



Monthly Report for March 2009

Meghan Sittler, Coordinator

Programs / Projects / Activities

- **Environmental Suitability Assessment (ESA):** We are close to done with the Needs Assessment portion of the ESA project. This month we met with the Planning Director & Roads Superintendent for Polk County and the Planning Director for the City of Columbus. I also presented to the Bellwood Village Board about the ESA project as well as the Alliance in general. The presentation and meetings were very helpful and overall very well received.

I have also spent some time assisting HDR with acquiring and evaluating data layers to be included in the ArcIMS site for the ESA project. NDNR provided a more comprehensive coverage of floodplain delineations throughout the corridor and have also agreed to place a “contact” link on the ArcIMS site to assist communities in acquiring base flood elevation data (if available) more easily. This has been one of the most consistent “needs” identified throughout our meetings with the various jurisdictions. Also, we worked with Nebraska Game & Parks Commission and the NRDs on identifying public access points along the Platte and tributaries.

We have finalized the Land Suitability Analysis model design for the ESA project and HDR is currently doing the final revisions. I have continued to make contact with individuals who we would like to have serve on the technical review committee for the model and we will look forward to having a meeting of the committee scheduled for early May.

- **LPRCA Outreach Plan:** HDR provided me a proposal for the development, implementation, and analysis of an LPRCA outreach plan. This plan is a reworking of the ESA-specific outreach and review plan currently drawn up in the ESA project budget and agreement to change the focus of the materials and workshops to focus on LPRCA efforts in general (as well as the ESA project), conduct an evaluation of the project and potential linkages, and develop a “branding” package for all LPRCA materials, reports, etc. Again, this design will be drawn from the new web design created by Troy Thompson at LPNNRD and I think will help to bring consistent recognition to the efforts of the LPRCA.
- **LPRCA Budget:** I have spent a good deal of this past month reviewing past LPRCA budgets and coordinating with project partners to assemble the FY2010 LPRCA budget. I have developed several drafts that I have been reviewing with Glenn Johnson, General Manager, LPSNRD, as I’ve gone through the process. I’ve also spent some time working with the finance personnel at LPSNRD on reorganizing LPRCA financial records.

I have also begun work on drafting a “Long Range Implementation Plan” for LPRCA. Later this year, I will be organizing a “retreat” for the Alliance members to evaluate the Long Range Implementation Plan and collaboratively set goals and directions for the Alliance over the next 3 years.

- **LPRCA File Review:** April 1 is my “4 month Anniversary” as the Coordinator of the Alliance. I can’t believe how fast those months have gone! I feel as if I’ve gotten a much better handle on many aspects of the Alliance and the many programs and efforts going on throughout the Lower Platte Basin but know I still have a lot to learn! In an effort to continue my education, I have been spending quite a few hours going through the Alliance files to review what has been done throughout the existence of the Alliance, what kind of things have been proposed and not completed, and also just to reorganize a little. I’ve also been working with LPSNRD staff to make sure that all records that need to be kept for a period of time or in perpetuity are filed for “safe keeping” either in hard copy or digitally. There is a lot of information to digest and I’m only part of the way through it but I feel that every day I become even a bit more grounded in the Alliance’s work, partners, and possibilities.
- **Cumulative Impact Study (CIS):** April 2 we will be having a demonstration and review meeting with all the CIS partners. Chris Poole will be giving an in-depth presentation on how to use the CIS ArcIMS site. It will also be an

opportunity for the project partners to review the outcomes of the CIS and the interest in and ideas for Phase III of the CIS project. USGS will be briefly discussing a pre-proposal they have to be included in a Phase III of the project.

