

# LOWER ELKHORN

## Natural Resources District

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*"Strive to improve the quality of life for all citizens of the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District by promoting and demonstrating sound methods of stewardship which conserve, develop and manage all natural resources."*

"Equal opportunity employer and provider."



To:



## Area couple receives Master Conservationist Award

Dennis & Imogene Wacker of rural Osmond were the recipients of the 2017 Omaha World-Herald's Master Conservationist Award. Dennis has been farming for over 50 years. Dennis & Imogene manage an organic cash grain operation, and began the transition to organic farming in 2009.

Dennis utilizes a strip cropping system that looks like a tapestry from the air. He rotates corn, soybeans, oats and clover or alfalfa in alternating strips approximately 18-foot wide. Maintaining strip widths discourages predators which then encourages pollinators and beneficial insects. Rotating the strips helps with weed control and nutrient management. The strips also provide wind and water erosion control, because of the increased mulch.

Dennis & Imogene have sponsored tours of their operation, showing the benefits of organic farming and are good mentors for beginning organic producers. They have also sponsored wildflower tours, showing the benefits of pollinators and wildflower ID on their 3 acres of pollinator habitat.

Joyce Reicks, Soil Conservation Technician for the Pierce County NRCS, said, "He deserves this award because of his enthusiasm, hard work, and dedication to successfully making organic work and providing healthy food without using chemicals. He has been a mentor for other farmers who want to try organic, but don't know how to get started. The Wacker family's ongoing commitment to conservation and the environment is very deserving of this year's Master Conservationist Award."



*Dennis & Imogene Wacker received the award during the banquet at the Nebraska Association of Resources District's fall conference in Kearney.*

Fall 2017

LOWER ELKHORN NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT

# Directions

## Sign-up by December 15th for new irrigated acres

Farmers within the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District (LENRD) boundaries, will have an opportunity to apply for new irrigated acres for 2018.

LENRD Assistant General Manager, Brian Bruckner, said, "After much debate during their October meeting, the board discussed allowing for the approval of standard variances district-wide, utilizing a map provided by the Flatwater Group."

The board voted to allow up to 2,500 acres of new groundwater irrigation development in the Hydrologically Connected or 10/50 Area, and to allow up to 2,500 acres of new

groundwater irrigation development in the Non-Hydrologically Connected or Non 10/50 Area under the district's standard variance process for 2018.

The board established a sign-up period to receive applications for Standard Variances. The district will receive applications for standard variances between **November 15, 2017 and December 15, 2017.**

Bruckner added, "The board suggested an annual limit on the amount of groundwater withdrawal from wells associated with approved variances, determined by board policy, which is subject to future modification if conditions warrant. In addition, a

minimum soil score of 90 must be met for any standard variance to be considered for approval."

Standard variance requests will only be considered for approval from areas within the district that fall within the top five Potential for Development categories on the Classification 4 Map, as provided by the Flatwater Group.

Standard variances will not be available in the Quantity Subareas already defined.

To view the map, visit: [www.lenrd.org/applying-to-irrigate-new-land](http://www.lenrd.org/applying-to-irrigate-new-land)



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Visit our website to sign up for emails and special reminders for all upcoming meetings and events:

[www.lenrd.org](http://www.lenrd.org)



## Limited cost-share still available for flow meters

In an effort to remain proactive in the management of our groundwater, flow meters are required on all active irrigation wells within the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District (LENRD) by **January 1, 2018**.

The LENRD received a grant to assist landowners with the expense of this requirement. The deadline to apply for this funding was June 30<sup>th</sup>. However, there are still some limited funds available for landowners.

LENRD Projects Manager, Curt Becker, said, "Since the application deadline has passed, the amount that landowners can receive per flow meter

has changed. Originally the amount was \$500 per meter, but that has now decreased to \$250, with a very limited amount remaining for those who have or will apply after the deadline. Contact your local NRCS or LENRD office right away to apply for this cost-share."

The LENRD has approved several meters for installation. Becker, said, "The change in our Groundwater Management Area rules and regulations also requires anyone installing a flow meter within the LENRD to attend an installation training session to become a certified installer."

A list of the approved meters as well as a list of the LENRD Certified Flow Meter Installation Contractors can be found on the district's website. These contractors have already completed the required flow meter installation training.

Becker added, "If you do not want to become certified to install your own meter, you must select a certified installer from the list." If you would like to be trained to install your own flow meter, please contact the LENRD.

Visit: [www.lenrd.org/flow-meters](http://www.lenrd.org/flow-meters) for more information.

## Board approves lowest tax levy in 45 years

The 2018 fiscal year budget for the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District (LENRD) once again calls for a lower tax levy.

The operating budget was approved by the board of directors at their August 24<sup>th</sup> meeting with a tax request of \$4,270,002. The budget of all expenditures shows a 5.52% decrease of \$477,863 from last year.

