



# Annual Report

2009

*“Making the Sandhills a Better Life”*

## Sandhills RC&D Partners with the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition

The Sandhills RC&D adopted a project to work cooperatively with the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition (NGLC) in their efforts to assist Nebraska’s private grassland managers in the application of long-term invasive plant management. This project will help land managers protect and restore ecological balance to Nebraska grasslands through tried and proven grazing practices as well as innovative strategies that promote healthy grasslands.

Using grant funds administered by the Sandhills RC&D, the NGLC contracted with a program manager and two Range Technicians to implement a statewide rangeland monitoring program. Funded by the Nebraska Environmental Trust and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service of Nebraska, the NGLC Rangeland Monitoring Program provides assistance to landowners and managers in identifying grazing management goals and implementing a monitoring system to measure change.

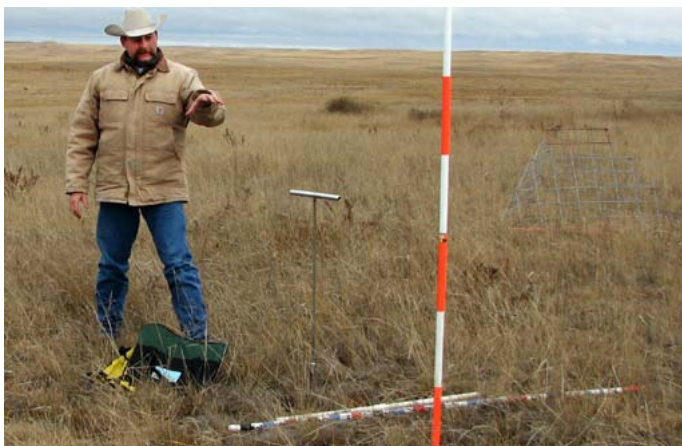
The monitoring program provides participants an initial on-site consultation and training session with a rangeland technician who will provide assistance in developing a monitoring

plan, establishing one monitoring site and collecting samples. Participants also receive a rangeland monitoring kit, consisting of grass shears, scale, tape measure, clipping frame and more, to help monitor rangeland health.



As part of enrollment, participants agree to share their knowledge and experience and help the program grow by committing to help one additional rancher or landowner in their region set up a similar monitoring program.

The Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition Rangeland Monitoring Program is available to all Nebraska grazing lands managers for a nominal cost of \$25.



*Nebraska Grazing Land Coalition Range Tech Kort Kemp demonstrates rangeland monitoring methods.*

## Grant Writing Workshops

As a strategy to strengthen community development capacity, Sandhills RC&D partnered with Mid-Plains Community College to host “Zero to Grant Proposal in 2 Weeks”, a grant writing course on November 2-11 2009. Sandhills RC&D office served as a distance learning



*The mission of the Sandhills RC&D is to create an environment where all the citizens of the region work together to revitalize the rural economy, enhance and protect the natural resources, improve community infrastructure, and improve and increase tourism opportunities.*

location for the workshops. Participants were guided step-by-step through the process of researching potential funders to the completion of a proposal package. Participants came to the workshop with a project idea in hand and had the potential to leave the last day of the workshop with a general proposal for their project. By providing grant writing training to the RC&D area, Sandhills RC&D continues to increase community capacity to develop local projects with grant assistance from a variety of sources.

### Housing Rehabilitation Program Continues

The Sandhills RC&D is pleased to serve as a regional housing resource provider and continues to offer funds for the rehabilitation of owner-occupied houses. When the Sandhills RC&D began its planning for this housing rehabilitation program, the long-term goal was to make the funds available to all areas of the six target counties. This project initially started in three communities, but over the past 3 years it has expanded to cover all areas in the six counties of Thomas, Hooker, Grant, Arthur, McPherson and Logan.



Since the beginning of this project in 2005, the Sandhills RC&D has been awarded \$500,000 for the Nebraska Affordable Housing Program through the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. Additional funding is available for more rehab project homes and the program administrators are taking applications in the expanded service area.

### Range Camp 2009—The 46th Nebraska Range Youth Camp

The Society For Range Management - Nebraska Section's 46th Annual Range Youth Camp was held June 8 - 12, 2009 at the Nebraska State 4-H Camp, located in the Nebraska National Forest near Halsey, Nebraska. Thirty-two high school students

from across Nebraska participated in this weeklong educational activity along with nine adult sponsors.

