



Nebraska Society News

NOVEMBER 2015 NEWSLETTER

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19TH ANNUAL NEBRASKA CHAPTER SWCS SCHOLARSHIP FUNDRAISER – DAVE LANGEMEIER MEMORIAL GOLF TOURNAMENT
Cameron Loerch - Treasurer

On September 4th, 2015, after enduring a morning rainstorm followed by a nice Nebraska “breeze”, 55 golfers made up of family, conservation professionals and

friends played in the 19th Annual NE Chapter SWCS golf event. The tournament was held at the Highlands Golf Course in Lincoln. The event, the “*Dave Langemeier Memorial Golf Tournament*” is named in honor of Dave Langemeier, for his committed efforts of hosting this event throughout the past years and also for his enduring service to the Chapter as treasurer.

A main purpose of the event is to raise funds for the Nebraska Chapter SWCS Student Scholarship program, as well as to promote our Chapter and fellowship. This past year the Nebraska Soil & Water Conservation Foundation awarded three scholarships, one of which was the inaugural David Langemeier Memorial Scholarship. This scholarship was awarded to Justin Herting, of Omaha, majoring in agricultural engineering with an emphasis in soil and water resources.



Poster highlighting event and sponsors (provided by Gary Wells).

We were pleased to have 14 teams (one more team than last year’s event) compete in a 4-person team, modified best ball format tournament.

Results of Team placement was as follows:

- 1st – Roland Langemeier, Chris Langemeier, Scott Langemeier, Scott Kracl
- 2nd – Rich Torpin, Tyler Specht, Josh Bowers, Jacob Bliven
- 3rd – Dave Johnson, Gary Buttermore, Will Adler, Tom Malmstrom
- 4th – Gary Wells, Bob Batterman, Lyle Steffen, Dave Jefferson
- 5th – Doug Wagner, Jason Lorenzen, Steve Grube, Ryan



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Kroemer

6th – Robert Hall, Taylor Zabel, Tim Weltmer, Kenton Weltmer

7th – Paul Zillig, Norm Kempf, Tom Keep, Andy Keep

8th – Cam Loerch, Dana Snyder, Bob Nielsen, Darwin Hinrichs

9th – Brian Breed, Roger Breed, Gale Breed, Al Scribner

10th – Jim Carr, Jim Culver, Ken Scheffe, Mike Kucera

11th – Craig Romary, Dick Erhman, Mike Dosskey, DeWayne Johnson

12th – Byron Fischer, Steve Dickey, Jim Fortner, Craig Derickson

13th – Ron Christensen, Ed Svendsen, Bob Rathgen, Marvin Thompson

14th – Jerry Knoche, Joe Calder, Carl McReynolds, Wayne Manthei

Doug Wagner had the low net individual score of 58, and Will Adler, Jason Lorenzen and Gary Wells tied for the low gross score of 71.

Due to additional support and donations provided by the Langemeier family and other contributors, we held a “long putt contest” and a “raffle” drawing for prizes.

Winners include the following:

- \$250 Long Putt contest (sponsored by Bank of Bridger – Leon Langemeier). Multiple winners with each getting a \$40 prize include; Ken Scheffe, Andy Keep, Dave Jefferson, Dick Erhman, Ed Svendsen, and Gary Wells.
- 2 - \$100 gift certificates ((donated by Beth O’Farrell) were won by Bob Nielsen and Byron Fischer.
- 2 - \$25 gift certificates (donated by Highlands GC) were won by Norm Kempf and Dave Johnson.
- 2 tickets to the UNL/South Alabama football game (donated by Cameron Loerch) were won by Tom Malmstrom.

The following individuals, businesses and organizations (some of which are longtime supporters) provided sponsorship for this year’s event: We thank them for their continued support.

- Sandy Langemeier
- Beth O’Farrell
- Bank of Bridger (Leon Langemeier)
- Stock Seed Farms (David Stock)

- Nebraska Association of Conservation Districts
- Lower Platte South NRD
- Lower Platte North NRD
- Nebraska NRCS
- Reinke Manufacturing
- Ruziska Associates
- Aurora Cooperative

The event would not have been the success it was without the help from the following:

- Gary Wells for his organizational skills, patience, and support;
- Lyle Steffen for number crunching;
- Ed Svendsen for running the “long putt” contest (and the Big Red “N”s);
- Kris Reed, Craig Romary, and Norman Helzer for sign up table support;
- And all the players for enjoying themselves.

