



The LPRCA is assisting the Lower Platte Weed Management Area (LPWMA) with placing informational kiosks at points in the lower Platte River Corridor. The kiosks provide identification of the invasive plant species found throughout the lower Platte River, its tributaries and adjacent counties. The kiosks are planned to be placed in Platte River State Park, Mahoney State Park, the Louisville WMA (Highway 50 Boat Ramp), Lied Platte River Pedestrian Bridge, and Platte River Landing access area near Valley.



## Upcoming LPRCA Events in 2013

LPRCA Quarterly Meeting, January 17th 9 a.m. at LPNRRD in Wahoo

LPRCA Kayak Tour: Summer 2014 \*\*more information soon

LPRCA Water Quality Open: August 28th, 2014 Quarry Oaks

Lower Platte River Summit: October 2014

Check [www.lowerplatte.org](http://www.lowerplatte.org) for updates about upcoming events and meetings

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**LEAD. ORGANIZE. INSPIRE.**

# PLATTE RIVER

Fall/Winter 2013



Lower Platte River  
CORRIDOR ALLIANCE

LEAD. ORGANIZE. INSPIRE. The voice of the Lower Platte.

# Update

**Biannual Newsletter  
of the Lower Platte  
River Corridor Alliance**



Lake 1A Louisville State Recreation Area -photo by Josh Price



## LPRCA MEMBERS

Lower Platte North NRD  
Lower Platte South NRD  
Papio-Missouri River NRD  
NE Dept of Natural Resources  
NE Dept of Environmental Quality  
NE Health & Human Services  
NE Game & Parks Commission  
NE Military Dept  
University of Nebraska -  
Conservation &  
Survey Division,  
UNL School of Natural Resources  
Water Center

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Layout, Design, and Editing by:  
Meghan Sittler & Joshua Price

## FROM THE COORDINATOR:

Summer and Fall are always busy times for the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance and our partners. This summer the LPRCA once again had two very successful events beginning in May with our Kayak Tour and ending in August with the 16th Annual Water Quality Open. In this issue you'll find photos of both events as well as an article from Duane Hvorka, Executive Director of the Nebraska Wildlife Federation who provided the keynote presentation at the Water Quality Open. We also are using this issue of the Platte River Update to highlight the work of the Tern & Plover Partnership, the continued success of the Nebraska Land Trust, and Metropolitan Utilities District's focus on protecting their wellfields.

The LPRCA continues our mission to better understand, manage and enhance the resources of the lower Platte River through addressing water quality concerns and promoting recreation on the lower Platte. Both efforts are detailed in this edition. At the center of our mission is communicating and collaborating with the many stakeholders of the Lower Platte River Corridor. We'd love to hear from you on issues, concerns or ideas you have to continue to promote the diverse resources of our unique area of the state.

-Meghan Sittler

# News Around the LPRCA

## The Schramm Bluffs: Preserving a natural Jewel in an Urban County

By Dave Sands, Executive Director of the Nebraska Land Trust

We've all been there – talking to someone who expresses the opinion that Nebraska is scenically challenged and devoid of anything but agriculture. When I hear such remarks, I wonder if they saw our state from 30,000 feet or through a windshield on I-80. I've seen a lot of Nebraska and know that it is a place of stunning landscapes, biological diversity, pristine rivers, world-class wildlife, and important history. But to be fair, the skeptics are right about one thing; 97% of the land is privately owned and most of that is in agriculture.

For those of us who appreciate Nebraska's scenic views, wildlife, and historic sites, we largely have agricultural landowners to thank for preserving these public benefits at no cost to the taxpayer. However, the continuance of agricultural stewardship is not a given, especially in our most scenic and development prone areas.

The Schramm Bluffs of western Sarpy County offer a prime example. On the final leg of its journey to the Missouri River, the Platte cuts through a ridge of limestone, creating steep bluffs and rolling farmland with deep ravines sheltering locally rare oak/hickory woodlands. It offers some of the best wildlife habitat in eastern Nebraska and the woodlands are especially important for migrating songbirds.