The Camp is a blend of educational and recreational activities, with the primary emphasis being on Range, Livestock and Ranch Management. Each camper receives a notebook of reference materials as well as priceless experience coming from both the classroom and the field. This premier Section Activity is successful because of the long-term support from professionals involved in rangeland management.

Financial support for this year's camp includes new support from Sandhills RC&D/Virginia Smith Charitable Trust. The Sandhills Task Force continues to be an invaluable sponsor and supporter of the camp and the Nebraska Grazing Coalition has returned as a sponsor of this Camp in 2009.



### *Sandhills RC&D*

#### *Active and Ongoing Projects for 2009*

*Housing Rehabilitation Phase IV  
Platte River Restoration  
Hooker County Tourism Pilot  
No-till Farming Outreach  
Pioneer Memorial Rest Home Improvements  
Mullen Library Improvements  
Sandhills Journey Byway Promotion  
Range Youth Camp  
Mullen Community Building  
Growing Rural Generations  
Agri-Tourism Workshop  
Youth Leadership Seminars  
Business Development Outreach  
Aronia Berry Feasibility  
Upper Loup NRD Recycling Project*

**Sandhills RC&D**

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**We are private citizens,  
 doing public good in your  
 neighborhood!**



*Serving the Nebraska Counties of  
 Arthur, Grant, Hooker, Keith  
 Lincoln, Logan, McPherson, & Thomas*

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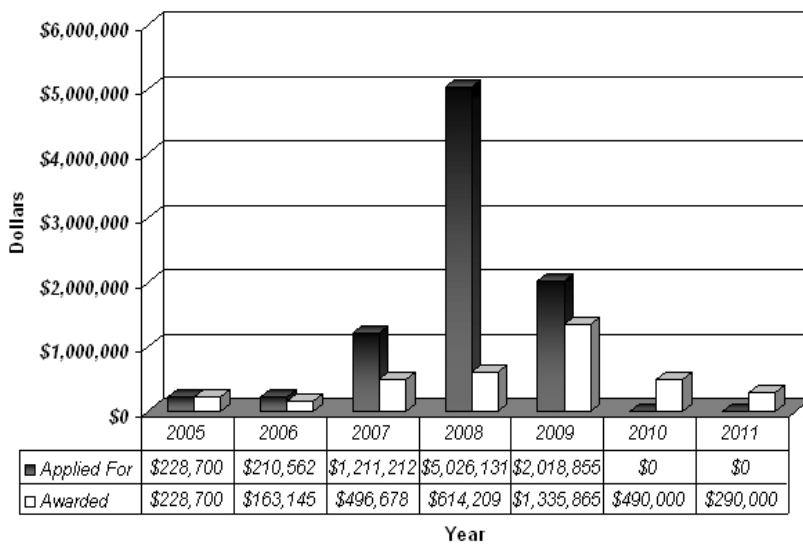
**RC&D Staff**

Twila Phillips  
 Executive Secretary

**NRCS Staff**

Bob Broweleit  
 RC&D Coordinator

**Sandhills RC&D Project Grants**



*Grant awards for 2010 & 2011 are multi-year awards*

**2009 MarketPlace Conference**

The Center for Rural Affairs hosted the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Market Place Conference in North Platte on February 25, 2009. Through the Youth Leadership Seminars project Sandhills RC&D sent 56 students and 9 high school business teachers to the Market Place Conference. Registration fees were paid by the Sandhills RC&D and transportation costs were asked to be covered by the schools. This opportunity was originally offered to all 15 high schools in the Sandhills RC&D area with a final of 11 schools being able to take advantage of the offer. In addition, Sandhills RC&D was able to assist four college students to attend the conference.



For the first time in Market Place Conference history, a full day "Youth Track" was offered. Students selected to attend were chosen based on entrepreneurial interest and desire to create rural opportunity. The students learned business skills from six hours of learning sessions geared directly to a youth audience. This track was strategically planned to help address youth retention and business recruiting that is desperately needed in many rural communities. The project goal was to influence business development by youth entrepreneurs, by exposing students to business education opportunities and business successes.

