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LOWER PLATTE NORTH NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT
Dedicated to the conservation, preservation and wise use of our natural resources

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NRD to Begin Certifying Irrigated Acres

Later this year, the Lower Platte North NRD plans to begin the process of certifying all irrigated acres in the district.

The certification process will verify the number of acres being irrigated by wells and/or surface water throughout the NRD and correct any errors in existing records. The main purpose of the acre certification is to protect future water use for existing irrigators.

Each year, the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) evaluates all river basins in the state to determine if they are "fully appropriated." When a basin is declared fully-appropriated, NRDs are required to impose a stay on new water wells and expansions of water use. In such an event, irrigators with certified acres know that their existing water use is protected.

While the Lower Platte basin has not yet been declared fully-appropriated, the Lower Plate North NRD believes there's a good chance that could change sometime within the next five years.

"If our basin is declared fully-appropriated by the state, certification will ensure that producers who have made the investment in their irrigation systems can continue to irrigate their existing acres," said NRD General Manager John Miyoshi. "It's the best way to protect our irrigators and their operations."

The certification will also be important for the NRD's moratorium areas in the Uplands area of Butler and Saunders counties, where expansion of irrigated acres is restricted and requires a variance from the district (see story on Page 2). Certified acres will be used as the baseline when evaluating proposed changes in water use in the moratorium areas.

The NRD hopes to begin certifying acres this fall in Saunders County, followed by Butler, Dodge, Colfax, Platte, Madison, and Boone. (The certification

will be restricted to the portions of those counties that fall within Lower Platte North NRD boundaries.) The process is expected to take at least two years to complete.

The intent is to make certification as simple and painless as possible for landowners. Initially, landowners don't

need to do anything; they will receive a mailing from the NRD when the district is certifying their area. The mailing will contain current records for their irrigated acres and the well or surface water right(s) used to irrigate those acres. Farm Service Agency (FSA) data will be used as the baseline for those records.

If the records are correct, all landowners will need to do is sign and return the form to the NRD. If there are mistakes in the records (such as unreg-

...certification will ensure that producers who have made the investment in their irrigation systems can continue to irrigate their existing acres.

-John Miyoshi, NRD General Manager

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:

Q: Will certification limit my current irrigation?

A: **NO.** In fact, certification is the best way to protect your existing irrigated acres if our river basin is declared fully-appropriated by the state.

Q: What do I have to do to get my acres certified?

A: For now, nothing. When we are ready to certify your area, you'll receive a mailing with the current records of your irrigated acres. If the records are correct, all you'll need to do is sign a form and return it to us. If there are mistakes in the records, we'll work with you to get them fixed.

Q: When will you be certifying my acres?

A: We hope to begin this fall in Saunders County and work our way westward across the district through Butler, Dodge, Colfax, Madison, Platte, and Boone counties. We expect the process to take at least two years, so depending on where you live, it could be 2010 before we reach you.

istered or improperly registered wells or discrepancies in irrigated acres between records from FSA, the Department of Natural Resources and county assessors), the NRD will work with the landowner to correct the mistakes.

Landowners will need to be current on their NRD certification (for nitrogen application/water conservation) to have their acres certified. Failure to certify acres could potentially lead to a cease and desist order for irrigation.

For more information on the certification program, please contact the NRD at (402) 443-4675 or email us at: lpnnrd@lpnnrd.org.

Permanent Moratorium Goes Into Effect for Portions of Uplands Aquifer Region

On May 9, 2008, a permanent well moratorium for portions of Butler and Saunders Counties went into effect. Drilling of new wells and/or expansion of water use served by existing wells is restricted in these areas and will require a variance from the NRD. (Domestic wells that water less than one acre and range livestock wells are exempt from this requirement.)