The region has also sustained people for millennia, as evidenced by archeological sites nearly 1,000 years old. It still sustains us with drinking water, but water quality could suffer from development in the bluffs. Due to the steep terrain, soil erosion from construction sites or the first flush of polluted urban runoff after a rainstorm would quickly reach the Platte, with one of Omaha's municipal well fields downriver. The area is also a magnet for recreation and the bluffs are highly visible from three popular state parks, I-80, Quarry Oaks Golf Course, Safari Park, and the Lied Bridge.

To preserve any landscape, the first step is local recognition that there is much to lose and a willingness to protect it. With an active landowner base advocating for preservation and county officials willing to listen, Sarpy County took this step when it designated the 11,000-acre "Schramm Conservation District" as the county's most important and vulnerable environmental area that should be preserved.

Voluntary land preservation agreements known as conservation easements were identified as the tool of choice, because they are more economical while keeping land in private ownership, on the tax role, and often in agriculture. Some people find the



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# News Around the LPRCA

## MUD's Well Head Protection Plans

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Although the District does not have the authority to enforce or implement zoning, Water Operations will continue to work with all the counties involved to promote a county-wide Wellhead Protection Overlay Zone so that that the District, landowners, and developers will be aware of the importance of protecting the groundwater in the Well Head Protection Area.

The District's Board of Directors unanimously approved the Well Head Protection Plans for the Platte South and Platte West water treatment facilities at the September 4 , 2013 Board meeting.

## COLORS OF THE PLATTE



As the LPRCA's newest intern, I had the pleasure this fall to go out and capture the leaves changing on the banks of the Platte. For your viewing pleasure here are some of my favorite shots.  
-Josh Price

# News Around the LPRCA

## MUD's Well Head Protection Plans

By Russ Iwan, Metropolitan Utilities District

Nebraska's Wellhead Protection Program (WHPP) is a voluntary program which assists communities and other public water suppliers in preventing contamination of their water supplies. The Nebraska Legislature passed LB 1161 in 1998 which authorizes the Wellhead Protection Area Act. This Act sets up a process for public water supply systems to use, if they choose, to implement a local Wellhead Protection plan. The Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ) is the lead agency for Wellhead Protection (WHP) Plan approval. Currently, there are nearly 100 WHPP in the State of Nebraska.

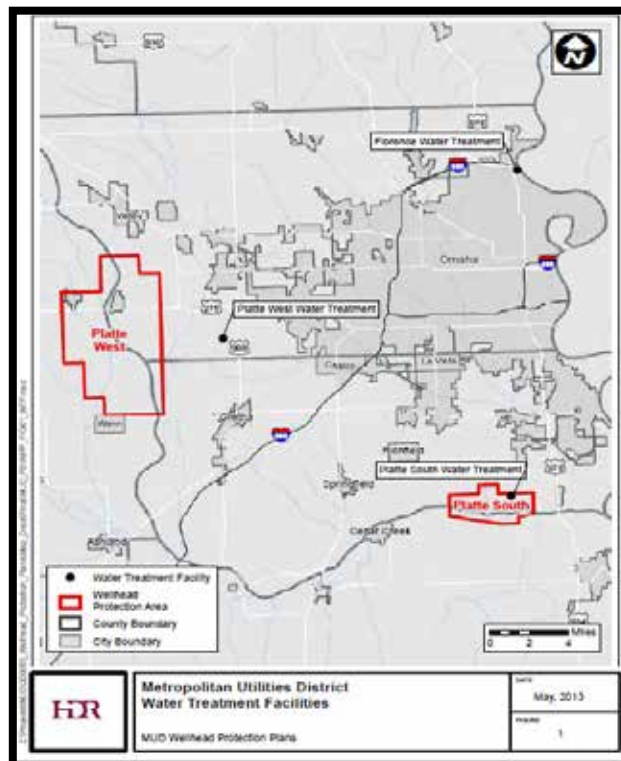
At the October 3, 2012 Metropolitan Utilities District's (the District's) Board meeting, the Board approved the hiring of HDR Engineering, Inc. (HDR) and JEO Consulting Group (JEO) to develop Wellhead Protection Plans (Plans) for the Platte South and Platte West well fields. A Public Hearing was held as part of the September 4<sup>th</sup> Committee Meeting and was on the agenda of the September 4, 2013 Board Meeting. Luca DeAngelis, P.E. of HDR made a short presentation regarding the Plans at the Committee Meeting.

