



Upper Loup Scoop

Upper Loup NRD

October 2023

What's the Scoop:

Soil Testing	2
Educator of the Year	2
Jr. High Field Day	2
Poster Contest	2
ACE 2024	3
Annual Report Recap	3-5

Calendar of Events

October

Indigenous People's Day/Columbus Day **9**
(Office closed)

Land Judging Contest **11**

Board Meeting @ 1pm CT **12**

November

Veteran's Day **11**
(Office closed the 10th in observation)

Board Meeting @ 7pm CT **9**

Thanksgiving **23-24**
(Office closed)

December

Board Meeting @ 1 pm CT **14**

Christmas Day **25**
(Office closed)

Tree Planning

Even though fall has just begun, it is time to think about windbreak planting for spring.

Trees provide important benefits such as: protecting homes and livestock from wind and snow, helping to reduce heating and cooling costs, preventing soil erosion, and also providing wildlife habitat. The Upper Loup NRD offers free tree program services including: planning, planting, weed barrier installation or weed control, and drip irrigation. The NRD also provides a 50% cost-share on tree plans. Trees and shrubs, planting, weed mulch, and drip irrigation systems are all eligible for the cost-share program.

Executive Travel is donating 2,000 trees for the 2024 planting season to offset their carbon footprint. Anyone who does a tree plan with the ULNRD for the upcoming planting season in addition to cost-share will get 100 free trees until they are gone. We are encouraging anyone wanting to plant trees in spring of 2024 to contact Justin anytime between now and March 1st to have him help develop a plan for your needs.



HMP Survey

Disasters are devastating for communities. Effective mitigation planning can break the cycle of disaster: damage, reconstruction, and repeated damage. The ULNRD is currently working on the required 5-year update to its Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) which will expire in January 2025. Hazard Mitigation Plans are a requirement for any community, county, or other eligible jurisdiction to be qualified for FEMA disaster mitigation funding- for up to a 75% cost-share. For every \$1 spent on hazard mitigation, \$6 in post-storm cleanup and rebuilding is saved. A HMP is a community driven document that addresses how communities intend to build resilience and mitigate against hazards such as flood, drought, severe weather and wildfire. The plan sets priorities for mitigation activities that protect people, their property and the environment from the impacts of those hazards.

Public input will be gathered throughout the duration of the plan development through online tools and public meetings. All taxing authorities including the county, communities, and school districts are eligible to participate and provide feedback. Other entities such as healthcare facilities, chamber of commerce, utility providers, businesses, or non-profits can also provide critical input as stakeholders.

A public survey to gather local priorities or concerns from hazards is available at <https://forms.office.com/r/EZrUtrtyTg> . All those completing the survey, and leaving their name, will be submitted for a drawing to win a high grade rain gauge.

Flowmeter Reading

Lexi, Kyon, and Justin will be out reading flowmeters. You will recognize them by the Upper Loup NRD emblem on the side of the vehicle. It is important to maintain your flow meter to ensure that it is reading water usage correctly. You may be contacted if there is an abnormal reading to verify if your meter needs maintenance. Weather permitting, all readings shall be completed by January 1.

Soil Testing

Soil testing is an important diagnostic tool to evaluate nutrient imbalances, understand plant growth, and optimize crop production. Management of soil also protects our environment from pollutants of improper fertilization such as excess phosphorus and nitrogen. Information gathered from routinely testing soil health will provide various benefits including crop and profit yield increases. The Upper Loup NRD has a cost share program to help land owners defray part of the costs associated with testings. You can find the application on our website or stop by our office.

Educator of the Year Award Winner



Zeta Greene of Sandhills Public Schools won the 2023 Conservation Educator of the Year Award. Greene joined the Upper Loup NRD staff at the NARD Annual Conference that was held in Kearney on September 25th and accepted her award. She has been a dedicated teacher and supporter of the NRD and goes above and beyond while teaching her students the importance of natural resources. Greene utilizes Ag in the Classroom for various activities to keep students engaged such as germination quality tests on GMO corn seeds, starch content tests on potato varieties, establishing hydroponic gardens, egg incubations, and much more. Greene encourages students to get out of the classroom and into the natural environment to do activities such as water sampling from the river, soil sampling to determine nutrient quality, and her biology class had the opportunity to dissect 3 different species of fish. She challenges her students to take on projects such as monitoring dune formations and

researching the use of algae from cattle tanks as possible fuel sources. With Zeta's help, the student council donated/planted over 1,000 trees for local landowners as a way to give back to their beef program. Congratulations to the Conservation Educator of the Year, Zeta Greene!

Jr High Field Day Held in August

On August 23rd, a field day was held in Thedford at the NRD office for District 8th graders. It was a great turnout with around 50 kids in attendance from Dunning, Hyannis, Mullen, Thedford, and Stapleton schools. Students were able to learn about natural resources such as water, range, forestry, soils, wildlife and geology during our field day with various hands on activities presented by volunteers.

