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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.

LLNRD Launches 2024 Photo Contest

The Lower Loup NRD Photo Contest began in 2022 with nearly 600 images submitted. The popular competition is back, and officials hope to receive even more high-quality photos during this year's contest.

Images may depict agriculture, natural resources conservation activities, wildlife, scenery, recreation, and other aspects of daily life. All photos must be taken within the boundaries of the Lower Loup NRD. The contest runs through May 15, 2024. Submit photos to abartels@llnrd.org. Find more information at www.LLNRD.org.

"We hope this contest inspires photographers of every level, including the average citizen with a smartphone, to take part," said LLNRD General Manager Russell Callan. "Prizes will be awarded, but the best reward just might be time spent outdoors exploring our District."



**LLNRD Photo Contest entry by
Chuck Hackenmiller of Lincoln, Nebraska.**



LLNRD Board of Directors Designate Drought Zones 18 and 20 as Water Quantity Management Areas

A Public Hearing was held on Jan. 25, 2024, at the Lower Loup NRD (LLNRD) Headquarters in Ord to hear testimony on the LLNRD proposal designating Drought Zone 18 and Drought Zone 20 as Groundwater Quantity Management Areas, as per Chapter 8 of the LLNRD Groundwater Management Area Rules & Regulations.

In 2020, the LLNRD began developing a Drought Management Plan. Irrigators, ranchers, city administrators, hydropower industry representatives, LLNRD staff and directors, and other stakeholders joined for a series of meetings. Input from this Drought Stakeholders Group was used to develop the LLNRD Drought Management Plan. This plan was developed to function as a guide to the LLNRD Board of Directors to enhance drought response. The plan was approved by the LLNRD Board of Directors during its November 2022 meeting.

Less than a year later, and according to the plan's guidelines, drought conditions rated as "Extreme" triggered a response. Simultaneously, groundwater level readings taken by LLNRD technicians in Drought Zone 18 (south of the South Loup River in Buffalo County) and Drought Zone 20 (portions of Nance and Platte counties) showed more than half of the wells tested were within 10% of the lowest readings

ever recorded.

The LLNRD's Water Resources Committee looked at the situation, ultimately recommending to the full board to initiate the process to require flow meters on all irrigation systems in Drought Zones 18 and 20. The LLNRD Board of Directors voted at its July 2023 meeting to begin that process.

In accordance with the laws of the State of Nebraska, among other purposes and responsibilities, Nebraska's NRDs are tasked with the conservation of surface water and groundwater. A response was required according to the LLNRD Drought Management Plan if two of the following had triggered:

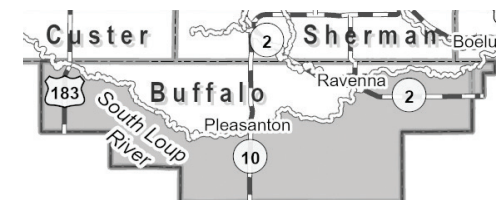
- A) Regional Short-term Drought Status is rated at D3, (Extreme) intensity or higher (D4) across greater than 50% of a Drought Zone.
- B) Local Long-term Groundwater Status: If more than half of readings are consistently at or below the lowest ever recorded, then additional management is required in that Drought Zone.
- C) Local Surface Water Status: Streamflows are at the lowest of the site's full historical range measured for that time of year.
- D) Local Reporting of Drought Impacts: Reports of well impacts throughout an area.

- E) Regional Drought Forecasting: Situational. Consult Drought Stakeholders and LLNRD Board.

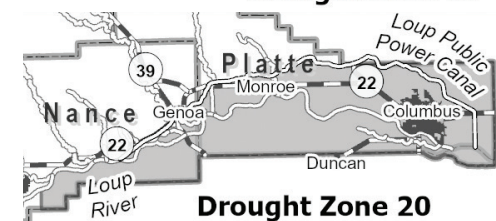
Following the presentation of exhibits, official comment from state and federal entities, and public comments, the LLNRD Board of Directors approved designation of Drought Areas 18 and 20 as Water Quantity Management Areas.

The effective date of the Order of Designation is Feb. 1, 2024. Irrigated agricultural fields in Drought Zones 18 and 20 not currently equipped with flow meters will require flow meter installation within two years. Additional restrictions, if required, will be determined by the LLNRD Board of Directors.

View the LLNRD's Drought Management Plan at www.LLNRD.org.



Drought Zone 18



Drought Zone 20

LLNRD Working with Communities to Reduce Flood Damage

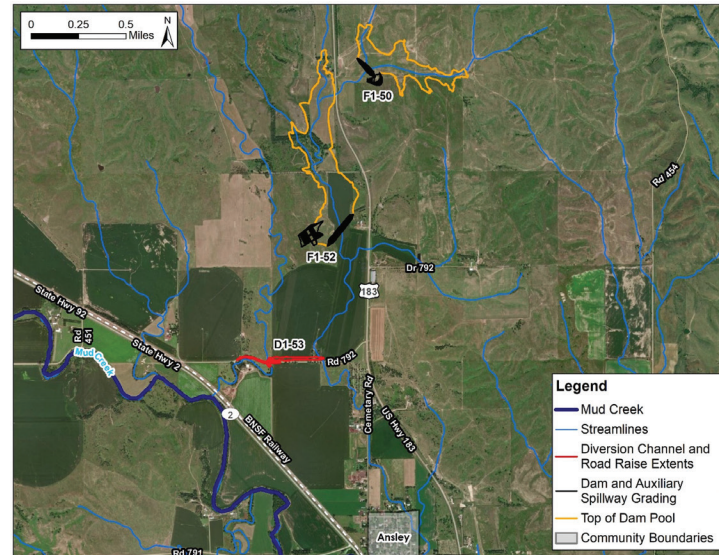
The LLNRD is assisting three communities in the District to minimize flood impacts from high rainfall events. LLNRD is using funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service to plan, design, and construct flood prevention measures near North Loup and Ansley. LLNRD plans to begin designing measures to reduce flooding in Sargent using funding received from the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