Two Advisory Group committees, comprised of landowners near the well fields, county and city officials, NRD officials, with the help of Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ), met at each treatment plant on two separate evenings to help create the Plan for the Platte South and Platte West well fields.

Five specific actions were completed by HDR and JEO for the Plan:

- Delineation maps of the 20-year time of travel lines for ground water to each well were developed and provided by NDEQ to outline the Wellhead Protection Areas (WHPA) for each well field.
- Potential contamination source inventories for each WHPA were completed and identified on several maps.
- Contaminant source management strategies were developed including existing well field management/operation practices, monitoring stream flow conditions, source water quality monitoring, well field water sampling, existing land use controls, and public education.
- Emergency and contingency plans were identified and included in the Plans.
- The public was informed throughout the process and public review and meeting notices were published and documented. The Plans were available for public

review on the District's website. Public notice of the Plans availability was made on August 4 in the Omaha World Herald. Notice of the Public Hearing was made in the Omaha World Herald on August 25<sup>th</sup>. Public comments were taken at the September 4, 2013 Board meeting.



permanence of conservation easements disagreeable and they aren't for everyone, but few would question a landowner's right to sell their farm for a shopping mall. That is a permanent decision as well. A conservation easement is the flip side of this same property right, which allows a landowner to determine the future of their land.

In 2001, the Nebraska Land Trust (NLT) was formed to work with private landowners who wanted to leave a legacy of preservation by using these voluntary agreements. From the beginning, the lower Platte Valley has been a priority for the land trust as it harbors important resources in the midst of a region that is projected to have 2,000,000 people within 50 years. However, conservation easements are most effective when focused on areas of highest importance. It didn't take long for the NLT to recognize that the Schramm Bluffs deserved our focus, especially with so many landowners interested in preservation.

In the assessment of 13 properties for conservation value it was no surprise that several of the best prospects were working farms. This also meant that the owners' financial security was tied to their land. When a landowner grants a conservation easement they reduce the value of their land through relinquishment of development rights and, in Sarpy County, the value of these rights is substantial.

To make the purchase of these agreements possible the NLT has obtained two grants from the Nebraska Environmental Trust, which is funded by proceeds from the state lottery. These grants allowed the NLT to obtain nearly \$2.6 million in matching federal funds from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Other partners have included the Lower Platte South, Lower Platte North, and Pappio-Missouri River NRDs, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the landowners themselves. Numerous foundations and individual supporters have helped along the way.

Of course the real measures of success are the acres and resources preserved. Currently the NLT has 957 acres under protection, including productive farmland, deep ravines, spring-fed streams, oak/hickory forest, sites eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and 269 acres adjacent to 330-acre Schramm Park. Anyone can readily view most of these protected properties from public places, especially a scenic stretch of Highway 31 as it winds through the Platte Valley.

In July of 2013 the NLT completed its largest single conservation easement in the Bluffs to date, which resulted in permanent preservation of the 262-acre Kennedy Farm. The farm is highly visible to the public, who may cross it on state Highway 31 or the newly constructed MoPac Trail. In addition, anyone who has ever climbed the observation tower at Platte River State Park has gazed down on the Kennedy Farm across the river.

The farm also has significant natural resources, including the first Chinquapin Oaks ever documented in Sarpy County, which normally occur further south. There is a pond heavily used by migratory waterfowl, sand bars off shore used by threatened piping plovers and endangered least terns, and the farm preserves a wildlife corridor running from the river to the bluffs.

