



Lower Platte River CORRIDOR ALLIANCE

The Coordinator's Corner...

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

For the period of March 1st, 2005 through May 27th, 2005

Budget Time

It's that time of the year again to develop an LPRCA budget. Working with Alliance members, I've developed a draft budget I hope reflects what we need to do and how we will approach LPR issues. We've been working hard the past couple of years on data gathering, outreach, and developing projects/programs to address the varied issues we face. The budget reflects this fact and has some changes from last year. You will notice a broader outreach component, program implementation funds, and additional funds to conduct 2 airboat tours this year. Each of these changes was made to match with the direction we are headed as an organization and to respond to the needs of the LPR corridor. Last year, we had a budget of \$150,500, while this year the proposed budget is \$238,500. The primary increase is for implementation of the Hwy 50 river obstruction removal pilot project. Administrative costs have remained the same, while more funds are being requested for on-the-ground project implementation.

Corridor Connections Newsletter

The latest edition of *Corridor Connections* has been printed and mailed to over 1,500 people, businesses, and organizations. If you did not receive one and would like to be on our mailing list, please contact the LPRCA office at (402) 476-2729.



Cumulative Impact Study

We are still plugging away and trying to finish the Scope of Work (SOW) for Phase II including development of cost estimates and components of the project. Recently, we held a committee meeting to discuss the hydrologic study portion of the study. USGS has proposed doing this part of the study and gave a presentation outlining how parameters will be measured and evaluated. We had originally looked at putting this portion of the study in Phase III, but now are considering having it as part of Phase II so we can do a trend analysis. The group also looked at adding a new time step - 1955 - and dropping the 1880's transect data. Although the transect data is not the same type of data and may not fit into our GIS, it would provide valuable background and historical information. We are currently looking into the availability and completeness of the 1955 information to see if it would be a good option to add.

[Water Issues Conference](#) I recently attended a water conference in Ogallala, "Exploring Nebraska's Water Future - A Water Resources Seminar." The event kicked off on March 29th at Lake McConaughy. I spent a little time beforehand driving around the lake and was astonished how much it has shrunk. The beaches are now really big beaches and the surrounding wetlands, inlets, and coves are also beaches. Even without its normal volume, it is still a very big body of water. On the first night of the conference we heard from the USGS on symmetry and topography of the lake. They have very sophisticated tools to study including 3-D software to do a virtual flyover into the lake basin. We also heard from NDEQ on developing Total Daily Maximum Loads (TMDL's) for Lake Ogallala- or the maximum amount of contaminants/pollutants that can enter the lake without degrading the water quality. The second day focused on recent drought issues and competition for water in Nebraska. Congressman Osborne opened the 2nd day and discussed a myriad of water-related problems for agriculture particularly in western Nebraska. Jim Goeke with UNL Conservation & Survey Division give an interesting presentation on geology of Western Nebraska and how it relates to groundwater quality and quantity. We then heard from Jim Cook with the NDNR on LB 962 and implementing integrated management plans in Nebraska as a result of LB 962. This bill will study all of our river basins to see if they are "over-appropriated," "fully-appropriated," or still have water available for development. The western and southwestern part of the state has already undergone this evaluation primarily due to priority status and several multi-state water compacts. The Lower Platte River Basin will be on the table in 2006 for evaluation. There is always the possibility that our basin could be deemed "fully-appropriated" particularly in light of the fact that some large-scale water projects will be coming on line in the near future. Planned use will be calculated into the equation to determine if a basin is fully or over appropriated. Following this presentation, there was a panel discussion on implementing integrated management plans. The panel was primarily made up of NRD managers in the areas working on such issues. We had a great luncheon speaker - Ernie Niemi with ECONorthwest - who spoke on changing paradigms and how we can survive in Nebraska even if irrigated agriculture is reduced. To do this, we must look outside the box and adapt to the limitations and possibilities we have. He used Oregon as an example and how the reduction in logging due to T&E species changed the economy from logging to natural resources and recreation. Our next speaker was ill so we moved up a presentation by the Bureau of Reclamation on conservation case studies in Nebraska and Kansas. The final element of the conference was a panel discussion on future activities and what is ahead for Nebraska. Most people understand that we are in changing times and we cannot continue as is. It took a drought crisis to get us to address the idea of water conservation. The drought cycle may end, but we cannot loosen our grip on conservation practices for water because drought is cyclical and will return.

