



Davis Creek Recreation Area Reopened for Public Use

The Lower Loup NRD's Davis Creek Recreation Area reopened on May 2 after being closed for road improvements since October 2024. The road improvement project included concrete paving of approximately 3,200 feet of roadway, parking facilities, and approaches. Funding for the project was provided by the Lower Loup NRD and the Bureau of Reclamation. The contractor for the project was NLC, LLC from York, and design and construction services were provided by The Flatwater Group and Midwest Engineering, both from Lincoln.

The area was opened for camping reservations on Sunday, May 4, and all facilities are currently open and ready for use. There will be some continued activities to complete the project for a short period of time, but they should have a minimal to zero impact on recreational users of the area.

The management and staff of the Lower Loup NRD would like to thank the public for their patience during the duration of the project. We understand that closure of the area was inconvenient for some, but we are confident that visitors will be pleased with the latest round of improvements that have been made.

Crop ET and Precipitation Reports

Crop ET and regional precipitation reports have been updated for the 2025 growing season at LLNRD.org. Crop ET reports are released every Wednesday during the growing season and consist of three infographics demonstrating the average daily water use over the past week for corn, soybeans, and potatoes. To cover the District, data from three weather stations in the western (Merna), central (Ord), and eastern (Central City) areas are displayed. All data is collected from the Evapotranspiration Calculator from the University of Nebraska. Growth stages for this season are determined on a May 7 to May 21 planting timeline.

Precipitation reports from each of the three weather stations are available and will be updated daily. These precipitation reports have an updated look and functionality. There are three types of precipitation reports; a weekly report that displays the daily rain totals

of the past 7 days, a monthly report that displays a hybrid graph that shows the daily rain totals for the past 30 days as well as the accumulated precipitation compared to the 30-year average, and a growing season report that displays the same data as the monthly report plus the water needed to produce a bushel of corn so producers can determine how many inches of irrigation water are needed throughout the season. The growing season precipitation for this season will be tracked from May 14 to October 1.

To view these reports at LLNRD.org, go to the Programs tab on the home page and select 'Crop ET and Precipitation,' or follow the QR code.



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Protecting Lives, Protecting

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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 Alan J. Bartels, Information & Education Coordinator.

A Message from the Manager



LLNRD General Manager
Russell Callan

The lingering drought seems to be on everyone's mind. It's the topic of conversation whenever I walk into my local hardware store, my bank, the grocery store, post office, and the gas station.

We are talking about the drought at the Lower Loup NRD, too.

As you've seen elsewhere in this newsletter, water resources management is a big part of what we do at the Lower Loup NRD. Water is a finite resource that belongs to everyone. Managing water is the only way to make sure we have it available in the future. That is why our Board of Directors, based on long-term trends, implements conservation measures to protect groundwater resources from overuse.

Requiring flow meters on irrigated fields doesn't please everyone. But I am reminded of the wise words of a colleague who said, "You can't manage what you don't measure."

Flow meters allow the NRD to track water usage. We are more interested in documenting water level trends within an area than in specific wells. But by measuring individual irrigation and monitoring wells we are able to determine the health of the aquifer across our 20 Water Quantity Management Areas and then share that information with the public.

Producers can also use the meters to track their water use day-by-day and year-to-year.

Some producers have told us that prior to the installation of flow meters they didn't have a good handle on how much water they were actually using each season. The addition of flow meters has allowed them to better manage the resource.

Another article in this newsletter deals with the topic of irrigation scheduling. Research from the University of Nebraska shows that early season irrigation typically is not needed for germination and does not benefit yield.

On top of that, early season irrigation can cause expensive nitrate inputs to leach out of the root zone before plants can take it up. The precise and timely application of irrigation water only makes sense, and it is even more critical during times of drought.

You know how planning a track meet or other outdoor event can seem to make it rain? I thought that writing about the drought might inspire Mother Nature to open the spigot for our District. Fingers crossed, and hands clasped together. I am praying for timely rain right alongside you.



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IN THE LOUP

Water Resource Management Challenging for All

Drought continues to be a concern to residents and agricultural producers who live and work within the Lower Loup NRD. Management and conservation of groundwater and surface water resources is one of the many responsibilities that Nebraska's NRDs are charged with by the Nebraska Legislature.