Another large conservation easement was completed on the other end of the Schramm Bluffs in July, preserving an additional 175 acres of the Patterson Farm. This brings the total protected acres on the farm to 414, as preservation has been occurring in increments due to previously divided ownership and the farm's large size. With funding in place to protect the final parcel in 2014, the Patterson Farm would become the second largest protected property in Sarpy County after Fontenelle Forest, preserving exceptionally rich natural and historical resources.

These lands are just the start, as preservation of irreplaceable landscapes is a long-term proposition. Land preservation also requires funding from irreplaceable state sources like the Environmental Trust and voluntary tools for private lands like conservation easements. This is especially true in landscapes with a high potential for development like the Schramm Bluffs, where landowners want to leave a legacy of preserved resources that benefits us all.

# News Around the LPRCA

## What's in Your Water: Water Quality in Salt Creek Watershed

By Duane Hovorka, Director of the Nebraska Wildlife Federation

This past August, as the Executive Director of the Nebraska Wildlife Federation, I gave a presentation at the Lower Platte Corridor Alliance Water Quality Open on water quality in the Salt Creek watershed. It was a message important enough to resound in this edition of the Alliance's newsletter.

The Salt Creek watershed covers most of Lancaster and Saunders counties, including Salt Creek which runs through Lincoln and Wahoo Creek in Saunders County. Many pollutants are common in the watershed, including fecal coliform bacteria, nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment. Based on testing from the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), just four stream segments in the watershed fully meet state and federal water quality standards: portions of Sand Creek and Duck Creek northwest of Wahoo, and portions of Middle Creek and Holmes Creek west of Lincoln.

In contrast, most of the larger streams in the watershed fail to meet water quality standards, six reservoirs in the watershed have sediment problems, and nine reservoirs have excess nutrients. Fecal coliform exceeds water quality standards in much of Salt Creek, several of the creek's tributaries in the Lincoln area, and much of the Lower Platte River.



The Department of Environmental Quality doesn't survey all the streams and lakes in the watersheds, so there are likely more polluted streams that we don't yet know about. The pollutants cause problems for the fish and other critters that live in those waters, and the fecal coliform can be bad for people who swim, canoe or fish in waters polluted with bacteria.

While the problem is local, Nebraska has similar problems state-wide. Based on DEQ testing, Nebraska has far more rivers and lakes that fail state water quality standards than that meet those standards, including portions of every major river in the state.

Clean Water Act regulations have reduced the pollutants coming from industrial sources like factories and wastewater treatment plants over the past several decades. "Non-point" sources like runoff from farms, ranches and golf courses remain largely exempt from Clean Water Act rules, so voluntary programs that pay landowners to change their practices have been the primary tool to reduce pollutants like nutrients and sediment.

We can look to examples like Kirkman's Cove and Wildwood Lake where focused, voluntary programs have markedly improved water quality in lakes and streams. However, such voluntary programs can be expensive. Ballpark estimates from the DEQ put a price tag of \$100,000 per mile of impaired stream, and \$25,000 per lake acre, to clean them up.

That means that state-wide, the price tag for voluntary incentives needed to make Nebraska streams and lakes fishable and swimmable again will be in excess of \$3 billion, just to clean up the rivers and lakes we know to be polluted.

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# News Around the LPRCA

## A riddle: what do the Lower Platte and the Missouri Rivers have in common?

*Mary Bomberger Brown, Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership, School of Natural Resources, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE 68583-0995*

*Lauren R. Dinan, Nongame Bird Program, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Lincoln, NE 68503*

**They don't pass through any of the same cities (except, Plattsmouth, of course). And, they certainly aren't the same length or drain the same number of acres, but, this past summer they did share one thing, one very important thing.....a nesting Piping Plover.**



