

Nemaha Natural Resources District Insight



ANNUAL REPORT

Fall 2006

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

DECEMBER

- 14 NRD Board Meeting, Tecumseh – 7:00 p.m.
- 25 Christmas Holiday, NRD Office Closed

JANUARY

- 1 New Year's Holiday, NRD Office Closed
- 1-15 Steamboat Trace Closed During Rifle Deer Hunting Season
- 11 NRD Board Meeting, Tecumseh – 7:00 p.m.
- 15 Martin Luther King, Jr., Day Holiday, NRD Office Closed
- 23-24 NARD Legislative Conference, Lincoln

FEBRUARY

- 4-8 NACD Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, CA
- 8 NRD Board Meeting, Tecumseh – 7:00 p.m.
- 19 President's Day Holiday, NRD Office Closed
- 21 Southeast Regional Envirothon, Beatrice

NRD Directors Sign Big Muddy Creek Resolution

In the fall of 2006, the Nemaha NRD Board approved a resolution obligating staff time and general funds of \$209,000 to match state and federal grant funds, which are currently being sought to implement land treatment practices designated in the Big Muddy Creek Watershed Work Plan.

The funding status of the two grant applications totaling \$816,000 will be known in the spring of 2007. If these grants are approved, the NRD, Nemaha County, and local landowners would match the grant funds with \$426,000 over a three-year period bringing the total amount of funds available to nearly \$1.25 million.

The goal of this \$1.25 million project is to construct 20 grade stabilization structures and 15 weir structures in the upper one-fifth of this watershed, located near the town of Johnson, Nebraska. Project objectives include the control of streambed and streambank erosion, preventing further damage to public infrastructure and utilities, improving water quality, and preventing the further loss of agricultural lands



This is one example of the erosion caused by Muddy Creek near Johnson, NE.

NeRAIN Volunteers Provide Valuable Rainfall Data

In June the Nemaha NRD held its first training sessions for volunteers who would later make up a network of valuable rain monitors for southeast Nebraska. Our goal was to have at least 60 volunteers from across the District, roughly representing each township in the District. As of September 27, we reached our goal.

If you're wondering just what NeRAIN is all about, it's simply a bunch of folks that are interested in helping track precipitation on a daily basis. A grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust helped with the purchase of special gauges that measure the rainfall down to the one-hundredth of an inch. The data is reported to a statewide clearinghouse that uses it to track weather trends.

The information is available to the public via the Internet. A variety of reports are available from daily rainfall to weekly or monthly reports and from one station, county, NRD, or even throughout the entire state. An easy way to access the site is to

log onto the Nemaha NRD's website, nemahanrd.org, and click on the NeRAIN logo on the front page.

A summary of precipitation reported at the Nemaha NRD's office, compared to normal, is as follows:

Month	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.
Total Precipitation	3.01	4.23	5.53	1.42
Normal	4.64	3.60	3.33	2.25

(in inches)

The dedicated NeRAIN volunteers in the Nemaha NRD have done a great job reporting their rainfall this year, and some may even help track snow this winter too. And we're still looking for a few more volunteers to help track rainfall beginning next spring in the following townships: Belmont and North Branch in Otoe County; Peru and Bedford in Nemaha County; Vesta in Johnson County; Porter, Liberty, Nemaha, and Salem in Richardson County; and Pawnee, Miles, and Clay in Pawnee County. If you're interested, contact Mark McDonald at the Nemaha NRD in Tecumseh (335-3325).



Now is the Time to Order Spring Trees

It's that time again to start thinking about your spring tree planting plans. Whether for a windbreak, wildlife habitat, woodlot, or other planting, it's not too early to get your order in and prepare your planting site. Nemaha NRD staff can provide assistance with planning, ordering, and planting.

If the NRD will be planting your trees, orders must be placed and paid in full no later than December 31. Also, if your ground is currently in sod, it **must** be fall plowed to qualify for planting services.