Youths were able to calculate stream flow with Chris Hobza (USGS) at the river, learn about soil with Kortni Burnett (NRCS), try their hand at identifying native grasses with JuliAnn Shaeffer (NRCS), identify rock classifications with Doug Hallum (UNL CSD), tree and shrub identification in the arboretum with ULNRD staff Justin Sprague, and finally discuss wildlife and dissect owl pellets with Julie Geiser (Game and Parks).

Enter the NACD Poster Contest

The National Association of Conservation Districts has begun their 2023 poster contest. This competition is for Kindergarten through 12th grade students in either public schools or who are home schooled. The goal is to create a poster that highlights the work of conservation districts that protect and enhance natural resources. This year's theme is **One Water**. The theme is focused on watersheds and their important role in our environment. Students are asked to reflect on this message and create a piece of artwork that depicts what this means to them and their community. Individuals who participate have the opportunity to win monetary prizes for their submitted works. In previous years we have had several winners from our District win at the state level. Previous winners include, Ember Chavez (2022 winner) and Charlise Teahon (2019 winner) of Sandhills Public Schools, Piper Hanson of Sandhills Elementary (2021 winner), and Brooke Milam of Thedford High School (2018 winner). The deadline to submit your poster to the ULNRD is **Wednesday, November 9th**. For more information on the contest, entry forms, or rules please contact Lexi at our office.



Adventure Camp about the Environment to return in 2024

Adventure Camp about the Environment is returning and with a new location! Due to the devastating BOVEE Fire in 2022, ACE was canceled for the 2023 season. Now, camp will return and will be held at a new location near Burwell at Kamp Kaleo. The age range for ACE 2024 has changed and camp registration will be available to individuals who have completed either their 6th grade or 7th grade school year.

Adventure Camp about the Environment is a great space for youths to learn about our state's natural resources in a hands-on, exciting atmosphere. Individuals will have the opportunity to learn about various topics such as wildlife, range, forestry, water, and soils while still enjoying all the perks of summer camp fun! Keep an eye out in the spring for our 2024 camp registration!



Subscribe to our E-Newsletter

Our quarterly newsletter, The Upper Loup Scoop, has transitioned into being available online only. If you would like the newsletter to be sent to you please visit our website to subscribe or call our office with your email address to be added to the subscription list. You can view all of our past newsletters by visiting our website as well.

Annual Report Recap

Information & Education

Activities that the Upper Loup NRD conducted or participated in during 2022-2023:

- Host Area District Range Judging Contest in Mullen
- Envirothon- NRD staff assisted at the regional contest
- Held a Hunter Safety course
- Gave 25 presentations to elementary students in Mullen, Thedford, Halsey/Dunning, and Stapleton
- ULNRD Jr. High Field Day
- Provided 2 scholarships, 1 for Range Camp and 1 for the Ranch Practicum
- National Association of Conservation Districts annual poster contest- 1 of the submittals from our District won the 7-9th grade division at the state level
- Quarterly newsletters- available to view online on our website homepage
- Website (www.upperloupnrd.org) and Facebook page (Upper Loup NRD)

Current Projects

- 5-year Hazard Mitigation Plan update
- Drought Mitigation Actions per completion of the District wide Drought Mitigation Plan in 2022
- Actions include: Drought Dashboard development, Drought Monitoring Committee, public awareness, educational and best management practices materials, etc
- Lower Platte River Basin Coalition groundwater modeling efforts
- Updating groundwater level monitoring network
- Purchasing replacement recycling trailers

New Directors & Staff

- January 2023 David Vinton was elected to represent Sub-District 1 and Max Fay was elected to represent Sub-District 4
- August 2022 Justin Sprague took over Shane Young's Resources Technician position
- March 2023 Kyon Neal became a full time Resources Technician with the ULNRD

Annual Report Recap

Groundwater Management

The ULNRD updated its Groundwater Management Plan in 2022 and updated its Lower Platte River Basin Plan the same year. In 2016, a Voluntary Integrated Management Plan with the Department of Natural Resources was developed (reviewed annually). All these plans along the District's Rules and Regulations provide direction, objectives and activities to be undertaken. Copies of all these plans can be found on the District website under Rules and Plans.

Groundwater Quality Management FY 22-23:

- Old water wells not properly sealed may provide a direct link for contamination from surface water to groundwater. Agricultural and lawn care chemicals, livestock waste, and other contaminants can filter through an abandoned well. The District provides 75% cost-share of materials and labor for decommissioning abandoned wells with a maximum of \$400 for a domestic or livestock well and \$700 for an irrigation or municipal well. Approval prior to closure is required and the work must be conducted by a licensed well contractor or pump installer. ULNRD decommissioned 10 wells this fiscal year.
- 118 domestic wells and 33 irrigation wells were tested for nitrates- Average for domestic wells was 0.77 ppm; for irrigation wells 1.18 ppm, both well below the 10-ppm maximum contaminant level safety standard.
- Applicator certification is required prior to chemigation. Training sessions are held throughout the State each winter/early spring. The ULNRD held one training session in 2023.
- 354 chemigation permits were issued and 103 inspections were performed for safety equipment compliance. Out of 354 permits issued 3 were new; 351 were renewals and there were no emergency permits.