**THE PLATTE RIVER**



**FEMALE PIPING PLOVER**



**THE MISSOURI RIVER**

A female plover, wearing a light blue flag and a gray and a black color band on her right leg and a numbered metal band and a yellow and a gray color band on her left leg, successfully nested along both rivers in 2013, producing two broods. Her first nest was located in a backyard at a lakeshore housing development along the Lower Platte River near North Bend in Dodge County. The four eggs in the nest hatched on 10 June and she was last seen at that location on 14 June. Seven days later, 21 June, she was seen on a sandbar in the Missouri River near Gavin's Point Dam by researchers from Virginia Tech University. One month later, 21 July, she was captured on a nest with three eggs; all three eggs hatched and she was last seen on 15 August. She was paired with a different male plover at the two locations. She was banded as an adult with a nest in 2012 at the same lakeshore housing development near North Bend, so she was at least two years old in 2013.

Typically, Piping Plovers are monogamous, having one mate and raising one brood per year, but polygyny (one male paired with two or more females), polyandry (one female paired with two or more males) and double-brooding (same male and same female producing a second nest after the first is lost) is not unknown.

As far as we can determine, this is the first documented observation of a female Piping Plover exhibiting polyandry and successfully raising two broods with two different mates during the same breeding season anywhere in the Northern Great Plains. The only other well-documented case of polyandry in Piping Plovers took place in Nova Scotia during the 2004 nesting season (that female also successfully produced two broods). A notable part of our observation is that the two nests and the two broods were located over 100 miles apart and on two very different habitat types—one at a lakeshore housing development and one on a midstream river sandbar.

We are looking forward to 2014 and finding out what this plover decides to do. Will she choose the Platte or the Missouri, a sandbar or a backyard and who will she choose for a mate...one of the 2013 males or another plover? We'll let you know what we find.

# LPRCA 2013 Kayak Tour



This year's Kayak Tour was a great success! We had a large turnout and beautiful weather!

# 2013 Water Quality Open

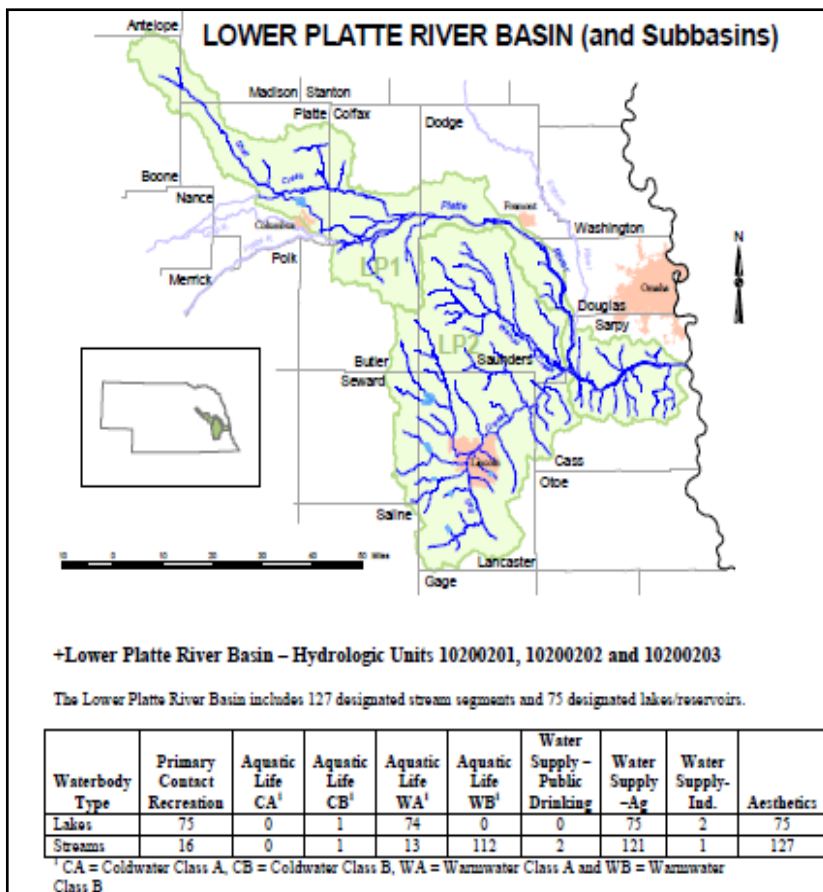


The weather was even more beautiful for this year's Open. With amazing scenic views of the Platte in the background and presenters between holes the 2013 Water Quality Open was fun for all!