This year’s golf event raised about \$2,800 for the Nebraska Chapter SWCS and Student Scholarship program.



Tournament winners Chris Langemeier, Scott Kracl, Scott Langemeier, and Roland Langemeier (photo from 2014 event)



Tournament “commish” Gary Wells, “chairman” Cameron Loerch (did I mention it was windy!!), and “special score keeping assistant” Lyle Steffen.

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SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

Craig Romary, Treasurer Nebraska Soil & Water Conservation Foundation

The Nebraska Chapter of SWCS and the Nebraska Soil & Water Conservation Foundation have opened the application period for the 2015-16 scholarships. The application form can be found at nebraskaswcs.org, with the deadline being December 3, 2015. Please share this note far and wide so that those needing assistance can apply.

70th SWCS INTERNATIONAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Wally Valasek

The 70th Annual Soil and Water Conservation Society conference was held in Greensboro, North Carolina on July 26 - 29, 2015. The conference theme was Coming Home to Conservation- Putting Science into Practice. The conference was hosted by the SWCS Hugh Hammond Bennett Chapter. North Carolina is the birthplace of the father of conservation, Hugh Hammond Bennett.

The conference began with House of Delegates leadership development training. No resolutions were submitted by chapters. The highlights were comments by SWCS president Mark Berkland. He emphasized that the strength of SWCS was in its chapters, the society is getting a more diverse membership from other organizations, NRCS has pulled back its sponsorship, and the value of the conservation brief newsletter as a tool to get the conservation message out. Executive director Jim Gulliford then talked about that individuals had forty chances or years to make a difference in their careers. His talk focused on soil health and value of cover crops. SWCS needs to partner with local leaders at the district level and partner with non-traditional organizations.

Monday's program was highlighted by Jerry Hatfield, USDA-NRCS, who talked about 2015 being the international year of soils. He indicated that soil is often overlooked as a critical part of the foundation for providing food, feed, fiber and water resources for humankind. Soil degradation continues to be a problem that needs to be addressed. It is not the only problem, but addressing it would go a long way in lessening the

instability of food production. Jason Wells, Chief of NRCS, then talked about global warming and the cooperation between NRCS and private industry to reach conservation goals. He also discussed soil degradation, cover crops and the need to reduce energy use by agriculture.

Tuesday's main speakers talked about soil health, economics and benefits of cover crops. Another topic was the use of planning tools to determine the most critical areas of a field. Typically a field consists of 3-15 % that is less productive. These areas need to be identified and addressed to increase their production.

The award luncheon was held on the July 28th with two Nebraska SWCS members receiving awards. Corey Brubaker received an Outstanding Service Award and Wally Valasek received a Commendation Award.

The conference in 2015 had 460 participants which is considerably more than Reno in 2013 with 298 participants. The 2016 annual SWCS conference will be held in Louisville, Kentucky.

SWCS CONSERVOGRAM CHAPTER SPOTLIGHT: NEBRASKA CHAPTER

The Nebraska SWCS Chapter was honored in the chapter spotlight section of the September 2015 issue of the Conservogram. [September 2015 issue of the Conservogram.](#)

Chapter location: Lincoln, Nebraska

Current chapter president: Scott Bohaty

Please describe any recent major member or chapter achievements. Recently the new office and laboratory building at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln High Plains Agricultural Laboratory near Sidney, Nebraska, was named in recognition of long-time SWCS member and professor emeritus at the University of Nebraska, Charles R. Fenster. Fenster is notable for his research into dryland cropping systems and minimum tillage.

What was the most successful chapter event in the last year? Our most successful event is the golf tournament. We gain valuable networking opportunities and long lasting friendships. Along with participant entry fees, several sponsorships help raise funds that go toward scholarships that are awarded annually. This is our



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biggest money making event that helps fund the five scholarships awarded this past year by the Chapter and the Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Foundation.

What other activities has your chapter been involved in this year? Our chapter helps sponsor the Nebraska Association of Natural Resourced Districts' Fall Conference. Individual members also attend in their professional capacity. The Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Foundation Board, which is comprised of chapter members, meets annually with chapter members to set a budget to determine scholarship funding available. Each fall, the Board meets to review scholarship applications and then meets again over lunch to personally award the scholarships to the recipients.