Groundwater Quantity Management FY 22-23:

- Annually in June, the ULNRD Board of Directors determine if they will allow up to 2,500 new groundwater irrigated acres for the upcoming year. For 2023, the NRD received 10 applications for a total of 956 acres and approved 8 applications for a total of 755 acres.
- 5 High-capacity well construction permits were issued- 4 associated with expansion of irrigated acres and 1 replacement
- 34 District wide NeRain reporters
- 591 flow meters checked for water use. Average water uses across the District for FY22:
 - Blaine County--16 inches
 - Brown County--15 inches
 - Cherry County--16 inches
 - Grant County--11 inches
 - Hooker County--14 inches
 - Logan County--15 inches
 - McPherson County--14 inches
 - Thomas County--13 inches
- A network of 129 groundwater wells, located throughout the District, were measured in the spring for level changes. The ULNRD follows water level trends annually as well as monitoring trends over a 12-year cycle.

County	Change from 2022 to 2023	12-year change
Cherry	Up .24 of a foot	Up 5.15 feet
Grant	Up .05 of a foot	Up 1.49 feet
Hooker	Up .23 of a foot	Up 4.35 feet
Thomas	Up .31 of a foot	Up 4.97 feet
Blaine	Down .20 of a foot	Down .45 of a foot
Brown	Up .39 of a foot	Down .73 of a foot
Logan	Down .53 of a foot	Down .18 of a foot
McPherson	Up .58 of a foot	Up 5.81 feet

Annual Report Recap

Conservation Assistance

Combined funds from Nebraska Soil & Water Conservation Program (NSWCP) and ULNRD funds provided 50% cost-share for:

- 15,210 windbreak trees
- 35,499 feet of fabric mulch
- 2,985 acres of planned grazing practices (cross fencing, wells, pipeline, tanks)

Noxious Weed Control

The ULNRD understands the impacts of weeds to the livestock industry by lowering yield and quality of forage, interfering with grazing, poisoning animals, etc. Therefore, it provides 50% cost-share of approved chemicals up to \$500 per landowner for spring and or fall management. This past year, just under 600 acres have been treated for noxious weeds.

Drill Program

No-till implementation has various positive impacts from improving soil health, to improving water quality, to increasing net farm income. Our 10' and 15' rental drills were able to drill 732 acres across the District.

Recycling

The ULNRD started a recycling program back in 2010 with four recycling trailers and are now up to twenty-one recycling trailers and numerous collection bins. Since beginning the program, we have diverted a little over 995 tons of materials from our local landfills. FY 2022-23 we collected 205,369 pounds of recyclables. Materials we collect include; paper, plastics 1-7, cardboard, tin, aluminum, glass, electronics, livestock mineral tubs, fiber optic pipe, and hard to recycle/ pliable plastics (Hefty Bag Program). For trailer and collection bin locations please refer to our website or call our office.

Yard Enhancement

The District provides 50% matching funds, maximum of \$200 per producer per year, for any resident in the District, both urban and rural that would like to plant landscape trees. Approval of application is required prior to the purchase of tree(s). 3 applications were submitted and approved for FY 2022-2023.

Learning Center/ Meeting Room

The ULNRD has a meeting room that is available at no charge to schools, non-profit organizations, and civic organizations. Private use is also available, donations are suggested. The Center may be used any time from 7:30 AM-11:00 PM CT and is available 7 days a week. The space may be used for various events such as meetings, trainings, educational workshops, etc. Seating is available for up to 50 individuals. Amenities include a kitchenette, mobile dry erase board, tables, chairs, tv monitor, data projector, wifi connection and an outside entrance. This past fiscal year the center was used 30 times.

Notary Services

ULNRD can assist you with obtaining a notarization at no charge. Our Administrative Secretary, Jamie Green, is certified to perform these services. For your convenience, notary services will be available during our regular office hours, Monday-Friday 7:30 AM-4:00 PM CT. Notary services were utilized 3 times.

ULNRD Staff

Anna Baum
General Manager
Lexi Spurlin
*Information & Education
Coordinator,
Resources Technician*
Kyon Neal
Resources Technician
Justin Sprague
Resources Technician
Jamie Green
Administrative Secretary
Spud Rowley
Recycling Coordinator
Pam Petersen
Field Office Secretary

ULNRD Board of Directors

Sub-District 1
David Vinton
Vacant
Sub-District 2
Judy Ridenour
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Miles Maseberg
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