In North Loup, a levee along the north side of town and a channel northeast of the community are planned to protect the community from flooding from Mira Creek resulting from floodwater due to storm events. The levee will prevent stormwater from entering town, and the channel will divert higher flows to the North Loup River. Two dams and a diversion channel are

planned north of Ansley to control stormwater runoff from Comer Canyon, historically a main source of flooding in town. The dams will control and slow water during storm events, and the channel will divert high flows around the community and into Mud Creek.

A diversion channel and improvements to storm drainage within Sargent are planned, with the design phase scheduled to begin soon. The drainage improvements will help to remove stormwater in town more efficiently,

while the diversion channel will intercept runoff from the north during storm events and divert it around the community.



Flood control measures planned for Ansley.

Davis Creek Recreation Area Update

Starting in 2024, the per night fee for RV camping on electrical sites at Davis Creek Recreation Area increased from \$25 to \$30. This small increase was implemented after many years of no fee increases to RV camp in the popular recreation area south of the community of North Loup.

Improvements over the last few years include a shower house/storm shelter,

wi-fi, new vault toilets, a second boat dock and new parking area, a fish cleaning station, and an RV sanitary dump.

Camping at Davis Creek Recreation Area remains economical, with the per night cost being considerably less than many other campgrounds in the area. Campsite reservations can be made at www.ReserveAmerica.com.

Plans to pave part of the access road through the recreation area in 2023 stalled due to a lack of qualified bidders. The road is open now and a rebidding period will commence in spring 2024.

Tentative plans include closing the access road by Oct. 1, 2024, to allow for the paving to begin. The road closure could remain until Dec. 31, 2024, but LLNRD officials hope to reopen the road sooner if at all possible.

Further updates on the road paving project will be made through the www.LLNRD.org website, as well as the District's Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages. Reach the Lower Loup NRD at (308) 728-3221.



Campground reservations for Davis Creek Recreation Area can be reserved at www.ReserveAmerica.com.

A Message From The Manager

The Lower Loup NRD staff enjoys interacting with our agricultural partners. Much of that work takes place out in the field, but we also administer cost-share programs for producers. Here is some information on just a couple of those programs.

Our Board of Directors recently approved an Advanced Soil Sampling Cost-Share Program. Funds are available across the District, but with emphasis being placed on Phase 2 Water Quality Management Areas and fields identified as vulnerable by the LLNRD's Nitrogen Vulnerability Model.

To qualify, the producer must have certified irrigated acres and must use an approved soil testing method. The purpose of the program is to encourage

producers to adopt advanced soil sampling analysis. This almost always results in cost savings to producers due to a reduction of nutrient inputs while also improving soil health (which can improve yield).

Since 2019, the Lower Loup NRD has also administered a cost-share program for producers to install Variable Rate Irrigation (VRI) equipment on their pivots. This technology allows producers to control their pivot speed. Most modern pivots can be updated to a VRI setup if not already so equipped. The benefits include increased watering efficiency and water savings, chemical and fertilizer use reduction and associated cost savings, increased yield in low production areas, and reduced yield variation.



LLNRD General Manager Russell Callan

Producers are limited to two applications per year. Funds are limited. Applications will be received through the month of March at your local NRCS office.

Feel free to call the Lower Loup NRD office to speak to one of our experts about these programs and other available cost-share opportunities.

Chemigation: Better Fertilizer Regulation Through Routine Application

The goal of the 1987 Nebraska Chemigation Act is to protect the surface water and groundwaters of Nebraska from contamination by fertilizers and pesticides.

Chemigation is the mixing of any ag-chemicals, including fertilizers, that are applied using either a surface or a groundwater source through an on-farm irrigation system. Many producers in the Lower Loup NRD choose to chemigate over other application methods as it allows better distribution of water-soluble chemicals, applied exactly when the crop needs it, instead of dumping it all on either in the fall or early spring when there is no crop in the field.

The LLNRD processes more than 3,500 chemigation permits each year but reminds producers that the deadline for

renewing a chemigation permit is June 1.

Renewal permits are inspected for safety checks every 3 years, whereas new or emergency permits require an inspection before any operation can occur. A renewal permit also costs \$30, a new permit is \$100, and an emergency permit is \$500.

Anyone wishing to chemigate is required to possess a Nebraska Chemigation Applicator Certification, which is good for 4 years. Find UNL's 2024 chemigation training schedule at www.LLNRD.org.



LLNRD Water Resources Technician Harold Benton, left, inspects chemigation equipment for a producer in Valley County.