

PLATTE RIVER

Summer 2015

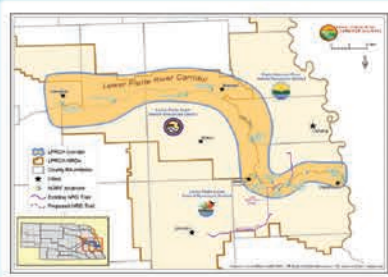


Lower Platte River
CORRIDOR ALLIANCE

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

Update

Biannual Newsletter
of the Lower Platte
River Corridor Alliance



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NE Dept of Environmental Quality
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NE Military Dept
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Ann Wilton & Meghan Sittler



Photo by Ann Wilton

From the Coordinator:

This issue is arriving in your mailbox after one of the wettest springs on record in most of the Lower Platte River Basin. The lower Platte River has been flowing fast and furious with very, very few of its characteristic sandbars visible since early May. Large rains throughout the watershed as well as heavy snow pack at the headwaters of both the North and South Platte Rivers have filled—or over-filled—the Platte River from border to border in Nebraska. The Summer edition of the Platte River Update features stories of the past, projects and resources of the present and future opportunities. As part of our now recurring feature on the history of communities of the Lower Platte—both those still here and those of the past—we are taken back in time to the story of the Ghost Town of Brooklyn. We are also taken back in time to hear from many of those people who were around the table when the legislation that authorized the formation of Natural Resources Districts was passed. The current legislature this year passed another important piece of legislation to help protect our lakes and streams from aquatic invasive species which is discussed in depth in this issue. You'll also have an opportunity to learn about current recreational opportunities as well as plans to expand those opportunities and resources. It's a packed issue again and I hope you will enjoy it!

Communities of the Platte: Brooklyn

Ghost Town Brooklyn on Ghost Island Cedar

By Harlan Seyfer, Historian, Plattsmouth Historic District

Too wide to bridge, too shallow to ferry, too sandy to ford, the lower Platte was an obstacle. When a territorial settler wanted to travel from south of the Platte to, say, Omaha, they would ride to the nearest Missouri River town, stable their horse (and wagon if necessary), then pay a steamboat to carry them upstream.

Although rare, there were places that boasted a crossing. One road was chartered by the territorial legislature to run “from Omaha City, by the way of ... Cedar Island in the Platte River ... to Nebraska City.” Cedar Island, four miles upstream from the mouth of the Platte, covered a little over 188 acres.

Fortunately, the original General Land Office survey, which mapped Cedar Island in Cass County on 3 June 1856, tells us what the island was like in those days. John Paynter and his crew surveyed a north-south line across the island – the vertical line in Figure #1. The Platte flowed through both sections, and the island straddled both.

Paynter wrote in his surveyor’s field notes, “Set limestone [marker] on south bank of Platte River. ... Finding the water sufficiently shallow for fording we measured with the chain. ... Strike an island and set limestone... marker on south bank of island in Platte River. ... Strike north side of island and set limestone marker.” The Platte channel north of the island was too deep to ford. But Paynter continued, “To obtain the distance from the north side of the island to the north bank of the Platte River, I left my flagman at [the marker] on north side of the island. Crossed over to the north bank of the River. ... By trigonometry I determined the distance across the river at this point.” Paynter measured 1211 feet from the Platte’s south bank, due north across the sandbar, to the south side of the island, then 1302 feet across the island, and finally 702 feet from the island to the north bank of the Platte. Figure #1 is a portion of the survey map showing Cedar Island. Paynter did not disclose how he crossed the Platte.

