Nemaha Natural Resources District Lusight

ANNUAL REPORT

2016

General Election Results in Board Vacancies

No new candidates were in the running for any of the 10 seats up for election in November. However, only eight of the ten incumbents chose to run again resulting in two vacancies on the 21-member board. Directors Steve Sugden, Adams, and Charles Duryea, Humboldt, were recognized by their peers on the board during their last meeting on December 8. Both served eight years on the board, Sugden representing Subdistrict 1 and Duryea in Subdistrict 8.

Applications are now being accepted for someone to fill these vacancies with the board to consider them at their February 9 meeting. Subdistrict 1 includes the area of Gage County within the Nemaha NRD as well as much of the Lancaster County section. Subdistrict 8 includes all of the Pawnee County area in the District as well as areas of western Richardson and southwestern Johnson Counties. Terms will only last two years for these spots before they go back up for election to fill out their remaining two years. Directors receive compensation for travel expenses as well as a \$65 per diem. Anyone interested may submit a letter to the NRD office at Tecumseh.

Steve Sugden (L) and Charles Duryea (R) received engraved plaques honoring their eight years of service on the NRD board.



Welcome to the Future

Beginning in February, 2017, the Nemaha NRD will accept credit card payments! Payments via Visa, MasterCard, or Discover will be accepted online or in person at our office for tree orders, park permits, and other permits and fees.

We're launching a new website as well which will include a mobile friendly version. Watch for more details about these new services on our website (www.nemahanrd.org) or our Facebook page (search Nemaha **Natural Resources District).**

Upcoming Important Dates to Remember:

March 10: Chemigation Training/Certification Session @ NNRD, 9:00-12:00. Contact Randy Pryor @ Saline County Extension (402-821-2151) for more information and materials

March 20: The deadline to order trees has been extended to March 20 (only trees you plant; NRD planting service deadline was January 31). Check our website or contact the office to find out what species are still available; we have conifers, shrubs, and deciduous varieties. You must order in lots of 25/species, and all varieties cost \$1.00 each, plus tax/handling charges. Advance payment is required, and trees will be available to pick up at one of five locations throughout the District sometime in April.

April 1: If you want a vehicle permit for Kirkman's Cove/Iron Horse Trail Lake/Wirth Brothers Lake, the \$10 annual permit discount ends April 1. After that date you'll pay \$12 for an annual permit. Applications are available on our website or by contacting our office.

June 1: Applications for Soil & Water Conservation Program (SWCP) funds may be submitted anytime now thru June 1 at your



It's never too late to start a windbreak for those cold winter

local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office. This program provides funds for work such as terraces, waterways, tile, diversions, grassland or tree plantings, and planned grazing systems.

that Dam? Who Owns

So you are driving around southeast Nebraska and notice a small, five-acre reservoir in a field and wonder who owns it. The answer is, it depends. Since the late 1950s numerous flood control and grade stabilization structures have been built by the NRD or its predecessors using federal or state grant funds. Most of these structures were built by acquiring easements from the landowner. This means the property stays under the ownership of the landowner, but the NRD has the right to operate and maintain the dam as well as store water. Although the NRD does not own the land, the State considers the District as the "owner" of the dam and reservoir. Generally, the landowner can use the property however they want so long as they do not jeopardize the safe operation of the dam and reservoir. Easements are usually perpetual and stay with the ground if all or a portion is sold. In many cases a dam and reservoir that fall in this category may include multiple landowners who have granted easements to the NRD.

Many dams in southeast Nebraska were constructed by landowners with some type of technical or financial assistance from the NRD or NRCS. Since these are dams built on behalf of the landowner, no land is acquired; and the landowner is considered as the owner of the dam by the State and is responsible for all maintenance and operation of the dam. In most cases there is an agreement with the landowner that the structure be left in place for a period of time (usually 25 years) to

protect the government's investment in the construction of the structure. Often structures in this category involve only one landowner.

Other small dams were built by private landowners without any outside assistance which are the responsibility of that landowner to operate and maintain. These dams are usually limited to one landowner

In all cases cited above, the property owner has the right to control who accesses the land and reservoir. Permission is required to use the lake just as you would obtain for hunting on the ground. The purpose and benefit provided to the public by these structures is flood control and/or grade stabilization, so there was never any requirement that they be open to the public.

