



# The Coordinator's Corner...

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

\*For the period of June 2006 through August 2006\*

\*\*STILL TIME TO REGISTER FOR SUMMIT!\*\*

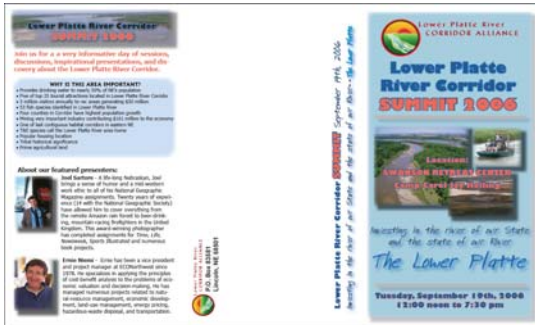
## LPRCA SUMMIT

"INVESTING IN THE RIVER OF OUR STATE AND THE STATE OF OUR RIVER - THE LOWER PLATTE"

Sept 19th, 2006 \* Noon to 8 p.m.

Swanson Retreat Ctr -Camp Carol Joy Holling\* 1.25 miles south of Ashland off Hwy 66

"Investing in the River of our State and the State of our River - The Lower Platte." That's the theme of this interactive summit featuring displays, presentations, and hands-on activities. Come learn how you can help protect the Lower Platte River. Contact me at (402) 476-2729 for more details or log on to [www.lowerplatte.org](http://www.lowerplatte.org) to see a schedule and print a registration form. We have two renowned featured speakers - Joel Sartore, a Nat'l Geographic Magazine photographer who will kick off the event with a photo journal AND Ernie Niemi, well-known environmental economist with ECONorthwet who specializes in demonstrating the connection between rivers/water and robust local economies. We will also be featuring two panel discussions - one on land use and one on water use. Finally, we have a myriad of concurrent sessions with topics covering tribal issues, national river issues, comprehensive planning, ecotourism, the Mead Superfund site, and extremes - drought & flooding. Two chef-perpared meals are included. All of this for only \$50! Help us fill the place to the brim. We want to have a 100 attendees so pass the word along or attend yourself.