- **DNR Floodplain Programs:** I met with DNR about the Floodplain mapping programs and ways that I can assist them with the outreach effort and communication with the communities in need of this information. The meeting was very helpful for me to get a better handle on the program, its progress, and what the plan is for this next year. I will look forward to assisting with this effort as the progress continues over the next year.
- **2009 Water Quality Open:** I finalized the agreement with NEBCO for them to sponsor the Water Quality Open for the next three years. Very few changes were made from the previous agreement and we will look forward to holding the event again at Quarry Oaks Golf Course. We've scheduled this year's golf tournament for Thursday, September 3. I have a "save the date" card developed and ready to go out to past participants and other contacts of the LPRCA. I will be sending that out over the next week to 10 days.
- **Coffee Shop Meetings:** We will be holding our first Coffee Shop Meeting of 2009 at "Cherri-O's" in Ashland on Wednesday, April 22. Dave Sands of the Nebraska Land Trust will also be joining us at the Coffee Shop Meeting to provide information on the Land Trust and connect with individuals that may be interested in conservation easements. We are looking to hold a second Coffee Shop Meeting in Gretna during early to mid May. We have another 6 or so communities we would like to visit over the rest of the year and are laying out a plan for meetings during the late summer and fall as well.
- **Washington DC meetings:** I traveled to Washington D.C. on Thursday March 5, with John Miyoshi, Marlin Petermann, John Winkler, and Glenn Johnson to meet with our Congressional delegation and the Chiefs of Planning and Programs at the US Army Corps of Engineers Headquarters. I think we all came away feeling as if the meetings had been very successful. I stayed behind in DC an extra day and was able to meet with Secretary Vilsack and other representatives of the USDA. I was also able to see some of the sites and even got to see Marine 1 land on the White House lawn and President Obama walk into the West Wing! Not bad for my first trip to D.C.!
- **UNL Environmental Studies Program:** I continued to meet with the UNL Environmental Studies seminar students who are researching public access availability and opportunities throughout the Corridor. They will be presenting their findings at the April LPRCA Quarterly Meeting and also a written report and/or web page for the LPRCA.
- **Meetings/ Conferences Attended:**
 - **Collaborative Adaptive Management Network (CAMNet) Rendezvous:** On March 9 & 10, I attended the CAMNet Rendezvous in Kearney, NE. CAMNet is a group that I have been involved in since my work on the Missouri River. The focus of their annual rendezvous this year was the Central Platte and Platte River Recovery Program. We visited some of the sites where they have removed invasive vegetation and trees, removed or deposited sediment, and are working to reconnect/recreate channels. We also heard from scientists working on the Everglades and Glen Canyon Dam programs as well as other agency or organizational representatives. Monday evening we visited the Whooping Crane Trust and were able to watch the Sandhill Cranes come back to the river from blinds along the river. It was cold but amazing!

As an outcome of this meeting, I had several meetings with representatives of the PRRIP about the program's efforts—particularly the Water Quality Monitoring efforts and invasive species—and how the Alliance and PRRIP can share information more effectively and potentially link efforts.
 - **LPR "Fully Appropriated" Status:** I attended the March 12 hearing in Fremont concerning the fully appropriated determination for the Lower Platte River. The hearing was attended by over 300 people with over 30 people testifying against the determination including the NRDs presenting the outcomes of their technical and legal review of the determination.
 - **Leveraging Conservation Dollars from the Farm Bill Conference:** Duane Hovorka of the National (and Nebraska) Wildlife Federation invited me to attend a conference in Nebraska City on Friday, March 27, focused on the new Farm Bill's Conservation programs. There were presentations given by Steve Chick, NE Chief of NRCS, representatives from the Missouri Department of Conservation, the main lobbyist for the National Wildlife Federation, Elbert Traylor, NDEQ, and others throughout the country. I was also

able to meet Dave White, the recently named Chief of the NRCS. It was great conference and I will be excited to continue to explore the changes and updates to the conservation programs and the possibility we have to fund efforts throughout the Lower Platte.

- **Waters of Nebraska Educational booklet:** One of the projects that I started while at UNL was working with Project WET to develop an educational booklet for children in grades 4-8 that highlights Nebraska's water resources. We involved NRD Information & Education personnel, representatives of Nebraska Game & Park's Commission, UNL, and other organizations throughout the process to gather ideas on what priorities should be included in the booklet and important information to ensure was included in the booklet. We received a draft of the booklet and I reviewed the draft with my main project partner, Donna Woudenberg, National Drought Mitigation Center. We sent the draft to our review panel last week and will be working with them to make any necessary changes. Overall, we are very happy about the draft and think it will end up being a great tool for NRDs and other educators to use in teaching children (and probably some adults too) on the importance of our water resources.
- **LPRCA Quarterly Meeting:** The next LPRCA Quarterly Meeting will be on Tuesday, April 28 at 9:30 a.m. at the LPSNRD. A draft agenda will be coming soon!