The NRD does own the property associated with our five recreation areas. A portion of the land comprising Wirth Brothers Lake is also owned by the Wirth Brothers Foundation, and the NRD has an agreement with the Foundation to operate it for public use. The NRD does all the maintenance on these structures.

Anyone having questions about a structure in the NRD is welcome to contact the District. Understanding ownership and maintenance responsibilities is particularly important if you are planning to purchase property that has a structure on it. Many realtors contact the NRD to get information on a dam, but some do not.

CALENDAR **OF EVENTS**



FEBRUARY

- NNRD Board Meeting,
- Tecumseh (7:00 p.m.)
- Presidents Day Holiday, **NNRD Office Closed**
- NRD Water Programs Conference, Kearney

MARCH

- **Deadline for Ordering NRD Trees**
- Nebraska's 150th Birthday
- Water Celebration for 5th Graders 7-8 @ Peru State College
- NNRD Board Meeting, Tecumseh (7:00 p.m.)
- **Chemigation Training** @ NNRD Office
- 18-22 NARD Washington, DC, Conference

APRIL

- **Deadline for Purchasing Discounted NNRD Park Permits**
- NNRD Board Meeting, Tecumseh (8:00 p.m.)
- 22 **Earth Day**
- Nebraska Envirothon, 26 **Nebraska City**
- 28 **Arbor Day**
- 29 NARD 5k/1-Mile Run, Lincoln

Annual Report:----

2016 Highlights

Buck and Duck Creek Project:

After many years of planning, design, and construction, the Duck Creek dam was completed in early 2016. This wraps up the implementation of the Buck and Duck Creek Watershed plan, which was discussed as far back as the 1960s. The plan proposed the construction of two dams to help protect the Peru Bottoms area from flooding and sedimentation, and the first structure on Buck Creek was completed in 2012. The 62-acre Duck Creek reservoir has begun filling, and it should be at normal operating pool in spring, 2017.

Now the focus is on development of the recreation area at the Duck Creek site. Phase 1 of the recreation development was completed in fall, 2016, with the construction of 7,600 feet of rocked park roads, various parking areas, and 28 RV pads all which eventually will have electricity. The cost to complete this phase was \$573,000. Approximately 40% of the Phase 1 cost will be covered by Federal Sport Fish Restoration Grand funds provided through the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the balance will be split between the NRD and State Resources Development Funds.

Over the next six months, the NRD plans to install the water and electricity needed for the park. Then the final phase should be completed by fall, 2017, and will include amenities such as picnic shelters, playground equipment, and restrooms. The area will officially be open for the 2018 recreation season; however, some limited use may be allowed in late 2017 depending on the construction schedule. Until the area is open, no public use of the lake or recreation area is allowed; and gates to the main entrances will remain locked.

In addition to the construction of the dams, the NRD has been working with Nemaha County to upgrade county roads impacted by the structures. Work on 736 Road which crosses the Duck Creek reservoir was completed in the spring, 2016; and the road work associated with the Buck Creek dam should be completed in the next few months.

Watershed Repair:

The District is responsible for operating and maintaining over 350 watershed dams. In 2016 the District repaired 19 dams at a cost of \$186,000.

Rehabilitation of Upper Big Nemaha 25-C (Doctor's Lake near Adams):

Although behind schedule, this project is planned to be completed by the end of 2018. Federal rehabilitation funds will pay for 65% of the cost to construct a large, concrete chute through the center of this high hazard dam. Federal engineers have determined that the original design of the structure does not meet current safety standards for safely passing a maximum probable precipitation event, which is 24 inches of rain in a 24-hour period. The NRD plans to begin land right negotiations soon with a goal of completing negotiations by the end of March, 2017.

Middle Big Nemaha Watershed:

The Middle Big Nemaha Watershed includes the communities of Tecumseh, St. Mary, Crab Orchard, Vesta, and Elk Creek. A watershed plan completed by the federal government in 1987 called for the construction of eight large watershed dams for flood control, which were completed from 1994 through 2004. After completion of federal flood control projects, a 10-year timeframe is allowed to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan and to determine if additional flood control dams are needed. This past year the District accepted a recommendation by the federal government that this watershed plan be considered complete and that the plan be officially closed out.



