



Sand & Soapweed

Newsletter of the *Middle Niobrara Natural Resources District*

Spring 2012

Middle Niobrara has Gopher machines for rental and we also carry poison Barley and Milo. Don't let those pesky Gophers ruin your new tree plantings!!

Have You Ordered Your Trees for Spring Planting?

There are a limited number of Trees still available.

Call Shane or Stop In at Middle Niobrara NRD

526 E. 1st

Valentine, NE 69201

402-376-3241



40 Years Ago - Governor Norbert Tiemann (center) signs legislation that created Nebraska NRDs in 1972. At far left is State Senator Harold Sieck, of Pleasant Dale, who later served on the LPSNRD Board. Today, the 23 NRDs celebrate 40 years of protecting lives, property and the future in the broad areas of flood control, soil erosion, ground water management and more. Since 1972, 154 men and women have been elected by the public to serve on the Board, setting local policy, adopting budgets and making decisions on local natural resource programs and projects.

NRD History

The year 2012 marks 40 years of protecting lives, property and future of natural resources for Nebraska's 23 Natural Resources Districts (NRDs). Throughout 2012, the NRDs will be celebrating the success of projects and programs that help protect Nebraska's natural resources. Natural Resources Districts are unique to Nebraska because they are governed by locally elected boards and Nebraska is the only state in the union to have this system. A handful of board members, managers and staff have been a part of the NRD system since the NRD creation in 1972.

Senator Maurice Kremer introduced and the Nebraska Legislature enacted Legislative Bill (LB) 1357 in 1969 to combine Nebraska's 154 special purpose entities into 24 Natural Resources Districts by July, 1972. The original 24 NRDs' boundaries are organized based on Nebraska's major river basins which allows for better management practices to be applied to similar topography. In 1989, the Middle Missouri NRD and the Papio NRD

were merged into one, becoming the Papio- Missouri NRD which resulted in the current 23-NRD system.

Natural Resources Districts were created to solve flood control, soil erosion, irrigation run-off, and groundwater quantity and quality issues. Nebraska's NRDs are involved in a wide variety of projects and programs to conserve and protect the state's natural resources. NRDs are charged under state law with 12 areas of responsibility including flood control, soil erosion, groundwater management and many others.

NRD Structure

NRDs are local government entities with broad responsibilities to protect our natural resources. Major Nebraska river basins form the boundaries, enabling districts to respond best to local needs. Elected boards of directors govern districts. Much of their funding comes from local property taxes. In many cases, your local natural resources district typically uses 1 to 2 percent of all property taxes collected in the county.

Challenges & Solutions

NRDs help Nebraskans respond to natural resource challenges with local control and local solutions. Often, they build partnerships with other agencies and organizations, including the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Nebraska Natural Resources Commission, Nebraska Department of Natural Resources and other state and federal agencies, municipalities, counties and private organizations.

Leaving a Legacy of Conservation

Many NRD projects produce long lasting results: dams, terraces, drainage ditches, windbreaks, reservoirs and recreational trails.

NRDs are unique to Nebraska, a state which has a long history of political innovation including the nonpartisan, single-house legislative and total public power.

In the past 40 years, NRDs have experienced tremendous growth in the responsibilities given to them by state statute, especially in protecting ground water.

With information, education and outreach efforts, NRDs also touch Nebraska's future generations, the young people who will watch over the state's resources in the 21st Century.

Legislation Part of Resource Management

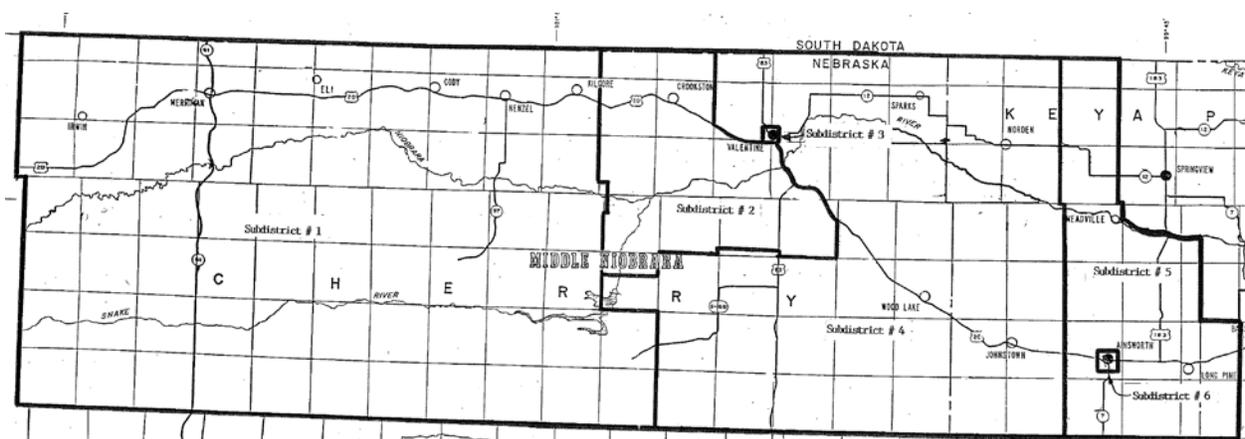
The NRD always has an interest in pending legislation and as bills were introduced for this year's session of the Nebraska Legislature, we began reviewing them for any positive or negative effects on protecting natural resources. We provide input when appropriate to help legislators make good decisions. Here are some of the bills that have our attention this session:

- **LB 391** - (carryover bill) - Would establish the Nebraska Invasive Species Council to minimize the effects of invasive plant species. Council would create and update a statewide management plan.
- **LB 529** - (carryover bill) - Would give county boards power to deny proposed conservation easements, would limit the duration of some conservation easements to ten years and would limit the amount of Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund money available for conservation easements.
- **LB 595** - (carryover bill) - Would create the Water Resources Revolving Loan Fund Act, providing low interest loans to NRDs and partner entities. Eligible projects would include buying water rights, buying and managing canals or reservoirs for irrigation, vegetation management and more.
- **LB 1134** - Would change eminent domain procedures for many agencies, including NRDs.
- **LB 1161** - Would provide for the study and evaluation of routes for proposed oil pipelines.

It's an Election Year

NRD Board seats currently held by these incumbents are up for election this year:

Wade Andrews	<i>Subdistrict 1</i>
Leonard Danielski	<i>Subdistrict 3</i>
Greg Wilke	<i>Subdistrict 5</i>



NRDs Encourage Producers to Use Best Management Practices When Applying Fertilizer

As the snow starts to melt and temperatures start to warm up, many farmers across the state are thinking about getting into the fields and getting a head start on spring planting. For some that means tilling and fertilizing fields. While fertilizer, if applied right, can have obvious benefits to crop production such as increased yields, there can also be negative effects to using nitrate fertilizer. In some areas of the state, the concentration in groundwater exceeds the federal maximum contaminant level for nitrate. When these situations occur, Nebraska Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) must take action to protect and improve groundwater by implementing management plans.

Nitrogen is an essential nutrient for crop production; however, outside of the root zone, nitrogen can cause problems with water supplies. Fertilization programs must account for multiple factors when determining the most appropriate nitrogen application method. In groundwater quality protection areas, NRDs require nitrogen accounting, including soil and water analysis. Soil sampling is used to determine residual nitrogen and is recognized as an important tool for fertilizer management. Irrigation water analysis should carry as much value, especially in areas where precipitation is, on average, not meeting the crops' needs. This analysis can actually reduce fertilization costs and benefit producers.

By using best management practices, soil and water analysis, and regulations that protect groundwater, producers can save money by keeping fertilizers where crop utilization is most efficient. The University of Nebraska has determined that nitrogen concentrations of 1 part per million in 12 inches of irrigation water can account for 2.7 pounds of nitrates per acre. A concentration of 10 ppm applied to 160 acres is the equivalent of more than two tons of nitrogen fertilizer; at \$700 per ton, this would save over \$1,500. Along with the economic benefit, crops remove the nitrogen from the water and help reduce aquifer concentrations. It should also be noted that the bulk of irrigation occurs when the plant is in most need of nutrients. Groundwater management programs and regulation have worked in several areas to reduce nitrate levels. "After implementing an aggressive groundwater quality management plan in 1988, areas of our district have seen a 21 percent decrease in average nitrate concentrations in the groundwater," said Ron Bishop, general manager of the Central Platte NRD. "Corn yields during the same time period, in most cases, have seen an increase," said Bishop. There are still areas of the state where more work needs to be done on reducing nitrate contamination. The requirements of these areas may prohibit application of nitrogen fertilizers prior to March 1. While this may seem like an inconvenience during mild winters such as is being experienced, the action helps keep nitrogen available for crop production rather than being flushed into groundwater. For more information on nitrates or nitrate programs contact your local NRD or visit www.nrdnet.org.

The NARD, the trade association for Nebraska's 23 natural resources districts, works with individual NRDs to protect lives, protect property and protect the future of Nebraska's natural resources. 2012 marks the 40th Anniversary of Nebraska's unique Natural Resources District system. NRDs are local government entities with broad responsibilities to protect our natural resources. Major Nebraska river basins form the boundaries of the 23 NRDs, enabling districts to respond best to local conservation and resource management needs.

NRD Programs

Nebraska's NRDs are involved in a wide variety of projects and programs to conserve and protect the state's natural resources. NRDs are charged under state law with 12 areas of responsibility:

- erosion prevention and control
- prevention of damages from flood water and sediment
- flood prevention and control
- soil conservation
- water supply for any beneficial uses
- development, management, utilization, and conservation of groundwater and surface water
- pollution control
- solid waste disposal and drainage
- drainage improvement and channel rectification
- development and management of fish and wildlife habitat
- development and management of recreational and park facilities
- forestry and range management

While all NRDs share these responsibilities, each district sets its own priorities and develops its own programs to best serve local needs.

Districts often team with other agencies to carry out projects. Technical services and administration for many NRD programs are provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. State funding for flood control and soil and water conservation projects is administered through the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources. Local partners often include cities, counties, and extension offices. For more on specific NRD program areas, explore other pages in section (tabs above).



Protecting Lives, Protecting Property & Protecting the Future Since 1972

Important Dates to Remember

Nitrogen & Chemigation Training
Valentine, NE April 10th

Fertilizer Reports for Zone #3 Are Due
April 15, 2012

Chemigation Permits are Due
June 1, 2012

Don't Forget To Certify Your Irrigated Acres

IF YOU HAVE PURCHASED LAND OR HAVE EXPIRING CRP
CONTRACTS YOU NEED TO CERTIFY THOSE ACRES WITH THE NRD



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