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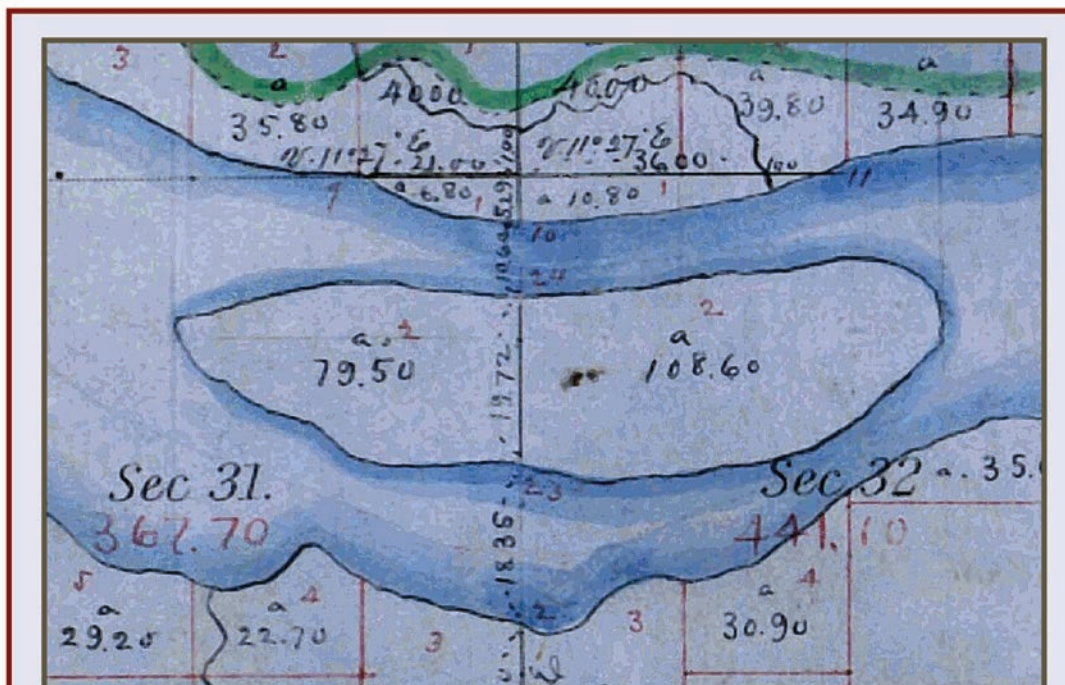


Figure #1:

Original 1857 Survey of Cedar Island, Platte River, sections 31 & 32, T13N R13E
Courtesy Nebraska State Surveyor's Office

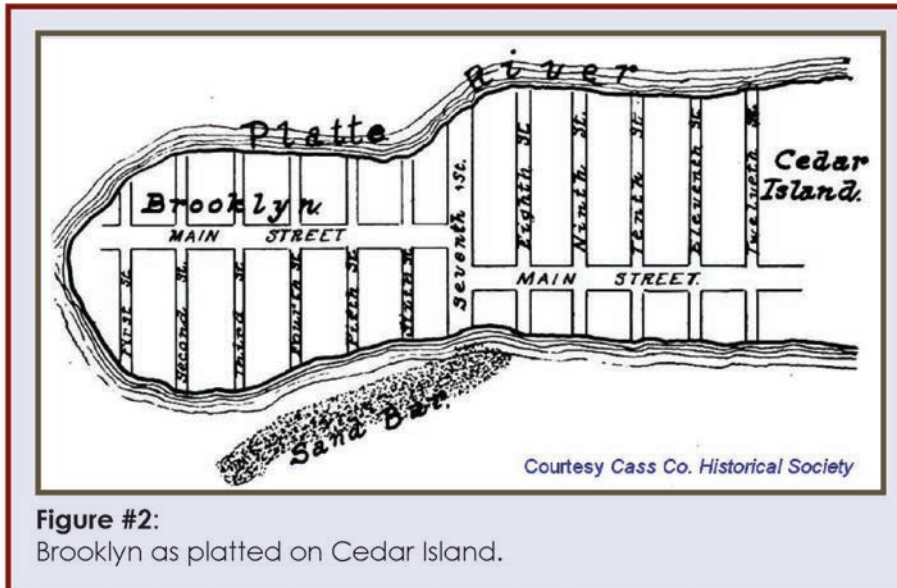


Figure #2:
Brooklyn as platted on Cedar Island.

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In January 1857, a trio of local land speculators – Joseph Harper, Peter Beaver, and Curtis Moore – hired surveyor H.G. Bixby to layout the town of Brooklyn on Cedar Island. Bixby had the job done by February 3, and the trio filed their town plat with Probate Judge Charles West in February.

