



The Coordinator's Corner...

Quarterly Report from the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance * Rodney L. Verhoeff, Coordinator
For the period of October 2007 through January 2008

WRDA 2007 Passes - \$12 Million Authorization

We achieved a great milestone this year - passage of WRDA! After five long years and a lot of work with our congressional delegation and agency personnel, we the Lower Platte River Watershed Restoration language made it into WRDA 2007. Essentially, this authorizes \$12 million for the COE and the LPRCA to work together on watershed planning, and projects such as the River Obstruction Removal Project, the WQ Monitoring Program, the Cumulative Impact Study, and the Environmental Suitability Assessment among others. Now the work begins to scope out future efforts and get an appropriation.

FEATURED PROJECT

Camp Ashland River Obstruction Removal Project – PHASE II

The project is essentially completed with the exception of a few clean-up items and grass seeding that will need to be completed in the spring. You can log onto a special website we developed for this project at http://oaprojects.com/platteriver_obstruction/index.htm and enter "Ashland531" for the user name and "w2j95mx\$" as the password. If you select the "PHASE II" link, it will take you to weekly photologs and reports. Below are a few photos. The first shows how the contractor built a coffer dam around the obstructions, pumped out the water, and then used a cutting torch to cut the metal casing before removal of the concrete pier. The second shows one of the additional pieces that had to be removed to continue. This piece weighed in excess of 18,000 lbs. The third photo shows the wooden pilings also removed. Notice the pencil sharp points still in-tact.



Overall in PHASE II, we removed 6 large (4' diameter) concrete and steel obstructions that were former road supports to 6' below the riverbed along with 11 additional wooden pilings. Last year, we removed 6 concrete and steel obstructions in PHASE I. Original cost for PHASE II was estimated to be \$268,000 by our consultant, but the low bid for deconstruction plus engineering fees came to \$309,949 (Valley Corp out of Valley, NE and Olsson Engineering). This increased the contribution request per NRD from \$28,000.00 to \$34,991.50 - a \$6,991.50 increase. As we began to remove obstructions, we also discovered several additional pieces of the supports that were buried next to the obstructions. To complete removal, we had to remove the additional pieces since they were lying against the supports. This additional removal resulted in an additional \$12,505.00. Half of this, we will request from the NG&PC Boating Safety Program. This leaves \$6,252.50 to split between the 3 NRDs or \$2,084.17 per NRD. In total, each NRD contributed \$37,075.67 (11.5% of project cost). We have received \$100,000 from the NE Military Department and will request \$111,227 from the NG&PC. The change request represents 4% of the total original project cost, which is less than the typical 10% contingency amount normally reserved for major projects.

Programs / Projects / Activities

Environmental Suitability Assessment (ESA) Project. As part of the Needs Assessment, we continued to meet with jurisdictions in the Phase II area (Fremont to Plattsmouth) over the past several months including: Lincoln Water System (LWS), Plattsmouth, Cass County, and Sarpy County. We still need to meet with: Fremont / Inglewood and Saunders County. We have also been working on creating the environmental features layers to use in the McHargian analysis as well as drafting the Phase II report. Phase III will kick off later this spring or summer where we will conduct the needs assessment and meet with local jurisdictions from Fremont upstream. We should have a working demo by the end of February. Once completed, the GIS will be housed on the MapMaker system that is accessible via the internet. PHASE III will repeat the Needs Assessment for the area from Fremont upstream to Columbus. We hope to begin this phase later in the spring of 2008.

Cumulative Impact Study – PHASE II. The next CIS partner meeting will be February 21, 2008 starting at 10 am at the LPSNRD in Lincoln. We hope to review a 2nd draft of the final report. Unfortunately, over the life of the project, we have been slowed by the COE's schedule and availability often due to deployments to Iraq and Hurricane Katrina duty. We have had to request two extensions for our NE Env Trust Fund (NETF) grant because of the delays. We now have until June 30 to complete PHASE II. We will soon discuss whether or not to move into a PHASE III of this project, where we would develop a predictive model to assess impacts of future projects on riverine habitat.