Caption: Public signing of Middle Big Nemaha Watershed Plan, 9-24-87; Pictured are seated, L-R: James T. Truscott, NRD Director; Ron Hendricks, NRCS State Conservationist; Lou Glathar, NRD Director; standing, L-R: Dayle Williamson, Nebraska Natural Resources Commission; Troy Walters, Johnson County Commissioner; Lavern Bartels, Tecumseh Mayor.

Small Dams Program:

This past summer the District provided \$25,000 in cost share funds towards the construction of a small dam on property owned by Klaus Hartmann located five miles south of Vesta in the Turkey Creek Watershed. The completed pond consists of 17 surface acres, is 22 feet deep, and provides flood control to a downstream county road. In addition to District cost share funds, the landowner contributed \$75,000 of his own money to complete this \$100,000 project.

Recreation:

Visits to the NRD's four public recreation areas have increased dramatically over the past few years. In 2016 the NRD sold 1,161 annual vehicle permits, an 11% increase over 2015. This was the second consecutive year in which permit sales exceeded 1,000.

Yearly Sales of Annual I	Park Permits
2005 – 2011 (average)	689
2012	850
2013	828
2014	859
2015	1,046
2016	1,161

The District continues to make improvements to facilities to help provide a better experience for users. This past year the NRD replaced the boat dock at Kirkman's Cove with a new design which will hopefully make the dock more stable than the old one. The loop trail completed at Iron Horse Trail Lake in 2016 allows users to walk around the entire lake including the east side. The east side of the lake includes shoreline angler access as well as a primitive tent camping area.

Blue green algae continues to be a problem at Iron Horse and Kirkman's Cove with the lakes on health alert for 13 and 9 weeks, respectively. It was particularly prevalent this summer, perhaps due to warm weather and limited wind. Blue green algae has become a problem nationwide, and accelerated efforts to monitor waterbodies has made people more aware of the potential risks to humans and animals. The beaches at three of the parks were sampled weekly during the recreation season for both toxic algae and E. coli. Kirkman's Cove tested high for E. coli five different weeks, Wirth Brothers for two weeks, and Iron Horse once.

Steamboat Trace Trail

This past fall Kreifels Conservation from Nebraska City completed a trail upgrade to a stretch of the trail starting two miles north of Brownville at Weldon Creek and continuing north two miles to Honey Creek. Major drainage improvements were completed as well as concreting over 1,000 feet of the existing limestone trail. A federal Recreational Trails Program grant administered by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission paid for 80% of this project.

Conservation Assistance:

\$173,562 of Nebraska Soil & Water Conservation Program (SWCP) funds provided up to 50% cost-share for:

157,822 linear feet of terraces

1.67 acres of grass waterways

37,514 linear feet of tile

1,600 cu. yards of diversions

900 linear feet of tree plantings

5.0 acres of planned grazing system or grass seeding

Beginning in July, 2016, the maximum cost-share allowance was increased to \$8,000/landowner. The sign-up for the next fiscal year is going on now through June 1 at your local NRCS office.

Nebraska Buffer Strip Program

Just over 1,000 acres are currently enrolled in the Nebraska Buffer Strip Program within the Nemaha NRD. This program provides annual payments for grass filter strips or riparian forest buffers along vulnerable surface water resources. Funding comes from a fee assessed on pesticides registered for sale in Nebraska. Applications may be completed anytime at your local NRCS office, and funds are currently available; so sign up today!

Trees & Grass Drilling Programs:

Tree sales were about the same as last year with just under 11,000 seedlings sold. Of those the NRD's tree crew planted about 5,000 at 14 different sites; another 2,000 were planted on a mitigation site.

Since 1998 the NRD has provided no-till grassland drilling services to hundreds of district landowners and has planted over 3,500 acres of land to native grasses and legumes. Recently the District was awarded a grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust that paid for 75% of the cost of replacing our existing 1998, 8-foot Tye drill with a brand new 8-foot Truax drill. Over 100 acres were drilled last fall with the new drill, and we are expecting to provide services to a similar amount of land this coming spring. Interested landowners are encouraged to contact the District for program details.