To accommodate the island’s shape, Brooklyn had only one east-west street and ten north-south streets, as shown in Figure #2. The town lots were unusually large, varying from 198 by 297 feet to 330 by 297 feet excluding fractional lots along the river bank. Since typical town lots of the era were 100 by 45 feet, the trio may have intended to sell their lots to other speculators, who would then subdivide them.

Also in January 1857, Territorial Councilman Mills Reeves introduced “An Act to Establish and Keep a Ferry across the Platte River at Cedar Island in Cass County.” This bill was approved by Governor Izard on February 9. The ferry charter was granted to J.B. Bennet, Wm. Carlyle, G.W. Owen, and J. T. Bennet.

Thus in early 1857, on paper all the pieces were in place: a road, a ferry, and a town.

The next step would have been for Harper, Beaver, and Moore to petition the Territorial General Assembly to grant articles of incorporation for the town of Brooklyn. The trio did not.

What happened?

With misplaced optimism, the territorial legislature chartered banks to issue money in 1855 through 1857 – with virtually no controls. *History of Nebraska*, Fourth Edition notes, “Late in the summer of 1857 the territory began hearing news of financial panic in the East, and by autumn of that year complacency in the territory had turned to panic.” “Bankers and land speculators ... saw their schemes suddenly fall apart.”

Sometime after 1860 Harper moved on to Colorado. Beaver and Moore apparently hung on to their island town for ten more years. Then on 6 September 1870, W.D. Merriam purchased 57 acres on the part of Cedar Island that once was occupied (on paper anyway) by Brooklyn. Merriam did this by paying \$7.63 in back taxes.

Today Cedar Island is an island in name only. It has merged with the north side of the Platte and is now in Sarpy County. In 1968 the Omaha Metropolitan Utilities District began operating its Platte South Water Production Facility on the former island.

There was something of value after all, not on, but under Cedar Island.

About this article: As a new addition to our newsletter the LPRCA is running a regular column introducing our readers to the communities within the lower Platte River corridor. If there are specific locations you wish to know more about or if you have affiliation with a community in the corridor and wish to contribute to future newsletters, please feel free to contact us. Contact information is provided on the back page.

Looking for a fun activity for the whole family?

**Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Education Complex
Platte River State Park
Located on Hwy 66 between South Bend and Louisville**

The Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Education Complex is a family-friendly activity center featuring shooting experiences for all ages. The focus is on safety and family fun! This new facility accommodates several shooting disciplines, including an archery range with shooting tower, a 50-yard small bore rifle range, a trap range with 5 stand feature and an indoor 10 meter pellet gun range. The ranges were created with everyone in mind, regardless of size, ability or skill level, as well as those who looking for a fun and a unique challenge.

The Commission has expanded efforts in the last few years to introduce youth and families to nature base outdoor recreation. Several thousand youth are introduced to hunting, shooting and aquatic sports each year through Expos, Hunter Education, Outdoor Skills Camps, and other educational events.



The Recruit, Develop and Retain plan (RDR) for Platte River State park does not end with the Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Education Complex. Fishing and boating is an important factor in recruiting and maintaining anglers and boaters.



**Summer is here! Come and check out
Platte River State Park for some family fun!**

News Around the LPRCA

Lower Platte River Recreation Master Plan Overview

By Meghan Sittler, LPRCA Coordinator & Ann Wilton, LPRCA Intern

A new Lower Platte River Recreation Master Plan has been prepared for the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance in partnership with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) and the United States Army Corps of Engineers. The purpose of this recreation plan is to assess the existing recreation resources, river conditions, and other resources within the Corridor, identify recreation issues and need for improvements, and to make recommendations for future recreation improvements. The ultimate goal of the plan was to assist the LPRCA and other stakeholders in developing a formal Lower Platte River Water Trail. A Water Trail includes adequate access to the river for boating or paddling, as well as education, access to camping and services and access to additional recreational opportunities such as fishing, wildlife viewing or other activities.