The estimated levy based on the property tax request is 2.327 cents per \$100 of valuation, which is a 2.74% decrease from the fiscal year 2017 levy of 2.401 cents per \$100 of valuation. For example, if a person owns a \$100,000 house, the taxes owed to the LENRD would have been \$24.01 in 2017, and will be approximately \$23.27 in 2018.

LENRD General Manager, Mike Sousek, said, "It's becoming more difficult to continue decreasing the tax levy year after year. This is the 6<sup>th</sup> year in a row for a decrease in property tax asking. This year valuations flat-lined, and our levy asking decreased 2.74%, which is a historic low for the district, the lowest tax levy in 45 years."

The funds received by the LENRD are returned to the citizens of the district, through projects, programs, and studies across all or parts of 15-counties in northeast Nebraska. Some of these conservation benefits

include: water quality and quantity programs such as groundwater management, flood control, and nitrate management; as well as erosion control, cost-share to landowners who apply for conservation practices, recreation areas and trails, urban recreation and community forestry programs, and many other benefits that protect our natural resources.

Sousek, added, "We are working

together to create a budget that not only addresses our 12 responsibilities, but that also focuses on improving the quality of life for the citizens across our district. We are doing more with less, by focusing on efficiencies and streamlining processes to protect our natural resources. With multiple flood protection projects coming down the pipeline, I am proud of the budget the board has put together."

## State FFA Land Judging Contest held near Scribner



**120 students from 38 Nebraska High Schools competed in the State FFA Land Judging contest near Scribner on October 18th. The top individual and winning team came from West Point High School. Congratulations!**

## Drought Management Plan protects current groundwater users

The district is taking proactive steps to reduce the negative impacts of future drought events. One of these steps is the development of the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District (LENRD) Drought Management Plan. The Drought Management Plan utilizes the U.S. Drought Monitor Map produced weekly by the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska, to define drought at the local level and identifies a response strategy to minimize the impacts of future drought events.

The LENRD held an Open House Public Hearing concerning the Drought Management Plan for this area. The hearing was held on Tuesday, November 21<sup>st</sup> from 5-7 p.m. in the Lifelong Learning Center on the campus of Northeast Community College in Norfolk.

The Drought Management Plan

defines drought locally and identifies processes to respond to and manage the impacts of future drought events. The hearing was the first in a multi-step decision process, and consideration of the adoption (or modification) of the proposed changes will be determined at a later date.

LENRD Assistant General Manager, Brian Bruckner, said, "If adopted, the integration of the goals and objectives of the Drought Management Plan into the Groundwater Management Plan, would allow the district to respond to the challenges of an acute drought situation. The geographic area impacted by the modifications to the District's Groundwater Management Plan is district-wide, all or parts of 15 counties in northeast Nebraska."

LENRD General Manager, Mike Sousek, said, "We must ensure that we protect the water resources of all

current users in the district because this is the law. The protocol we are proposing for determining drought in the district is considered to be the most accurate method in the world."

The full text of the proposed amendment is on page 105 of the Groundwater Management Plan, which is available at the LENRD office in Norfolk and on the district's website at [www.lenrd.org/latest-news](http://www.lenrd.org/latest-news)

The Plan was funded by a FEMA planning grant. The cost is shared 75% through federal funding and 25% through a local match. The LENRD is providing the 25% local match. The LENRD hired JEO Consulting Group, Inc. to assist with the plan development.

For more information on this planning effort, contact the LENRD at 402-371-7313 or [lenrd@lenrd.org](mailto:lenrd@lenrd.org)

## 4th graders attend Life on the Farm event



Introducing students to the importance of agriculture was the focus of the Ag Literacy Festival "Life on the Farm" event held in Pierce County. UNL Extension teamed up with Farmers Pride, the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District, Farm Credit Services of America, and the Nebraska Farm Bureau to host the event at the Pierce County Fairgrounds on Thursday, October 12th. Over 200 fourth graders from Cedar and Pierce Counties attended, learning more about the Ag industry through demonstrations and hands-on activities. Some of the sessions included presentations from: Husker Ag, Helena Chemical, Demerath Farms, Nebraska Honey Queen, Miss Rodeo Nebraska, the Siebrandt family, the Stemick family, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Other sponsors included: Petersen Ag Systems and Aschoff Construction. Contact the Pierce County Extension office for more information.

## Certification of Irrigated Acres

The acre certification process is nearly complete. If you have not yet certified your irrigated acres, contact the LENRD immediately, or email [lenrd@lenrd.org](mailto:lenrd@lenrd.org)

## Conservation Tree Program

A new tree season is upon us! If you're looking to plant trees this spring, the LENRD will have order forms ready in December. Contact your local NRCS office, the LENRD office, or visit our website at: [www.lenrd.org/tree-catalog](http://www.lenrd.org/tree-catalog) for program details.