If you will plant your own trees, orders must be placed and paid in full by March 1, 2007

All seedlings will be available approximately April 1, and planting will begin as soon as ground conditions allow. You, or the ground where your trees will be planted, must reside within the Nemaha NRD to qualify for this program.

To obtain a brochure and/or order form or to request planning assistance, contact the NRD at (402) 335-3325; or check our website at www.nemahanrd.org.

2007 Permits Available for Nemaha NRD Parks

Vehicle entry permits are now available at the Nemaha NRD for the 2007 season at Kirkman's Cove, Iron Horse Trail Lake, and Wirth Brothers Lake. Those who purchased annual permits last year should have received a renewal notice in the mail. The permits are still the same price: \$10 for the annual permit if purchased before April 1 (\$12 after April 1); \$6 for one additional, duplicate permit for an additional vehicle. There are several ways to get your permit for next year:

By Mail – Request an application by phone (402-335-3325), mail (62161 Hwy 136; Tecumseh NE 68450), or email (nrd@nemahanrd.org); or print an application from the NRD website (www.nemahanrd.org). Complete the form, and mail to the NRD with your payment. Your permit(s) will be mailed to you within two weeks (and usually sooner).

In Person – Stop by the Nemaha NRD office during regular business hours (M-F, 8-12, 12:30-4:30); make sure you have your vehicle license number for the application.

At the Parks – Iron collection boxes are available at the parks for you to purchase temporary, two-day permits for \$5. Or you could opt to include the extra payment for an annual permit, initial at the bottom of the envelope, and your annual permit sticker will be mailed to you as soon as possible after the envelopes are collected from the park.

Last year over \$8,200 was collected, and those funds are used for maintenance and improvements at the parks. A new boat dock was installed at Kirkman's Cove last spring, and a new, concrete outhouse is planned for Iron Horse Trail Lake this fall.

Annual Report:----- 2006

Buck and Duck Creek

The past year has been a busy one for the Buck and Duck Watershed project near Peru. Geologic investigation has been completed, which included evaluating soils and geology at both sites to determine what issues will have to be considered as part of the design of both structures. NRCS has also moved ahead with the design of both structures with enough work completed to update dam information and revise permanent pool and flood pool boundaries. The District has also worked with Nemaha County to address impacts to county roads. Efforts are now beginning to secure funding from the federal government to construct these structures. If funding is secured in the federal 2008 budget, the earliest construction could occur is in 2009.

Recreation Areas

The District continues to replace aging facilities at its four recreation areas: Kirkman's Cove, Iron Horse Trail Lake, Wirth Brothers Lake, and Prairie Owl. Some of the improvements included a new floating boat dock at Kirkman's Cove; improving accessibility to a new restroom that was installed in 2005 at Kirkman's Cove; and the District continued its efforts to replace older picnic tables with permanent pedestal tables. Staff is also working on an expansion to the present number of electrical hookups at Kirkman's Cove from 10 to 16 sites. Plans are to have them completed by May, 2007. A new restroom will also be installed at Iron Horse prior to the end of the year.