The existing conditions evaluated as part of this plan are river conditions, recreation resources including river access, and opinions of the public and city and county officials regarding recreational use. A public survey was conducted to gather information on public opinion, needs and concerns regarding recreation opportunities and use of the Platte River and surrounding resources. The recommendations provided in this plan are at a conceptual level and intended to guide future collaborative recreation planning and development decisions along the Corridor.

The Plan focused on public recreational resources within the boundaries of the Corridor. Those resources could include river access, hiker/biker trails, city/county parks or open spaces, Natural Resources Districts

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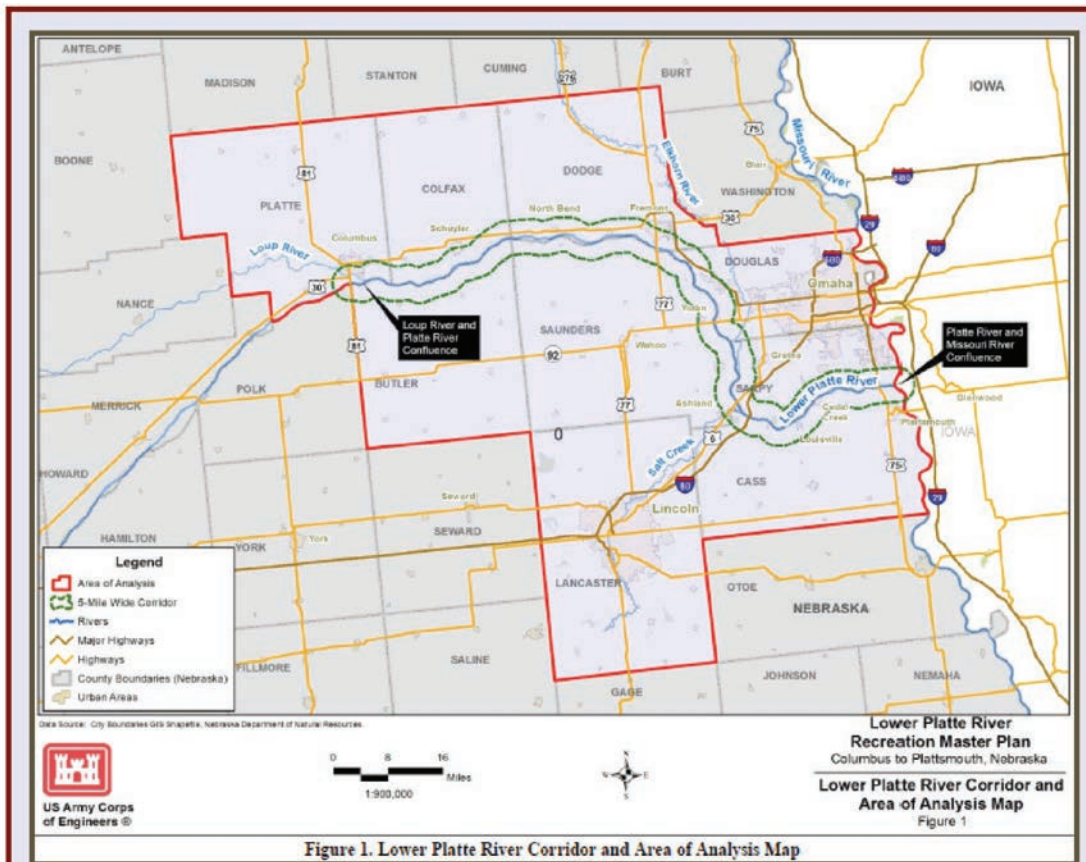


Figure 1. Lower Platte River Corridor and Area of Analysis Map

Lower Platte River Corridor and Area of Analysis Map

News Around the LPRCA



View from the Mahoney State Park Observation Tower. Mahoney will be part of the new Venture Park Program,

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(NRDs) recreation areas, and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission properties. The NGPC operates a total of fourteen wildlife management areas, state recreation areas, and state parks in the Lower Platte River Corridor. Additionally the NRDs operate a total of four river access sites on the Platte and Elkhorn Rivers. The NRDs have also helped to develop trails and recreational areas in the Corridor and adjacent communities. Cities, counties and the Loup Public Power District also operate access areas, parks or other recreational facilities that are open to the public.

