



2620 Airport Drive
Ord, Nebraska 68862

Phone: 308-728-3221

Fax: 308-728-5669

E-mail: info@llnrd.org

www.llnrd.org

Nebraska's NRDs . . .

**Protecting Lives, Protecting
Property, Protecting the Future.**

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.

Test Your Well

With the issue of nitrate pollution in Nebraska's drinking water being at the forefront of the water conservation conversation in Nebraska, and the topic of extensive press coverage, now is a great time to test your private well. Testing your drinking water supply is easy, affordable, and the results will let you know what actions can be taken to make your drinking water the safest it can be. The Lower Loup NRD samples thousands of groundwater wells annually and mails a report to owners that includes year-to-year nitrate readings. If your well is not registered, and you would like to register it, you can obtain the proper forms at www.llnrd.org.

Private testing facilities, such as Ward Laboratories (Kearney), offer a variety of water tests. Irrigation wells can be

tested for water quality, wells supplying stock tanks can be tested for livestock suitability, and domestic wells can be tested for nitrate or coliform/E. coli – all through the same lab. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services also offers testing kits. Request yours by following the QR code included below. Results from those samples can be used to apply for the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy's Private Well Reverse Osmosis Rebate Program. This program allows citizens to get up to \$4,000 for installing reverse osmosis systems for wells testing above the Environmental Protection Agency's recommended nitrate level limit of 10 parts per million. For more information on this program and how to apply, please visit www.dee.ne.gov.



Test your well to ensure the safety of your water.



No New Irrigated Acres for 2023

At the recommendation of the Water Resources Committee, the Lower Loup NRD Board of Directors voted at its April 2023 meeting to not allow additional irrigated acres in the District for 2023. The proactive, conservative decision was

based on drought conditions within the Lower Loup NRD, and the District's recent Static Water Level Report. Although most development had already stopped, this is the first time in five

years that new irrigated acres will not be allowed in the District. The LLNRD Board of Directors revisits this issue annually and allows new acres when possible. Find the LLNRD 2023 Static Water Level Report at www.llnrd.org.

Chemigation Permit Deadline Approaching

Chemigation can be an efficient method of applying agricultural chemicals, but there are risks. These include the possibility of backflow of chemicals into the water source.

To mitigate the risks, the Lower Loup NRD has instituted an inspection and permitting procedure required prior to chemigation use. The LLNRD reminds producers that any closed irrigation delivery system has the potential for backflow, meaning any closed systems drawing off surface water sources will require a permit for operation.

The deadline is approaching for renewal of chemigation permits. All chemigation systems with a new permit will



Water Resources Technician Harold Benton inspects chemigation equipment near Ord.

require inspection by an LLNRD technician prior to operation. All renewals require inspection every 3 years.

Renewal applications must be submitted by June 1.

Applications received after June 1 will be treated as new applications. Permit renewal is \$30. The fee for a new permit application is \$100. Find chemigation applications in the Forms section of the Resources tab at www.llnrd.org. Applications can also be picked up at LLNRD Headquarters, 2620 Airport Drive, in Ord.

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Students Compete at Nebraska Envirothon

High school students from across Nebraska competed at Nebraska Envirothon on April 26 at UNL's Cedar Point Biological Station near Lake McConaughy. To qualify for the state-

level event, teams competed at regional qualifiers testing their knowledge of soils, aquatics, forestry, wildlife, range, policy, and a current environmental issue. Burwell's win at the Northeast

team from Ord, and one from Loup City, also snagged Wild Card spots.

Dawson County Envirothon Club took the top prize at the 2023 event and qualifies as Nebraska's representative at the NCF Envirothon, which will be held in New Brunswick, Canada, in July. A team from Milford Public Schools took second place, and St. Paul Public Schools Team #1 won third place. Funds from the Lower Loup NRD's Larry Schultz Outdoor Education Memorial Scholarship Fund provide financial assistance to teams from District schools to compete at Envirothon events.



St. Paul Team #1 took third place at Nebraska Envirothon.

