

## Lower Loup Natural Resources District

# IN THE LOUP

Under new rules, the Lower Loup NRD Board has lifted a stay placed on the transfer of irrigated acres.

#### To transfer irrigated acres in the Lower Loup NRD:

- A consultation with NRCS to determine if the acres where new irrigation would take place is Highly Erodible Land (HEL)
- If determined to be HEL, a conservation plan with NRCS must be developed and followed
- A title search must be completed for both the land from where irrigation is being transferred and the land to which irrigation is transferred
- Each landowner must sign a transfer agreement

## LLNRD Board Lifts Irrigated Acres Transfers Stay

The Lower Loup Natural Resources District Board of Directors voted to end its stay on the transfer of irrigated acres after new criteria were added to the process. The NRD Board voted 17 to 1 to lift the moratorium on transfers. The change in criteria means that landowners will have to consult with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to get a Highly Erodible Land (HEL) determination.

General Manager Leon “Butch” Koehlmoos said the vote ends a temporary suspension on the approval of new transfer requests that began July 25<sup>th</sup>. Koehlmoos said that, with the new criteria, issues with soil erosion created by farming on slopes and hillsides should be

diminished.

NRD Assistant Manager Russell Callan said that the first step for a landowner seeking a transfer of irrigated acres is the HEL determination from NRCS. He said that if the land is found to be highly erodible, a conservation plan must be written for the parcel, establishing what conservation practices must be put in place for compliance. Once the plan is established, the landowner must remain in compliance or face the possibility of loss of irrigation.

Callan said that, once completed, copies of the HEL determination and the conservation plan must be submitted to the NRD. A title search must be completed on both the parcel of

land receiving the irrigated acres and the one from which the acres come and the \$300 fee for the transfer must be submitted.

Parcels of land upon which a lien has been placed will require approval of the action by the lienholder. The landowners must also sign an agreement approving the transfer, the land parcels re-certified for the current irrigated acres, and any conservation plan developed will be attached to the deed for the land.

Forms for irrigated acres transfers and a step-by-step procedure for completing a transfer are available on the NRD web site, [www.llnrd.org](http://www.llnrd.org).

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## Flowmeters Required For Water Quality Area

Regulations approved by the Lower Loup NRD Board of Directors last fall require groundwater flowmeters for wells in water quality areas showing high nitrates. The meters will allow producers to accurately determine how much nitrogen they are pumping on their fields via irrigation water.

NRD General Manager Leon “Butch” Koehlmoos said that, to assist with the new require-

ment, the NRD will provide cost-share for the meters. The program will provide 100% cost-share the first year, 75% the second year, and 50% in the third year. Flowmeters must be in place by the end of 2016.

The cost-share application for Area 28 meters is available on the NRD web site, [www.llnrd.org](http://www.llnrd.org). Once approved, the producer will have nine months for installation of

the meter.

Currently, the NRD’s only Phase III Groundwater Management Area is Area 28, a strip of land south of the Loup River from southeast of Palmer to south of Columbus. Producers in that area with questions about the water quality flowmeter cost-share program should contact Technician Mike Lorenz at (402) 276-2004 or the LLNRD at (308) 728-3221.



Jason Moudry and Dan Ray work on soil sampling to determine soil nitrates as part of efforts to protect community water systems.

## Wellhead Protection Work Underway

As part of an ongoing project sponsored by the Lower Loup NRD and the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, the District is working with the communities of Burwell, Callaway, Elba, Genoa, Litchfield, and St. Edward to offer some insights regarding the amount of nitrate that may be located within their wellhead protection area (WHP).

The communities were selected due to elevated nitrate levels in the recent past. The Environmental Protection Agency's maximum contaminant level for nitrates is 10 parts per million (ppm). Anything higher than 10 ppm could pose certain health risks that affect the young and also the elderly.