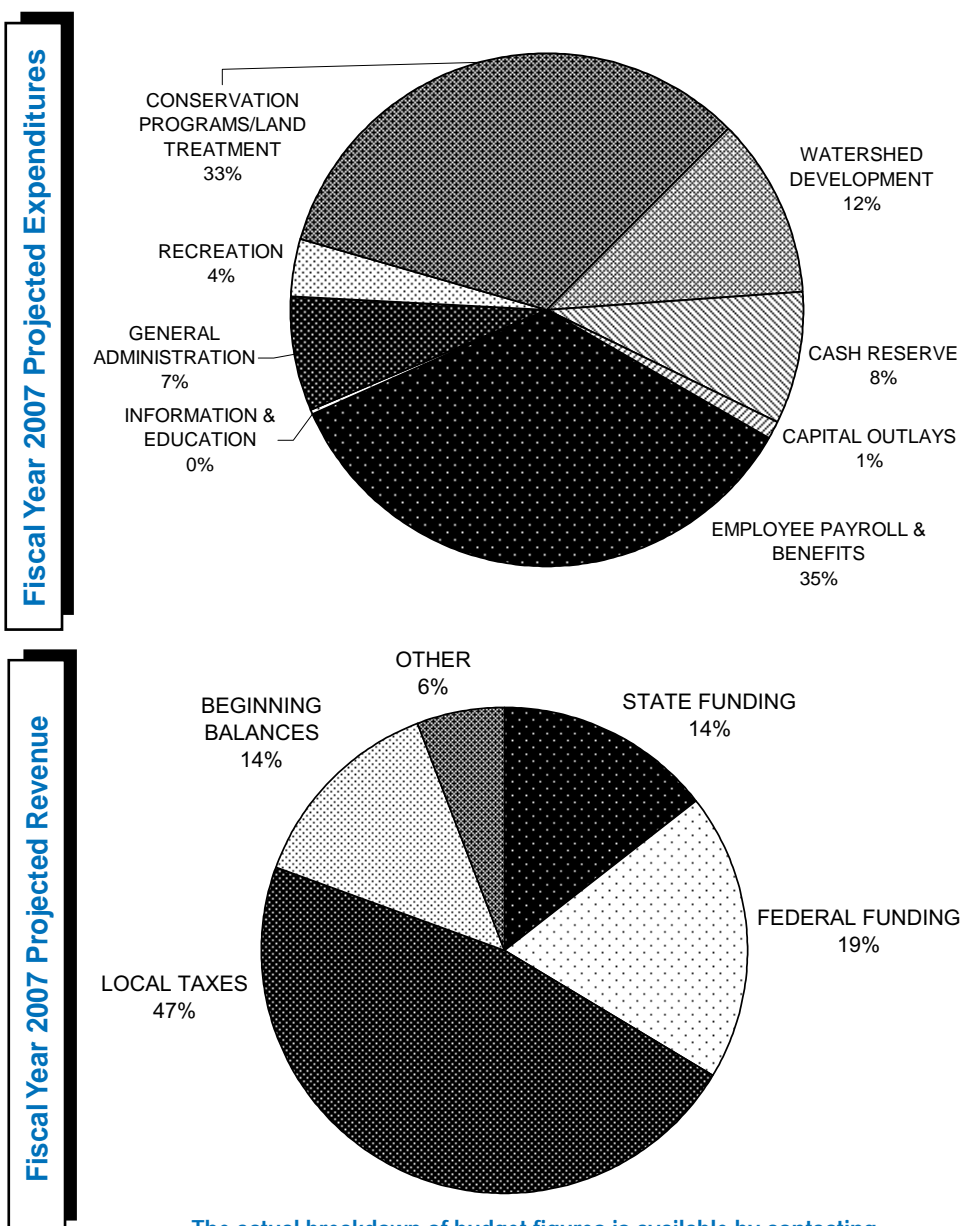
Outstanding cooperation was received from the local sheriff's departments to better enforce park rules and reduce vandalism at District facilities. Vandalism problems were greatly reduced over past years.

Although still a concern, blue-green algae were not as troublesome in 2006. The NRD was forced to restrict water contact activities for two weeks at both Iron Horse and Kirkman's Cove this year. Areas are monitored weekly for the toxic algae during the summer months. Levels surpassed alert status at Iron Horse in late June and Kirkman's Cove in late August and early September.

Budget

Totaling \$2,726,735, the NRD budget saw only a modest increase in 2006. The District board approved funding several activities including improvements to recreation areas; hiring a consultant to assist the District with updating the 20-year old groundwater management plan; completing several dam repair projects; providing cost share on conservation practices in the Iron Horse watershed; and funding was also set aside to continue with efforts in the Muddy Creek Watershed.

Projections For 2006 - 2007



The actual breakdown of budget figures is available by contacting the NNRD Office, Tecumseh, NE.

Water Resources Report 2006

Groundwater Levels

- Continuous groundwater level recording devices located near Firth, Sterling and Cook indicate overall average annual groundwater level declines of 0.88, 0.56 and 0.80 feet, respectively, from October, 2001, to October, 2006. The average decline for the three wells is 0.75 feet.