Region contest in Norfolk, and St. Paul's top finish at the Central Region contest in Columbus, qualified a team from each of those schools for the state competition. St. Paul also qualified a Wild Card team, making it the only Nebraska school to qualify two teams for the state competition in 2023. A

Mud Creek Watershed Plan

The Lower Loup Natural Resources District (LLNRD) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are completing the Watershed Plan and Environmental Assessment (Plan-EA) to reduce flood damage in Ansley. Following public input meetings and landowner discussions, two dry dams and a diversion channel are being planned in the watershed currently

flowing through Ansley. The dams will store storm water temporarily and release it at a slower rate. The diversion channel will divert the storm water around Ansley to Mud Creek instead of through town.

The plan is currently being reviewed by NRCS to ensure all planning requirements have been met. When the review is complete, LLNRD will

host a public information meeting for all interested parties, including local officials and the public. JEO Consulting Group is completing the plan for LLNRD. Representatives from both entities will be present to explain the preferred alternative selected and answer questions.

Recreation Areas 'New and Improved'

Lower Loup NRD management often receives comments from visitors who appreciate the work being done at LLNRD recreation areas. Maintenance to keep park areas attractive, safe, and enjoyable is constant. In addition, spring means the beginning of a new round of recreation area improvements.

restroom structure. Another new restroom unit was installed near the entrance to Pibel Bible Camp. The new structures were built and installed by Boom Concrete of Newell, S.D. The structures are open for use.

In Valley County, Davis Creek Recreation Area continues to draw visitors from far and wide. To better serve traffic needs, the road through the recreation area will close beginning October 1, 2023, for a paving project. Campsite reservations will not be accepted during the closure.

"Visitors tell us that our recreation areas are among the best in Nebraska," said LLNRD General Manager Russell Callan.

"We take pride in keeping the rec areas looking good, while taking care of needed repairs as soon as possible. Our staff and directors spend personal time at these destinations, too. It's important to us that people enjoy themselves while visiting the Lower Loup NRD's recreation areas."



Restroom replacement at Pibel Lake.

A Message From The Manager

Nitrates in groundwater are a topic that has received a lot of attention lately.

Recent articles from the *Flatwater Free Press* and *Omaha World-Herald* reported that high nitrate levels may cause uranium to become mobile and absorb into water. University of Nebraska Medical Center studies have shown a correlation between high nitrates in drinking water and the occurrence of cancer in humans.

To promote the responsible application of nitrogen fertilizer, the Lower Loup NRD Board of Directors recently made some changes to rules that deal with water quality. Those rule changes went into effect on April 15, 2023, and can be

viewed anytime at www.llnrd.org.

The Lower Loup NRD Board of Directors did not pass the proposed rule that would have banned the fall application of commercial nitrogen fertilizer on irrigated land. Instead, the Board opted to allow producers to cooperate with the LLNRD to demonstrate good stewardship without the need for additional regulations at this time.

The Board of Directors has committed to revisiting the proposed ban of fall application of commercial nitrogen fertilizer on irrigated land at its February 2024 meeting.

As my staff continues gathering real-time

LLNRD Employee Remembered During Arbor Day

Planting trees is a big deal at the Lower Loup NRD. Since the founding of Nebraska's NRD system in 1972, the Lower Loup NRD has helped plant more than 12 million trees in the District. That tree-planting mission involves education. During his career at the Lower Loup NRD – Larry Schultz – who led the District's Information and Education department for more than 20 years, taught thousands of children about the history of Arbor Day and the tree-planting holiday's Nebraska roots. At the end of those presentations, tree seedlings were given to students to take home to plant with their families.

"I only knew Larry for about a year before his passing in 2022, but I did get to work some Arbor Day presentations with him," said LLNRD Information and Education Coordinator Alan Bartels. "Larry enjoyed talking about the importance of trees with the children

and then giving their teachers a bundle of tree seedlings – one for each student. Larry is missed. Surely, many of the seedlings he handed out are now shading Nebraska homes."

At the 2023 Arbor Day program in Ord on April 25, the community where the



LLNRD General Manager Russell Callan

scientific data in the field, we are working with producers to promote efficient and effective ways to apply and utilize nitrogen fertilizer while also protecting our valuable water quality.



Fourth graders from Ord Elementary School planted a tree in honor of longtime LLNRD employee Larry Schultz.