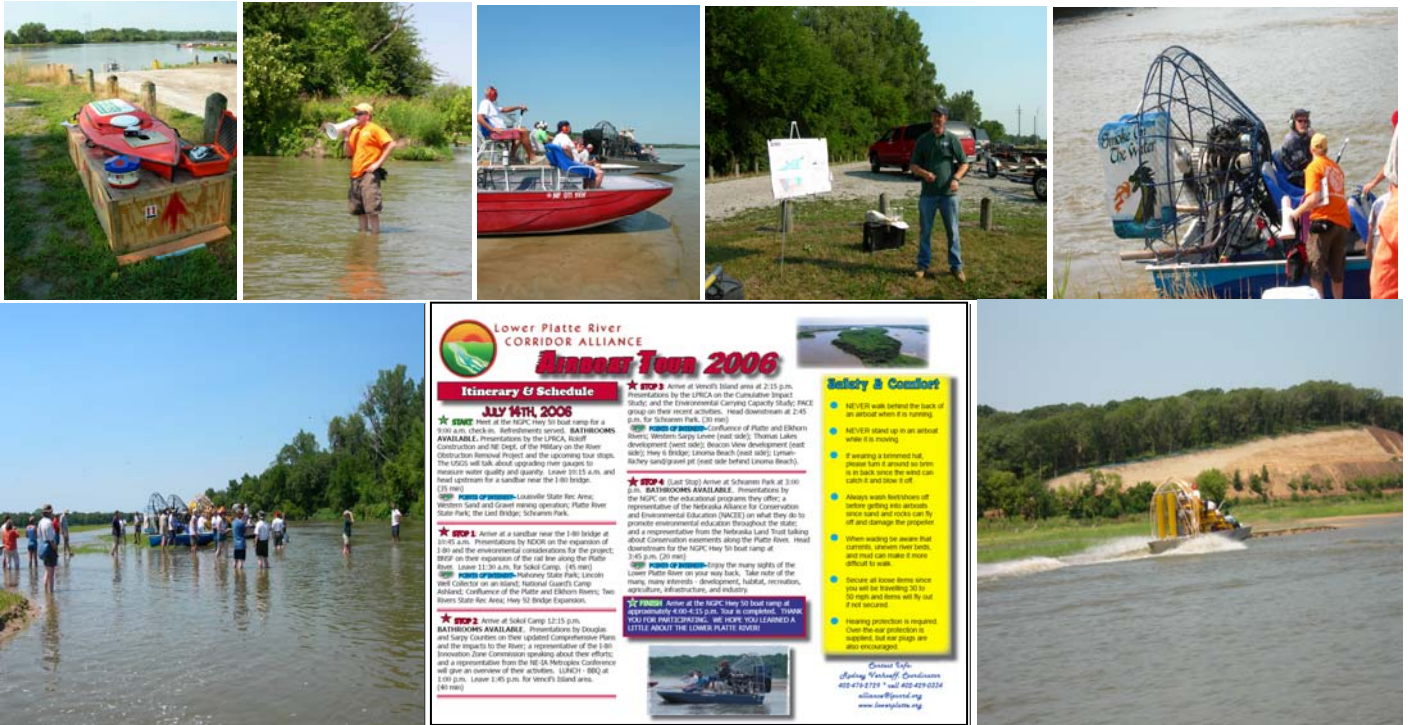
## Alliance Launches New Website Design

With a tremendous amount of help from the LPNNRD's Troy Thompson, we have launched the redesigned LPRCA website. You can check it out at [www.lowerplatte.org](http://www.lowerplatte.org). Intended to be more informational, easier to navigate, and more up to date, the new design incorporates the "8 Reasons to Protect the Lower Platte River" as identified in the LPRCA's mission. We are still adding to the site, but check back frequently for updates, links, and information on our programs, projects, and events.



[www.lowerplatte.org](http://www.lowerplatte.org)

**Airboat Tour - Held on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2006** This year's tour proved to be as enjoyable and exciting as previous tours. With nearly 60 participants and 18 boats, we toured the segment of the Platte from Louisville to Sokol Camp (near Hwy 64). We covered topics from T&S species to the RR expansion to water quality sampling techniques. There really is a lot of things you can see from the river that you wouldn't by driving across the I-80 Bridge - - the place where most people experience the river. One of the most obvious changes to the landscape was the BNRF railroad track expansion project. Along the hillsides near the I-80 Bridge, you could see the massive undertaking to go from two to four tracks (see bottom right photo). We were also treated to numerous encounters with wildlife and of course the bald eagles obliged us with their beautiful flight. As the LPRCA continues to work on removal of river obstructions, I was reminded of the importance of this program as several boats received some damage from hidden obstructions near the Hwy 92 Bridge. A huge thank you to all participants, presenters, airboat operators, and to Sokol Camp for their assistance.



**2006 Water Quality Open - August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2006 \* Quarry Oaks near Ashland**

We were back again this year at Quarry Oaks, located along the banks of the Platte River, for the 2006 Water Quality Open. This event allows us to educate attendees on water resources issues while having a great time. I always say that it's so much fun, you won't know you're learning. Over 136 players making up 34 teams participated this year making for a competitive, yet enjoyable atmosphere. We did not have a presentation prior to the event since the Summit is so close. However, we had 8 demos and as many trivia signs on various holes. We also added some awards for those who participated in the educational activities and we threw in some twists with requirements to use a rope-handled putter and second-hand driver on special holes. NEBCO, owner of the course, had agreed provide a sponsorship, marketing assistance, teams, and other assistance for the next three years in exchange for us holding the tourney at their facility. This arrangement worked very well this year and I expect it will for the next two. Quarry Oaks employs a number of conservation practices and exemplifies how to fit a recreational into the existing natural landscape rather than making the environment fit the development. This is a theme we are working to instill into other developers in the corridor. A burger and brat buffet along with awards ceremony followed the event.



**Environmental Carrying Capacity Project** The LPRCA has decided to partner with the NE Innovation Zone Commission (NIZC) on this project to gain a broader support base and pool resources for a project that will benefit both groups. With several common issues between the two groups, the obvious choice is to work together to get the project done more timely and avoid duplicative efforts.

**Cumulative Impact Study (CIS)** The project continues to move forward. September 15<sup>th</sup> is the date for a demonstration of the CIS process and how we can compare aerial photos and data layers for 6 time steps. The COE will be conducting the demo at the LPSNRD in Lincoln starting at 10 am.

## INFORMATIONAL TID BITS

The LPRCA budget - version 4 has been approved by the LPRCA and accepted by the NRD partners who had to agree to the requested amounts. The LPRCA FY07 budget totals \$853,185.02 and includes a few new items including a water quality monitoring network, the Camp Ashland River Obstruction Removal Project, and significant funding from several partners for the CIS project. There are also several new outreach and education items including the kiosks we've been talking about.

**LPRCA Newsletter - "Corridor Connections"** The next edition (VOL 4, NO 1) of the LPRCA newsletter, "Corridor Connections" will be published in September 2006 and distributed to over 1,700 people. We had to delay production of this issue since we got wrapped up in the airboat tour, WQ Open, and now the Summit. Look for yours in the mail soon!

