

## **NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)**

### **DISTRICT CONSERVATIONIST'S MONTHLY REPORT**

**6/11/2025**

#### **PERSONNEL/OFFICE**

- The Lancaster and Cass County Service Centers are under normal operations.
- Lincoln NRCS Resource Conservationist - VACANT
- Lincoln NRCS Soil Conservation Technician – VACANT
- Weeping Water NRCS Soil Conservationist - VACANT

#### **LPSNRD LAND TREATMENT**

- Current soil moisture conditions are variable across the district; staff are conducting soil moisture evaluations on all projects prior to construction. Projects are being released on a site-by-site basis; some may be withheld due to inadequate soil moisture conditions.
- Staff are finalizing documentation for payment of the remaining Fall 2024 cover crop applications.
- LPSNRD currently has the following active or completed land treatment cost-share program applications:
  - Lancaster County
    - 2 Summer 2025 Structural Applications
    - 2 Fall 2025 Structural Applications
  - Cass County
    - 5 Summer 2025 Structural Applications
    - 6 Fall 2025 Structural Applications

#### **USDA PROGRAMS**

- Technicians are checking completed projects, preparing for spring/summer projects, and doing frequent soil moisture monitoring for planned construction.
- Planning staff are finishing FY25 EQIP and CSP application contracting and certifying completed practices on existing contracts.
- Staff are wrapping up 2025 Food Security Act Compliance Reviews.
- Staff are beginning to conduct CRP site visits/status reviews.

#### **UPCOMING EVENTS**

- 6/19/25 – Offices closed in observance of the Juneteenth Holiday
- 6/20/25 – Conservation Stewardship Program Renewal Application Deadline
- 7/4/25 – Offices closed in observance of Independence Day Holiday

Tom Cowan – District Conservationist




## LOWER PLATTE SOUTH natural resources district

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### MEMORANDUM

Date: June 16, 2025  
To: Board of Directors  
From: David Potter (courtesy of Dean Edson)   
RE: **NRD Basin Tour Explores the Niobrara River**

More than 80 elected directors and staff from Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) along with state and federal conservation partners gathered in Valentine June 9-10, 2025, for the annual NRD Basin Tour hosted by the Middle Niobrara and Lower Niobrara NRDs. Deborah Eagan, Luke Peterson, and John Yoakum from Lower Platte South NRD attended the Tour.

Each year, the NRD Basin Tour explores a different watershed offering a firsthand look at local conservation projects, natural resources challenges, and successful partnerships. This year's focus was the Niobrara River Basin – an ecologically diverse and economically vital region in north central Nebraska.

"The Niobrara River is a cornerstone for our communities, supporting agriculture, recreation, and wildlife," said Mike Murphy, Middle Niobrara NRD general manager. "Everything we do ties back to responsible water management—handled locally, with long-term sustainability in mind."

The Niobrara River is Nebraska's only National Wild and Scenic River, designated in 1991, and draws tens of thousands of visitors each year. According to the National Park Service, in 2023, more than 80,000 people visited the Niobrara National Scenic River, generating \$8 million in visitor spending and supporting 111 local jobs.

The Niobrara River is not only a scenic treasure, it's also essential to the state's agricultural economy. The basin spans 11,600 square miles and includes more than 617,000 irrigated acres. It lies at the heart of the Nebraska Sandhills, where ranching is central to the state's role as a global leader in beef production. Cherry County, located in the Sandhills, is the top beef-producing county in the United States with nearly 166,000 cows. Half of Nebraska's 23 million acres of rangeland and pasture are located in the Sandhills, making it the prime region for raising cattle.

In 2014, five NRDs—Lower Niobrara, Middle Niobrara, Upper Elkhorn, Upper Loup, and Upper Niobrara White—joined forces to form the Niobrara River Basin Alliance. One of their

major milestones was securing a legal transfer of senior water rights formerly held by Nebraska Public Power District for use at the now defunct Spencer Dam. The Alliance, in partnership with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, successfully converted the water rights for instream basin management and uses such as agriculture, recreation, and fish and wildlife habitat. This marks Nebraska's first instream flow right jointly held by NRDs and Nebraska Game & Parks Commission.

"This collaboration protects more than just water—it preserves a way of life that depends on it," said Wade Ellwanger, Lower Niobrara NRD general manager. "By working together across district lines, we're showing how local leadership and shared vision can drive lasting resource stewardship."

Tour participants visited a variety of natural resources landscapes and project sites, including:

- CSS Potato Farm (southwest of Cody)
- Dick Minor Ranch & Snake River Headwaters (Gordon)
- Niobrara Valley Vineyards (Nenzel)
- Fort Niobrara Scenic Overlook (east of Valentine)
- Windbreak Project (east of Valentine)
- Cub Creek Reservoir (east of Norden)
- Shane Lechtenberg's Drip Irrigation Field (west of Mills)
- Lower Niobrara NRD Office (Butte)
- Spencer Dam and the Niobrara River Basin Alliance (Spencer)
- Long Pine Creek Watershed Project (Long Pine)

As Nebraska continues to face challenges related to water use, drought, and changing environmental conditions, events like the NRD Basin Tour provide critical opportunities for education, partnership building, and strategic planning.