The Plan provides a description of all of those properties as well as locational maps. The plan also includes current travel times between access areas for paddle craft on the Platte River. A separate hydrologic analysis was also completed that compiles historic Loup Power Plant discharge information and the impact on those discharge “tides” on the Platte River at 3 gage points on the Lower Platte. The study was done to assist the LPRCA in better communicating average flow conditions and changes in river dynamics on a daily, weekly or seasonal basis. The results of the public opinion survey is also compiled and discussed in the report. The report and selected figures from the plan can be found on the LPRCA website.

While developing the Plan in partnership with the LPRCA, the NGPC and the NGPC Foundation announced the launch of an ambitious campaign to create a unique set of adventures at four of Nebraska’s most popular parks: Mahoney State Park, Platte River State Park, Schramm SRA, and Louisville SRA. The Venture Parks will have many different features and attractions ranging from rock climbing walls to water parks, zip lines, and nature centers. Aside from the attractions a big part of the Venture Park program will be marketing these parks to the people of Nebraska and tourists throughout the United States. One of the marketing focal points will be the Platte River and how it links all four of these parks together. The Lower Platte River and the recreation

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areas within the Corridor have often been called “The Platte Valley Playground”. The new attractions plus the expanded programs such as canoe/kayak tours will get people out to the river to experience one of Nebraska’s greatest natural treasures. The Venture Park Program will bring exposure and visitors to the Lower Platte River for many years to come and will be an exciting message to bring as we implement the recommendations of our Plan.

Some recommendations of the Plan included expanding access to the Platte River upstream of Fremont which could include potential locations near Columbus, Schuyler and North Bend to provide the upstream linkages for the entire 103 river miles. The recommendation also included developing access to the river downstream of Highway 50 to essentially create an “end point” of the trail. Additionally, locations such as Two Rivers SRA and on or near Salt Creek were mentioned as important points for linking with upstream and downstream access. Improving existing recreation areas for safer or easier access as well as adding primitive camping and linkages to services were also some of the recommendations. One of the most important is also providing education about the Platte River, the critical resources within as well as the opportunities the communities and counties have for recreationists. As an initial step to integrating river data and other information the LPRCA will begin creating a web application to make that information accessible to river users and recreationists. We hope to begin that work later this year. Please check out a complete description of the recommendations on the LPRCA website!

The LPRCA will be holding meetings later in 2015 to “roll out” the plan and get feedback from the public, communities, counties and other stakeholders. We will be conducting those meetings in partnership with the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program. By working through their Midwest Region office, this partnership will focus on working with local stake holders and communities to improve education, conservation planning, and recreation opportunities on the lower Platte River. Please contact the LPRCA to get involved!



Kayakers approach Platte River Landing. Platte River Landing is located off Highway 64 near Valley.



Kayakers depart Hormel Park near Fremont.

News Around the LPRCA

Nebraska Passes a Law Creating an Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Program

By Allison Zach, Nebraska Invasive Species Program Coordinator

Aquatic invasive species such as zebra mussels and Eurasian watermilfoil are a growing threat to our water resources. With the recent findings of invasive zebra mussels at Lewis and Clark Lake on the South Dakota side and at Offutt Base Lake, in Bellevue, Nebraska, the need to take preventative actions to protect our waters and natural resources has become clear. Aquatic invasive species impact all water users: anglers, boaters, recreationalists, irrigators and industry.

