

NRD Working on Plan to Allow Limited Irrigation Development in Stay Areas

State Reverses Preliminary Declaration That Lower Platte River Basin Is “Fully Appropriated,” But Stay on New Wells and Expansion of Irrigated Acres Remains in Effect For Now

In December 2008, the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) made a preliminary declaration that the Lower Platte River Basin is “fully-appropriated.” As a result, an immediate stay was placed on new wells or expansion of irrigated acres throughout most of the Lower Platte North NRD. (The state-imposed stay areas are shown in red on the map.)

In March of this year, DNR reversed that preliminary declaration due to issues discovered with some of the science it was based on. As a result, the Lower Platte Basin is not currently considered fully-appropriated. However, contrary to what many people may have heard, the reversal did **not** lift the December 2008 stay on new wells and expansion of irrigated acres.

Before the stay can be lifted, the Lower Platte North NRD is required to come up with a plan for

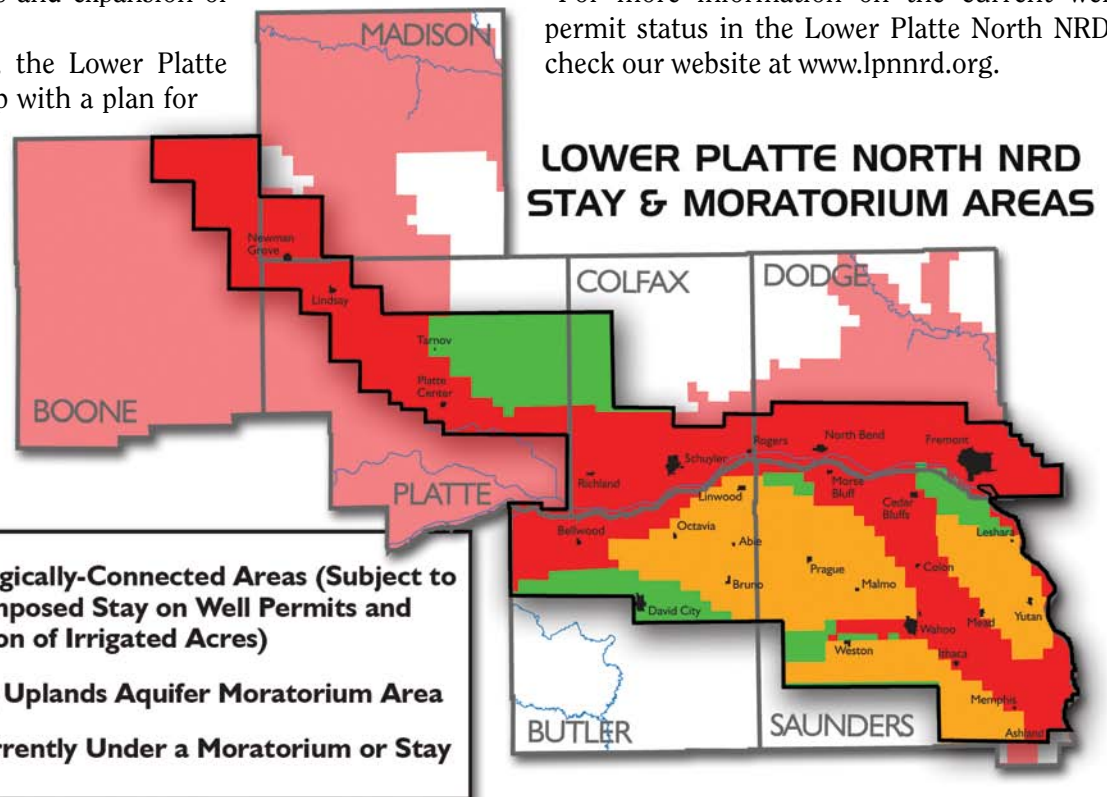
allocating a limited number of new well permits in the affected areas, and the Department of Natural Resources must approve the plan before any well permits can be granted. This process is already underway and the NRD expects to have a finalized plan by the end of the summer.

This does not affect the NRD’s prior moratorium areas in the Uplands aquifer region (yellow areas on map), which will remain in effect regardless of the status of the rest of the basin.