Sandhills RC&D partnered with Mid-Nebraska Community Foundation and other Community Foundations throughout the RC&D area to provide funding support for students from their communities.



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Polar Bear Tank Race a Huge Success

The second Polar Bear Tank Race was held on the Middle Loup River north of Mullen on Saturday, March 7<sup>th</sup>. It was a very chilly, frosty day for the seventeen Polar Bear Tank Race teams. Eight teams were first-timers and nine returned for the second year.

When the tankers reached the "Finish Line" at a campsite near Hwy 97, they were transported to the Consolidated Telephone building north of Mullen for a wonderful Hamburger and the fixin's lunch provided by the Nebraskaland National Bank. A prime rib dinner award banquet was held at the Thomas County Fair Grounds near Thedford that evening, where the teams received trophies and awards. Between the race and the awards banquet Thedford received about 8 inches of snow. If that snow would have begun eight hours earlier, the race quite possibly may have ended with some different race times.

The Polar Bear Tank Race is held as a collaborative event between Hooker and Thomas Counties and proceeds are used to benefit the Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway. Earnings from the event will help the Byway in matching grants and promoting the attractions and communities along the Byway.

### Dismal River Club Job Fair

The Dismal River Club hosted a job fair at the RC&D building in April. Fifteen people filled out job applications and interviewed for summer employment. Sandhills RC&D plans to



*The second Polar Bear Tank Race was held in March 2009 as a collaborative event between Hooker and Thomas Counties.*

expand the job fair in 2010 and encourage other employers to join the job fair to reach a larger number of potential employees. Contact the Sandhills RC&D office for more details.

### Hooker County Tourism Project

Assistance is being provided to the Hooker County Lodging Tax Advisory Committee to enhance, grow and develop tourism activities, events, and outreach in Hooker County as well as the Central Sandhills of Nebraska. This assistance includes writing grants, maintaining meeting minutes and records, providing financial reports, responding to information requests, website implementation and updating, coordinating advertising efforts, and promotion of local tourism events.

## Sandhills RC&D Fiscal Year 2009 Budget

### *Incomes*

<i>Interest</i>	\$68
<i>Dues</i>	\$900
<i>Private Sources</i>	\$5,785
<i>Public Sources</i>	\$114,107

***Total*** **\$120,860**

### *Expenses*

<i>Operational</i>	\$19,494
<i>Project</i>	\$96,112

***Total*** **\$115,606**



### Byway Reps Attend National Byway Conference

'Elevate Your Expertise' was the theme for the National Scenic Byway Conference held in Denver in 2009. Representatives from four of the nine state scenic byways in Nebraska attended. During the pre-conference tours and the three day conference, attendees gained new knowledge and ideas on marketing, partnerships, signage, authenticity and what is happening at the federal level with the national scenic byway program to name a few. Tourism is economic development, and the conference certainly emphasized that. "The best parts of the conference were networking with people from other states and learning one on one", said Marlene VanDiest, vice-president of the Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway.

Those attending from the Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway include Terri Licking and Tom Witt, Thedford, Marlene VanDiest, Dunning, Jeanne Davis, Hyannis, Denise Russell, Broken Bow, and Twyla Phillips, Mullen. Resource people attending from Nebraska included Jim Pearson, State Byway Coordinator, Christian Hornbaker, Director of Travel and Tourism, Twyla Witt, Div. of Travel and Tourism-Byway Consultant, Bob Broweleit, Sandhills RC&D Director and Connie Francis, UNL Rural Initiative. Jim and Christian were co-presenters of a marketing workshop during the conference.

Other highlights for attendees included field trips to some of the Colorado scenic byways. One such trip featured a stop at Look

Out Mountain, where Buffalo Bill Cody and his wife are buried, and a marathon baseball game between the Colorado Rockies and the San Francisco Giants. (The Rockies prevailed in the bottom of the 14th inning).

### Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway Wins Outstanding Regional Group Award

For the second year in a row, the Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway was awarded the Outstanding Regional Association Award at the 2009 State Travel Conference held in Norfolk, October 22-23. The Nebraska Department of Economic Development's Travel and Tourism Division hosts the annual conference and banquet.

"Each nominee honored truly loves Nebraska and wants to see the state's tourism industry succeed and flourish," Lt. Gov. Sheehy said. "They have shown that they enjoy being from Nebraska and working hard to make this state a tourist destination."

