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Tri-Basin Topics

A quarterly publication of Tri-Basin Natural Resources District

High Flows Expected in Platte River

By Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District and Tri-Basin NRD Staff

High flows are expected along the Platte River over the next several weeks as more water is released from Wyoming reservoirs. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is releasing water to create space for spring snowmelt runoff into its series of North Platte River reservoirs which are already more than 80 percent full.

In response, The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District increased releases from Lake McConaughy to make room for higher inflows in an effort to reduce the risk of more severe downstream flooding later this spring.

The higher releases are likely to result in lowland flooding along the North Platte River from below Lake McConaughy to the city of North Platte. Residential properties, roads and fields near the river – particularly in a stretch where the channel's capacity is constrained as it passes through North Platte – are likely to be affected by high water. Lowland flooding is also likely to occur along the Platte River east of North Platte.

With Lake McConaughy nearing storage limits, Central General Manager Don Kraus said the best course of action is to evacuate water from the reservoir in advance of much higher inflows expected later this spring.

"We're doing what we can to reduce the amount of flooding that's likely to occur," Kraus said, "but the amount of water that's projected to come down the North Platte River may be more than the system of reservoirs can handle."

Releases from the Lake McConaughy have been higher

than normal this winter in an attempt to lower it ahead of anticipated high inflows. Flows at North Platte could rise to around 2,600 cfs or more by mid-April as inflows to Lake McConaughy increase.

Central has been in discussions with officials from the City of North Platte, Twin Platte Natural Resources District, the Lincoln County Emergency Management Agency, and other entities about the situation and how best to deal with the expected high flows.

"We agree that it's better to increase flows now, realizing that it will result in lowland flooding in the North Platte area, in the hope that it can reduce or delay much higher flows later this spring," said Jim Hawks, North Platte city administrator.

As this issue of *Tri-Basin Topics* goes to press (late March) it is unclear whether significant flooding will occur this spring in the Platte Valley within Gosper, Phelps and Kearney Counties. It is likely, however, that sustained high flow rates in the Platte River will cause the groundwater table in the Platte Valley to rise. That could saturate soils in some fields, making them unsuitable for planting.

Tri-Basin NRD operates three Improvement Project Areas (IPAs) in Kearney County (Fort Kearny, Fort Kearny-West and Whiskey Slough) that are specifically designed to help stabilize groundwater levels.

These projects are well-maintained and should help alleviate high groundwater levels in their immediate vicinity.



The spillway at Pathfinder Dam, southwest of Casper, Wyoming, ran for several days in June 2010, the first time since 1984. (Photo courtesy of The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District.)



Manager's Message

by John Thorburn

The Never-ending Battle

The Nebraska Unicameral held a hearing recently on LB 391, Senator Ken Schilz's proposal to establish a state-wide Invasive Species Council. The bill, co-sponsored by Holdrege

Senator Tom Carlson, intends for the state to develop long-term strategies to deal with a growing number of problems that result from importation of non-native plants and animals.

Senator Carlson is a leading advocate for eradication (where possible) of non-native, invasive riparian vegetation like phragmites and saltcedar that were, until recently, choking the Platte and Republican Rivers. The Riparian Vegetation Management Task Force that he established has worked closely with interagency weed management groups to set a strategy for effectively controlling riparian weeds. The Platte and Republican are more free-flowing and environmentally healthy rivers today thanks to the efforts of Senator Carlson and many other Nebraskans who are dedicated to protecting our natural environment from invasion. Nebraska is now a national leader in riparian vegetation management. However, we can't rest on our laurels, or even on dead phragmites stalks. Invasive plants and animals seem to pop up all over, like furry varmints in a carnival Whack-a-Mole game.

Most invasive plants and animals outcompete native organisms by reproducing rapidly and prolifically. We will never be rid of plants like Musk Thistle and phragmites, because their seeds blow in the wind and wash downstream long distances. Controlling these weeds costs government and private landowners millions of dollars every year. If past generations could have had enough foresight to aggressively attack the first plants that were detected, all this expense could have been avoided. That would have required pre-planned response strategies and on-going public awareness campaigns, critical components of any invasive management strategy. A Nebraska Invasive Species Council could provide us with those tools.

We now have an opportunity to learn from mistakes of the past and avoid repeating them. Three current invasive threats to our native ecosystems can only infect and infest our state if people move them around. These threats are Zebra (Quagga) Mussels, Emerald Ash Borer and Wild Boars. Let's look at each of these pests and what we can do to keep them out of Nebraska.