The green areas on the map are not currently under a stay or moratorium and the NRD is still accepting well permits from those areas.

For more information on the current well permit status in the Lower Platte North NRD, check our website at www.lpnrd.org.

Red areas on the map show the stay areas on new wells and expansion of irrigated acres imposed by the state in December 2008. The NRD is working on a plan to allow limited irrigation development in these areas again, subject to approval by the Department of Natural Resources.



Taking Shape

Good Weather Throughout the Spring Helps Speed Construction on Lake Wanahoo

With favorable weather and a small army of workers, construction on Lake Wanahoo has been going full speed ahead since the groundbreaking last October.

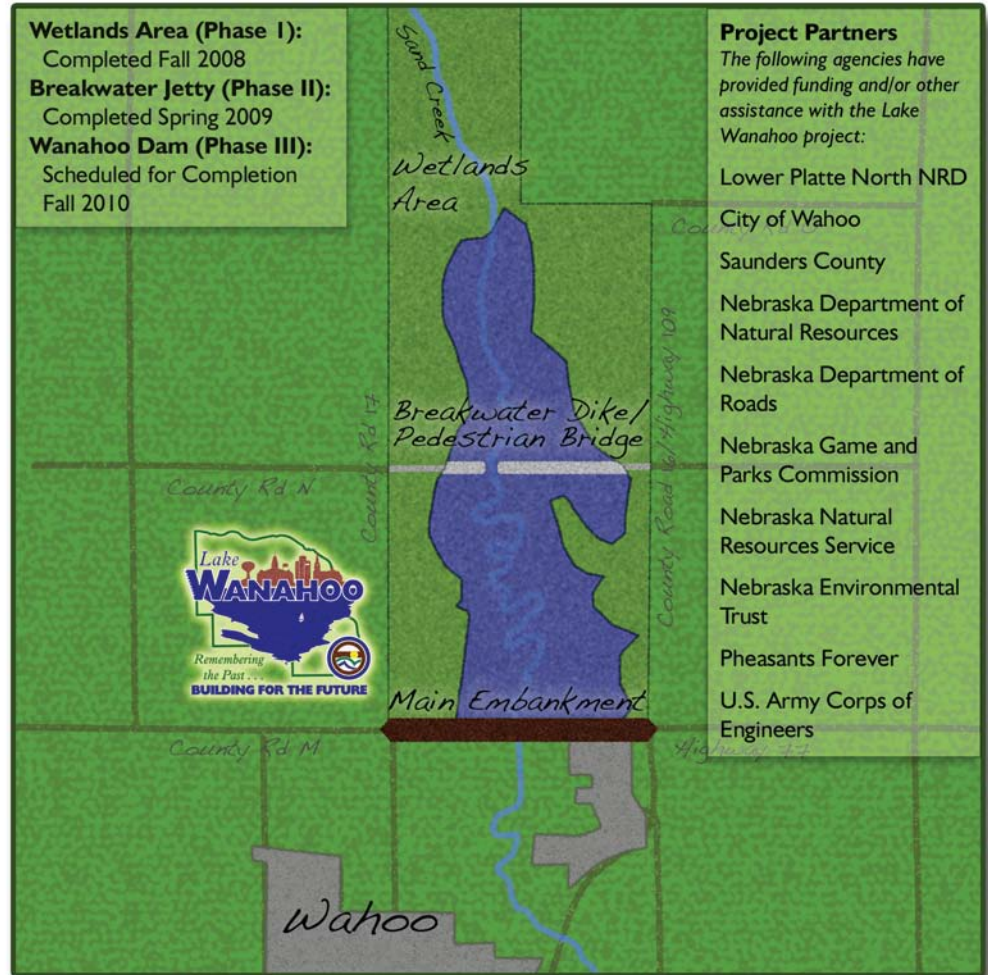
Phase 1 of the project, a wetlands area at the far north end of the lake site, was completed last fall. Ditches, berms, basins, and other measures were constructed there to trap sediment before it can enter the lake. That project was financed by the US Army Corps of Engineers with assistance from the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

Work on Phase 2, a breakwater jetty constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, was completed in late spring. The jetty, built up from the former County Road N across the center of the lake site, will help control wave erosion along the dam. A pedestrian bridge installed across a gap in the middle of the jetty will eventually help connect a planned hiking/biking trail around the lake.