What is your membership's preferred method of communication? Teleconferences and email for business; newsletters/email for updates to all members. Most Board meetings are conducted via teleconference due to the large distances between districts.

What would you say are the most important current conservation concerns for your region? Soil health, promotion of cover crops, prevention of soil erosion, and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)/pasture conversion.

What is your favorite part of membership in SWCS? Networking and building friendships.

What advice would you give to a new chapter? Create a strong student chapter. Promote the development of a separate, nonprofit foundation for sustainable support to the chapter's mission. Have fun, interactive events and meetings. Also you need a clear idea of what your chapter does and why people interested in conservation should want to be a part of that.

Is there any other information you'd like to share about your chapter? Our chapter is going through a transition period, and needs the younger members to step up and take leadership roles and responsibilities. A strong chapter starts with its members and their ideas on how to promote healthy soils and clean water. We need to discover new ways to be involved within the community, which will help the longevity of our mission and chapter.

UNL SOIL JUDGING TEAM EXCELLENCE FUND Mark Kuzila

The Soil Judging Team Excellence Fund has been setup within the University of Nebraska Foundation. The fund can be used to cover team expenses such as contest

registration fees, production of contest training guides, equipment and travel expenses. Currently the fund contains \$6,000. Mr. and Mrs. Mark Kuzila initiated the fund with a \$5,000 donation and the Nebraska SWCS Foundation donated \$1,000.

A donation drive is planned for spring 2016. We are in the process of building a contact list of former soil judging team members and other people with interest in pedology and soil survey. We will have a small committee that will work with the University of Nebraska Foundation on the solicitation effort. At this time, donations can be made by writing a check to the University of Nebraska Foundation with the notation that the funds be directed to the Soil Judging Team Excellence Fund. Donations can also be made by going to nufoundation.org and entering "Soil Judging Team" in the "Give to a Specific Fund" search function. Thank you, Nebraska SWCS for your support.

NEBRASKA SWCS MEMBER RECOGNIZED BY WHITE HOUSE

Keith and Brian Berns of Bladen, NE and owners of Green Cover seed were recently recognized by the White House for their contributions to agriculture. Read more at:

[Nebraska Farmers Recognized by White House as Champions of Change for "Sustainable and Climate-Smart Agriculture"](#)

ARMBRUST ACRES CONSERVATION FARM AND RANCH PROTECTION PROGRAM

Dave Sands, Nebraska Land Trust
Tim Weltmer, Nebraska NRCS Easement Program
Manager

On September 24, 2015 the Nebraska Land Trust (NLT) in partnership with the NRCS closed on the Armbrust Acres Farm and Ranch Protection Program (FRPP) Easement which means that the 693 acre farm in Sarpy County is now protected from development forever. This makes the farm one of the largest protected property (after Fontenelle Forest) in our state's smallest and fastest growing county.

Even more important than the acres are the conservation values on those acres, which are emblematic of the three legs of the NLT's mission -- protecting agricultural, historical and natural resources. This includes preserving a beautifully terraced working farm with prime soils of

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statewide importance, evidence of the rich Native American history found in the lower Platte Valley, spring fed streams and some of the best quality oak/hickory woodlands in the area.

This effort started in 2008 with a virtual handshake between the NLT and the Landowners, where they promised to try and get all four parcels under protection (even though they only controlled two at the time), and the NLT promised to do the best to raise the funds that were needed.

The Nebraska Environmental Trust and the Natural Resources Conservation Service deserve recognition, as this project could never have happened without the funds they provided for purchase of the easements. A number of individuals, foundations, and two NRDs provided funds for associated transaction costs. Others provided essential technical and in-kind expertise.

But of course the biggest heroes are the landowners themselves, who made significant donations through bargain sales of each easement and maintained their steadfast commitment to permanent protection over seven years.

NEBRASKA NRCS NEWS UPDATE Craig Derickson, Nebraska NRCS State Conservationist

Fiscal year 2015 proved to be a very productive year for NRCS Nebraska, and in many ways a very challenging year. Starting with the good news first, Nebraska NRCS and our partners had a very successful year in getting conservation on the land and in carrying out annual Farm Bill programs. NRCS reported progress on 27,000 acres of cropland that benefited from conservation applied to improve soil health, 35,000 acres of improved irrigation efficiency and 600,000 acres of grazing land and forest land protected through conservation.

