research, technology, and private industry to create a tremendous partnership for technology and economic development. He stressed the need for Nebraska to help get adults educated in technology to meet today's industry needs and compete nationally and internationally.

Two discussion panels followed. The first discussed the topic, "Next Generation of Economic Development" and included panelists from the Omaha and Lincoln Chambers of Commerce and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. The main point that came out of this panel is the need to work together as a region and to take advantage of the opportunity we have right now before it bypasses us. Also, LB 775, the bill that gave economic/tax incentives to bring business to Nebraska, was given much praise as the catalyst for bringing many big businesses to our state. The second panel of the afternoon covered the topic "Here and Now, Resources Along the I-80 Corridor." Along with the State Highway Commission and a venture capital firm, Steve Oltmans with the PMRNRD served as a panelist. As mentioned earlier, Steve pointed out the unique and valuable natural resources of the I-80 corridor and particularly where it intersects the Lower Platte River Corridor. Steve introduced me to the group and allowed me to hand out the LPRCA brochure to the 200+ attendees. He also plugged the many projects the Alliance is undertaking including recent infrastructure projects to address water supply/wastewater. One of the biggest points to emerge from this discussion was directing development to allow for economic development, while protecting the natural qualities of the area. The panelist from the venture capital firm also mentioned that we don't pursue much venture capital in Nebraska and there is a tremendous opportunity to do so.

Probably one of the most stirring and interesting presentations came from Robert Siegel with Siegal and Associates, a market analysis firm. His firm has studied the Nebraska market for the past 30 years focusing on the Omaha to Lincoln I-80 corridor. The population of the nation is moving inward from the coasts as they run out of room for economic development. However, more people move out of Nebraska than move in. Mr. Siegel says that those outside Nebraska see the state as a dying state because of the population exodus and the lack of employment opportunities. Generally, large companies look for metro areas with at least a million in population. Omaha alone does not meet this number. However, combining Omaha and Lincoln into an "Omaha-Lincoln" regional area would meet this level and could interest companies to move here. He likened this idea to the Raleigh-Durham and Dallas-Fort Worth areas. Mr. Siegel had several recommendations: (1) Hold annual I-80 conference/summit; (2) Create an I-80 Commission to bring stakeholders together - statewide entity; (3) Do a study on infrastructure - If we were even keeping pace with U.S., our state would have a population of 4 million minimum rather than our current population of 1.7 million; (4) The State of Nebraska needs to do whatever it takes to put Omaha-Lincoln on the map - - even if it includes raising taxes; (5) Create a research park or similar regional technology/business/economic development area similar to what North Carolina has done in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area; (6) have our representatives in Congress and all state officials mention the area as "Omaha-Lincoln" - - as one metro area. Also get the economic area redefined as one unified area - - most business looks to locate in metro areas with 1 million people or more and combining would put the area at that level; (7) Continue and build cooperation between Omaha and Lincoln; (8) Have high capacity highways to move people in and out of core areas; (9) Create a webpage to promote the I-80 Corridor; and (10) Include the Council Bluffs, Iowa area in the area.

The next presentation, which led into a third panel discussion on "High Tech and Information in Nebraska" was by Bart Stenco with Gartner, a research advisory firm and the largest IT consultant in the nation. According to Mr. Stenco, Nebraska isn't on the radar screen for high tech jobs, but we can change that and become a high tech Mecca. Things to consider include: infrastructure, quality of life, social issues, regulatory issues, skilled and available workforce, fortune 500 company clusters, climate, and natural resources. To put the area on the radar screen for high tech issues, the following needs to be addressed: educational system, investment capital, sustainability, communications, advisors, incubators, alignment, workforce programs, and apprenticeship programs. The third panel discussion included IT professionals. They stressed three types of leadership necessary to have success in the high tech industry: (1) visionary, (2) strategic, and (3) tactical. You need people who are idea people, but you also need the "do-ers." The fourth and final panel of the day was entitled, "Developing Good Jobs in IT, BT, Financial Services, and Agri-Business" and included panelists from the University, NEBCO, and Cargil - - successful Nebraska businesses and institutions. The

I-80 Economic Summit –continued – panelists discussed what attracts businesses and the current efforts underway including partnerships in Omaha between business and educational institutions (i.e. J.D. Edwards Honors Program, Peter Kiewit Institute, Scott Technology Transfer and Incubator Center, and University of Nebraska Technology Park). The discussion again emphasized the importance of LB 775 to encourage businesses to locate in Nebraska. Global marketing and competition were also common themes in the discussion.