The majority of work at the project site is now concentrated on Phase 3 - the dam along the former County Road M, just west of the Highway 77/Highway 109 interchange. Workers have been busy there this summer finishing outlet structures and emergency and auxiliary spillways as the dam takes shape. Dirtwork on the embankment is approximately 70-75% complete, -well ahead of schedule - and major concrete work began at the end of June.

The dam is scheduled to be complete in fall 2010, and the project sponsors are currently working with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission on a final plan for recreational facilities at the lake, which will include fishing, no-wake boating, hiking/biking, and more.

Project sponsors also got a nice surprise when the Nebraska Department of Roads moved up construction plans for the Highway 77 Expressway around Wahoo by a year. Dirtwork for that project is now scheduled to begin next June, with final paving completed by 2012. The four-lane expressway will swing around the west and north sides of Wahoo, with the final segment running across the front face of the Wanahoo dam before linking up with the existing intersection of Highway 77 and Highway 109.



Above:

View looking west from the pedestrian bridge on the breakwater jetty (former County Road N). The bridge will eventually link a planned hiking/biking trail around the lake.

Left:

Outlet structure under construction above the emergency spillway.



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Timetable for Certifying Irrigated Acres Moved Up

After the Lower Platte River Basin was temporarily declared fully-appropriated last December, the Lower Platte North NRD decided to accelerate plans for certifying all irrigated acres in the district. Initially the plan was to do one county at a time, a process that was expected to take two years to complete. However, the district feels it is now imperative to have all irrigated acres certified as soon as possible, to protect current irrigators if the basin is again declared fully-appropriated in the future. An outside contractor has been hired to assist with the process so that the entire district can be certified this winter (2009-10).

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 in areas where stays on new wells and irrigated acres might be put into effect.

The NRD will certify all irrigated acres within the district boundaries in Saunders, Butler, Dodge, Colfax, Platte, Madison, and Boone counties.

The intent is to make certification as simple and painless as possible for landowners. All landowners with irrigated acres in the district will receive a mailing with the current records for their acres and the well or surface water right(s) used to irrigate those acres. County assessor records will be used as the baseline for this information.

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 unregistered 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.

New Buffer Strips Funds Available

New cost-share funds are being made available by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture through the Nebraska Buffer Strip Program. These funds are available to existing buffer strip contracts that have expired and not yet been approved for renewal, contracts that will expire between now and September 30, 2010, and new buffer strip contracts (completely new acres or existing buffers that are not currently enrolled in the Buffer Strip Program).

These funds will be disbursed on a first-come, first-served basis. If you are interested in applying for buffer strip cost-share funds or renewing an existing contract, please contact Eric Gottschalk at (402) 443-4675 or egottschalk@lpnnrd.org as soon as possible.



Photo Courtesy of USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Sensation-al Day!

The Spring Conservation Sensation, an outdoor festival for elementary grades, hosted 320 students from area schools on May 6 at Czechland Lake near Prague.

Fourth, 5th and 6th grade students from 10 local schools attended the 2009 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 "Secrets of Scat," students learned how animal scat can give clues about an animal's diet and did their best to gross each other out by constructing their own realistic-looking "scat" using Tootsie Rolls, Shredded Wheat, crushed mint candy, and other items. "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 (including a mountain lion), turkey legs, elk antlers, rattlesnake rattles, and more.

At other stations, students got to plant trees; practice casting and other

fishing skills; hunt for insects, fish, and other parts of a lake ecosystem; compete in a Jeopardy! game focusing on water; and use GPS technology to locate hidden items.

Nearly 6,000 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 2009 event were classes from Immanuel Lutheran (Columbus), Logan View Elementary, North Bend Elementary, Schuyler West Ward Elementary, St. John Lutheran (Columbus), St. John Nepomucene (Weston), St. John Neumann (Clarkson), 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, the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance, and the Lower Platte South NRD. High school students from David City served as group leaders. In-kind services were provided by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Youth Fishing Program.



