



The Coordinator's Corner

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

For the period of September 2006 through December 2006

LPRCA Planning Retreat Held December 19th, 2006

The 2006 LPRCA Planning Retreat was held on Tuesday, December 19th at Camp Kitaki near South Bend from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. With approximately 20 attendees, I took the group through the history of the LPRCA including structure, funding, focus, and activities. We then covered where we are today and ended with where we want to go in the future. One of the points made at the meeting is that the LPRCA really has stayed true to its original course. We are still that "facilitator" group that brings stakeholders together; informs and educates; and helps get the best information into the right hands for informed decisions. I handed out a survey to all attendees to get input on our direction and focus. I hope to have these back and tabulated soon to assess our progress. We won't have a retreat for two more years as is our planned schedule and then it will be an in-depth effort. Thank you to all those who participated.



RIVER SUMMIT IS A HUGE SUCCESS!

The LPRCA River Summit held on Tues, Sept 19th, 2006 was a huge success. Over 90 people attended the event which featured short concurrent sessions, panel discussions, and 2 keynote speakers - - all focused on pertinent Lower Platte River issues. The event kicked off with a thought-provoking photo presentation by Joel Sartore, a renowned Nat'l Geographic Magazine photographer. Following this presentation, there were several concurrent sessions covering topics on: tribal history, comprehensive planning, ecotourism, the Mead Superfund Site, drought, and flooding. The Summit also included two panel discussions with one on water use and the other on land use in the Corridor. Ernie Niemi, environmental economist with ECONorthwest out of Oregon, capped off the event with a great presentation on the value of "amenity-driven" or quality of life issues and the value of natural resources to local economies. We followed the event up with an evaluation/survey to keep the momentum going. Results can be found on our redesigned website at www.lowerplatte.org.



A Few Stats on the 2006 LPRCA River Summit

Following the LPRCA River Summit on September 19, we sent out evaluation forms not only to gauge the summit presentations and discussions, but also to identify the emerging issues for the Corridor. A few stats:

Total Attendees: 91

No. of Presenters: 9 - with 2 featured presenters

No. of Panelists: 10 - for 2 panel discussions

Sponsorship Funds: \$500 - USGS

Displays: 15 including 9 from LPRCA

Breakdown of Attendees:

* Gov't (Total)	66.3 %
-Local/County/Community	34.8 %
-State	24.7 %
-Federal	6.7 %
* Non-Gov't Orgs	19.1 %
* Private Biz	6.7 %
* Public	4.6 %
* Congressional Rep/Staff	2.2 %
* NE Legislative Rep/Staff	1.1 %
Total	100.0 %

A few comments from the Summit evaluation:

*Should we have future River Summits? What Frequency?

Almost all surveys indicated we should do this again with the following frequencies: Bi-annually (2x/yr), Annually, Biennially (every other year), every 3 yrs, and every 5 yrs.

***What are the most important issues facing the Corridor.** Development Pressure; Future Water Use; Protection of Resources; Public Access that Preserves Resources; Water quantity; Residential Development; Land Use and Smart Growth; Lack of discussion on Recreational Opportunities and Lake Development; Population increase; Push to Bypass Adequate Planning; Lack of Regional Development Vision; Encroachment on Farmland and Natural Areas; Smart Econ Dev Decisions; Unchecked Commercial Dev; Water Conservation; Land Use Governance Issues; Lack of Regional Coordination Between Cities and Counties; Balancing Mining with Environment; Too Much Irrigation; Public Info and Awareness; Jurisdictional Disputes - Jealousy.

***How can we better involve ALL stakeholders?** Weekend Event; Community Event; Invite Communities/Counties/Private Biz as Featured Speakers; Targeted Meetings; Collaborative Efforts - Break through Territorial Disputes and Think Regional; Legislation; Continue to Build Public Info and Outreach; Invite Zoning Admin to LPRCA Meetings and put them on Agenda; Need to Address Creative Ideas including Recreation; Less Meetings Targeted to Gov't and More for Public and Private Biz; Develop Clear Vision for Corridor and Invite ALL Stakeholders to Create Ways to Achieve Vision; Education; More Meetings like Summit with Decision-makers AND Developers; Keep up Efforts and Let Others Know About Them - They Will Want to Be Involved; Talk About Progress Made to this Point; Develop Linoma Platte Valley talking points to share; Continued Dialogue; Get Local Gov't to the Table; "Green Planning Summit" Addressing all components including Env Protection and Public Access; Use Ernie Niemi's Message that Natural Amenities Build a Vibrant Economy; Broader Group of Stakeholders - Birders/Outfitters; Have a 5-7 Member Review Committee meet to Begin Looking at Future Actions; Work More Closely with Economic Development Entities; Point Out Benefits of Lower Platte Valley to Potential Employers; NRD Boards Assist with Making Personal Contacts; Stress to Stakeholders the Importance of Issues in Corridor and How they Impact Them.