Meeting that responsibility includes LLNRD technicians taking Static Water Level (SWL) measurements each spring and fall. The fall SWL measurements are taken to monitor aquifer stress related to irrigation season, and spring SWL levels are recorded to document any recharge that takes place between harvest and spring planting.

LLNRD technicians have just finished taking the 2025 spring Static Water Level measurements from 454 irrigation and monitoring wells in the District. Forty-eight percent of the wells showed a decline in water levels when compared to samples taken at the same time in 2024. The largest single-year decline was -7.62 feet at a well in Greeley County, and the largest single-year increase was +8.52 at a Merrick County well. When compared to baseline Static Water Level data collected in 1982, the largest decrease in the District was a drop of 10.47 feet at a well in Custer County.

The largest concentration of decreasing water levels in the Lower Loup NRD continues to be found south of the Loup River in Platte County as well as in Buffalo and southern Custer counties, south of the South Loup River. In response, the LLNRD Board of Directors has designated Drought Zones 18, 19, and 20 as Water

Quantity Management Areas and requires the installation of LLNRD approved flow meters in those areas in order to measure and manage the resource. More details and requirements are available at LLNRD.org.

Drought always adds challenges to water management. But even in times of plenty, we shouldn't turn a blind eye toward the proper use and management of the natural resources that belong to all Nebraskans. Nobody knows when this drought will break, and it seems that the next one is always looming. Proper management and conservation now will help get us through the lean times together.

Flow meter and telemetry cost-share is available through the Lower Loup NRD, and see page 2 of this newsletter for information on crop evapotranspiration reports.



LLNRD technicians measure Static Water Levels each spring and fall.



LLNRD.org

Visit LLNRD.org for news, events, forms, applications, rules, newsletters, to opt-in for SMS alerts, and more from LLNRD.

Busy Tree Season for Lower Loup NRD



An LLNRD crew machine plants tree seedlings in Valley County.

Spring means Tree Season for Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts. Since the founding of the NRDs in 1972, they have helped sell and plant more than 101 million trees across Nebraska. In that time, the Lower Loup NRD has helped plant more than 12 million trees in our District.

Drought conditions resulted in lower tree sales at some NRDs in 2025, but the Lower Loup NRD sold nearly 63,000 trees. That is an increase of more than 9,000 from 2024. While some customers picked up their tree and shrub orders and planted them by hand, NRD tree crews machine planted tens of thousands of trees and shrubs of dozens of species across the District.

Sargent Fourth Grade field trip at Pibel Lake Recreation Area.



Tree Season includes Arbor Day, and that means classroom visits and field trips by the Lower Loup NRD's Information & Education department. Students from across the District learned about Nebraska's tree planting heritage and the history of Arbor Day, and at the end of each presentation, students received their very own spruce tree seedling. Some fortunate students were also able to visit the new Nebraska Champion Eastern Cottonwood tree at Pibel Lake Recreation Area for fun field trips where they enjoyed a nature hike and Arbor Day program before receiving cottonwood

seedlings to take home. "Planting trees and educating youth about the importance and conservation value of trees is a big part of what we do at the Lower Loup NRD," said General Manager Russell Callan. "Nebraska is a prairie state, but trees have long been a natural part of the landscape here. The LLNRD's Conservation Tree Program ensures that our residents, landowners, and agricultural partners have access to trees and tree experts so that trees remain abundant on our landscapes for the benefit of people and wildlife, as well as for the health of our land and water resources."



Early Season Irrigation Scheduling During Drought Conditions



As drought-like conditions continue in our District and planting wraps up, plans quickly shift from getting seed in the ground to getting the seed to germinate and emerge. To complete imbibition, corn needs to absorb 35% of its weight in moisture. This is a small amount of moisture that is needed to get the crop initiated, as a kernel is generally 0.3 grams in weight (half of a paper clip). Even with lack of moisture from the non-growing season, most irrigated fields still have adequate moisture to get the crop initiated. It is important for producers to probe down to seeding depth and check the moisture that is in the soil.

Early season irrigation can be useful for residual pre-emergent herbicides that require around 0.75 inches of rainfall/irrigation for activation/incorporation, and also to prevent the risk of losing them to wind erosion. Other than those circumstances, early season irrigation has been shown to not benefit yield or prevent yield loss.