Information & Education:

Activities that the Nemaha NRD conducted or participated in during 2016:

- Water Celebration held each March at Peru State College, 400 fifth graders enjoyed a day full of water activities presented by a variety of agencies and volunteers
- Third Grade Plant-A-Tree –in April 540 trees were distributed to third graders at 12 schools; presentations about the importance of trees and how to plant and care for their trees were also provided to each class
- Envirothon This high school competition tests teams of five on seven different natural resources related categories. Teams from across the state compete at regional contests with 14 advancing to the State contest, which was held in Nebraska City in 2016.
- On June 15 Kirkman's Cove was the site of our biannual day camp, Watershed of Wonders. Over 60 children took part in hands-on activities including archery, water rockets, fishing, and a boat ride.
- NRD staff assisted with the Farm Safety Day in Tecumseh in April and Husker Harvest Days in September.
- Nearly 170 high school students from 11 area schools participated in the southeast area land judging contest held in Johnson County in October. NRD and NRCS staff combined to host the event that tests FFA members on soil characteristics and land use

FFA students examine the soils in one of four pits during the 2016 area land judging contest.



- Awards Ken Malone, Vo-Ag Instructor at Palmyra High School, was chosen as the 2016 Outstanding Educator by the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts. The Nemaha NRD nominated Malone largely because of his long history of support for FFA programs and specifically his efforts as coordinator of the statewide land judging committee.
- Staff Service NRD staff members honored in 2016 for their years of service included: Vernon (Junior) Speers & Mark McDonald-35 years; Scott Nelson-15 years; Kathy Harlow & Doug Schmidt-10 years; Kim Zech-5 years.



Ken Malone addresses the crowd at the NARD Annual Conference in September, 2016, during presentation of the Outstanding Educator Award

Urban Special Projects:

In May of 2016 four projects were approved for matching funds during FY17 with final deadlines of June, 2017.

- Johnson-Brock Public School Courtyard outdoor classroom (\$24,400)
- Auburn Public School Agricultural greenhouse (\$25,000)
- Lewiston Consolidated School Butterfly garden/arboretum (\$1,250)
- Village of Shubert Butterfly garden (\$465)

Pre-applications are due by February 1 each year in order to be considered for funding in the following fiscal year that begins July 1. Funding is limited to public entities, specific priorities, and a maximum of \$25,000/entity.

Water Resources Report FY2016

Groundwater Management

Water wells that are designed to pump greater than 50 gallons per minute (gpm) require an approved well permit from the NNRD prior to construction. A ranking system was developed to assist in evaluating the permits for approval, and a well driller's testhole log must accompany the permit application. (Testhole drilling does not require a permit; however, anyone considering a high capacity well is encouraged to call or stop in the office prior for additional information and groundwater availability.) Well permit applications must be received by the 1st Thursday of each month in order to be approved by the NRD Board at their monthly meeting held the 2nd Thursday of each month. Upon receiving approval, the applicant has one year in which to have the well constructed before the permit expires. A flowmeter is required to be installed on any new or replacement wells.

In 2016 a total of 28 well permits for irrigation were approved. A minimum score of 201 points is needed to receive approval.

In response to potential interference between irrigation, public water supply, and domestic/livestock wells, the Board of Directors approved in September, 2016, to temporarily increase the number of points needed to 300 for any well permit applications received for wells located in Richardson County east of US Highway 75, south of the Nemaha/Richardson County line, west of the Missouri River and north of 705 Road.

A complete copy of the District's Groundwater Management Plan and associated Rules and Regulations and ranking system scoring is available upon request and can be found on the District website.

Groundwater Levels

A network of 136 wells (irrigation, livestock, domestic and public water supply) located throughout the District were measured in the spring and fall of 2014 and 2015. A comparison of the spring readings indicated a median groundwater rise of 1.95 feet, and the fall readings indicated a median groundwater rise of 0.04 feet.

• Local area median rises and declines from the October, 2015, to October, 2016, measurements were as follows:

 Barada -0.17'
 Firth +0.77'
 Eagle -1.62'

 Sterling North -0.03'
 Burr +0.14'
 Talmage -0.15'

 Humboldt -0.31'
 Sterling South +0.54'
 Cook -0.11'

 Adams -0.01'
 Auburn +1.31'
 Brock -1.07'

Well Abandonment

The District provides 75% cost-share for the proper 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 contractor. Funds are available and applications accepted anytime!