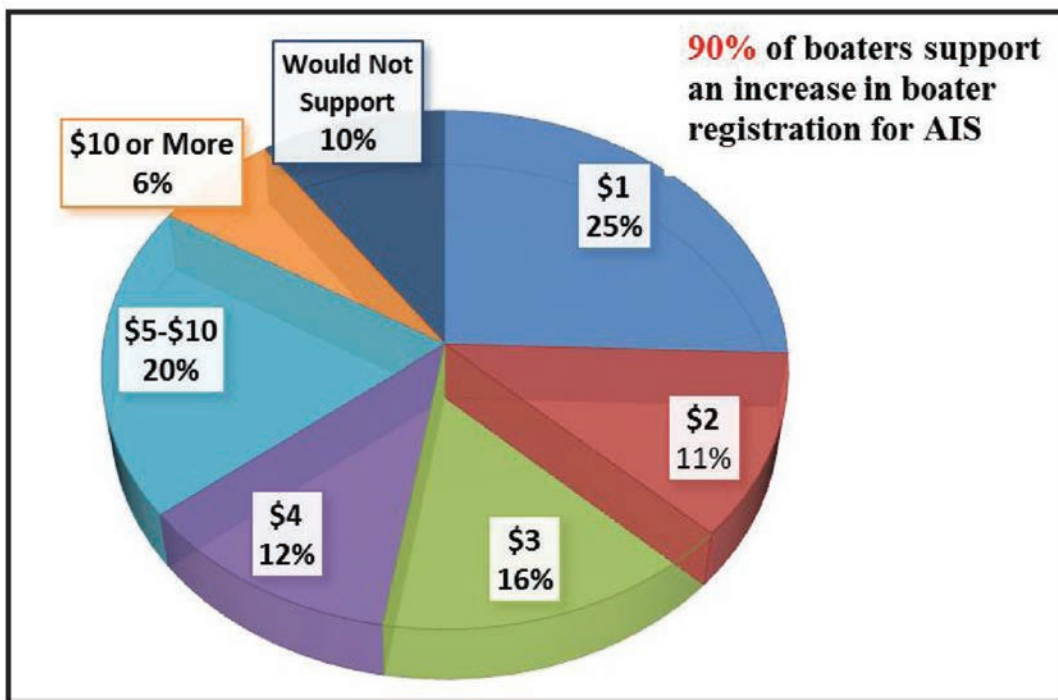


Zebra Mussels on a rock at Offutt Air Force Base Lake (Bellevue, NE) in June 2014.

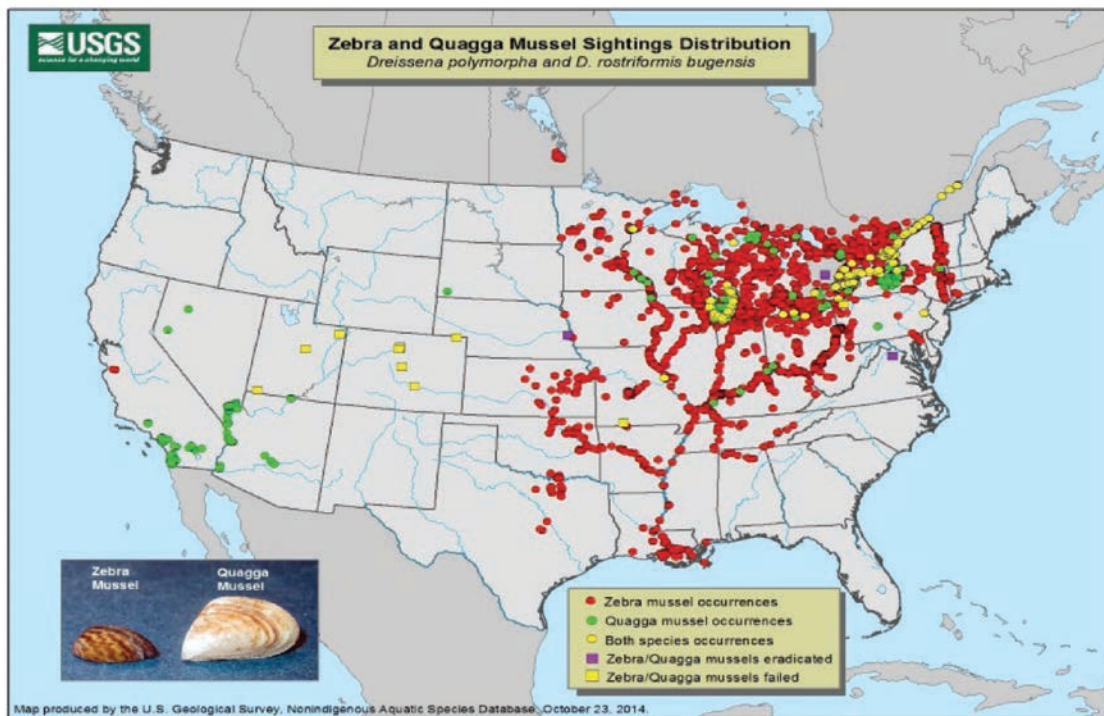
Established in 2009, the Nebraska Invasive Species Program is a grant funded program created to provide public education on invasive species threats, to conduct research regarding invasive species and to work with state agencies and groups that conduct invasive species research and controls in the state. The program provides the public with information on existing invasive species as well as new threats and steps the public can take to prevent the spread of invasive species. The program has been employing seasonal technicians stationed at high risk waterbodies in Nebraska since 2011 to survey boaters on their knowledge of aquatic invasive