- A network of 91 wells (irrigation, livestock, domestic and public water supply) located throughout the District were also measured this fall. Fall readings from last year compared to this year indicated an average groundwater level decline of 0.13 feet.

Well Abandonment

- 58 abandoned wells were closed in FY06 with combined state and District cost-share funds totaling \$15,448.

- The District provides 75% cost-share for the decommissioning of abandoned wells with a maximum of \$500 for each smaller diameter, cased type well and \$700 for each larger diameter, hand dug type well. Approval prior to the closure is required, and the work must be conducted by a licensed pump installer or well driller.

- Funds are available – Sign Up Your Unused Well Today!

Well Permits

- In August of 1999 the entire District was designated as a Phase I Groundwater Management Area (GWMA). Phase I controls include obtaining a permit for wells designed to pump greater than 50 gallons per minute prior to construction.

- The District approved 49 permits in 2005 and 119 permits in 2006.

- In May, 2006, the NRD board issued a temporary, two-year suspension to the issuance of well permits for wells which pump greater than 50 gpm. The two-year period was set to allow time for updating the District's Groundwater Management Plan, which will include addressing some localized quantity concerns.

Well Monitoring

- 149 wells (irrigation, domestic & livestock) were sampled this year for nitrate and some for bacteria (domestic wells) also; 102 wells were also tested for pesticides.

- The District is capable of analyzing groundwater wells for nitrate and bacteria and provides this service to residents free of charge. Contact us to have your well tested!

- Additional tests are available from Ward Laboratories of Kearney at varying fees.

Phase II GWMA

- A Phase II GWMA was established in January of 2004 for Northwest Richardson County. The 73 square mile area includes all land east and south of Pawnee and Nemaha Counties, respectively, north of the North Fork of the Big Nemaha River and west of Highway 75.

- Elevated levels of nitrate in the groundwater prompted the designation.
- The District is offering cost-share assistance for soil sampling & complete fertilizer control systems – contact the District office for more information.

- Annual groundwater sampling occurred in September with 25 wells sampled for nitrate-nitrogen averaging 10.24 parts per million, which was down from 10.8 from 27 wells sampled in 2005.

FY 2006 Highlights -----

☑ Following nearly 10 years of deliberation, several public meetings, and much intense discussion, the NRD board voted in March, 2006, to discontinue its involvement in the Pawnee County Lake Project. This project was proposed to construct a 1600+ acre lake and recreation area south of Pawnee City.

☑ A road dam project southwest of Nebraska City was completed in November, 2005 at a total cost of about \$148,000. The NRD contributed \$69,000 to the project with Otoe County picking up the balance.

☑ Two small dams program cost-share projects were finished in June, 2006, for Paul Phillips in Richardson County and Dennis Thomas in Otoe County. A larger dam near Falls City on the Bob Taft property is scheduled for construction in the spring of 2007 along with two other cost-share dams for Bob Brandt and Ken Brinkman, both in Johnson County.

☑ Watershed structures receiving repairs during the past year included Wilson Creek 3-3 and 9-1; Ziegler Creek Z-5-3 and Z-5-1; Brownell 2-3; Upper Big Nemaha G-35; South Fork 3-D; Winnebago-Bean 41-3a; and Upper Little Nemaha 5. Work ranged from repair of wave erosion to beaver dam removal to erosion repair and riprap placement. The District also constructed a berm at Upper Big Nemaha 9-D.

☑ Three urban special projects were completed in the spring of 2006. Norris Public School received \$20,000 toward their outdoor classroom trail project, which also helped replant trees and shrubs destroyed in the 2004 tornado. Another public trail project through the City of Pawnee City finally reached completion in May, 2006, receiving \$20,000 of NRD funds. The 16-block Prairie Hills Trail connects the Prairie Hill Sports Complex with downtown Pawnee City. The City of Syracuse completed a pond restoration project in Williams Park with \$2,989.36 of NRD funds. This project transformed a temporary ice skating pond into a permanent fishing pond. For FY07, the NRD approved a \$1,000 grant to the Palmyra Action Committee for plant identification and improvements in the city park.