*Representatives from the Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway accept the plaque for the 2009 Outstanding Regional Association Award from Jim Pearson, State Byways Coordinator, and Lieutenant Gov. Rick Sheehy.*



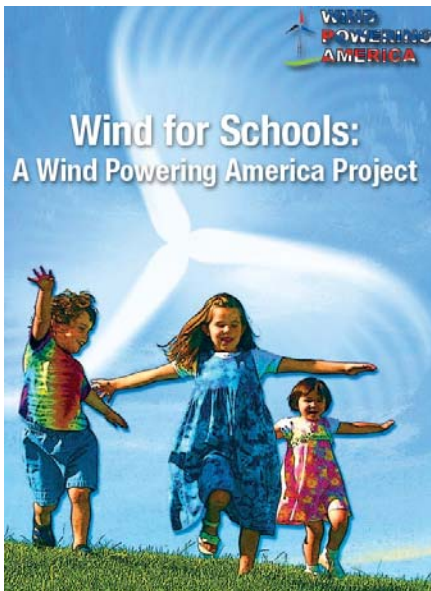
*ation Award from Jim Pearson, State Byways Coordinator, and Lieutenant Gov. Rick Sheehy. Left to right: Connie Francis, Mitch Glidden, Jim Pearson, Helen White, Terri Licking, Denise Russell, Lieutenant Gov. Rick Sheehy, Tom Witt, Patty Glidden, and Twyla Witt.*

## Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Production

Sandhills RC&D participated in the Value Added Marketing and Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Production program at the North Platte Community College Campus. The program was geared to agricultural educators and producers as well as farmer's market managers looking for new income opportunities. By assessing markets and adding products, services or value to their current mix, agricultural entrepreneurs can add value to the income line on their balance sheets. The program's sessions included: Low Cost Heifer Development, the 100 Cow/100 Acre Program at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture, Beginning Farmers and Low Income Producers programs, Value Added Agriculture and Conservation Practices programs through USDA, Agri-Tourism Development, Direct Marketing of Vegetables, What Community Colleges Can Offer, and Ranch Enterprise Development.

## Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Project

To assist the RC&D area in renewable energy development, the RC&D Council adopted an ongoing energy project. One strategy is to assist schools that wish to install small wind turbines as a teaching tool in hopes of developing student interest in the emerging wind industry in Nebraska.



Other facets of the project include assisting small business owners and agricultural producers as well as qualified homeowners to access USDA Energy Efficiency funding to reduce energy costs.

## Platte River Restoration Project Continues in Lincoln & Keith Counties

The Platte River Restoration Project is a long-term strategic project that will improve river flow conveyance and restore critical habitat for migratory water fowl and many other wildlife species as well as reduce flooding potential to communities along the river.

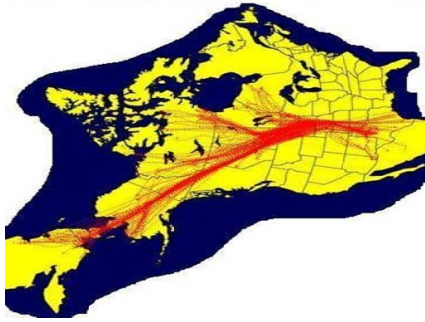
Within the Platte River, an invasive species called *Phragmites* has out-competed native vegetation thus reducing biodiversity. This plant is an aggressive invader and rapidly replaces native plant communities. The Sandhills RC&D, working in conjunction with the West Central Weed Management Area and many other partners, has developed a multi-year plan to reduce *Phragmites* infestations with a variety of treatment methods. The project will incorporate an integrated weed management philosophy and an applied research approach that is supported by the state's Riparian Vegetation Management Task Force.

In 2008, over 2,700 acres of the invasive *Phragmites* were treated and during the fall of 2009, over 950 additional acres were sprayed in Lincoln County and Keith counties. Early season cold and frost halted the 2009 fall treatment progress, so additional treatments will occur in the fall of 2010 primarily in Keith County.



