



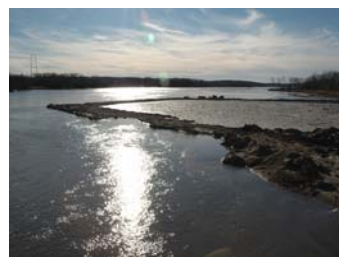
The Coordinator's Corner

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

For the period of August 17th, 2005 through November 15th, 2005

Hwy 50 River Obstruction Removal Project – COMPLETED!

In my last quarterly report, I reported that we had just finished planning this project. As of January 2006, we have completed the project. Our contractor, Roloff Construction, worked tirelessly to complete the removal of 21 clusters of concrete pilings in just six weeks. A causeway was constructed from the south side out into the river to remove the first 15 piling clusters, while the remaining pilings were removed by building a causeway from the north side. The north side proved more difficult as the main channel runs right next to the bank. Roloff had to build a diversion dike out in the river to re-direct the main flow and then build the causeway behind the diversion dike. Clean-up, land contouring, and seeding were completed in the first weeks of January 2006. Usually on projects, we tell people to go and see what it looks like. For this project, there is nothing to see. That's the point. There are still some additional obstructions directly adjacent to the Hwy 50 Bridge, but these will come out during the expansion of the bridge by the NE Dept of Roads in a few years. A huge thanks to Olsson Associates, Roloff Construction, the LPSNRD, the P-MRNRD, the Nebraska Airboaters Association, and especially Gerry Bowen of the P-MRNRD and Todd Skoog of the LPSNRD. On to the next obstruction removal project....



2006 LPRCA Summit Don't miss the first Lower Platte River SUMMIT on Tuesday, September 19th, 2006 at the Swanson Retreat Center located at Camp Carol Joy Holling near Ashland. This event will provide a forum to discuss the variety of issues facing the Lower Platte River ranging from water supply to habitat to land use to recreation. Be prepared to learn a lot, engage in active discussions, and have a great time. Not your typical meeting, this one will include engaging presentations, displays, hands-on activities, and plenty of time to interact with other attendees. We are still working out details such as the theme and presenters. Mark your calendars NOW since space will be limited. More details to come in the near future.

INFORMATIONAL TID BITS

The LPSNRD held an open house in January to showcase the new "green" addition to the office. Nearly 160 people stopped in to see such advances as dual flush toilets (still on boat from Aussie), sorghum board, geothermal heating/cooling, and a rain garden to name a few of the advances. Our condolences go out to the LPNDRD and the family of NRD Director Ron Larsen, who passed away recently. Ron was truly a great NRD director and all-around great person. The LPRCA has agreed to assist the Groundwater Foundation with a water quality program focusing on pathogens in drinking water. This will entail holding a series of meetings in various communities around the Midwest including the Corridor. A lot of attention has been given lately to the concept of a lake near Ashland - Lake Linoma OR Lake Nebraska - that would be larger than Lake Mac. Senator Pam Brown introduced LB 1121, which was not advanced by the Appropriations Committee this past Monday. However, the senator vows to continue to pursue this and other economic development ideas in the area. I began a dialogue with USGS on establishment of a water quality monitoring network recently. We are still pursuing funding for this network through the federal Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 2006 amendment.

Environmental Carrying Capacity Project We are refining the draft PHASE I Report and plan to meet in March to scope out PHASE II and future phases. We have a base map, and the beginnings of our GIS, which we will continue working on in PHASE II. This project is very timely as we start to see ideas such as technology parks/centers and recreational opportunities proposed. Other parallel efforts which all compliment each other include the Nebraska Metroplex Indicators Conference - the implementation portion of the 60-Mile Radius Project, and the Nebraska I-80 Innovation Zone Commission - which is looking at economic development along the I-80 corridor between Omaha and Lincoln. The LPRCA project is much broader in area and focuses on sustainability of the Lower Platte River Corridor resources.

Cumulative Impact Study (CIS) What impacts (both good & bad) do our activities have on the Lower Platte River Corridor & its ecosystems? What changes have resulted over the past 100 years to the river itself? These are the questions the CIS study is looking to try and answer. Individually, it may seem that activities and projects have little if any impact, but cumulatively these can add up to a detectable effect. The CIS is examining aerial photos for five time periods (1850's, 1938, 1950's, 1970's, 1993, and 2003), combining them with 1850's transect data and throwing in a USGS-run hydrologic study of stream gage data to look at changes, determine trends, and make predictions of impacts for planned activities. Phase I (scoping) finished up in August of 2005 and the project is now in Phase II where all data is gathered, digitized and entered into a GIS system available on-line. Our NETF grant application has been recommended for the full amount of funding requested - \$115,000. There will be a public hearing in April and then if all goes well we will be officially approved for funding shortly thereafter.