In terms of challenges, NRCS nationwide continues to transform all administrative functions in the agency and will launch a new network of 12 national service delivery teams to perform all Administrative functions. Nebraska and all other states will no longer have our own separate Administrative staffs for Human Resources, Financial Management and Property and Procurement. This plan will indeed result in greater efficiency and greater expertise for NRCS, but moving from our current structure to the new Administrative model will be a

significant challenge.

Another good news item is the interest continues to grow in soil health and conservation systems based on soil health concepts – i.e. Soil Health Management Systems. NRCS has been promoting that implementing Soil Health Management Systems can lead to increased organic matter, more soil organisms, reduced soil compaction and improved nutrient storage and cycling. As an added bonus, fully functioning, healthy soils absorb and retain more water, making them less susceptible to runoff and erosion. This means more water will be available for crops when they need it. Soil Health Management Systems allow farmers to improve profitability because they spend less on fuel and energy while benefiting from the higher crop yields resulting from improved soil conditions. The photo below is from a recent soil health field day in southeast Nebraska sponsored in part by NRCS and the Conservation Innovation Grant program. The photo shows Dr Ray Ward of Ward Soils Lab in Kearney explaining soil health benefits and principles to a group of NRCS employees and local farmers.



NRCS has produced a simple soil health quiz to help get the word out on soil health and soil management principles. Give the quiz a try!

SOIL HEALTH QUIZ (TRUE OR FALSE)

1. **Regular tillage/plowing helps keep open pores at the soil's surface and increases water infiltration into the soil.**
2. **Microorganisms in the soil generally harm plants.**



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3. **In a teaspoon or two of healthy soil there can be more living organisms than there are people on the globe.**
4. **Half of a healthy soil's composition should be pore space that contains air, water and microorganisms.**
5. **Organic matter buffers the soil against big changes in moisture and temperature.**
6. **Healthy soil should be allowed to rest from time to time – that is to lie bare without growing plants.**
7. **Fungi are not needed for healthy plant growth.**
8. **Each one percent increase in soil organic matter could increase soil water holding capacity by 20,000 - 25,000 gallons per acre.**
9. **Earthworms are more abundant in tilled or plowed soil.**
10. **Leonardo DiCaprio wrote, “We know more about the movement of celestial bodies than about the soil underfoot.”**

SOIL HEALTH QUIZ ANSWERS

1. **False.** You may be happily hoeing in your garden thinking you're helping your plants receive the water they need, but hoeing (or tillage/plowing) actually reduces the capacity of the soil to receive and hold water. Tillage destroys soil aggregates and the biologically produced glues that hold soil aggregates together. This results in the collapse of those can lead to compaction and crusting. However, by using “no-till” drills and planters, farmers can insert the seed into the soil by cutting a very narrow slice into the soil—resulting in minimal soil disturbance.
Resource: Tisdall, et. al., “Organic matter and water-stable aggregates in soils,” *Journal of Soil Science*, 1982, 33, 141-163.
2. **False.** Most microorganisms are beneficial to plants in many ways. For example, they decompose residues, and so are able to build soil aggregates. They also make key nutrients available to plants, such as nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium, through nutrient cycling that is the result of a dynamic soil food

web involving soil microorganisms like bacteria, fungi, protozoa and nematodes. Beneficial organisms can also help fight disease organisms. Those tiny organisms are so important that many plants exude substances through their roots to attract them to live in their root zones.

Resources: Brady and Weil, “The Nature and Properties of Soils” 13th edition, pg. 709; Shen, et. al. “Phosphorus Dynamics: From Soil to Plant; Plant Physiology,” *American Society of Plant Biologists*, July 2011, Vol. 156, pp. 997–1005, 2011