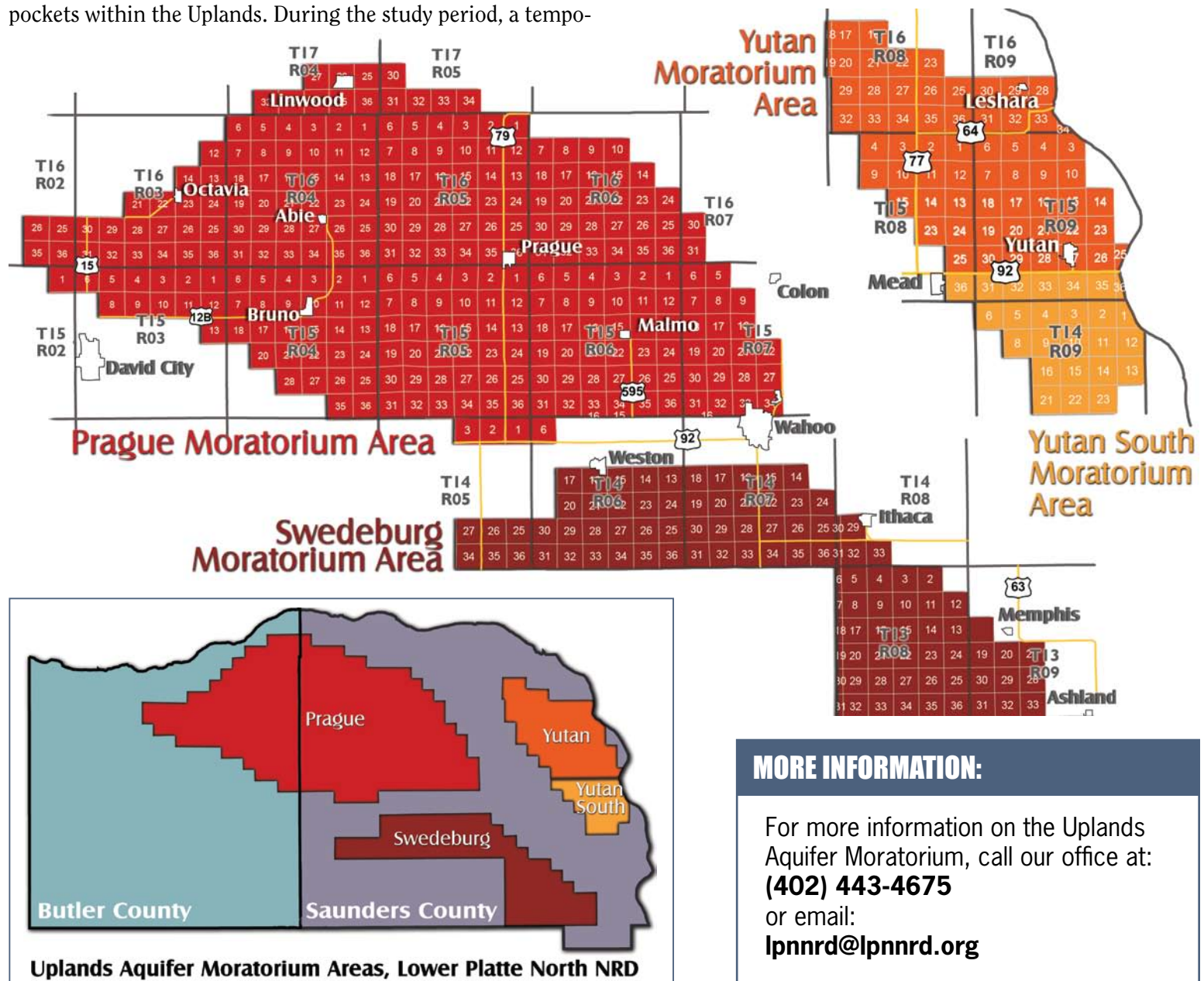
The moratorium was declared due to the NRD's concerns about the fragility of portions of the Uplands Aquifer, which includes northeastern Butler County and western and eastern portions of Saunders County. The region is a glacial till area and has a number of "pocket aquifers" that are hydrologically distinct from surrounding areas. In these pocket aquifers, high-capacity wells can have a much more significant impact on domestic water use than they would within a larger aquifer.

Due to the geologic complexity of the region, the NRD conducted a year-long study to determine the boundaries of these pockets within the Uplands. During the study period, a tempo-

rary stay on new wells and expansion of irrigated acres was in effect for the majority of the Uplands region. The final moratorium was split into four smaller subareas: Prague, Swedeburg, Yutan, and Yutan South. Together, the four subareas cover approximately 455 square miles.

A fifth subarea, Morse Bluff, was originally included in the final moratorium. However, the subsurface geology of that area is similar to other nearby areas that were left out of the moratorium, so in May the NRD Board of Directors voted to exclude the Morse Bluff subarea as well.

Currently these four subareas are the only moratoriums within the Lower Platte North NRD. However, if the Department of Natural Resources declares the river basin as fully-appropriated, there could also be state-imposed stays on wells and expansion of irrigated acres outside the Uplands area.