The next presenter was Theo Freye, President of CLAAS North America, a maker of large agricultural implement equipment including a 16 row combine. Mr. Freye discussed what attracted his company to the Omaha area. CLAAS is a German company and in order to locate here there had to be a skilled work force, good infrastructure, and economic incentives to make it work. Nebraska had all of that and LB 775 provided the incentives. Inland states such as Nebraska are often at a disadvantage since they are located quite a distance from shipping ports. Workers and management at CLAAS in Omaha appreciate the atmosphere Nebraska offers (social benefits).

The final speaker of the day was Governor Johanns. The Governor reiterated the importance of economic development in Nebraska to keep the state viable and competitive. We need to consider both local national and international markets. He also praised LB 775 and other similar legislation that has brought so many jobs to our state. Governor Johanns also stressed the need to continue to work together in the state. Final thoughts from Senator Pam Brown summed up many of the points made at the summit and hinted at future gatherings of the attendees to put the ideas into action. There was a social gathering following the summit. I did notice that LPRCA projects and collaborative projects were mentioned in handouts including: The Environmental Carrying Capacity Study, the infrastructure studies in Cass and Sarpy Counties, and the Joslyn Castle Institute's Flatwater Metroplex Study.

Cumulative Impact Study (CIS) The CIS group met on October 5, 2004 at the LPSNRD in Lincoln. Attendance was great with 16 attendees. The draft Scope of Work (SOW) had previously been mailed out and was the first item of discussion. The SOW details the items to cover in this study, the area of the project, costs, and timelines. Attendees thoroughly went through the document and made suggestions for changes. Everyone was also asked to read through the SOW carefully and e-mail any additional changes to the LPRCA or NG&PC. A final draft will incorporate these suggestions so the group can finalize before the deadline of December 31, 2004. The group then discussed subsequent phases and funding possibilities including COE Section 22 funds. There was discussion on adding 1999 aerial photos as a time step since they were taken during a "leaf off" time when there were no leaves on the trees and vegetation. Sometimes it is easier to view details on the ground during a "leaf off" time. The group determined that it wanted to keep the number of time steps to 5 and use 1999 as a supplement to the 1993 time step. Water resources issues may be a part of the predictive model component (later phases) and represent a different form of data, which could supplement the aerial photos. Results of the August 24th GIS CIS meeting were discussed. GIS representatives from the CIS partners were asked to provide cost estimates for specific types of data. Once this info is compiled, we can work on the scope of future phases. The GIS CIS group will be meeting on November 3rd at the LPNNRD at 10:00 a.m. to finalize these numbers. The entire CIS group will meet on November 23rd at the LPNNRD at 10:00 a.m.

Flatwater Metroplex Conference September 9th, 2004 was the date for the "Flatwater Metroplex Conference" at the Scott Conference Center in Omaha. This is a follow-up conference to one held last fall to present findings from the Joslyn Castle Institute's (JCI) 60-mile Radius Study. This three-year study is coming to an end and the Flatwater Metroplex conference provided the opportunity to present results from a public opinion survey on development and a final report/recommendations for addressing development and growth between Omaha and Lincoln (the "Metroplex"). Cecil Steward, President of JCI gave an introduction and brief summary of the project. He outlined 10 recommendations from the study: (1) Need for Coordinated Planning; (2) Regular Communications between the Many Jurisdictions; (3) Need for Urban Indicators (should match 5 domains which guided the 60-mile Radius Study - Environmental, Socio-Cultural, Technologies, Economics, Public Policies); (4) Use of BMPs; (5) Address Fragile Environments - Rivers and Watersheds, Interstate/Highway/ Todd Valley Corridors, Flat Alluvial Plains; (6) Develop Alternative Strategies; (7) Acreage/Ag Policies - Protect Rural Lands; (8) Regional Water Policy Strategy; (9) Regional Energy Policies; and (10) Creation of a Rural/Urban Coalition. We heard an interesting presentation by the Executive Director of the Central Texas Sustainability Indicators Project (CTSIP). The CTSIP has helped to develop a sense of regionalism in Texas. Population growth projections for the project area are similar to Nebraska so many comparisons can be made. The project started in 1996 and included the creation of a 50-member advisory board to look at a variety of indicators (100 total) such as immigration, housing, natural resources, infrastructure, and many others. Sustainability was a guiding principle. The project has used the scenario planning approach and created planning documents, recommendations, a website, and other resources for communities to use for development and land use planning. During lunch Cecil Steward gave a short presentation on the State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference (SOLEC) he attended recently. A group of governments in and around the Great Lakes area got together