3. **True.** And those living organisms play a critical role in decomposing crop residue into soil organic matter that enhances nutrient cycling and a soil's available water holding capacity.
Resources: Brady and Weil, “The Nature and Properties of Soils,” 13th edition, page 458; Colorado State University Extension CMG GardenNotes #212.
4. **True.** An ideal soil composition by volume should be about 50 percent solids (45 percent mineral and 5 percent organic matter, though this depends on climate and texture, too!), and approximately 50 percent pore space (in ideal weather approximately 25 percent air and organisms that need that air to breathe, 25 percent water).
5. **True.** Organic matter provides insulation from variations in temperatures and it provides greater water holding capacity. Increasing the soil organic matter by one percent can add approximately one inch of water to the soil profile.
Resource: NCSU Soilfacts publication AWG-439
6. **False.** Having plants growing all the time allows more solar energy to be converted into carbon to feed soil microbial populations and improve soil health. When living roots grow in the soil throughout the year, they continuously feed soil organisms and build porous soil structure (through root and earthworm channels, decomposing residues to create soil organic



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matter and producing biotic glues). Root-fed microorganisms also help make nutrients available to crops.

Resource: Altieri, "The Ecological role of Biodiversity in agroecosystems," 1999

- 7. False.** Arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi (abundant in healthy soils) have a symbiotic relationship with almost all agricultural plants. They grow into the inside of plant roots to tap into the sugars and carbohydrates transported from the plant leaves. In turn, the fungal hyphae (filaments) that grow out from the roots bring water and soil nutrients back to the plant, and they can even help protect roots from pathogens. (A pretty amazing relationship, huh?)

Resource: Brundrett, et. al., "Working with Mycorrhizas in Forestry and Agriculture," 1996.

- 8. True.** A one percent increase in soil organic matter could result in as much as 20,000 to 25,000 more gallons of available soil water per acre. (That's the amount of water that will fill a typical 18'x36' residential swimming pool.) And since only a portion of the total water in a soil is "available," the increase in the soil's water holding capacity is even greater than that. That's the kind of water retention we can all live with!

Resource: Kansas State University e-Updates, Number 357, July 6, 2012. Note that amount of water stored in a specific soil will differ by soil texture and other factors.'

Resource: Kansas State University e-Updates, Number 357, July 6, 2012.

- 9. False.** Tillage damages earthworms directly, and also damages the habitat earthworms need to survive. It stimulates drying the surface soil and creates wide day/night temperature fluctuations. Tillage also brings earthworms to the surface where they are subject to predators such as birds. Total earthworm populations in long-term no-tilled fields are typically at least twice those of clean-tilled fields.

Resources: Edwards and Bohlen, "Biology and Ecology of Earthworms," 1996 (Chapman &

Hall, London, UK) and "The farmer's earthworm handbook," Ernst, 1995 (Lessiter Publications, Inc., Brookfield, Wis.).

- 10. False.** (Hey, we had to throw in one tricky question.) It was the other Leonardo – Leonardo da Vinci. And he's probably right. Though we're learning more about the soil's complex and miraculous ecosystem every day – the more we discover, the more we realize how much more there is to still learn about that amazing universe beneath our feet.

PREScribed FIRE: A HOT TOOL FOR KEEPING GRAZINGLAND HEALTHY

Nadine L Bishop

Twenty years ago, a prescribed burn to improve the grazing resource was rare on Nebraska's rangeland. Over the years, landowners have begun to realize the benefits of prescribed fire to grasslands. Today, prescribed burns are widely accepted and are commonly used as a tool to improve Nebraska's native rangeland, pastureland and conservation lands such as land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Prescribed burning can be used to accomplish a variety of objectives including to improve wildlife habitat, improve grazing distribution, reduce wildfire hazard, reduce the amount of annual bromegrass or smooth bromegrass and control woody species. The most common use of prescribed fire in Nebraska is eastern red cedar control.

Eastern red cedar occurs naturally in small amounts on many ecological sites in Nebraska, but the trees were kept in check by periodic fire. Improved fire suppression has caused an increase in the canopy cover of eastern red cedar on many sites across the state. In 2010, the Nebraska Forest Service estimated that each year eastern red cedar encroaches into 38,000 acres to the extent that the land essentially becomes an eastern red cedar forest¹. When rangeland or pastureland is converted to eastern red cedar forest, grass production is extremely reduced as compared to the potential production, and the loss of grassland for wildlife habitat is tremendous.