Lake Ecosystems



Oh Fish!



Secrets of Scat



Fishing



Tree Planting



Wildlife Roundup



Water Jeopardy!



GeoHunt

HEM Flights Map Swedeburg Area

In April, a strange visitor criss-crossed the skies in the Swedeburg area - a helicopter trailing scientific instruments in a large metal tube.

The flights were part of a HEM (Helicopter Electromagnetic) survey of the area. This technique, previously used in a pilot study of the Gretna-Ashland area in 2007, can quickly map surface and subsurface geology over a large area without the need for extensive drilling.

Instruments that transmit electromagnetic signals are suspended beneath the helicopter in a horizontal tube. Sensors under the helicopter pick up the electromagnetic energy “bouncing” back, allowing a map of the the surface and subsurface to be built up - somewhat similar to the way bats and dolphins use echolocation to map their surroundings. The helicopter flies at an altitude of 100 to 300 feet and follows a preplanned route using a global positioning system (GPS) to provide optimal coverage of the area. The HEM data is then “ground-truthed” by correlating the results with data from traditional drilling techniques.

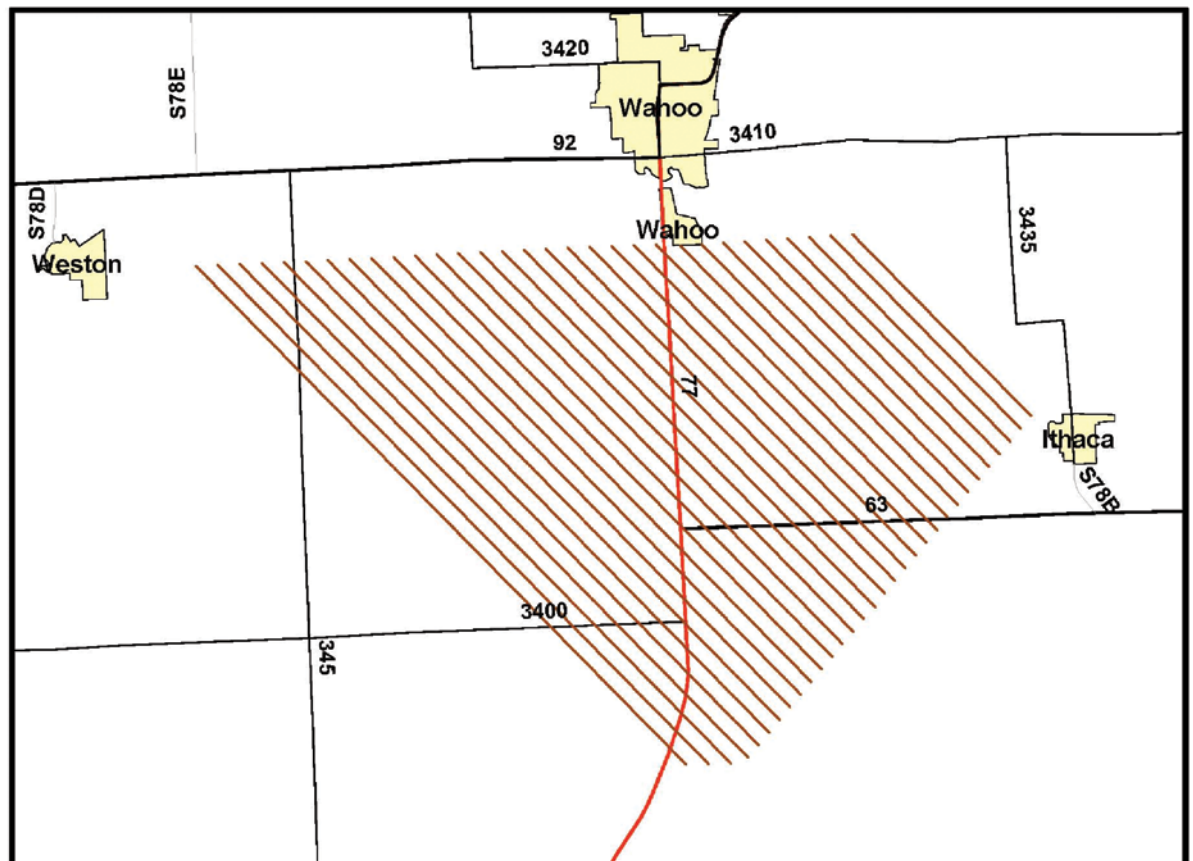
The HEM flights were a joint effort of the Lower Platte North NRD, Lower Platte South NRD, and ENWRA (Eastern Nebraska Water Resources Assessment). The NRDs will use the data in their ongoing planning for managing water resources in the Lower Platte River Basin.