MORE INFORMATION:

For more information on the Uplands Aquifer Moratorium, call our office at: **(402) 443-4675** or email: lpnrd@lpnrd.org

NRD to Host Hazard Mitigation Planning

Representatives from Area Jurisdictions Invited to Attend July Public Meetings

As part of an effort to establish a comprehensive Hazard Mitigation Plan for communities in the Lower Platte North NRD, the district will be hosting a series of public meetings throughout July.

The NRD was recently approved for grant funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to develop a Hazard Mitigation Plan. JEO Engineering has been contracted to develop the plan. For each jurisdiction in the district, the plan will:

- identify vulnerabilities to various natural hazards (floods, drought, wildfires, winter storms, earthquakes, etc);
- assess potential losses associated with those hazards;
- identify projects that can mitigate these hazards.

Once the plan is approved by FEMA, mitigation projects will be eligible for grant funding. These projects could include drainage evaluations, improvements to stormwater infrastructure, educational activities, establishment of community storm shelters, bridge elevation improvements, and more.

HAZARD IDENTIFICATION MEETINGS		
Tuesday, July 8	2:00 pm	Fremont City Office Chambers (400 East Military Avenue)
Tuesday, July 8	7:00 pm	Lower Platte North NRD (511 Commercial Park Road, Wahoo)
Thursday, July 10	7:00 pm	Platte Center Auditorium (315 4th St.)
Tuesday, July 15	7:00 pm	David City Library (399 N. 5th St.)
PLANNING MEETINGS		
Tuesday, July 8	5:00 pm	Lower Platte North NRD (511 Commercial Park Road, Wahoo)

In order to be included in the plan and qualify for grant funds, each jurisdiction in the district must send at least one representative to one of the public meetings. (Jurisdictions include cities, towns, villages, counties, school districts, and Sanitary Improvement Districts.)

The initial public meetings will focus on hazard identification (see above for dates, times and locations). A planning meeting to coordinate the effort will also be held in Wahoo on July 8.

For more information on the Hazard Mitigation planning process, call NRD Assistant Manager Tom Mountford at (402) 443-4675 or email tmountford@lpnnrd.org.

Full Steam Ahead on Lake Wanahoo Project

The long-in-the-making Lake Wanahoo project is moving full steam ahead in 2008, with one major phase nearing completion and two others set to begin this year.

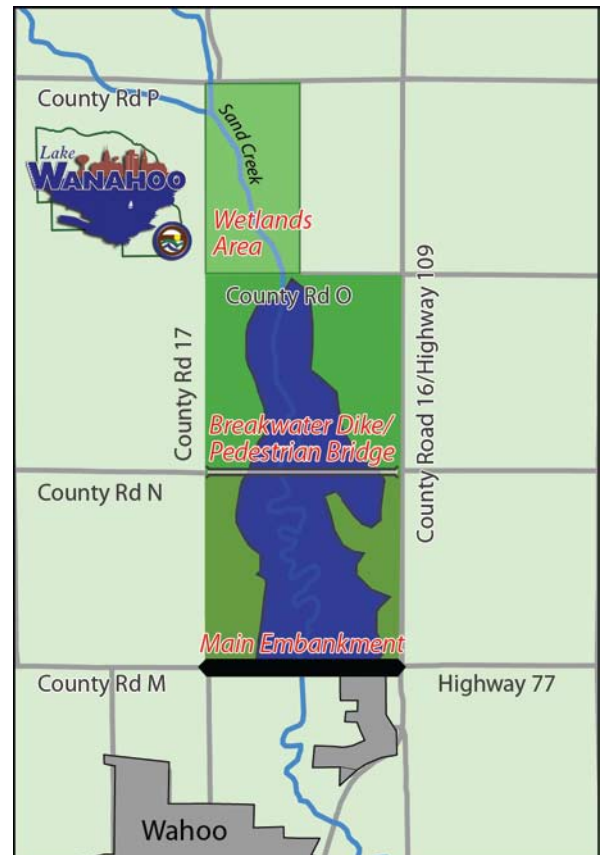
When completed, Lake Wanahoo, the keystone of the Sand Creek Environmental Restoration Project, will be a 637-acre lake one mile north of Wahoo. The project is being sponsored by the Lower Platte North NRD, the city of Wahoo, Saunders County, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Nebraska Department of Roads.

The wetlands phase of the project (a series of ditches, basins and other measures north of the lake site for controlling high water) is approximately 65% complete. Most major dirt work has been finished and a replacement bridge on County Road O is done, though a section of the road will remain closed as final dirtwork and rip-rap is completed in the wetlands area. The project is scheduled to be wrapped up by August 1, weather permitting.