Prescribed burning is an effective, relatively inexpensive way to control smaller cedar trees. In situations where the landscape has become dominated by cedar trees, prescribed burning is used in conjunction with mechanical

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removal of larger trees to change the landscape from an eastern red cedar forest back to a grassland with occasional trees. Another common use of prescribed fire in Nebraska is improvement of wildlife habitat on CRP land and other land managed for wildlife. In those types of situations, prescribed fire creates a disturbance that removes old dead material and allows annual and perennial forbs to establish or re-establish in open areas. In some parts of the state, prescribed burning is used to control introduced cool season grasses like smooth brome grass and to return the land to a grassland composed of more productive, native grasses.

The Nebraska Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) started their involvement in prescribed fire about 15 years ago, with a series of demonstration burns. Over time, the type of assistance provided by NRCS has changed. Initially, assistance was technical assistance – assisting landowners with developing prescribed burn plans, training landowners how to burn safely and conducting training burns for landowners, NRCS employees and other resource professionals. NRCS also provided support for landowners working together to form Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs). These Prescribed Burn Associations provide a framework for neighbors helping neighbors to conduct prescribed burns. During this time period, Pheasants Forever (PF) also became involved in promoting prescribed burns, implementing prescribed burns and working with landowners to develop landowner groups and associations. Currently, there are at least fourteen Prescribed Burn Associations in Nebraska; many of these PBAs were organized through the efforts of PF and they are invaluable to the prescribed burn effort.

As prescribed burning became a more accepted practice, financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) was made available to producers who were implementing prescribed burns. NRCS staff would develop prescribed burn plans, and a number of these landowner burns were designated as training burns. NRCS staff and other resource professionals would participate as members of the burn crews alongside landowners and their neighbors in these training burns.

In 2014, the Nebraska policy regarding NRCS involvement in Prescribed Burns took a new direction. Going forward, in response to concerns for employee safety, NRCS staff will no longer participate in informal training burns. NRCS will continue to promote

prescribed burning, will continue to develop prescribed burn plans as resources allow and will continue to provide financial assistance for prescribed burns.

The need for prescribed burns is tremendous and the requests for assistance with prescribed burns continue to increase. To help address the demand, NRCS is turning to the private sector to assist with prescribed burns through a mechanism called Technical Service Providers (TSP). Qualified individuals can be certified as TSP for planning and/or implementing prescribed burns. Producers can apply for financial assistance through the EQIP program for a Conservation Activity Plan or CAP for a prescribed burn plan. Once this EQIP contract is funded, the producer will hire a TSP who will develop a prescribed burn plan. After the TSP develops the burn plan it is reviewed by NRCS. After the plan is determined to be sound and meet the requirements of CAP, the producer will receive his or her EQIP payment.

After the CAP is developed, the producer could apply for a second EQIP contract to implement the prescribed burn. The producer would either hire a prescribed burn contractor, hire a TSP, work with a prescribed burn association or put together a crew to conduct the prescribed burn.

Because prescribed burns are complex and no two burns are alike, Nebraska NRCS requires formal, in-the-field training for individuals who review and approve prescribed burn plans. Due to workload demands and the cost to maintain expertise in prescribed burning, the number of NRCS staff qualified to develop burn plans will be limited. NRCS encourages landowners to utilize Technical Service Providers to develop prescribed burn plans as a way to implement prescribed burns on their property.

Prescribed burning is a valuable tool. While prescribed burning can be useful in conjunction with other practices in accomplishing a number of conservation objectives on rangeland, it is extremely valuable to control woody encroachment on grasslands. In Nebraska, and throughout the Great Plains, prescribed burning is the most economical and effective tool to reverse the encroachment of eastern red cedar. NRCS will continue to partner with Nebraska landowners to provide technical and financial assistance to increase the use of prescribed fire in grassland management.

¹ From Adversity Rises Opportunity: Capitalizing on <http://www.nebraskawcs.org/>



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eastern red cedar expansion is key to improving grazing land and increasing economic development. [Annual Report. Nebraska Forest Service. 2012](#)

STATE ENTITIES WORKING ON FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND WATER SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

HISTORIC AGREEMENT TO ENSURE LASTING USES OF NIOBRARA RIVER FOR NEBRASKANS

Christy Rasmussen, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Erika Hill, Nebraska Association of Resource Districts

Mark C. Becker, Nebraska Public Power District

A historic agreement has been negotiated to preserve the future of the Niobrara River Basin between the Niobrara basin's Natural Resource Districts (NRDs), the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (Commission) and the Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD). Formal action on a memorandum of understanding will be taken by each of the parties at their respective meetings today.