Flight Path

The cross-hatched area in the diagram shows the area that was mapped using helicopter electromagnetic imaging techniques in a series of flights in April. The flights were a joint effort of the Lower Platte North NRD, Lower Platte South NRD, and ENWRA (Eastern Nebraska Water Resources Assessment).

Photo and diagram courtesy of ENWRA



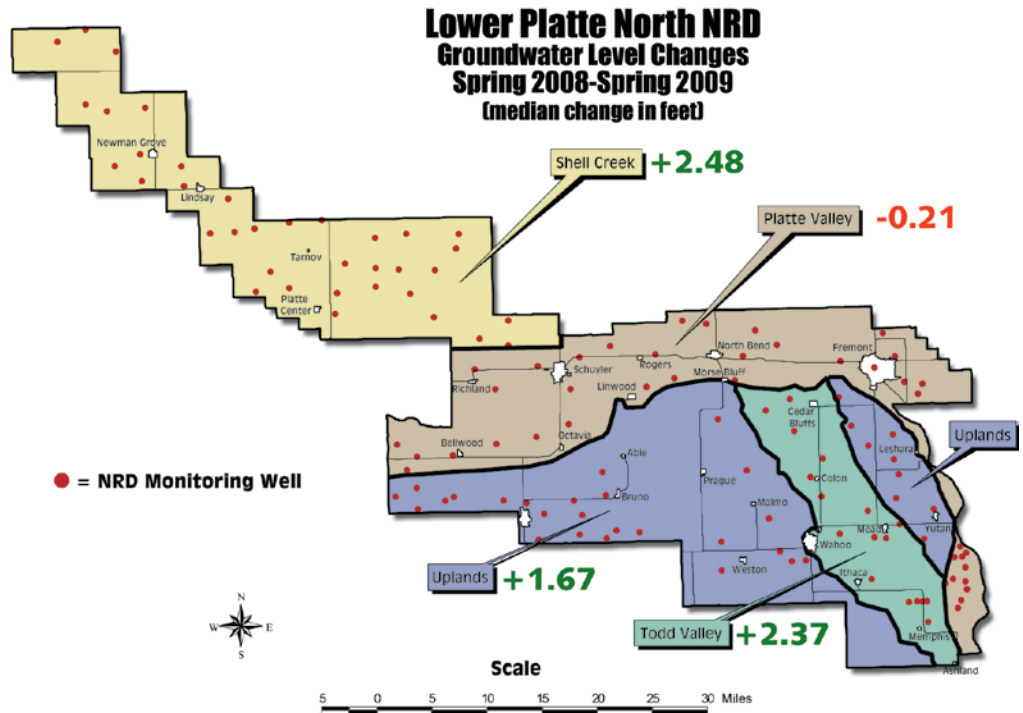


It was another good year for water levels in the Lower Platte North NRD, with increases in three of the district's four aquifer regions.

The NRD measures groundwater levels twice a year (once in the fall and once in the spring). There are currently 145 wells in the NRD's monitoring network, most of them owned by private cooperators.

This year, the Platte Valley region showed a slight decrease of -0.21 feet. The other three aquifer regions all showed increases: Todd Valley was up +2.37 feet, Shell Creek was +2.48 feet, and the Uplands was +1.67 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. A permanent moratorium for new wells and expansion of water use is in effect for portions of the Uplands aquifer. The moratorium is intended to protect "pocket aquifers" where groundwater levels may vary widely from the overall average. The NRD will continue to monitor groundwater levels across the district to protect this vital shared resource for future generations.



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