Flatwater Metroplex Conference –continued - with the help of EPA to address growth and development in the area - - they termed the group SOLEC. They determined indicators to gauge growth and development impacts. Cecil laid out a similar concept for the Flatwater Metroplex area which would include the following: (1) Create a NE/IA Metroplex Indicator Conference (NE/IA MIC) group - voluntary group of partners who would propose planning recommendations; (2) Hold an annual event of the group; (3) Release publications and annual report on the area prior to conference; (4) Address coordinated regional planning, determine indicators and goals, and recommend planning/development guidelines and principles. The proposed make up of the NE/IA MIC group is 2 state governments, 16 counties, large communities, 10 smaller communities, agricultural interests, financial institutions, economic development entities, NRDs, MAPA, home builders and development interests. In the afternoon, we broke out into small groups to discuss the five domains mentioned above. I served as moderator for the Environmental Domain. The final exercise of the day was to present our findings and what considerations/indicators we came up with. Also, we discussed the idea of creating the NE/IA MIC. This concept received a favorable response from most participants. The JCI is applying to the NETF for an additional three-year's worth of funding to continue the 60-mile Radius Study.

Virtual Symposium I forgot to mention this last month, but I attended a "virtual symposium" at UNL on August 25th. The EPA sponsored this symposium in Philadelphia, which was then broadcast live via a web-cast to many areas including UNL. The program was titled "Environmental Aspects of Pharmaceuticals and Personal Care Products" and focused on concerns with these chemicals collectively known as PPCPs, and how we are seeing them enter our waters and the tissues of fish and animals. This issue is starting to make headlines nationwide. Recall, that the LPRCA did a small study and found PPCPs in groundwater located near septic systems in sandy soils with shallow water tables. Recently, I read an article in the Omaha World Herald about a study in Colorado looking at the mutation of fish downstream from metropolitan wastewater discharge points in the South Platte River. Fish upstream were shown to have normal tissue and equal numbers of male and female fish. However, downstream from a municipal wastewater discharge point, many fish had both male and female sexual tissue and the number of female fish greatly outnumbered male fish. The same was true of a tributary to the South Platte in Colorado.

Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund (NETF) Grants The two NETF grants discussed last month were submitted to the Trust. One is for the development and installation of display panels along the Platte River showcasing the 8 Reasons to Protect the Lower Platte River in the amount of \$9,000. The other is for the Environmental Carrying Capacity Study in the amount of \$12,000. We will know if we were awarded any funds by early 2005.

Pallid Sturgeon/Sturgeon Chub Task Force (PS/SC Task Force) the PS/SC Task Force met on July 14th at the AK-SAR-BEN Aquarium located in Schramm PARK SRA near Gretna. After the usual financial and new depletions updates, the group got an update on research efforts by UNL. This was the last sampling season for the project and it will take until next summer or fall to produce reports on the data. Please refer to the last newsletter for more details. A contract extension has been sent to all members of the task force to extend the time frame until next fall. This extension only asks for time, but no additional money.

Project/Activity Status Updates

- **River Obstruction Study** - Report recently put together and submitted to COE as requested by the COE to assess the identified obstructions. They plan to do research to determine owners/responsible parties of old pilings. I will be attending an Airboaters Association meeting on Sunday, October 24th to discuss the project and get input on which obstructions should be the highest priority. There will be a meeting in November with NG&PC to discuss funding possibilities through grants.
- **Environmental Carrying Capacity Study** - Working on getting project cooperative agreement between three NRD's to outline parameters of project. The LPSNRD will be project sponsor on behalf of the Alliance. A draft "Agreement for Professional Services" with HDR is being considered by the LPSNRD board.
- **Nebraska Community Foundation Affiliation** - We are still in the process of getting all signatures (from Alliance members) on a 2nd amendment to the Interlocal Agreement that created the LPRCA to allow for the establishment of a "Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance Fund." This fund will allow the LPRCA to accept grants and donations. The amendment stipulates how the fund will be managed and that a "Fund Advisory Committee" will provide recommendations for investment and disbursement.

Recent & Upcoming NRD and Alliance Meetings:

- ✓ **NEXT LPRCA QUARTERLY MEETING** - Tuesday, November 30th, 2004 * 9:30 a.m. * LPNNRD Office near Omaha.
- ✓ **PMRNRD Board Meeting** - Thursday, Oct 14th, 2004 * 8:00 p.m. - Nat Res Center @ Chalco Hills Rec Area - Omaha
- ✓ **LPSNRD Board Meeting** - Wednesday, Oct 20th, 2004 * 7:00 p.m. - LPSNRD Office - Lincoln @ 3125 Portia Street
- ✓ **LPNNRD Board Meeting** - Monday, Oct 25th, 2004 * 7:00 p.m. - LPNNRD Office - Wahoo @ 511 Industrial Road