Under the memorandum of understanding, the Commission and NRDs will work with NPPD to take steps towards transfer of assets, including NPPD's water appropriations on the Niobrara River, Spencer Hydro dam and the lands and easements associated with the dam. The parties will seek legislative authority to convert NPPD's water rights to a multi-use water right, part of which will be conserved for recreation and fish and wildlife needs, and part of which will be conserved for integrated water management in the Niobrara River basin.

The NRDs, the Commission and NPPD reaffirmed why water management in Nebraska stands apart from other states. "This is a Nebraska plan for conserving a Nebraska jewel," said Jim Douglas, director of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. "The Commission, the NRDs and NPPD want to ensure that the future of the Niobrara River will be decided by Nebraskans, with the best interests of Nebraskans in mind. All parties involved are pleased with this outcome and proud to work together to achieve a diverse set of goals for a valuable Nebraska resource."

The five Natural Resources Districts located in the Niobrara basin created the Niobrara River Basin Alliance to help protect the river with agreements like

the one announced today. These in the Alliance include the Upper Niobrara White NRD, Middle Niobrara NRD, Lower Niobrara NRD, Upper Elkhorn NRD and Upper Loup NRD, who are working together to ensure the long-term sustainability of sufficient water in the Niobrara River basin to safeguard future economic activity, agriculture, other water users, fish and wildlife, and recreation activities along the Niobrara for generations to come.

In addition to accepting the transfer of NPPD's assets, the Commission and the NRDs plan to seek an instream flow for the 39-mile stretch of the river below the dam to the confluence of the Niobrara and Missouri rivers. This stretch of river is used by several endangered species, including pallid sturgeon, interior least tern, piping plover and whooping crane.

"Nebraska Public Power District is pleased that the water which has been benefitting Nebraskans with renewable electricity since 1927 while maintaining flows in the river for a variety of uses, will be preserved through this agreement," said Brian Barels, NPPD's Water Resources Manager. "NPPD is extremely proud to be a party to this agreement, which will provide for water sustainability in this great Niobrara River Valley and to enable Nebraskans to continue to enjoy the river for fish, wildlife recreation and other uses into the future."

NPPD established the value of the Spencer facility and water rights at \$12 million. The Commission and the NRDs will secure \$9 million to purchase the assets, and NPPD will provide an in-kind contribution of \$3 million. The Commission and NRDs plan to seek funding from the Water Sustainability Fund, the Nebraska Environmental Trust and other sources.

The next steps for the group include securing funding and seeking legislative authority to convert NPPD's water rights to multi-use water rights. NPPD will continue to own and operate the facility to generate power until it is able to transfer assets to the Natural Resources Districts and Commission. The transfer is expected to take two years to complete.

"While the NRDs support local solutions, it was important to work with all interested parties," said Marty Graff, Middle Niobrara Natural Resources District Board Member and secretary of the Niobrara River Basin Alliance. "Because instream flow rights



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can only be held by NRDs and the Commission, an invitation was made and together we reached out to NPPD. In the end, all parties were responsible for creating a sustainable water management plan that will protect the Niobrara River and basin for years to come.”

The Niobrara River extends across northern Nebraska from its narrow beginnings 50 miles inside eastern Wyoming. It empties into the Missouri River 486 miles later between the village of Niobrara and Niobrara State Park. The main sources of inflow are tributaries and Sandhills groundwater. In 1991, a 76-mile stretch of the Niobrara was designated a National Scenic River to preserve unique biological features. Eastern, western and northern species of trees and wildlife all can be found intermixed on slopes along the river. The Niobrara is also extremely popular for canoeing, kayaking and floating trips.

2016 FARMING EVOLUTION Claudia Stevenson

The 2016 Farming Evolution Conference will be held February 17 and 18 at the Event Center in Holyoke, Colorado. Speakers include Jill Clapperton, Lance Gunderson from Ward Labs, Paul Jasa from UNL, farmers Nathan Pearce, Dietrich Kastens, Michael Thompson, and John Heermann. For more information contact Claudia Stevenson. Registration rates are still pending.