species and provide information on how to prevent their spread. Surveys in 2014 gauged public support for a fee which would fund an aquatic invasive species prevention program. People strongly supported the fee (90% of those surveyed) and results of the surveys were provided to the Nebraska Legislature. In March 2015 a new law was passed protecting Nebraska from aquatic invasive species through a new motorboat registration fee.

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News Around the LPRCA



Current Zebra and Quagga Mussel Infestations

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Residents will pay \$5 for the new program in addition to the cost of their motorboat registration fee every three years. Non-residents will be required to purchase a \$10 aquatic invasive species stamp for their motorboats each year. Nebraska is one of the few states in the Midwest with a motorboat registration fee specifically dedicated to funding an invasive species prevention program.

Passage of this law is timely due to the increasing number of aquatic invasive species threats in surrounding states. The motorboat registration fee will go into effect in early 2016 and will fund a fulltime program coordinator as well as seasonal staff to conduct boat inspections and technical guidance to increase public knowledge of how to clean, drain and dry watercrafts and prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species. Aquatic invasive species are easily spread on boats, angling equipment and other recreational gear. The new prevention program will help preserve Nebraska's natural resources and contain and prevent invasive species infestations.



Aquatic Invasive Plants on a Boat Trailer

For more information regarding the Nebraska Invasive Species Program please contact Allison Zach, Nebraska Invasive Species Program Coordinator at (402) 472-3133 or azach3@unl.edu. Feel free to visit the program website <http://neinvasives.com> for more information or to report sightings of invasive species.

News Around the LPRCA

Collaboration Makes NRD Oral History Project Come Alive

By Jesse Starita, Water for Food Institute Education/Outreach Specialist

April Fools' Day 2013. Three veteran Nebraska conservationists gather around a beige table in Lincoln. A black Sony recorder's red light flickers on. Minutes pass. They trade tales and occasional wisecracks. Soon, potent personal histories of service to Nebraska's land, air and water fill the room. An hour passes. They switch off the recorder, excited. *Who else should we talk to? Who else was around back then? "Let's get Bishop at the Central Platte,"* one says. *"Yeutter's still in D.C., right? Turnbull? Yeah, he'd probably help do some interviews,"* says another. Sparks fly as names get jotted on a legal pad.



Two years later, Jim Barr, Gayle Starr and Dayle Williamson could reflect on how a day reserved for pranks made such a serious delivery: the first oral history of the formation of Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) told by those responsible for their existence.

Like the Unicameral, Nebraska's system of NRDs is unique. In 1969, Senator Maurice Kremer introduced and the legislature enacted LB 1357. For the first time in the nation's history, this new law created resource districts based around hydrologic boundaries rather than the more conventional districting by county lines. Championed by some, vociferously resisted by others, the state's 23 districts are now generally viewed as pragmatic innovations that have fostered the conservation of our natural resources. For example, they set district-specific groundwater pumping regulations that have helped Nebraska avert large-scale water level declines seen elsewhere in the Ogallala Aquifer. Yet innovations don't prosper alone. Their success is reliant upon men and women who infuse them with talent, passion and hard work.

Luckily for Barr, Starr and Williamson, these men and women – and their stories – were abundant. But one key resource was not: time. When pivotal figures like Kremer died, their oral histories were also lost. Furthermore, some living NRD architects were not in perfect health. According to Starr, if they wanted to preserve these stories, time was critical.