[UNL Water Law, Policy, and Science Conference](#) This annual UNL conference was held on April 7 & 8, 2005. The focus this year was on drought and climate change and how these affect water management in the Great Plains. One of the highlights from the first day was the plenary session, which focused on water management and policy and the increasing competition for water. This session was presented by Dr. Peter Gleick from California. He said that we are better able to weather droughts today, but we still need to work on our planning. The water crisis is real and is not only national, but international. In the world today, 1.1 billion people lack availability to clean water and waste management systems. We are changing the climate since we are changing the hydrologic cycle. Dr. Gleick outlined 6 characteristics of long-term sustainability and pointed out the need for new ideas and thinking. The first day also had Dr. Don Wilhite of our own UNL, who is an expert in the area of drought and drought monitoring. He pointed out that drought is a normal part of our natural system and we need to prepare even when times are good. We need to be proactive and develop drought preparedness plans, instead of waiting for a crisis. Drought is the most costly natural disaster in the US. After several other presenters, the conference ended on the first day with a banquet at Morrill (Elephant) Hall at UNL. We actually ate in the room with the fossils of mammoths and mastodons looking over us. Day 2 started with a panel of Congressional staffers discussing relevant water issues. Following that session, we had presentations on taking our science and our findings and translating them into policy. One presenter gave two reasons why there is so much litigation and regulation: (1) There is bad science, and (2) Decisions are not always determined by science, but by judgment. One point all presenters made is that although drought is not good, a crisis does provide opportunity and probably is the catalyst for addressing the problem and prepare for future droughts. One panelist said that many water resources managers lack the big picture mindset, hate uncertainty, and don't formally address risk. We finished the conference with two editors from the "High Country News" newspaper, which addresses a variety of environmental issues and particularly water management in the west. Throughout the conference the media had been taking jabs, so the newspaper folks wasted no time in taking their turn. They mentioned that media is often criticized for not understanding the issue, painting a on-sided story, and not having people with science backgrounds on their staffs. The scientific community also needs to be able to convey their message better, more concisely, and in a manner that both media and the general public can understand. I enjoyed the conference and would recommend it anyone with an interest in Nebraska's water.

D.C. Trip On March 9 & 10, the Lower Platte River (LPR) NRD's and I traveled to D.C. to make our presence known and push for funding of the LPR Feasibility Projects - Sand Creek, W. Sarpy, and Antelope Valley - and to work for inclusion of LPR environmental restoration funding authorization in the next WRDA bill. It was a quick, yet necessary and effective trip. We have received tremendous assistance from our Congressional officials (Sen. Nelson, Rep. Terry, Rep. Osborne, Sen. Hagel, and Rep. Fortenberry) and they know the right people to work with and contact to get the funding sent our way. I have to give kudos to our legal representative in D.C., Bob Weaver, who has been instrumental in the process and finding us the funds in a tough budget time.

LB 546 The I-80 Innovation Zone Commission legislation looks to be headed for the law books and has been sent to the Governor for a signature after passing final reading and getting signed by the Speaker of the Legislature. The LPSNRD and PMRNRD have seats reserved on the commission, which consists of a 19-member board that will help identify economic development opportunities for the area on I-80 between Omaha and Lincoln. It is an advisory committee only but will work with zoning jurisdictions and recommend consistent zoning rules and regulations.

Nebraska Wellcare Workshop The Groundwater Foundation along with the water Systems Council sponsored a "wellcare workshop" on April 14th focusing on private wells, pollution prevention, and education. I was asked to present info on the Water Wellness program we did last year. Other participants included NE Well Drillers Assoc, USGS, NH&HSS, City of Hastings, the Groundwater Foundation, Lincoln/Lancaster County Health Dept, and reps from the Water Systems Council. The day before, I attended a demo by the Water Systems Council on a new software program they've developed for entering well data and housing it on-line called "Well Census."

Lower Platte Weed Management Area (LPWMA) The LPWMA has continued to meet monthly and met most recently on April 21st in Wahoo at the LPNNRD. The group worked out a deal with a billboard company in Omaha to put a display on open billboards throughout the Omaha area to support Public Service Announcements (PSA's). "Spike", a cartoon purple loosestrife plant, has been developed and adopted as the evil weed mascot for the display and for other LPWMA campaigns. The LPWMA is looking for more stable funding and will be approaching the NRDs for future support. They are also on the LPRCA agenda at the May 27th meeting.