Corn has been shown to be very drought tolerant through the vegetative stages. Limited moisture will make the corn root down deeper which helps it not only become more

efficient in holding water, but also increases its ability to hold on to nitrogen. Last year, with above normal spring precipitation, we observed root depths at the end of the season to be at maximum two feet, with the majority at 20 inches maximum depth. These findings further support not getting overly aggressive with early season irrigation.

The biggest concern with early irrigation is the risk of leaching nitrogen past the root zone before the corn is even taking up or needing nitrogen.

Corn has only taken up 10% of the nitrogen it needs for the year at V6, which last year was around June 14 on early planted crops. UNL research has shown that for every inch of water lost to percolation, 10 pounds of nitrate is lost to leaching even in heavy soils. Sandy soil can allow as much as 30 pounds lost to leaching for every one inch of over-irrigation.

Using good soil moisture monitoring is key to raising a good crop as well as preventing your nitrate inputs from leaching out before the corn is using it.

CHEMIGATION PERMIT RENEWAL DEADLINE IS JUNE 1

Farmers planning to use chemigation (fertigation) to apply fertilizer or other chemicals to crops have a deadline of June 1, 2025, for permit renewal from the Lower Loup Natural Resources District. Completed chemigation permit applications must be received by the Lower Loup NRD on or before that date.

The fee for chemigation permit renewal is \$30 for each renewal application submitted. Applications received after June 1 will be treated as a new application.

New permit applications require a \$100 fee and an inspection by an LLNRD technician prior to operation.

New and renewal permits expire the June after the year they were issued – chemigation permits issued in 2025 will expire on June 1, 2026.

Emergency permits are \$500 and expire after 45 days.

Applications are available at the Lower Loup NRD Headquarters, 2620 Airport Drive, in Ord. They are also available at Natural Resources Conservation Service offices and can be downloaded at LLNRD.org.

Contact the Lower Loup NRD at (308) 728-3221 for more information.

NRD Recreation Exploration: Discover Nature, Win Prizes

Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) encourage participation in the NRD Recreation Exploration program, which is designed to inspire individuals and families to venture into the great outdoors and explore the state's natural beauty. The program aims to foster a deeper connection with nature while offering participants the chance to win a grand prize of \$1,500 in Scheel's gift cards.

The NRD Recreation Exploration program invites participants to embark on an adventure through more than 80 NRD recreation areas. From the rolling grasslands of the Sandhills to the tranquil shores of the Platte River, Nebraska boasts an abundance of breathtaking landscapes.

The Lower Loup NRD's recreation areas include Davis Creek Recreation Area near the village of North Loup, Pibel Lake Recreation Area south of Bartlett, and the LLNRD Arboretum and Trail in Ord.

The program will run through Sept. 19, 2025. By exploring NRD recreation areas and documenting their visits, participants will be eligible for prizes. Whether biking scenic trails, fishing in lakes or rivers, or simply basking in the serenity of Nebraska's wilderness, each exploration offers a chance to connect with nature and appreciate our natural resources.

To participate in the NRD Recreation Exploration Program, individuals can follow these simple steps:

- Visit an NRD recreation area.
- Capture a photo while exploring.
- Upload the photo using the NRD Recreation Exploration form at nrdnet.org/recreation.

By actively participating in the NRD Recreation Exploration program, participants could qualify for prizes while developing or strengthening a love for the outdoors, promoting physical activity, and encouraging environmental stewardship.

The NRD Recreation Exploration Program is supported by the Nebraska Association of Resources District's Foundation and Scheel's, a leading sporting goods retailer.

For more information about the NRD Recreation Exploration program, including a list of recreation areas and the prize structure, visit nrdnet.org/recreation.

NRD RECREATION EXPLORATION

Get outdoors and explore Nebraska's 80+ NRD recreation areas. Submit a photo to win prizes!

WIN PRIZES!

JOIN THE FUN!

1. Visit an NRD recreation area
2. Take a photo with the red sign or landmark
3. Submit your photo to win various prizes

SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT NRDNET.ORG/RECREATION



Dennis Wiehn of Elgin casting for bluegills at Pibel Lake Recreation Area.