

# THE FLOW DOWN

A publication of the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District

Issue 2 February 2026

## From the General Manager



As we look forward in anticipation to the new year, it's important to reflect for a moment on what happened in the year prior. At the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District, 2025 presented numerous challenges and opportunities, and 2026 will likely offer its own twists and turns.

The safe prediction is that 2026 will be different than the last, whether we're discussing the weather, markets, UNL sports, or what's in the news. Having the ability and willingness to adapt is key, in addition to the need to build resilience into every aspect of our daily lives.

The rains were timely and plentiful in 2025 and much like you I wonder if we'll ever see another year like it. Commodity prices remain below the cost of production for field crops, yet the cow/calf producer is finally getting their due for the fruits of their labor. Main street business owners feel the immediate impacts of the ag economy, and whether we like to admit it or not, we're all part of a larger community that needs the support of one another to succeed.

The LENRD is working hard to address a number of issues within the District, whether it's management activities related to groundwater, helping property owners with planning and renovation of conservation tree projects, evaluating flood protection measures for Battle Creek, Osmond and Pierce, or collection of water quality samples from domestic wells as part of our Groundwater for Public Health project, we remain mindful of the fact that we have an opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of our friends, family and neighbors. While

we may sometimes share disagreements about the best solution for the resource management challenge, we remain committed to creating positive change that will better our community as a whole.

I've also had the unique opportunity to represent our District on the Water Task Force, which was an initiative put in motion by Governor Jim Pillen. His charge to the group was to identify goals, objectives, and action items to further advance groundwater quality and quantity management efforts that are already ongoing within the state. As many are aware, elevated levels of nitrate impact drinking water in portions of the state, and water quantity issues have caused problems in other locations in Nebraska, but it's encouraging to see stakeholders from a broad range of interests coming together to consolidate around the common goal of protecting this critical resource. Watch for further updates from the Task Force in 2026 as rollout and implementation of the recommendations is scheduled to occur.

In closing, though I have only touched on a handful of the current activities going on with the LENRD, know that we remain committed to carrying out our responsibilities with a focus on the future, but are ever mindful that we can learn from the past. Using this approach will help us on our journey to adapt to the changes that are certain to show up along the way.



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# Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District

## Conservation Tree Program Order Form - 2025-2026

\*Name: \_\_\_\_\_ \*County: \_\_\_\_\_ \*Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_ \*City: \_\_\_\_\_ \*Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Will trees be planted by LENRD Tree Planter: YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ **\*Required**

If yes, you must contact the LENRD to develop a planting plan, and pay for the cost of the tree planting at the time you order. If you're interested in CRP plantings, contact your local NRCS office.

**\*If no, please check the location where you prefer to pick up your seedlings.**

Lower Elkhorn NRD Residents: Stanton \_\_\_\_\_ West Point \_\_\_\_\_

Papio-Missouri River NRD Residents: Walthill \_\_\_\_\_ Omaha \_\_\_\_\_ Blair \_\_\_\_\_

**Deadline to order trees is February 20, 2026**

Some tree species are in short supply and are subject to availability. If you would like the LENRD to plant your trees, you need to have a written plan and trees purchased by February 20, 2026.

### Each Species must be ordered in bundles of 25 seedlings

CONIFERS	DECIDUOUS	FRUIT & NUT TREES	SHRUBS
1. Black Hills Spruce	9. American Elm	18. Black Cherry	27. American Plum
2. Colorado Blue Spruce	10. American Sycamore	19. Black Walnut	28. Amur Maple
3. Concolor Fir	11. Catalpa	20. Bur Oak	29. Aronia (Chokeberry)
4. Eastern Redcedar	12. Cottonwood	21. Crabapple	30. Buffaloberry
5. Jack Pine	13. Hackberry	22. Hazelnut	31. Chokecherry
6. Norway Spruce	14. Honeylocust	23. Manchurian Apricot	32. Cotoncater
7. Ponderosa Pine	15. Kentucky Coffee Tree	24. Northern Pecan	33. Cranberry
8. White Pine	16. River Birch	25. Red Oak	34. Elderberry
	17. Silver Maple	26. Swamp White Oak	35. False Indigo
			36. Golden Currant
			37. Gray Dogwood
			38. Lilac
			39. Nanking Cherry
			40. Red-Osier Dogwood
			41. Sandcherry
			42. Serviceberry
			(Juneberry)
			43. Skunkbush Sumac

- Number of seedling bundles ordered \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$32.00/25 seedlings = \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- **Small Acreage Package (shown on back) \_\_\_\_\_ bundles x \$32.00 =** \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Wildlife Package (Shown on back) \_\_\_\_\_ bundles x \$32.00- \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- **Planting cost (contact LENRD to determine cost, if applicable)** \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Coco Weed Guards (shown on back) \_\_\_\_\_ bundles x \$47.50. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**SALES TAX: 7.5% (West Point pickups), 5.5% (all other locations)** Tax: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

A check must be enclosed with this order, made payable to the:

Lower Elkhorn NRD  
1508 Square Turn Blvd.  
Norfolk, NE 68701  
402-371-7313

Signature of Purchaser \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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The Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District does not guarantee the growth or survival of the seedlings you are purchasing. We do guarantee that the seedlings are purchased from quality nurseries and are maintained in good condition at our facilities.