A total of 45 abandoned wells were decommissioned this fiscal year totaling \$17,635 in payments. Since the program's inception in 1994, the District has helped fund the closure of over 1,300 wells. Statewide NRD's have provided cost-share for the closure of over 20,100 wells. Part of the funding is provided annually by the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources based upon the amount of money received from well registration fees. Each NRD is allocated a percentage of the funds based upon the District's average number of wells decommissioned in the previous three years.

Phase II Groundwater Quality Management Area

A Phase II GWQMA was established in January of 2004 for northwest Richardson County due to elevated levels of nitrate-nitrogen in the groundwater. 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. Within this area cost-share assistance is available for soil sampling & complete fertilizer control systems.

- Annual groundwater sampling occurred in July and August with 29 domestic wells and 9 irrigation wells sampled for nitrate-nitrogen averaging 8.6 parts per million (ppm), which is up from 7.3 ppm measured last year.
- Throughout the District 189 wells (118 irrigation, 59 domestic, & 12 monitoring) were sampled and analyzed for the nitrate-nitrogen concentration averaging 8.1 ppm for the domestic wells, 3.9 ppm for the irrigation wells, 1.8 for the monitoring wells, and 5.1 ppm overall. Of the samples collected, 156 were also analyzed for atrazine with 40 of the samples exceeding the minimum detection limit at or above 0.05 parts per billion (ppb); however, none exceeded the 3 parts per billion (ppb) maximum contaminant level (MCL) set by US EPA. The MCL for nitrate nitrogen is 10 ppm.

Irrigation Well Registrations

Unregistered irrigation wells are considered "illegal wells" per State Statutes and could ultimately be required to cease pumping or to be decommissioned. Registration of irrigation wells has been required since 1957. District staff can assist you with looking up the information about your well, or you can log on to the Nebraska Department of Natural Resource's website at http://dnr.ne.gov/gwr/groundwaterwelldata and search by several methods such as owner name, legal location, county, or NRD. This site may also be used to search for registered livestock, domestic, and all other type wells. If you discover that your irrigation well(s) is not registered, is listed in a previous owner's name, or is not shown to be in the correct location, District staff can assist you with gathering the information needed for completion of the form(s). Owner name changes and location updates are free of charge. Also, there are NO PENALTIES to the well owner for registering a well late other than the standard registration fee. Registering your well helps to protect it from encroachment of other proposed, high-capacity wells. There are no fees associated with changing or updating well ownership information.

Chemigation

- This year the District received 235 permit applications and inspected 156 systems for safety equipment compliance. Of the 235 applications received, 192 were renewals, 42 were new, & 1 emergency permit.
- Applicator certification is required prior to chemigating. Training sessions are held throughout the state each winter/early spring. The District will host a training session at the NRD Office in Tecumseh on Friday March 10, 9:00-noon. The training will be proctored by Randy Pryor, Saline County Extension Agent (402) 821-2151. Contact the NRD or log on to www.deq.state.ne.us/ and click on Licenses & Certification dropdown box located on the top right center of the page then click Chemigation for a current list of training dates, locations, and training materials. Applicators can also find their certification number and expiration year.

High Capacity Flow Meter & Irrigation Management Cost-Share Program

The District has a cost-share program for flow meters for water wells within the District pumping greater than 50 gpm. The program covers 50% of the cost of a new flow meter up to a maximum of \$500. Cost-share is also available for irrigation management equipment including soil moisture sensors, sensor readers, and atmometers (evapotranspiration gages). The program covers 50% of the cost of the equipment up to a maximum of \$300. Approval is required prior to purchase for both programs. Contact the office for more information or log-on to our website and download the fillable applications. The District is also certified to conduct repairs and general maintenance on flow meters on a fee basis for parts and labor.

• 149 flowmeters were read this fall indicating an average of 4.30 inches of water was applied per acre on approximately 18,818 acres.