During 2008 and 2009, over 3,650 acres of the invasive *Phragmites* were treated on the Platte Rivers in Keith and Lincoln Counties

A long-term management strategy being developed will work with the landowners to implement grazing systems focused on maintaining native wildlife habitat. Fence-line visual observations show that grazing significantly reduces stands of *phragmites*. By offering various conservation program incentives to landowners to implement grazing in the riparian zone, long-term sustainability can be achieved to control this invasive plant.



### North American Central Flyway

The annual migration is said to be one of the greatest wildlife spectacles on the continent. The North American Central Flyway is a bird migration route that generally follows the Great Plains. The main endpoints of the flyway include central Canada and the region surrounding the Gulf of Mexico; the migration route tends to narrow considerably in the Platte River valley of central Nebraska, which accounts for the high number of bird species found there. Some birds even use this flyway to migrate from the Arctic Ocean to Patagonia. Routes used by birds are typically established because no mountains or large hills block the flyway over its entire extent. Good sources of water, food, and cover exist over its entire length.

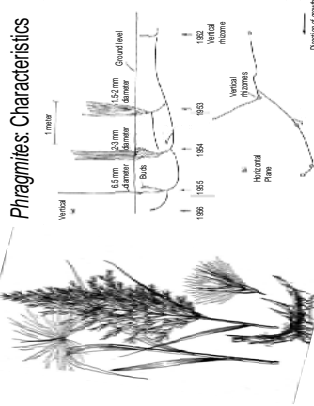


# Central Platte River Restoration

## Phragmites – Nebraska's new noxious weed

For more information visit [www.plattevalleywma.org](http://www.plattevalleywma.org)

### Phragmites: Characteristics



**The Good:** grazing livestock find phragmites nutritious and palatable during the early growing season, so the plant can be controlled with grazing.



### Long-term Management

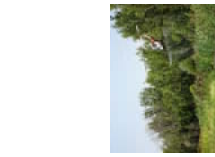
"Take a Bite Out of Invasive Weeds"

**The Bad:** hybridized phragmites also know as common reed, is an aggressive invader and spreads from large rhizomes with potential to grow over one foot/day. "Phrag" populations out-compete native plants, creating dense plant stands that collect stream sediments and destroys the Platte River "sandbar habitat" used by many wildlife species. Recreation potential is reduced and flooding potential is greatly increased as river channels become clogged.



The Ugly: phragmites has infested thousands of acres of Platte River habitat along a 250 river mile stretch between Ogallala and Columbus.

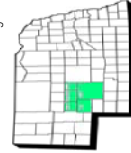
### Scottsbluff



### Project Funding

2007	\$514,000
2008	\$795,000
2009	\$597,000
2010	\$400,000
2011	\$200,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,506,000</b>

West Central Nebraska Weed Management Area



### Partners



Central Platte Natural Resources District



USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer

Nebraska Department of Agriculture

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer

# Sandhills RC&D Facts

**Sandhills RC&D is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization recognized by the IRS and State of Nebraska.**

The purpose of the Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) program is to promote conservation development and utilization of natural resources; to improve the general level of economic activity; and to enhance the environment and standard of living in all communities.

Many RC&D projects focus on the protection and improvement of natural resources or community facilities. Still others work on improving a community's quality of life. All projects are intended to make rural communities more viable places to live.

"Communities know what communities need" sums up the philosophy of Resource Conservation and Development Councils. Each local council establishes policies and develops projects to address local needs.

The Sandhills RC&D program office is located on Highway 97 in Mullen and was established in April of 2003. The RC&D is sponsored by eight counties and two Natural Resource Districts, and includes the counties of Arthur, Grant, Hooker, Keith, Lincoln, Logan, McPherson, and Thomas.

The Sandhills RC&D is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization that allows the organization to secure grants and to receive individual donations that are tax deductible by the donor.

The Sandhills RC&D has been a member in the National RC&D Association's Circle of Diamonds Program for the last 2 years. Circle of Diamond Councils exemplify positive impacts in the quality of life within their local areas. The program highlights Councils that have produced quality programs within their local communities. Primarily, membership in NARC&DC's Circle of Diamonds show the honesty, integrity and strong commitment of Councils to the RC&D mission.



**In 2009, more than 105 Sandhills RC&D volunteers contributed over 3,462 hours toward Sandhills RC&D projects**



*Sandhills Resource Conservation and Development Council receives technical assistance from the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service.  
An equal opportunity employer and provider.*