## Private Well Sampling

Water quality is something not only Nebraska Natural Resources Districts take very seriously, but the State of Nebraska as well. Clean drinking water is essential for the health and wellbeing of all Nebraskans, but especially to those who are more susceptible to the effects of nitrate and chemicals in our groundwater. Nitrate is a form of nitrogen that can sometimes be found in our drinking water. It is colorless, odorless and tasteless. The only way to know if you have nitrate in your drinking water is to test for it.

The Lower Elkhorn NRD has two programs in place specifically for domestic well-owners in the District:

The LENRD Domestic Well Sampling Program is intended to provide free domestic well sampling for well owners. Samples are collected by LENRD staff and tested for: Nitrate/Nitrite, Total Coliform/bacteria, agricultural herbicides, and glyphosate/AMPA. Wells are eligible for sampling once every five years. To participate in this program, your domestic well must be registered and listed as 'active' by the Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment. If your well tests positive for any of the pesticides or 5ppm or greater for Nitrate, you qualify for the Domestic Well Treatment System Cost Share Program.

The Domestic Well Treatment System Cost Share Program is a one-time use program intended to assist with funding the installation of a water treatment system on eligible domestic wells. The program will provide financial assistance, 50% of the total cost, not to exceed \$800, for the equipment and installation costs for a water treatment system. If a domestic well owner ends up receiving cost share for the installation of a water treatment (Reverse Osmosis) system, then eligibility for sampling will cease.

To get started, call or stop in to visit with us about our Domestic Well Sampling programs.

## Source Water Protection Specialist



If you farm in Pierce or Madison Counties, chances are Jim Olson is no stranger. Beginning in February 2022, Jim served as the LENRD Madison/Pierce County Conservation Planner where he gained extensive experience in NRCS programs and conservation planning. During his time as the Willow Creek Watershed Coordinator, he helped implement over 7,000 acres of Best Management Practices (BMPs) which led to significant water quality improvements in that area.

In May 2025, Jim started a new role as a Source Water Protection Specialist. His job was formed as a partnership between the Lower Elkhorn NRD, Lewis & Clark NRD, and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Jim works directly with producers, municipalities, rural water districts, and community members to promote voluntary, incentive-based conservation practices. His focus is on protecting and improving groundwater quality in Wellhead Protection Areas (WHPAs) by promoting conservation practices such as cover crop adoption, irrigation water management, nutrient management, and crop-to-grass conversions within WHPAs.

The role of a Source Water Protection Specialist is relatively new to Natural Resources Districts. Jim is currently one of three Source Water Protection Specialists in the state, with the possibility of a fourth in the near future. The Lower Elkhorn NRD is one of six Natural Resources Districts in Nebraska that is lucky enough to have someone in this position serving our District.

Jim and his wife, Jennifer, moved to Norfolk in 2019 from Maskell, Nebraska. They have three children and enjoy spending time outdoors camping, hiking, biking and golfing. The Olsons are proud to call Norfolk home and enjoy being active members of the community.



# Producer Connect

If you are a producer in the Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District, you've probably already been introduced to our new online reporting system, ProducerConnect. ProducerConnect is a free, web-based application with a secure digital dashboard specifically designed for Nebraska ag producers. With this tool, producers will be able to access field and crop reporting data, track irrigation use, receive nitrogen recommendations, and make more informed decisions for their individual farms. ProducerConnect accounts are password protected and have access to see only their own personal data.

The LENRD made the shift to ProducerConnect this year due to complications with the former reporting system and to be cohesive with the other NRDs also utilizing the

program. ProducerConnect is now where producers will go to submit flowmeter readings (due December 1 every year) and, for producers in the Phase 2 and Phase 3 areas, annual nitrogen use reporting.

A partnership to begin piecing together this unique application formed with Longitude 103, the company designing and hosting ProducerConnect, began in 2023. ProducerConnect was developed by Nebraska's NRDs and numerous ag partners who understand the unique needs of Nebraska's producers. Additional participants on the project include the Nebraska Corn Board, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Central Valley Ag, Corteva Agriscience, Nebraska Cooperative Council, a majority of Nebraska's 23 NRDs, the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD) and the NARD Foundation.

We know that change is always difficult – even for us – and we thank you for your patience and cooperation during this transition period. We hope this tool will help make reporting more efficient and convenient for you.

Still need to get set up with ProducerConnect? To get started, call or stop into our office to have staff register you. You will need a current email address to register.



## Reasons to Register Your Well

If your well is not yet registered, you can register it with the State at a cost of about \$70. What you get in return is worth the price!

1. You get over \$300 in water testing for free!  
Testing your water – especially if you have a family drinking, bathing, and cooking with it – will give you peace of mind that the water is safe.
2. Registering your well gives you rights and protections from spacing requirements. This gives you protection from potential infringement on your quality and quantity of water from new wells drilled in the future.
3. Registering your well is easy and opens the door to LENRD programs, and potentially State programs as well.