2004 Water Quality Open September 1, 2005 is the date of the 2005 Water Quality Open. The event will take place at Quarry Oaks this year, which is near South Bend. There will be a 10:00 a.m. presentation followed by a shotgun start for the tourney at 12:30 p.m. Dinner will be provided in the \$65 registration fee and lunch will be available for a fee at the clubhouse. As with past tournaments, we will have displays, presentations, demos, and awards for various achievements. Registration forms will be available soon and will be posted on the website at www.lowerplatte.org. Craig Wacker, LPRCA/LPSNRD intern, and I recently visited Quarry Oaks to prepare for the tournament. We took a trip around all greens with a golf cart to gauge our locations for displays and trivia signs. We also toured the new much larger meeting room in the clubhouse. It is quite impressive and will accommodate us quite nicely. If I can fill all slots for the tourney - 144 people, Quarry Oaks will give us a reduced cost. So, I need you help to recruit people who not only would enjoy golfing, but have a stake in protecting the Platte River and water resources in general. We also really need sponsorship support to make this event happen. Please consider becoming a sponsor.

River Obstruction Project We have determined a cost estimate for the Hwy 50 pilot project and will be approaching the NRDs to help fund this portion for FY06. Once funding is secured, we can proceed with removal of the obstructions at Hwy 50. I also just had a second meeting with our consultant and started to work on developing a project plan and scope of services agreement. Additionally, the Lincoln Journal Star newspaper in Lincoln recently interviewed me about the project for an upcoming article.

Environmental Carrying Capacity Project I just met with our consultant and turned over all of the comprehensive planning and zoning plans we have gathered over the past year to them. We are looking for a summer completion of Phase I - data gathering and compilation and then further scoping of the remainder of the project. Craig Wacker, the LPRCA/LPSNRD intern, has completed a summary of the existing zoning plans in the LPR corridor. If interested, contact Craig at the LPSNRD for a copy.

FEMA Floodplain Maps I met recently with DNR to discuss setting up public meetings to present the new FEMA floodplain maps. Once completed, the LPRCA will be helping DNR organize and facilitate these public forums designed to address questions, comments, and concerns the public might have with the new maps. Since Douglas and Sarpy County maps are already completed and meetings were held previously, we will be focusing on other LPR counties. Looking at a fall 2005 timeframe.

New WS/WW Project Coordinator The LPSNRD Water Supply/Wastewater Project in northern Cass County has its first Project Manager - Todd Skoog. Formerly, with the Omaha COE District Office, Todd started the last week of April and has been busy getting up to date on the project and has already spearheaded a couple of meetings of project partners. This project addresses the issues of drinking water supply needs, poor water quality and inadequate waste management (septic systems/lagoons) - - all issues the Alliance has a stake in.

Presentations This past month, I gave two presentations on LPRCA activities - one to the Lincoln Executive Club and one to the City of Valley. The reception was very good at both with many good questions about what we do and who we are. I hope to make the rounds in the coming months to many of the Corridor communities and counties.

River Rally 2005 I recently attended the 2005 River Network's River Rally in Keystone Colorado from May 20 - 24, 2005. Yes, what an awful location for a conference with the backdrop of snowcapped mountains, fresh mountain air, beautiful streams, abundant wildlife, and 70 degree weather. This is the second time I have attended this rally and again it was full of interesting presentations, fundraising seminars, topical issues (some controversial), camaraderie, and a genuine opportunity for me as a river manager to mingle and exchange ideas and stories with others in my field. On Sunday of the conference, we had the opportunity to take a field trip and see firsthand some watershed restoration projects.



Keystone Resort - My view every morning

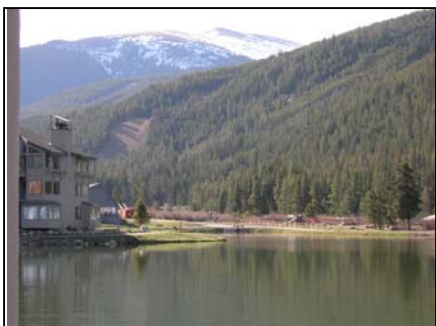


Conference Center



Keystone Ski Slopes in Background

I chose a variety of sessions to attend rather than sticking to just one track as I did last year when I was certified in watershed assessment by the Center for Watershed Protection. I attended the following sessions: SATURDAY - Creating Less Stupid Growth, Hybrid & Quasi-Governmental Watershed Groups, and Grant-writing for the Small Shop; SUNDAY - Funders Forum Panel, Field Trip to see several restoration projects on the Blue River; MONDAY - How to Ask for a Major Gift and Preventing the Impacts of New Development. I departed 5:15 a.m. on Tuesday. Although the area was so beautiful, I was happy to return to a lower altitude since Keystone is at 9,000 feet above sea level. Several speakers and many participants were literally breathless from the thinner air. After a few days, I was finally getting used to it and then it was time to return.



View of Mountains Near Keystone



Restored Section of Blue River Through Former Mining Area



Discussing Water Clean-up at Former Wellington Mine - Site of largest gold nugget found in US