# News Around the LPRCA

It will take a coordinated effort from state and federal agencies, organizations, and landowners to make real progress. For its part, Nebraska Wildlife Federation is focusing on:

- **Public Education.** Few people in Nebraska understand the extent of the problem and the huge effort needed to make our waters fishable and swimmable again. Simply getting kids and adults out into their local creek or lake helps them appreciate the resource and understand the need to take care of it.
- **Adopt a Stream.** The Federation created this volunteer program to teach volunteers how to adopt, assess, and conserve their local stream, lake or wetland. Several hundred Nebraskans have gone through Adopt a Stream training workshops, and the Federation is actively looking for agencies and organizations interested in joining the partnership to expand the program.
- **Advocacy.** The Federation educates policy-makers about the benefits of Farm Bill conservation programs that deliver over \$150 million per year to help farmers and ranchers become better stewards of the land, and much of that funding impacts water quality. The Federation is active in the state Legislature and with state and federal agencies that share the responsibility for fish, wildlife and water quality in Nebraska. The Water Funding Task Force is one group of people who need to know more about the extent of the problem, since they are discussing water funding needs in Nebraska.



The promise of the Clean Water Act, making America's rivers and lakes fishable and swimmable again, is an important goal that Nebraskans broadly support. The solutions start with education but they must include a commitment at the state and local level to understand and solve the causes of the problems.

Learn more about the Nebraska Wildlife Federation at [www.NebraskaWildlife.org](http://www.NebraskaWildlife.org).

# LPRCA Project Updates

## WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN



The LPRCA received funding from the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality in spring 2013 to develop a Watershed Management Plan for the Lower Platte River Corridor. The goal of the plan is to identify pollutants in surface water that could be attributed to non-point sources and develop implementation strategies for potential management practices that could be put in place to limit the contaminants. The plan is anticipated to be complete in spring 2014. Check the LPRCA website in the upcoming weeks for updates on the plan's progress and a draft of the plan.

## REMOVAL OF ABANDONED BRIDGE PIERS NEAR TWO RIVERS STATE RECREATION AREA.

The LPRCA received funds from the Nebraska Environmental Trust to assist with the removal of abandoned bridge piers near Two Rivers State Recreation Area. This effort was mentioned in the previous issue of the Platte River Update and was slated to begin this fall. Unfortunately the project has been put on hold due to unforeseen construction costs. We hope to continue the project in the fall of 2014.



## RECREATION PLANNING STUDY



The LPRCA is partnering with the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) to conduct a recreation planning study for the Lower Platte River Corridor. The study's goal is to assess current and potential recreation resources and opportunities within the lower Platte River Corridor and to develop a plan on how recreation—particularly water based—could potentially be enhanced on the lower Platte.



One element of the study is to ask the opinion of the public that live near the Lower Platte River Corridor or recreate on the Platte or at NGPC parks and recreation areas in eastern Nebraska. The survey will be available on-line or in print. If you are interested in voicing your opinion on recreation in the lower Platte please contact Meghan Sittler, LPRCA Coordinator, at 402-476-2729 or [msittler@lpsnrd.org](mailto:msittler@lpsnrd.org).



We are also attempting to contact cities, counties, organizations and businesses that have, or provide, recreational services within the Lower Platte River Corridor. Through those contacts we are hoping to verify that we have identified all public access and public recreation areas as well as identified outfitters or service providers within the recreation industry. We would also like to hear ideas for how we may be able to collaborate to promote or expand recreation on the lower Platte.

The study is anticipated to be complete by spring 2014.

Pictured below-A view of the Platte from Highway 31 -photo by Josh Price