In mid-June construction will begin on the second phase of the project, a breakwater levee and pedestrian bridge on a permanently-closed section of County Road N. That work is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year.

In July the NRD plans to let bids for phase 3 of the project - construction of the main embankment. Work should begin on the dam in fall 2008 and continue into 2009.

The NRD also recently received \$400,000 from the Nebraska Resources Development Fund for the project, and has submitted a \$1.6 million grant request to the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The status of that grant should be known this summer.





is the quarterly publication of the Lower Platte North Natural Resources District and is edited by Troy Thompson, Information & Education Specialist.

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Jenny Campbell.....	Dodge County
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Noxious Weed Control on the Lower Platte

by Russ Schultz, Lancaster County Weed Control Superintendent

The Lower Platte Weed Management Area has been working with Natural Resources Districts in controlling riparian noxious weeds and other invasive plants invading the Platte River from Columbus to the Missouri River. This effort has been expanded to control all the vegetation that has become established on many of the sand bars over the past eight years.

Purple loosestrife was designated a noxious weed in 2001 and began showing up in the Lower Platte River system. Coordinated efforts to combat it began in 2003, providing control of over 4,000 acres.

A few scattered infestations of phragmites (common reed) also were found. These infestations have increased to over 300 in number. While these infestations are fairly small, they will expand very rapidly if not controlled. Phragmites received an emergency designation as a noxious weed in 2008.

These noxious weeds along with other vegetation have been covering sandbars during the recent years of reduced flow in the river. This invading vegetation has increased to an extent that it will impede the natural scouring action of the river as normal flows return. This condition is also impacting the flow capacity of the channel and ice jams, as well as reducing the area of desirable nesting habitat for the threatened and endangered birds, piping plover and least terns.

The Lower Platte North NRD and the Papio-Missouri River NRD have committed funds to work with landowners to control invasive vegetation on over 300 acres of selected sandbars and portions of sandbars. Planning efforts have begun that will include contacts with landowners to finalize plans prior to the implementing the control in September and October.

The plan is to make very precise applications of EPA approved application of an aquatic herbicide by helicopter. All of the areas to be controlled will be surveyed and photographed by airboat. GPS coordinates will be provided to the helicopter operator. A pre-flight will be made by the helicopter to fine tune and make any needed last minute changes. The contacts with the landowners will include developing a long range riparian vegetation management plan for the Lower Platte River.

Plans are to work with the landowners along the 170 miles of river and the tributaries in the control of purple loosestrife, saltcedar and phragmites. The Central Platte NRD and the Lower Platte South NRD are considering providing funds to assist in this effort. More details will be provided to the landowners and the public as they are developed.

For more information on the Lower Platte Weed Management Area, please visit us at www.lowerplattewma.org or call (402) 367-0510.



Phragmites on the Platte

This aerial photo from a small stretch of the Platte River shows phragmites infestations (blue dots) on sandbars. More than 300 infestations have been identified, and phragmites received an emergency designation as a noxious weed in 2008.

“No Child Left Inside” at Conservation Sensation

The Spring Conservation Sensation, an outdoor festival for elementary grades, hosted 297 students from area schools on May 7 at Czechland Lake near Prague.

Fourth, 5th and 6th grade students from 10 local schools attended the 2008 event, which featured hands-on activities designed to teach them about the importance of conserving natural resources. The students rotated through eight 25-minute sessions focusing on a variety of topics.

At “Tree Trivia,” students worked in teams to answer forestry-related trivia questions while constructing a model tree. “Oh Fish!” had students take on the role of fish in a fast-paced game that taught them about the importance of habitat and predator-prey relationships. At “Wildlife Roundup,” students learned about wildlife conservation and management while getting a hands-on look at pelts, turkey legs, elk antlers, rattle-snake rattles, and more.

At other stations, students got to plant trees; practice casting and other fishing skills; examine the parts of a lake ecosystem; role-play as predators and prey to learn about bird migration; and use GPS technology to locate hidden items.

More than 5,000 students have attended the Spring Conservation Sensation since it began in 1991. The event is open to schools from Butler, Saunders, Platte, Colfax, and Dodge counties.

Attending the 2008 event were classes from Ashland/Greenwood Elementary, Bellwood Attendance Center, East Butler Elementary (Brainard and Dwight), Logan View Elementary, North Bend Elementary, Platteville Elementary, St. Mary’s (David City), St. Wenceslaus (Wahoo), and Trinity Lutheran (Fremont).