To learn about the aquifer

and the amount of nitrates in the drinking water in these areas, the NRD sampled 200 domestic, irrigation, and stock wells during the summer of 2013. The samples were tested and results provided to the producer or home owner at no cost. For more about the LLNRD's groundwater quality program, please contact Jason Moudry at 308-728-3221.

## Fullerton, Newman Grove Tops In Envirothon

Teams from Fullerton and Newman Grove tied for the top spot at the Central Region Envirothon Contest in Columbus on March 4th, hosted by the Central Platte and Lower Loup Natural Resources Districts.

Envirothon is a contest for high school students designed to test their knowledge in forestry, range, soils, wildlife, aquatics, and natural resources policy.

With high scores of 91, the Fullerton team of Brandon Wamberg, Ryly Haughton, Tyson Hellbusch, and Jarred Ulferts; and the Newman Grove team of Megan Nelson, Brooke Pieke, Celine Dunlap, and Kleo Edgell; earned invitations to the Nebraska State Envirothon.

The Central Region Envirothon Contest was held in conjunction with the District II and VII Agriculture Educa-

tion Contests at Central Community College-Platte Campus in Columbus.

High school teams from Aurora, Howells-Dodge, Humphrey, Loup City, Ord, Schuyler, Lakeview, David City and Hampton also took part in the Envirothon. The Nebraska State Envirothon will be held May 3, 2014, at the Nebraska Nature and Visitors Center near Alda.

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Adam Rupe of JEO Consulting Group discusses the Clear Creek /Pibel Lake Watershed Project at a stakeholders meeting in Ericson.

## Clear Creek/Pibel Lake Survey Complete

A survey of property owners and residents of the Clear Creek Watershed in central Wheeler County is complete and survey results are being compiled to develop a list of usable, best management practices (BMPs) for conservation in the watershed.

NRD Water Modeling Coordinator Tylr Naprstek said the consultant hired for the project, JEO Consulting Group, Inc. of Lincoln, is assembling

the survey results.

Clear Creek drains into Pibel Lake, owned by the NRD, which is listed as an impaired water body by Nebraska's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). The impairments identified include a decreased amount of dissolved oxygen and increased levels of phosphorus, pH, and nitrogen.

The survey results will be

used to develop basin-wide approaches in land management and promote certain BMPs. Naprstek said that the entire process is being guided by input from the general public. He said that any plan needs to address the water quality concerns through practices acceptable to area landowners. He said that NRD and DEQ financial assistance may be available for implementation of the improved practices.

## A Message From The Manager

Welcome to the latest edition of *In the Loup*. In our last couple of newsletters I have introduced members of our District staff and how they represent the LLNRD. I will continue this series in upcoming editions.

This time, however, I would like to discuss some legislation being carried by Senator Steve Lathrop of Lincoln. The original copy of his bill, LB-1074, originated from disputes in the Republican River Basin and would change how all of the state's groundwater is regulated. Not only did the State of Kansas sue Nebraska, but the Frenchman Cambridge Irrigation District (who sided with Kansas in the Nebraska lawsuit) and Bostwick Irrigation District also sued Nebraska.

Now, what they could not win in the US Supreme Court, they have taken up with legislation. At the hearing on the original bill, the proponents included the Frenchman Cambridge Irrigation District,

Bostwick Irrigation District, Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District, Nature Conservancy, Ann Bleed (former Director of the Dept. of Natural Resources), Ron Wolf from the Twin Loups Irrigation District, and several individuals from the Republican River Basin.

All argued that groundwater irrigation needs to be shut down to benefit surface water users and argued for the need to shut down groundwater irrigation until all surface appropriators are made whole. If a river basin would be declared "a basin in need of comprehensive management," the basin has to get back to fully appropriated status or the state will take over all water management in the basin.

Surface water appropriations that were only available 20% of the time when granted would now need to be available 100% of the time. Even if all groundwater irrigation was shut down, there would

not be enough water to meet all surface water rights granted by the State of Nebraska.