These Norris Elementary students enjoy a walk on the trail built through their school yard with NRD Urban Special Project funds.

☑ \$137,487 of State Soil & Water Conservation Program funds coupled with about \$3,217 of NRD funds provided 50% cost-share for:

- 164,447 linear feet of terraces
- 21.53 acres of grass waterways
- 27,398 linear feet of side dikes
- 28,303 linear feet of tile
- 12,225 cubic yards of diversions

The next sign-up will be January 2, 2007, through June 1, 2007, at your local NRCS office.

☑ In November, 2005, the NRD donated its 10-year old ATV to the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission's Conservation Officers to use while patrolling the Steamboat Trace trail.

☑ Regular maintenance kept crews busy on the Steamboat Trace again this year; wind and rain often result in downed trees or displaced rock on the trail. Crews are also assisting a local boy scout who is constructing a memorial along the trail as his Eagle Scout project. Under construction near Peru, this tribute remembers long-time Peru resident and trail enthusiast, Roland Sherman, who passed away earlier this year. Sherman left his mark on the trail, literally, with his many intricate carvings on the stone walls along the trail corridor. He also helped identify some of the native plants along the trail and was always willing to share his insight with trail visitors.

In addition to these activities, though, the District worked more closely with volunteers to help promote the trail. With the passage of Lewis & Clark enactors through the area in September, events were held in Peru and Brownville commemorating the historic journey. Though the weather didn't cooperate, a few people braved the conditions to

see the boats pass by and enjoy the fall colors along the trail.

☑ About 25 people attended a forestry workshop hosted by the NRD on February 2. Participants received information on wildlife effects on trees, insects/disease, programs available, species selection, etc. Nebraska Forest Service and Nebraska Game & Parks Commission personnel assisted with the workshop.

☑ Approximately 33,000 trees and shrubs were distributed and/or planted by the NRD during the spring of 2006.

☑ Over 650 trees were provided to third graders throughout the District in April. Each spring the NRD distributes the trees and provides planting and care information to the youngsters.

☑ In the fall of 2005, the Area Range Judging Contest was held near Unadilla with about 100 youth participating. The NRD also hosted the Area Land Judging Contest near Tecumseh in October, 2006, for 96 students from five schools. Tecumseh High School and Norris High School each qualified a team for the state Envirothon competition held near Hastings in May; the NRD contributed \$100 toward the registration of each team.

☑ Another day of fun and learning was held at Kirkman's Cove in June for about 65 10-12 year olds. The third Watershed of Wonders day camp provided the youngsters with hands-on opportunities to learn more about water and watersheds. Funding was provided in part by the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality.

☑ Two meetings of the National Watershed Coalition were held in Nebraska City in August and September, 2006. NRD staff assisted with the tours and demonstrations held for participants from across the country.

☑ Staff changes were abundant during the past year within the NRCS offices in the Nemaha NRD. Carolee DeVorss, NRD Clerk at the Syracuse office, retired in July after 30 years of service. Cheryl Skinner, Clerk in Pawnee City, also gave up her position after only a year to return to school. Jim Masters was hired to replace Carolee in Syracuse, and Kathy Harlow started in August in Pawnee City. NRCS staff also changed faces this past year with the retirements of Steve Wilson in Falls City, Kent Reiersen in Auburn, and Wes Pope in Tecumseh. Mark Nowack was hired as Resource Conservationist in Falls City; Stephen Kennedy took on that role in Auburn; and Terry Newell moved into the District Conservationist position vacated by Pope in Tecumseh. Robert Rothwell just recently started as the new RC in Pawnee City following Newell's move to Tecumseh. Another unexpected loss was experienced last year with the death of Bob Baum in February. Bob worked for NRCS for many years before retiring and subsequently returning to work part time for the NRCS and NRD.