The event was sponsored by the Lower Platte North Natural Resources District. Additional presenters came from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Aksarben Aquarium, and the Lower Platte South NRD. High school students from Mead served as group leaders. In-kind services were provided by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Youth Fishing Program.

FROM TOP:

Oh Fish!

“Bluegill” run for their lives in a fast-paced game about habitat and predator-prey relationships.

Tree Planting

NRD Forestry Manager Bob Heimann shows students how to plant a tree seedling.

Fishing

Students line the bank of Czechland Lake to try out their casting skills.

Tree Trivia

NRD General Manager John Miyoshi and NRD Technician Marla Milliken host this “game show” that tests students’ knowledge of forestry topics.

Water Jeopardy

I’ll take “Groundwater” for 100, Alek . . . students wait to buzz in during a round of this water-themed version of “Jeopardy!”

Geo-Hunt

(Bottom right) A GPS unit and sharp eyes are all students need to find hidden items in this modern-day scavenger hunt.

Wildlife Roundup

(Bottom center) Students get a hands-on look at turkey legs, furs, porcupine quills, and other wildlife items from the collection of Nebraska Game and Parks Conservation Officer Mike Luben.

Lake Ecosystems

(Bottom left) A student searches for insects, snails and other critters at “Lake Ecosystems.”




SPRING
CONSERVATION
SENSATION

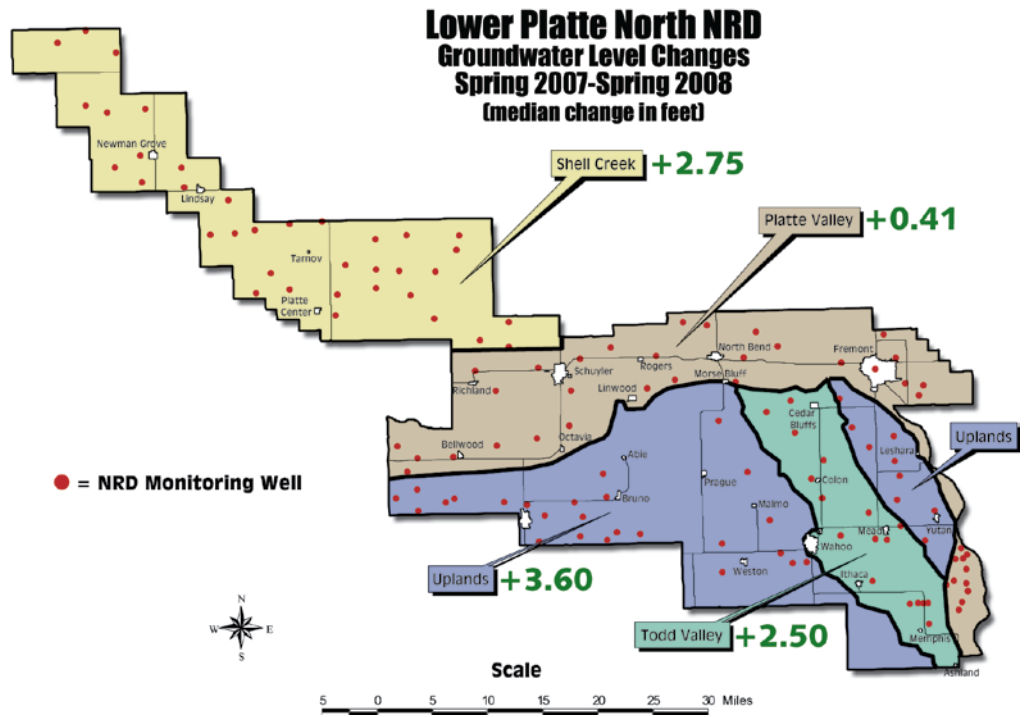


For the first time in nearly a decade, all four of the NRD's aquifer regions showed increases in groundwater levels from the previous spring.

The NRD measures groundwater levels twice a year (once in the fall and once in the spring). There are currently 139 wells in the NRD's monitoring network, most of them owned by private cooperators.

This year, the Platte Valley region showed a modest increase at +0.41 feet. Next was Todd Valley at +2.50 feet, Shell Creek at +2.75 feet, and the Uplands at +3.60 feet. (Results are given as the median change in feet.)

While the overall increase is good news, there are still areas of concern in the district. The largest increase this year was in the Uplands area as a whole, but certain portions of it were recently put under a permanent moratorium for new wells and expansion of water use. The moratorium is intended to protect "pocket aquifers" where groundwater levels may vary widely from the overall average (see story on page 2).



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