PACE The PACE group met for its quarterly meeting on January 18, 2006 at the NG&PC headquarters in Lincoln. With nearly 20 attendees, the group covered a variety of important issues including an update on the group's first management plan on the Feala property. There was discussion on an "evaporative surcharge" if there is > 25 ac-ft of evaporation from a body of water including sand pits. If > 25 ac-ft, then landowner pays the surcharge, but if < 25 ac-ft, then it is paid out of a pool of money with the USF&WS Foundation. Douglas County recently updated its comprehensive plan and included the PACE group as a resources for decisions regarding mining issues. The group discussed whether they could get similar inclusion in the recently-updated Sarpy County plan. The group is looking at hiring a consultant to investigate the use of Brownfield money available through NDEQ for mine site reclamation and redevelopment. Adam Zwickle, who recently was hired by TNC to help with PACE, presented a draft "Landowner Information" brochure for review. This will help inform and education landowners about aggregate mining, reclamation and PACE. Tern and Plover Partnership representatives discussed problems with the birds moving into large housing developments around sand/gravel pits. They give an example of Big Sandy near Ashland. They asked for any assistance or ideas PACE could contribute. The next meeting will be sometime in late spring.

Nebraska Land Trust I've reported on this in the past, but a reminder is always good. The LPRCA sits on this board as a non-voting member. This is the first and only statewide land trust in Nebraska. The organization works to preserve open space, natural lands, ag land, and other valued lands in the Lower Platte River area as well as other areas in Nebraska using conservation easements. The group will be meeting three times a year - December, May, and September. You can find out more about the NLT activities or contact the executive director, Dave Sands by visiting their website at www.nelandtrust.org.

Nebraska I-80 Innovation Zone Commission (NIZC) The NIZC meets the first Thursday of each month to consider economic development opportunities and ways to stimulate it in the I-80 corridor between Omaha and Lincoln. This state commission met most recently on February 2nd, 2006 at Mahoney State Park near Ashland. There was considerable discussion given again to the Lake Linoma/Nebraska proposal making its way through the legislature. The NIZC was concerned that their efforts were not confused with this particular proposal and wanted to make it clear they are different efforts even though Senator Pam Brown was the introducing senator for both ideas. Steve Oltmans, General Manager of the P-MRNRD, passed out a draft Quality Growth Strategy for review by the commission. Since there is a sunset clause on the commission of two years and over six months has already passed, the group is hoping to get a jump on developing a growth strategy for the area of interest. To develop this strategy, the commission is considering conducting a study that would include visioning meetings, data collection and mapping, scenario development, public awareness campaigns, growth strategy goal development, community presentations and demos, and ultimately an implementation toolbox for I-80 corridor communities. The initial cost estimate for this study is around \$2 million dollars with 60% projected to come from private businesses, 30% from state government, and 10% from local governments. The NIZC will meet again on Thursday, March 2nd, 2006 at 7 p.m. at the Ashland Country Club. More info can be found on the NE Dept of Economic Development at www.neded.org.

Lower Platte Weed Management Area (LPWMA) Group - Conference The LPWMA group is working on putting together a noxious weed/invasive species conference for this fall. I've been asked to sit on the planning committee for this event which will be a statewide conference bringing together weed management groups from around the state, agencies, resources managers, landowners, and legislators. The focus will be on raising awareness of existing and emerging weed issues. NO date, place or time has been set yet but most likely, the event will be sometime in September or October of 2006. Partial funding will come from a US Fish & Wildlife Foundation PTI (Pulling Together Initiative) grant.

Outreach/Educational Items The Outreach & Education Committee met for the first time ever in January and discussed a variety of outreach & education items. The list for this next year includes 4 public service announcements, 8 kiosks, a fold-out map, a traveling display, several giveaways, and a variety of items for kids including a comic book and trading cards. The public service announcement (PSA) voice recording were made just last week and a couple of weeks back the committee helped pick a voice talent and background music for the spots. The PSA's will entail 4 - 30 second with each focusing on a different issue including Water Supply, Land Use, Fish & Wildlife Habitat, and Recreation & Tourism. Out timeframe is to have them ready for airing in late March and April. We will be focusing on the larger markets (Omaha, Lincoln, and Columbus) for this round to hit the biggest number of listeners but plan to pursue the smaller markets next.

LPRCA Newsletter - "Corridor Connections" The latest edition (VOL 3, NO 2) of the LPRCA newsletter, "Corridor Connections" was distributed in January to over 1,700 people. Features include the Hwy 50 River Obstruction Removal Project; Recaps of the 2005 airboat tours and golf tourney; Updates on the Environmental Carrying Capacity Study and Cumulative Impact Study; an article from Larry Angle of the LPNNRD on the Mead Superfund Site, and photos from several of the events (you might see yourself). We still have copies available if you would like more.

Annual Meeting of the NE Airboaters Association On February 4th, I attended the NE Airboaters Association annual meeting in Council Bluffs. I spoke on the recently-completed Hwy 50 River Obstruction Removal Project and answered questions regarding future obstruction removal. The group was very appreciative of the project and give great input into future projects including the Hwy 77 area where there are two sets of obstructions. We discussed the need for signage on bridges for safe travel routes but the problem with liability associated with placing these signs. I recommended the association create a map of safe passage and distribute to their members. Herb Angell with the NG&PC was also in attendance to discuss boating rules and regulations.

LPRCA Intern Receives MS Degree Craig Wacker, LPRCA/LPSNRD intern who has been with us for over a year now, passed his final oral exam in November 2005 and received his MS degree in Community & Regional Planning from UNL in December. He plans to stay on at the NRD until he finds that perfect job or close to it. Craig has been a valuable asset to the Alliance for the past year and his internship has really been a win-win for all parties involved. Please congratulate Craig on this accomplishment.

The Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance -- "Helping to Protect, Enhance, and Restore"