Watershed Management Projects

Kirkman's Cove

Conservation work within the Kirkman's Cove Watershed area is nearly complete. Two tile jobs remain to be finished before the practice implementation for the project is done. The project's main focus was to reduce the amount of sediment and nutrients entering Kirkman's Cove and to increase the life of the structure by using conservation practices throughout the watershed. Funding for the project was provided through the federal EQIP (NRCS), NDEQ/EPA Section 319, Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nemaha NRD, and the 21 landowners who participated. The project offered cost-share to implement conservation practices such as flood control structures, grade control structures, tile-outlet terraces, cropland to grass incentives, etc. Not including the two pending tile jobs, here is the tally for the work completed:

- 7 flood control structures
- 10 grade stabilization structures
- 1500 acres of tile outlet terraces (includes a small percentage of grade terraces)
 - Equals 328,647 feet or just over 62 miles of terraces built!
 - Tile equals 81,006 feet or more than 15 miles!
- 147 acres of cropland converted to grass

With the help of everyone involved, especially the landowners, this has been a very successful project. The total amount of funding for the project will end up around \$1.5 million, which covers all phases of project implementation.

Iron Horse

The Iron Horse Watershed project is currently very busy with the implementation of conservation practices. This watershed project mirrors the Kirkman's Cove project in that the main focus is to reduce the amount of sediment and nutrients entering Iron Horse lake. Partners and funding are the same: NRCS (EQIP and TSP funds), NDEQ (EPA 319 funds), Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nemaha NRD, and the landowners throughout the watershed. In its second year of implementation, the conservation practices available include those offered through the Kirkman's project along with some additional EQIP practices such as pest and nutrient management, buffer strips, and no-till incentives. Currently two ponds will be built, and already 1,090 acres of tile terraces have been constructed and 100 acres of cropland converted to grass. Much of the work still remains to be completed, and there is also a possibility of approving more contracts for this watershed. Plans are to have all practices in place by the end of 2007.

From the Manager's Desk by Bob Hilske, General Manager

Thanks for 25 Years

It was 1981: President Reagan was shot; NASA launched the first space shuttle; Dolly Parton was singing about the woes of working “9 to 5”; and everyone was watching Dallas on TV. It was about that time the NRD decided that field work was outpacing the present staff, so a decision was made to hire two new, full-time employees. They didn’t need rocket scientists, just someone that could help with dam maintenance, plant trees, and accompany the manager on late night meetings. I’m sure the office was overwhelmed with applications; who wouldn’t want a chance to work hard for minimum wage? How many applications were actually received has long been forgotten, but legend has it that only two men were foolish enough to take the job – Vernon and Mark. Vern was a sports superstar at Elk Creek High School. “They retired all my jerseys,” he brags, failing to recall they really closed the school. Mark claims to be a star but in what field is still unknown, although he is said to be second to none when it comes to weeding bean fields. The one thing neither of them realized was that when they took the job they signed a lifetime contract.

Twenty-five years later they are still working for the NRD. In that time they have worn out three managers (not counting the present one), planted thousands of trees, seeded hundreds of acres of grass, and still come back for more. Sometimes it isn’t much fun when the equipment breaks down, an upset landowner yells at you, or you’re stuck in a riser with an angry beaver. Their quarter century of service to the NRD goes beyond punching in the time clock and putting in eight hours. They know where almost every dam is in the NRD, know about every inch of the Steamboat Trace, and are on a first-name basis with many landowners in the District. They have learned some valuable life lessons along the way too such as you don’t put gasoline into a diesel truck, or it’s a good idea to strap down a piano when hauling it around.

Recently we honored both Vernon and Mark for their 25 years of service to the NRD. For their service they really didn’t receive much, just a heartfelt thank-you and a small gift. Hopefully their real reward is the many work related accomplishments they have had, the landowners they have helped, and the staff they have worked with. It would be nice to think that they could offer the NRD another 25 years, but I’m not sure the Scooter Store has a power chair that comes with an attachment for spraying weeds on dams.



NRD Manager Bob Hilske (left in each photo) congratulates Vernon (Junior) Speers and Mark McDonald on 25 years of service to the Nemaha NRD.