## Phragmites



Chances are that you recognize the plant in this picture.

But did you know that it's actually a noxious weed called Phragmites? Phragmites is found throughout the Great Plains, forming dense patches in wet and moderately fertile soils along banks of ponds,

lakes, streams, marshes, roads, ditches, and wet fields. These weeds compete with pastures and crops, reducing yields substantially. They also create competition for other plants having access to available surface and groundwater. The losses resulting from noxious weed infestations can be staggering. If you see any of these on your property, or along the road way, please report them to your local county weed control superintendent.

# Conservation Tree Program

## Services and Prices

The Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District's **Conservation Tree Program** offers a wide variety of seedlings and services to landowners interested in planting trees and shrubs for windbreaks, living snow fences, livestock protection, forest buffers, woodlots, and wildlife habitat. You can use the order form on the other side to order seedlings. Below is a list of other services available through the **Conservation Tree Program**:

### Tree and Shrub Seedlings -

- Seedlings cost \$32.00 plus tax for a bundle of 25
- Each species must be ordered in lots of 25

### Machine Planting Service - Not available for Small Acreage or Wildlife Packages

- There is a charge of \$0.60/seedling
- There is a minimum planting charge of \$300.00 per project

### NEW Drip Irrigation Cost Share

- Must be installed on LENRD approved and designed windbreaks
- Drip irrigation systems will be cost shared at 75% or \$0.78/foot, whichever is less

**\*Hand Planting and/or Weed Mat Installation Services may be available through a private contractor. Contact the LENRD for the private contractor list.\***

*The Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District (LENRD) does not guarantee the growth or survival of the seedlings you are purchasing. We do guarantee that the seedlings are purchased from quality nurseries and are maintained in good condition at our distribution center. Contact the LENRD if you have any questions at 402-371-7313.*

# Small Acreage Package

The **Small Acreage Package** is an option for landowners who want to diversify the trees and shrubs they plant, but do not need 25 of the same species. In this package you will receive 20 seedlings for \$32 plus tax, 5 each of 4 different species:

### \*Species available for 2025-2026:

- ◆ 5 Douglas Fir
- ◆ 5 Red Oak
- ◆ 5 Black Gum
- ◆ 5 Allegheny Serviceberry

**Please note:** The Small Acreage and Wildlife Packages do not qualify for machine planting services or cost-share. Trees will be available in late April. We will notify you when they arrive. The LENRD does not guarantee the growth or survival of the seedlings.

## Wildlife Package

The **Wildlife Package** is an option for landowners who want to promote wildlife habitat within their planting. In this package you will receive 20 seedlings for \$32 plus tax, 5 each of 4 different species:

### \*Species available for 2025-2026:

- ◆ 5 Persimmon
- ◆ 5 Common Pear
- ◆ 5 American Hazelnut
- ◆ 5 Domestic Apple

**\*Please note\*:** The species provided in the Small Acreage and Wildlife Packages are pending availability from the nursery. If a species listed is unable to be sourced, an alternative providing similar benefits will be selected and substituted.

## Coco Weed Guards

**Please note: the LENRD has limited experience with these weed barrier mats and cannot make any guarantees on performance. The information provided is from the supplier and is based on the anticipated performance. \$47.50 plus tax for a bundle of 25 mats.**

- 60 centimeter diameter (roughly 24 inches) and 1/4" thick
- All natural, biodegradable weed control disc made of compressed coconut fibers
- Provides improved watering efficiency by retaining moisture
- Porous material prevents the buildup of heat experienced with plastic discs
- Anticipated to last 2-3 years before gradually decomposing by year 5-6. Slits around tree to prevent girdling.





## Natural Resources District

1508 Square Turn BLVD  
Norfolk, Nebraska 68701

Phone: 402-371-7313  
E-mail: [lenrd@lenrd.org](mailto:lenrd@lenrd.org)  
[www.lenrd.org](http://www.lenrd.org)

**Nebraska's NRDs . . .**

**Protecting Lives, Protecting**

**Property, Protecting the Future.**



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## Conservation Tree Program

Since 1972, Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts have partnered with landowners to plant over 102 million trees statewide! Conservation trees provide immense benefits to people, wildlife, and the environment. They offer shade, shelter homes, reduce soil erosion, protect crops and livestock, support wildlife by providing food and cover, buffer noise, and add beauty to the landscape.

As windbreaks mature, NRD foresters recommend landowners consider rehabilitating old windbreaks or plan new plantings. The NRD Conservation Tree Program provides an affordable way for landowners to safeguard their property. Our Tree Guy, Todd, is always happy to do site visits to help landowners choose the best tree species for their property and create planting plans. The Lower Elkhorn NRD offers several cost-share programs associated with the Conservation Tree Program and even helps with the planting. An order form for tree and shrub seedlings is attached. The deadline to order is Friday, February 20, 2026.