About 90 percent of the irrigation in Nebraska is from groundwater and 10 percent is from surface water sources. In this NRD, it is 5 to 1, groundwater to surface water. Imagine the economic impact to the region if something like LB-1074 were enacted. Local control works because individuals who know the needs of their river basin make the decisions that guide resources management.

Bills like LB-1074 would remove local control in favor of a "one size fits all" statewide management. It appears that the disgruntled parties in the Republican River Basin are attempting to legislate what they failed to achieve in litigation, which is a reduction of groundwater irrigation in Nebraska. The question is, "How could that be good for the Nebraska ag economy?"



Leon "Butch" Koehlmoos is the General Manager of the Lower Loup Natural Resources District.

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Lower Loup NRD  
Web Site  
[www.llnrd.org](http://www.llnrd.org)*

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## Scholarships Available for Range, ACE Camps

The Lower Loup Natural Resources District is offering \$100 scholarships to students living in the NRD to attend the 2014 Adventure Camp about the Environment (ACE), June 15-18, or the 2014 Nebraska Range Youth Camp, June 9-13.

ACE Camp is sponsored by Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts while Range Camp is sponsored by the

Nebraska Section of the Society for Range Management, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the University of Nebraska's Cooperative Extension Service and Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The Lower Loup Natural Resources District provides the financial support for campers living within the NRD's boundaries. Students

must make a formal request for assistance from the NRD. Written requests for financial assistance must be made by May 23rd for either camp.

For more information or a camp application, contact Larry Schultz at the Lower Loup Natural Resources District, (308) 728-3221 or e-mail [larrys@llnrd.org](mailto:larrys@llnrd.org). Camp brochures are available at [www.llnrd.org](http://www.llnrd.org).



Students examine range plants during the 2013 Adventure Camp about the Environment (ACE). NRD scholarships are available for ACE and Range Youth Camp.



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*IN THE LOUP* is a publication of the Lower Loup Natural Resources District. It is published quarterly by the LLNRD and is distributed to the residents of the 16 counties that make up the District. *IN THE LOUP* is edited by Larry Schultz, NRD Information/Education Coordinator.

## Groundwater Levels Fall, But Overall Trend Is Still Higher

As was the case in most of the state, groundwater levels in the Lower Loup Natural Resources District have fallen following the record drought of 2013. In the LLNRD, levels dropped an average of 2.58 feet.

NRD General Manger Leon "Butch" Koehlmoos said that the NRD data comes from annual monitoring of groundwater levels, a practice that has been ongoing for decades. He said that the decline in 2013 is notable when looked at in a narrow one-year view. However, when

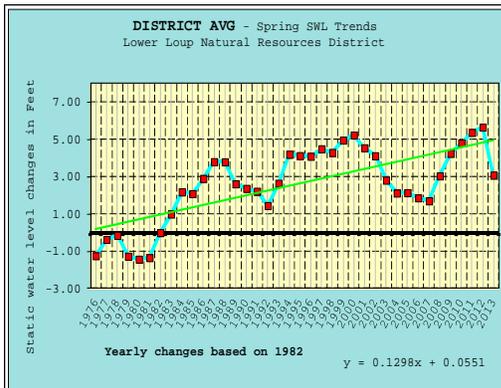
data accumulated over four decades is reviewed, the 2013 decline is just one of many peaks and valleys in ground-

water levels in the lower Loup River Basin.

NRD Assistant Manager Russ

Callan said that when observed over multiple decades, groundwater levels continue to trend upward, even when including data from last year's drought. He said that from 1982 to 2013, the Lower Loup NRD showed a district average increase of 3.08 feet. Koehlmoos said that the Lower Loup NRD will continue to be a watchdog for groundwater levels and that the NRD Board of Directors has an excellent record on management of groundwater for the district.

Callan said that in 1992, the Lower Loup NRD had an average 2.11 feet decline in groundwater levels following another severe drought. He said that drop was followed by a 2.92 foot increase in groundwater levels in 1993. He said that groundwater lev-



Even with a significant impact from irrigation during the drought, NRD groundwater levels are still trending higher.