Water Quality Monitoring Network. We finished up with the first year of monitoring and sampling in October 2007 and will be working on season two starting in March/April 2008. We have developed a website just for this project at <http://ne.water.usgs.gov/lowerplatte/>. We will continue to build the network adding Salt Creek and Maple Creek to the network this year. In a related but separate project, I worked with the USGS to identify some way to add Shell Creek to the network yet this year even though it isn't scheduled to be added until 2009 or 2010. The USGS was able to free up some NAWQA money to put towards realtime monitoring and sampling if we could find local match money. After a presentation on this proposal by USGS, the LPNNRD agreed to contribute up to \$30,000 to add a sonde (WQ monitor) on Shell Creek. Additionally, the LPRCA has worked with the USGS to expand upon the one sonde and add two additional through a USDA grant program. The USGS was unable to meet the first deadline for funding (where the LPRCA would serve as the applicant), but will be submitting an application in April 2008 with Kansas State University serving as the applicant (requires an institution of higher education). Slowly but surely, we are building this WQ network to help us assess what is happening in the basin. Also, with the passage of WRDA in 2007, we will have an additional funding source in the future.

UNL Class Presentations & Tours. The LPRCA has been working with several UNL classes focusing on natural resources, land use planning, and leadership. This past September, I presented to and assisted with a UNL community and regional planning class. We toured a portion of the Lower Platte River Basin as part of this class. I also presented to a UNL Honors Water Class and assisted with another tour of the Lower Platte River Basin. Later this spring, I will be presenting to a class on leadership.

Lower Platte River Basin Determination / NG&PC Biological Opinion. On January 16th, 2008, DNR Director Ann Bleed officially declared the LPR Basin as "Not Fully Appropriated." This comes on the heels of a public hearing held December 19th. Testimony at the hearing was approximately 12 to 1 in favor of keeping the preliminary designation of "Not Fully Appropriated." As everyone is aware, the NG&PC has been working on a biological opinion, but this opinion was not submitted as part of the commission's neutral testimony at the hearing. However, the NG&PC did discuss various studies and research they have conducted over the years including the Pallid Sturgeon Study and two additional studies that they have jointly conducted with UNL. Additionally, the NG&PC expressed interest in working cooperatively with all stakeholders to help manage the surface and ground water of the basin. DNR evaluates basins annually and once a "Fully Appropriated" status is determined then DNR and the respective NRD(s) work cooperatively to develop an Integrated Management Plan to manage the areas where surface and ground water are hydrologically connected.

Programs / Projects / Activities –continued–

Coffee Shop Meetings. We are currently planning a series of coffee shop meetings throughout the Corridor to gather community input on Platte River and LPRCA issues/suggestions/concerns as well as taking time to meet members of the public. We want to hold the meetings at various locations throughout the Corridor with the intent to have at least one meeting per county and in a majority of communities in the Corridor. The format would be to buy doughnuts/coffee in cafes and coffee shops in corridor communities for an hour and, at the same time, take input from the public while explaining a little about the LPRCA. Potential locations include: Columbus, Bellwood, Schuyler, Linwood, North Bend, Morse Bluff, Cedar Bluffs, Fremont, Valley, Waterloo, Yutan, Gretna, Ashland, Louisville, Springfield, Cedar Creek, and Plattsmouth - 17 locations in total. This is quite an ambitious undertaking and we may require splitting the meeting schedule between this spring and fall/winter. We are looking for people with an involvement with the LPRCA to assist us in hosting these meetings in their communities.

Strategic Planning Efforts. The 3 NRDs in the LPRCA held a joint meeting on January 22nd, 2008 at Mahoney State Park as a part of the LPRCA's strategic planning effort. With 35 attendees, the meeting was a great success and attendees decided that we should hold this joint meeting annually. The meeting started with a review of the LPRCA's mission, goals, programs, projects, and a little history of the organization. Attendees then reviewed a comparison of programs/projects/activities to the mission/goals and to the "8 Reasons." We also considered alternative titles for the "8 Reasons" to see if existing categories/titles really cover the important issues or whether they need to be changed. A short survey was also handed out to gather input on existing activities. This year, as part of our 6-year strategic planning cycle, we will be conducting an in-depth strategic planning session sometime in December. Leading up to that effort, we will hold various other meetings and sessions to assess the current and future direction and activities of the LPRCA.