Featured Project

Camp Ashland River Obstruction Removal Project

After three weeks of intensive work, Phase I of the Camp Ashland River Obstruction Removal Project wrapped up in December with a final walkthrough. Six former Highway 6 bridge supports were removed to a depth of 6-8 feet below grade. Each support was approximately 4 feet in diameter, wrapped in steel and filled with concrete and wooden supports. The consultant, Ziegler Construction, built a causeway to reach the obstructions and then used back hoes and a hydraulic breaker to peel the steel off and breakup the concrete and wood. Six additional supports remain and are expected to be removed next year during Phase II of this project. A big thank you to all of the project sponsors: LPSNRD, LPNNRD, P-MRNRD, the Nebraska Military Department, and the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission, and LPRCA member agencies. Recall, that the LPRCA identified 12 locations along the Lower Platte River Corridor where obstructions were located and posed safety, flooding, and natural habitat degradation issues. Once we complete part 2 of the Camp Ashland project, two of the sites will be completed (Camp Ashland & Hwy 50), and a third that was undertaken by the LPNNRD (North Bend area) should be complete by the end of 2007.

Below are a few photos and a map of the Camp Ashland Project before and after obstruction removal

BEFORE



Programs /Projects/Activities

Environmental Carrying Capacity (ECC) Project We are still waiting to hear if the Nebraska Innovation Zone Commission (NIZC) will be willing to partner with us on this project as a part of their I-80 Economic Development Comprehensive Plan development. I've been attending NIZC meetings to help get the ECC study included in their legislative package request. To date, we have not seen any legislative bills come across the radar screen with provisions to fund such a project.

Cumulative Impact Study (CIS) The project continues to move forward. On September 15th, the COE held a demonstration of the CIS process and how we can compare aerial photos and data layers for 3 of the six time steps. The LPRCA (on behalf of the CIS partners) was successful in writing and receiving a \$115,000 grant from the NE Environmental Fund (NETF) to complete Phase II and the Hydrologic Study component. Hopes are to have most of data acquisition and compilation completed by the summer of 2007. The next meeting of the group will be following the NARD Legislative Conference on Jan 24th at the Embassy Suites in Lincoln. The meeting starts at 2:45 pm.

LPRCA Newsletter – “Corridor Connections” The next edition (VOL 5, NO 1) of the LPRCA newsletter, “Corridor Connections,” will be published in late spring of 2007 and we are looking for submissions. This newsletter goes out to over 1,700 people with an interest in LPR issues.

Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) A WRDA bill passed both houses of Congress (House and Senate) in late 2006 and was in the final conferencing process when the session ended without resolution. So, WRDA 2006 now becomes WRDA 2007. The good news is: it sounds as though both houses of Congress are willing to pick up where they left off right before conferencing. There are a few sticking points that need to be ironed out though. Both versions of WRDA 2006 did include a \$12 million authorization for Lower Platte River Watershed Restoration efforts. We hope we can keep that language in the next version.

Nebraska Land Trust (NLT). The NLT met on December 1, 2006 at the LPNNRD in Wahoo. Items of discussion included the 2007 budget, scoring/feasibility criteria on the Schramm Bluffs Preservation Project, NLT records policy, and updates on several on-going easement projects. The group decided to hold a strategic planning effort to coincide with the next scheduled board meeting. June 1, 2007 will be the board meeting and the following day will be a strategic planning exercise.

LPRCA Website. As discussed in previous reports, the LPRCA website (www.lowerplatte.org) recently underwent major cosmetic surgery. Now, we are working on developing some new components including a project/program journal, a discussion board, and a multi-media area. We also are working on a “members” section. It will take a few months to build this new website infrastructure, but once completed, it will add tremendously to the educational and informational value.



LPRCA Intern Position. As I mentioned a few reports back, our LPRCA intern of two years, Craig Wacker, left the fold for a fulltime job with JEO out of Wahoo. We are now in the midst of hiring a replacement intern who will be shared with the LPSNRD. We hope to have someone on-board by the end of January.

NARD Tour. The NARD tour this year is scheduled to take place in the Lower Platte River Basin. I have volunteered to assist with the logistics and tour stops as have several NRDs.

UN-L Presentation. On the evening of December 4th, I presented information about the Alliance to the UNL Soil & Water Resources Club. Approximately 15 students and faculty advisors attended. I talked a great deal about the formation of the LPRCA and the pertinent issues we face including water quality, land use, and integrated management. Ironically, while at the university many years ago, I was a part of a group of students who helped revive this club after years of inactivity.

UN-L Water Class. Along with the LPSNRD, the LPRCA has been asked to present to a UNL honors class focusing on water and titled, "Water, Society, and the Future." This is a small class with ten students from various disciplines who will hear from several professionals involved with water in some way. I will be presenting on Feb 13th then may be involved later to assist with a student research project.

UN-L School of Nat Res (SNR) Director. The UNL SNR is currently looking for a permanent Director to oversee the school. Presently, Mark Kuzila is serving as interim director until a permanent replacement is found. I sit on the SNR External Advisory Committee and we've been given the opportunity to be involved in the hiring process by meeting with candidates for the position and giving our input. The group met with the final candidate this past Friday. No word on when the position would be filled.

Kiosks Frank Albrecht (with the NG&PC) and I have been working on the final design and hope to have it ready yet this spring. 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.

Water Quality Monitoring Network The 3 NRDs and I took a tour with the USGS on June 30th to see realtime stream gages in action near Ponca, NE. The LPSNRD and P-MRNRD agreed to move forward on the project at this time. I've been working with USGS to develop a scope to upgrade 2-3 gages to take realtime continuous water quality data in the spring of 2007.

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