FISCAL YEAR 2016 - 2017 PROJECTIONS

NRD board members successfully lowered the FY17 budget nearly 25 percent which allowed them to avoid any increases in the property tax request. Revenues switched from a federal focus to an emphasis on state funds. Completion of the recreation facilities for the Duck Creek project are responsible for a significant share of the

budget. However, watershed rehabilitation and water quality and quantity studies and programs also account for some of the main expenses. Other major projects include completion of improvements on two miles of the Steamboat Trace, urban cost-share projects, and general watershed maintenance and repair.

Here's a brief description of the major items included in this year's budget:

Projected Expenditures

Watershed & Flood Control Projects: \$882,955

Buck Creek Road Improvement

Watershed Rehabilitation (Upper Big Nemaha 25-C)

Watershed Structure Repair/Maintenance

Recreation: \$1,474,944

Duck Creek Recreation Development (interior roads, parking, camping pads, electricity, water supply, etc.)

Park Maintenance (rock, sand, tables, grills, utilities, mow-

Steamboat Trace trail resurfacing/repair & maintenance

Personnel & Director Expenses: \$1,249,438 **General Operation & Administration: \$179,975**

Utilities, vehicle & equipment expenses, property maintenance, supplies, insurance, dues, postage, etc.

Conservation Assistance: \$223,030

Tree Planting & Grass Drilling Nebraska Buffer Strip Program Soil & Water Conservation Program **Urban Special Projects**

Small Dams Cost-Share Program

Water Quality/Quantity: \$258,138

Groundwater & Surface Water Monitoring Well Abandonment

Chemigation Flow Meter & Irrigation Management Cost-Share

Basin Planning/Groundwater Consulting

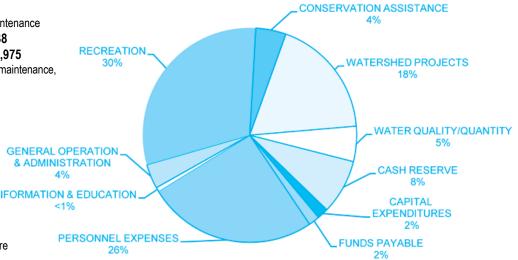
Capital Expenditures: \$82,018

Building loan payment & interest, no-till drill, loader for Case tractor (excludes

recreation improvements) Information & Education: \$28,640

Awards, youth & education programs, newsletter & website, advertising, etc.

Funds Payable: \$80,898 Cash Reserve: \$400,000



Projected Revenue



Watershed Rehabilitation/Dam Assessments (NRCS) Nemaha Basin Water Quality Plan (EPA)

State Grants & Funds: \$1.021.297

Nebraska Game & Parks: Duck Creek Recreation; Steamboat Trace Trail Improvement Nebraska Resource Development Fund: Duck Creek Recreation

Nebraska Department of Agriculture: Nebraska Buffer Strip Program Nebraska Environmental Trust: No-Till Drill

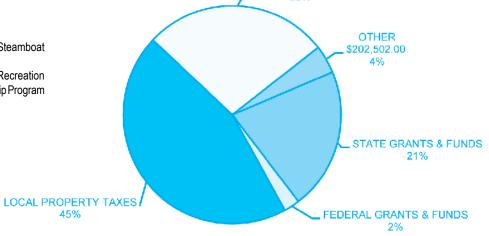
State Water Quality Funds

Local Property Taxes: \$2,189,521

Cash On Hand & Funds Receivable: \$1,332,846

Other: \$202,502

Landowner Share of Project Costs (Duck Creek road project; small dams) Tree sales & planting services Park Permits & Electrical Hookup Fees



CASH ON HAND

NEMAHA NRD STAFF

Bob Hilske, Manager Scott Nelson, Assistant Manager Jane Kuhl, Administrative Assistant Karen Mahonev.

Administrative Assistant 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, Field Technician Ken Hatten.

Land & Water Resources Assistant Phil Vance, Summer Maintenance Doug Schmidt, Summer Maintenance Micah Scholl, Summer Maintenance

NRD STAFF IN NRCS OFFICES

Alice Alexander, Auburn Glenda Bates, Tecumseh Kim Zech, Syracuse Monica Dishong, Falls City Kathy Harlow, Pawnee City

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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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 or at nnrd@ nemahanrd.org.