**Water Resources Development Act (WRDA)** A WRDA version has passed both houses of Congress and now the Senate and House will need to conference and come up with a combined version. We anticipate some action yet this fall. Both versions include a \$12 million authorization for Lower Platte River Watershed Restoration efforts. Keep your fingers crossed.

**Weather Channel Segment** I recently participated in an airboat tour of the upper portion of the Lower Platte River near Columbus as part of a Weather Channel segment on drought in Nebraska. Dr. Heidi Cullen, climate expert with the Weather Channel, is touring various areas of Nebraska and looking at the drought impact. I was asked by Dr. Ken Dewey of the UNL High Plains Regional Climate Center to participate one of the days they were filming. Unable to launch from the Platte due to lack of water, we took off from the Loup River. We stopped at the confluence of the Platte and Loup Rivers, at which, I was interviewed for the segment. Whether or not I make the cut is to be seen, but I enjoyed the experience and the possibility of getting some national recognition for the Lower Platte River. An HBO documentary crew was also filming the filming of the segment and following Heidi as she made her rounds. Below are a few photos:



**Kiosks** Frank Albrecht with the NG&PC and I have been working on the final design and hope to have it ready yet this fall. I've also been working with a representative from Big Muddy Workshop to assist in ordering the materials and print the panels. We anticipate placing 8 kiosks throughout the corridor.

**Nebraska Land Trust (NLT)** At the request of several landowners in the Bluffs Region (near Schramm State Rec Area), the NLT has been working to establish a conservation easement program for willing landowners in the area who want to preserve their farmsteads or their open space. The NLT board meets on Friday, Sept 8<sup>th</sup> to further discuss this program. Dave Sands, Executive Director with the NLT recently spearheaded the Conservation Easements workshop that I participated in on August 16, 2006 in Omaha. The event was geared to attorneys, CPAs, accountants, developers, estate planners and other parties interested in the various aspects and uses of easements.

[S.A.V.E. Landowner Group](#) Several proposed developments in the Bluffs Region - Sarpy County area have raised a stir with some landowners who have formed an advocate group called Schramm Association for a Viable Environment (S.A.V.E.). This group has been active in Sarpy County land use planning activities and meetings. They have recently begun a discussion group and listserv to keep their members up to date on activities in their area. Much of the interest has come from the recently updated comprehensive plan and zoning regulations and how they are interpreted.

### [Water Quality Monitoring Network](#)

June was a busy month for this new project that is just in the conceptual stages. For several years, the LPRCA has looked into establishment of a surface water quality monitoring network along the Lower Platte River by upgrading existing USGS stream gaging stations to take continuous, realtime water quality measurements. As a result, we have been informally talking with the USGS regarding what it would take to do this. The idea behind this project is to gather baseline surface water quality data for an extended period of time, couple this with data from existing NRD groundwater monitoring networks to get a comprehensive picture of water quality for the Lower Platte River Basin. Why is this important? First, there is no such program in place now that looks at surface water specifically in the entire basin. Second, no one has yet taken surface water quality measurements and paired this data with groundwater quality measurements to get a complete picture of water quality in areas known to be interconnected. Finally, identifying water quality issues will help us target our outreach, education, and other assistance programs to the type of contaminant and location allowing us to be most efficient and effective. Since we are not a regulatory entity, we can address the problems in ways that are not punitive but rather informative and provide incentives to correct the problem. Typical water quality parameters that can be measured include pH, specific conductivity, dissolved oxygen, and turbidity. Several other parameters are available including chlorophyll and various nutrients. On June 30<sup>th</sup>, representatives from the three NRDs and USGS took a site visit to Ponca State Park to view a USGS stream gaging station equipped with water quality probes. We also rode on a monitoring boat used to take transects along a river to measure the riverbed profile and determine flow velocities. The experience really opened my eyes to the sophistication the USGS has in data collection for rivers. It also reinforces my confidence in working collaboratively with USGS to develop this water quality monitoring network.



[River Obstruction Program - Camp Ashland](#) Looks like things are coming together for this project. The NE Military Dept has pledged around \$105,000 towards removal of the 6 piling groups (12 total pilings), while the 3 NRDs have pledged \$61,000, and the NG&PC is being asked to contribute a matching \$61,000 from its Boating Safety Grant Program. This same program provided \$190,000+ for the Hwy 50 River Obstruction Removal Project. This summer, a company out of Denver conducted a preliminary assessment on the pilings to determine compositions and size using a non-intrusive radar device. Results are promising with the metal portion of most pilings appearing to extend only to around 10 feet below the surface.



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