NEMAHA NRD STAFF

- Bob Hilske, Manager
- Scott Nelson, Assistant Manager
- Jane Kuhl, Administrative Assistant
- Artis Fisher, Business Assistant
- Allison Caspers,
Administrative Secretary
- Lisa Bartels, Secretary
- Chuck Wingert,
Water Resources Manager
- Charlie Pierce,
Water Resources Technician
- Steve Bartels, Field Representative
- Mark McDonald, Field Representative
- Vernon Speers, Jr., Field Representative
- Aaron Stalder, Resources Specialist
- Tomas Chalé Aké, Projects Crew Leader
- Shawn Kreienhop,
Watershed Project Coordinator

NRD STAFF IN NRCS OFFICES

- Deb Kreienhop, Auburn
- Glenda Bates, Tecumseh
- Jim Masters, Syracuse
- Lori Foster, Falls City
- Kathy Harlow, Pawnee City

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- John Albrecht, Nebraska City
- Jeff Crunk, Nebraska City
- Orval Gigstad, Syracuse
- Ted Godemann, Falls City (**Vice-Chair**)
- Ron Heskett, Nemaha
- David Hunzeker, Humboldt
- Scott Kudrna, Auburn
(**Secretary-Treasurer**)
- Roland Meyer, Palmyra
- Dave Neddenriep, Johnson
- Gerald Royal, Palmyra
- Jim Rush, Tecumseh
- Steven Sherrow, Nebraska City
- Don Siske, Table Rock
- Mike Speece, Auburn
- Charles Starr, Bennet
- J. Duane Sugden, Sterling
- Bruce Walker, Falls City
- Dan Watermeier, Syracuse
- Paul Weber, Firth
- Tom White, Falls City
- Jim Wirth, Nebraska City (**Chair**)

Election 2006 Showed Some Mixed Results

The 2006 general election showed some mixed results in the Nemaha NRD. Though most races featured incumbents in uncontested races, at least two races appeared to be contested. In the at-large position, Lisa Beethe of Elk Creek defeated incumbent, Gerald Royal from Palmyra, in the only race that was voted upon by all registered voters within the District.

In Subdistrict 6, the two candidates listed on the ballot were Jim Rush, incumbent, and Ken Brinkman, both of Tecumseh. And while it appeared Brinkman may have defeated Rush in the election, the end result is not that clear. Unfortunately, after filing to run for the position last spring, it was discovered that Brinkman actually lives on the wrong side of the road and, therefore, in Subdistrict 5. His name, however, was not removed from the ballot in time for the general election. So while he may have garnered more votes, he is not eligible to fill the position. In January, when Rush’s current term ends, the NRD board must declare the seat vacant and appoint someone to fill it.

Directors will take their oath of office at the January 11, 2007, board meeting and serve four-year terms.

Final, unofficial tally of votes for all the positions on the Nemaha NRD board are as follows:

Subdistrict (Counties Included)	Candidate	Total Votes (Unofficial)
1 (Gage, Lancaster, Otoe)	Paul Weber	1432
2 (Cass, Otoe)	Dan Watermeier	1470
3 (Otoe)	Jim Wirth	1244
4 (Otoe)	John Albrecht	787
5 (Johnson, Otoe)	Duane Sugden	1342
6 (Johnson, Nemaha)	Ken Brinkman	840
6 (Johnson, Nemaha)	Jim Rush	753
7 (Nemaha)	Scott Kudrna	1255
8 (Johnson, Nemaha, Pawnee, Richardson)	Don Siske	1474
9 (Nemaha, Richardson)	Ron Heskett	1099
10 (Richardson)	Bruce Walker	1359
At Large (All)	Lisa Beethe	7064
At Large (All)	Gerald Royal	5697

NEMAHA NRD OFFICE:



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The Nemaha NRD's *Insight* is a publication of the Nemaha Natural Resources District. Requests to be placed upon the *Insight* mailing list and/or comments regarding information in this publication should be directed to Jane Kuhl, Administrative Assistant, at the above address.