SWCS DIRECTOR NEEDED Wally Valasek

A director is needed for the Sandhills section of the Nebraska SWCS chapter. This position is for a one year

term until 6/30/2016. If anyone is interested please contact Wally Valasek at WV84827@windstream.net or 402-223-2874. Thank you for your consideration.

ENCOURAGING MEMBERSHIP

At the 2007 International Conference, 2006-2007 SWCS President Theo Dillaha summarized some of the information gleaned from a recent online member survey. Approximately one third of our members completed the survey, and 60% listed the main reason they joined SWCS as being “they were encouraged to do so by an SWCS member.” Forty-three percent responded they had not asked anyone to join in the last three years, and approximately one third had been a member for 5 years or less. There are likely many factors affecting declining national membership, but with all of the competition for our time and resources, it seems apparent that each member needs to consider the value of their membership and relay that value to others.

CHECK IT OUT - WEBSITE UPDATE

A list of Nebraska SWCS Honor Roll of Memorials and Honor Roll of Recognition can be viewed on the [chapter website](#).

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The Nebraska SWCS chapter has a collection of historical documents to be scanned. Anyone willing to volunteer to coordinate the effort of scanning please contact Sarah Gray for more information.

NEBRASKA SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

Kris Reed

All Nebraska SWCS Chapter members are members of the Nebraska Soil & Water Conservation Foundation, and the Foundation Board of Directors would like to hear from you regarding ideas for educational or demonstration type projects. Look around your office or those you associate with to see if you know someone who would benefit from a grant or scholarship.



Nebraska Society News

NOVEMBER 2015 NEWSLETTER

If you have not done so, please help promote these scholarship opportunities to students and colleges in your area. The Scholarship Committee will be reviewing student applications in December. Stay tuned to see how your donations will be working to help the next round of scholarship recipients.

As always, Foundation "tribute cards" can be used to make a donation to the Foundation by recognizing someone with a memorial or to recognize a memorable milestone in their career or family life. Please see the Foundation brochure at nebraskaswcs.org for more information.

2015-16 NSWC Foundation board members are:

President- Kris Reed
Vice President - Ed Harms
Secretary – Corey Brubaker
Treasurer and Registered Agent – Craig Romary
Director – Dick Ehrman
Chapter President, Scott Bohaty, is a non-voting member of the Board

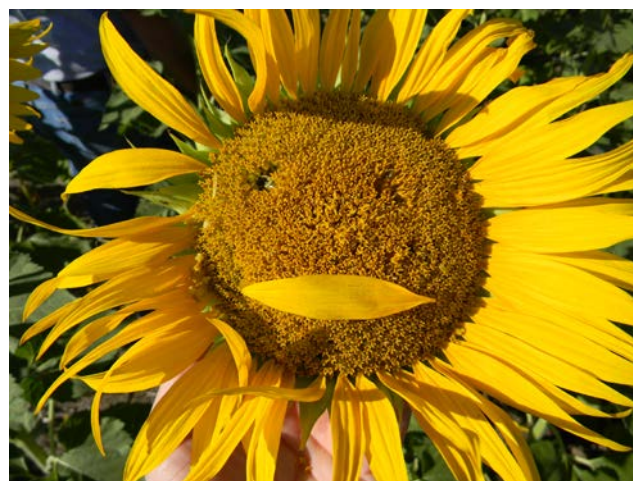
NEBRASKA CHAPTER SWCS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Northeast – Patrick Cowsert
Sandhills – Vacant
Lincoln – Corey Brubaker
Blue Nemaha - Wally Valasek
Panhandle – Ed Harms
South Central – Darwin Hinrichs
Student – Vacant
At Large - Claudia Stevenson

NEBRASKA CHAPTER SWCS COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Awards - Anita Nein
Scholarship – Kris Reed / Craig Romary
Membership - Robin Foulk
Elections - Paul Zillig
Nominations - Wally Valasek
History – Vacant*
Environmental Ed. (Student Chapter) – Tom Franti
Student Chapter Liaison – Craig Romary
Bylaws – Vacant*
Newsletter – Sarah Gray
Website – Doug Garrison

*Volunteers needed to fill vacant committee positions. Anyone interested please contact Sarah Gray for more information.





Nebraska Society News

Nebraska SWCS Chapter
830 N 5th Street
Seward, NE 68434