Zebra Mussels

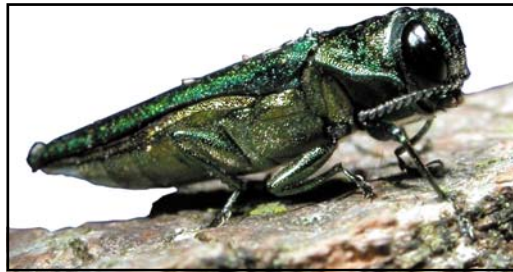
Zebra Mussels are fingernail- to quarter-size, freshwater shellfish native to the Black Sea. They get their name from a striped pattern on their shells. They were carried to North America in the bilgewater of freighters. These highly adapt-

able shellfish swim freely in the larval stage. As adults, they attach to rocks, pipes and other underwater objects. They coat the bottoms of lakes and streams, clog pipes and leave behind razor-sharp shell shards on beaches and streambeds. Zebra Mussels also disrupt native ecosystems and outcompete native shellfish. They already are well-established in the eastern U.S., and they are spreading westward. Zebra Mussels are known to infest the Missouri River, but they have only been detected in one Nebraska location, Zorinsky Lake near Omaha. The man-made lake was immediately drained after the mussels were discovered there last fall in the hope that they will dry out and die.

The only way that Zebra Mussels spread from one watershed to another is when humans transport them in bait buckets or on boats. People who use a boat in an infested lake or river must thoroughly wash it, drain the livewells and leave it out of water for at least a few days, before launching it into uninfested waters.

Emerald Ash Borer

Also of great concern is the Emerald Ash Borer, a beetle that kills ash trees. It was brought into the U.S. from China in the 1990s in pallet wood, initially infesting trees in the Detroit area. Since then it has spread to at least 14 states, including nearby Iowa, and two Canadian provinces. Emerald Ash Borer infestations are always



Emerald Ash Borer

fatal to native ash trees like Green Ash. Because of its rapid growth and adaptability, Green Ash is a popular landscape tree, comprising at least 20 percent of trees in community forests across Nebraska. Ash Borer beetles can only fly a few miles a year, but they have spread much further and more rapidly because people haul ash firewood infested with the insects from state to state. This has

led the US Department of Agriculture to launch a public awareness campaign using the slogan "burn it where you buy it".

Wild Boars

Plants and insects aren't our only concern. Wild boars native to Europe were brought to the U.S. for recreational hunting, but now are well-established in the southeastern states. They damage riparian areas and grasslands by rooting around for insects and roots. They are opportunistic feeders, that eat the eggs of reptiles and ground-nesting birds. Wild hogs are prolific, readily interbreeding with feral pigs. They have no natural predator in North America. There is a self-sustaining population of wild hogs in northern Kansas. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has worked diligently to keep them from slipping across the border.

Invasive plants and animals cause millions of dollars in damage every year to crops, infrastructure and the environment. Humans are often their unwitting accomplices, spreading them into new environments that are unprepared for their destructive habits. A well-educated public can alert authorities to invasives and help us eradicate them before they spread and become chronic menaces.

Chemigation permit renewals due June 1

Chemigation renewal forms have been sent to producers and are due, along with payment, in the Tri-Basin NRD office by June 1, 2011. Anyone needing to apply for a new chemigation permit for the 2011 season should contact the Tri-Basin NRD office at 308-995-6688 or 1-877-995-6688. All newly permitted chemigation systems must be inspected before use.

NRD staff do routine inspections on chemigation systems from June until August. Routine inspections are required every three years. If your system is due for an inspection, you will receive a postcard this summer. Routine inspections must be completed for the permits to be eligible for renewal the following year.



NRDs Offer Natural Resources Camp

Adventure Camp about the Environment (ACE) is a natural resources camp for students who have completed sixth, seventh or eighth grade sponsored by Nebraska's natural resources districts. The camp will be held at the State 4-H Youth Camp at Halsey June 5-8. The cost of the camp is \$180.

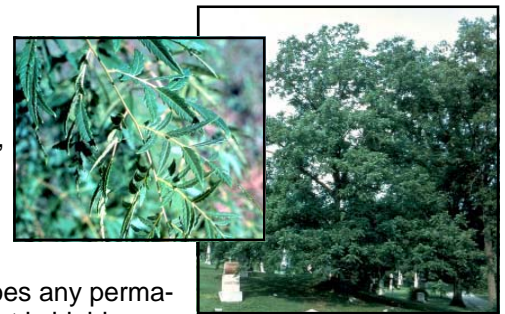
Tri-Basin NRD is offering six scholarships that cover the full cost of camp registration for students from Gosper, Phelps and Kearney Counties who want to attend this adventure camp. For more information about ACE Camp, call Nicole Salisbury at Tri-Basin NRD at 308-995-6688.