"Part of the motivation was, well, if this is going to be done, it needs to be done now because those people with those memories – a lot of them are gone," Starr says.

As interest in the project grew, so too did its roster and scope. Barr, Starr and Williamson all held key positions with Nebraska's Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SWCC), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Natural Resources Commission (NRC) and various state offices and congressional delegations. Later, they were joined by Ann Bleed, former DNR director; Ron Fleecs, former NRC and Lower Big Blue NRD general manager; and John Turnbull, Upper Big Blue NRD general manager. Jim Cook, former DNR legal counsel put in critical work. Dean Edson, NARD executive director, became an early advocate and contributed association funds to transcribe lengthy interviews. Mary Kay Quinlan, a UNL journalism professor and oral history expert and Paul Eisloeffel, Nebraska State Historical Society audiovisual collections curator, also added invaluable contributions.

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But before long, talk grew of the need to share these stories. Why? So they could connect future generations of Nebraskans to past ones whose natural resource investments have helped sustain the state. So a 30-year-old doctor in Gothenburg can learn how nitrates multiplying in his town's drinking water were controlled. So a teenager in Wahoo can hear how people came together to build flood-blunting dams along neighboring Sand Creek. Or simply to hear Nebraskans talk about the attachment to their land – and how together they formed a better way to preserve it.

“It was an interesting time in Nebraska’s history,” recalls Barr. “I think the NRD legislation, not only was it forward-looking, but there was a lot of persistence involved in making it actually happen.”

In the spring of 2013, around the time Barr, Starr and Williamson recorded that first interview, I attended my first meeting with the group. My initial responsibility was to help them select recording equipment, but I soon became enthralled with the group's rich collective history and their amusing anecdotes about farmers' dress codes and runaway center pivots. Moreover, the project seemed to align well with the mission of my employer – the Daugherty Water for Food Institute (DWFI) at the University of Nebraska – where we work to ensure water and food security through research, policy and education and engagement programs. Soon, it became clear what was needed: a website where anyone, from Rulo to Rushville, could listen and learn from these 85 rich personal histories.

So last summer, Craig Eiting, DWFI web developer and graphic design specialist, and I proposed an NRD oral history website to DWFI's director of policy Nick Brozovic. He immediately recognized the site's value and its relevance to one of our institute's core objectives: to increase national and global visibility of Nebraska's success in water management and food production. But the site and this project are too much to do alone, Nick advised. What we need, he said, are a couple of good student interns.

As luck would have it, finding them didn't take long. This January, the project's two newest (and youngest!) additions, Sandra Dizdarevic, a University of Nebraska at Omaha senior and Cindy Reyes, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln junior, joined our team. Sandra is pursuing a bachelor's degree in management information systems and is developing the site's architecture and functionality. Cindy is pursuing a degree in graphic design and is creating the site's style and look. When completed in early June, the site will host the recordings, transcripts, biographies and photos of all 85 interviewees in a visually-compelling, searchable format. Moreover, Sandra and Cindy will have a capstone project to present to prospective employers.

It's now been two years since that black Sony recorder flickered on – and soon it will power off for good. But not before Barr, Starr, Williamson and the rest of the team crisscrossed Nebraska to interview scores of NRD general managers and board members, as well as lawyers, state senators, ranchers, hydrologists and a former United States congressman and secretary of agriculture. And now, thanks to a little technology and a lot of teamwork, their histories will be present on nrdstories.org.

Finally, as a coda to this history, I'd like to thank Rachael Herpel, DWFI research and outreach coordinator, who first introduced me to the oral history project. Actually, an interview she did with Warren Fairchild in 1994 for her master's thesis became, in a sense, the original NRD story. Now, twenty-one years later, when another student like Rachael comes along, she'll find that Warren's story is not alone. In fact, she'll find many others, each with their unique story to tell.

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Photo by Ann Wilton

Upcoming LPRCA Events in 2015

LPRCA Kayak Tour - July 21st (make-up date)

LPRCA Quarterly Meeting - August 4th @ Nebraska Game and Parks

LPRCA Water Quality Open - Sponsored by NEBCO - August 27th

Check www.lowerplatte.org for updates about upcoming events and meetings.

For further information contact:
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