Nebraska Natives

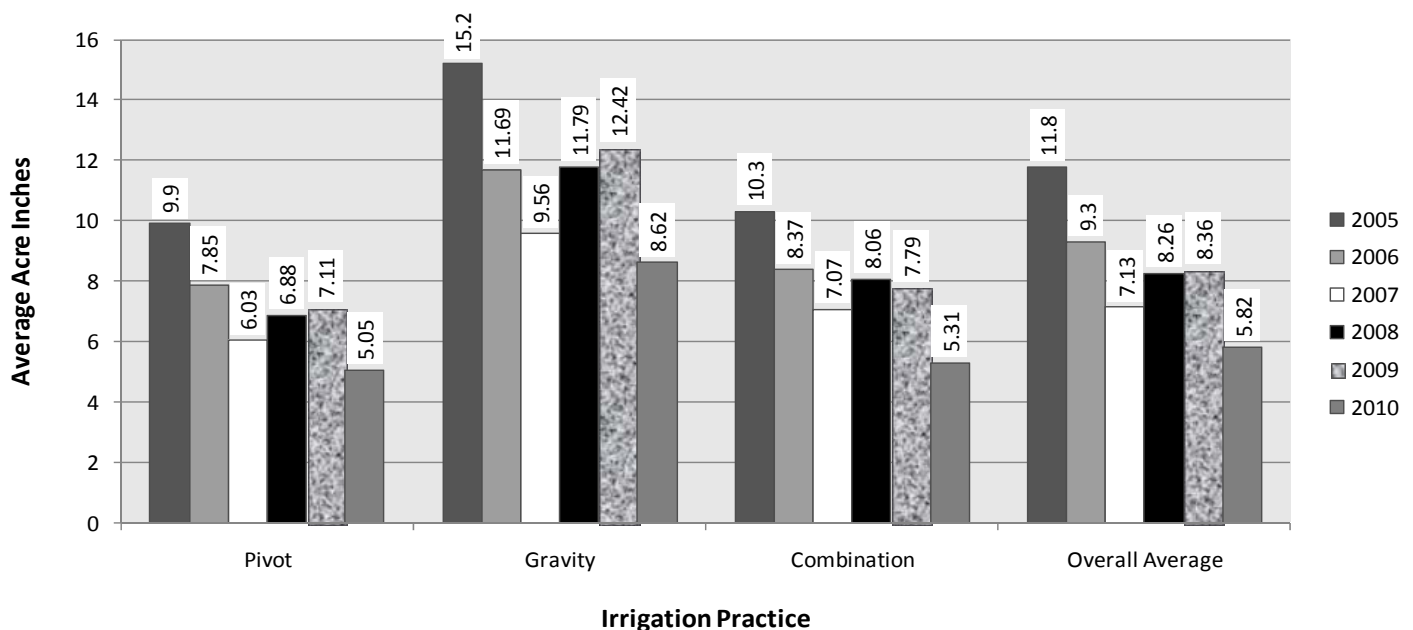
Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*)

Black Walnut is native to Nebraska's eastern and north central fertile bottomlands. It is highly prized for its rich, chocolate-brown wood and nut meats. Straight, fork-free trees are very valuable to the timber industry. Walnut trees have a medium growth rate and a long life span. Walnut requires a deep, silty-loam soil having good internal drainage for maximum growth. Walnut seedlings have been planted in the Sandhills for wildlife habitat and as a local source of nut meats.

Walnut caterpillars can defoliate trees in mid- to late summer, but this seldom does any permanent damage. "Thousand canker" disease is a looming threat to these trees. Walnut is highly susceptible to broadleaf herbicide damage.



Tri-Basin NRD Republican Basin Irrigation Water Pumping



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

(All meetings are at NRD office in Holdrege unless otherwise noted.)

April

April 5NRD Board Meeting at 1:30 p.m.*
 April 20 & 21.....Water Jamboree at Harlan Co. Reservoir
 for area 5th grade students
 April 29Arbor Day

May

May 10NRD Board Meeting at 7:30 p.m.*
 May 30Memorial Day observed (office closed)

June

June 14NRD Board Meeting at 7:30 p.m.*

* Times are tentative

CONSERVATION TIP

Arrange plants in your garden according to watering need. This is called "Hydrozoning."



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A mailing list is maintained and requests to be placed on the list should be sent to the above address. Comments and suggestions may be addressed to the General Manager.

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