



The Communicator

Published by The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District

Storage conditions good as irrigation season begins

The first irrigation runs of the season have already taken place, but as the weather warms up, deliveries will ramp up as well.

Storage conditions at Lake McConaughy are good as irrigation season begins, although the reservoir will not quite reach last year's level.

Early projections that Lake McConaughy would benefit from a spill of excess water from federal reservoirs on the North Platte River in Wyoming failed to materialize as the Bureau of

Reclamation revised its snowmelt runoff forecasts and plans for higher releases. However, the Bureau's recent forecast for flows in the North Platte River still indicates that river flows will be higher than average through the end of June until declining to average levels later this summer.

Inflows to Lake McConaughy bounced up and down between May and mid-June, between a low of 1,250 cubic feet per second (cfs) in mid-May to a high of more than 5,500 cfs in early June.

The reservoir responded by gradually gaining in elevation and storage and is expected to peak at about 3,258.0 feet above mean sea level, seven feet below maximum capacity.

From a recreational standpoint, more beach should be available this summer, although access to some areas has been restricted to protect nesting habitat for two federally protected species of shorebirds as part of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Master Plan for recreation at the lake.

Central marks 75 years of irrigation deliveries from Lake McConaughy

It was 1942. Kingsley Dam had been closed the preceding year and Lake McConaughy was just beginning to fill. In just under a year and a half, almost 840,000 acre-feet of water had been stored behind the dam.

This summer Central will reach a milestone: 75 years of delivering storage water from Lake McConaughy through its canal system. In 1942, farmers on almost 45,000 acres had signed contracts with Central for delivery of irrigation water in Gosper, Phelps and Kearney counties.

Although Central had been bringing water to the area since the spring of 1938 from a temporary diversion point on the Platte River east of Lexington, the deliveries were limited to about 3,300 acres near the river and functioned mostly as an opportunity for

area farmers to learn how to best utilize water on their fields.

Central sponsored demonstration days to show irrigation equipment and practices. One such "irrigation school" of note was conducted on April 28-29, 1938 by Ivan Wood, an irrigation specialist from the University of Nebraska Agricultural College's Extension Service. Held at the Henry Peterson farm eight miles northwest of Holdrege, the school attracted an estimated 10,000 people over two days. Wood demonstrated various instruments for leveling ground, making farm laterals, the use of canvas dams or light, steel dams for shutting off water or raising water levels in a lateral, the use of homemade lath box turnouts and how to distribute water over the field in the most practical manner.

Corn yields jumped from an average of 28 bu./acre in the 1920s to more than 100 bu./acre on irrigated ground under improved farming practices during the 1940s. The ability to irrigate was probably the most significant factor in increasing yields and producing a crop every year, even during dry periods.

But in 1942, there remained some uncertainty about how beneficial – and necessary -- these new canals would be. Most of the area had received decent rainfall during May and June, but – as often happens in Nebraska -- July and August turned out to be hot and dry. The new irrigation canals bringing water to the area proved to be a blessing for those who had delivery service contracts with Central. Success bred success and by the end of the decade, the number of

(continued on p. 2)

75th anniversary of first storage water deliveries (cont. from p. 1)

acres under irrigation doubled as more producers saw the advantages of irrigation.

One such farmer was Laverne Johnson, who had started farming in the 1930s, right in the middle of one of the most brutal droughts Nebraska has ever experienced. Johnson, who years later would serve two terms on Central's board of directors, had been a supporter of the irrigation project during the struggle to gain approval and funds to build the project. But from his perspective, he didn't know if the project would be built in time to save him from ruin.

In the early 1990s, he recalled the difficulties he experienced during his first years of farming and the elation of seeing irrigation water come to his farm.

He explained that he was nearing the breaking point in the late '30s, having experienced crop failures and poor harvests time and again because of the lack of rainfall.

"I was almost to the point that I had to start thinking about another way to make a living, because I was just hang-



Two men stand at the edge of adjacent fields in Phelps County displaying stalks of corn from a field irrigated from Central's canal system (on the right) and a non-irrigated field (left). Note the farm lateral on the border of the irrigated field. Evidence like this of irrigation's benefits led to a doubling of the number of acres taking water from Central's canals before the end of the 1940s.

ing on by my fingernails," he said. "I was excited when I learned that the project had been approved and would soon be built, but I still didn't know if I'd be able to keep farming long enough for the water to get to me."

Then he emotionally recalled the moment after the canals had been completed and he first saw water making

its way down to his fields.

"I just dropped to my knees," he said, "and cried like a baby because I knew at that point everything was going to be all right."

And it was. Over the years, Johnson would expand his farming operation, putting the additional acres under irrigation from the canals and later from wells as the groundwater table beneath the area began to rise because of recharge from the canal system.

Laverne passed away in 2001, but today the farm that he thought he was going to lose remains in his family, thanks in part to the reliable source of water in Lake McConaughy that enabled him, and many others like him, to prosper instead of being driven from the land by the whims of nature.

Central and NGPC launch project to enhance access at Jeffrey Lake and Plum Creek Canyon

The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District has entered into an agreement with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to improve boater access and fishing opportunities at two of the District's reservoirs along Central's Supply Canal.

The project at the Plum Creek Canyon Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA), southwest of Lexington, will include construction of a new 16' x 80' concrete boat ramp to replace the existing gravel ramp and a new fishing node and a sidewalk adjacent to the ramp. Improvements will also be made to the parking area and the access road

to the site. Work to stabilize and protect the shoreline adjacent to the ramp will also be done. The site is located on the south side of the reservoir and is accessible from Dawson County Road 750.

Improvements will also be made at the Jeffrey Lake WMA, located south of Brady. Access to an existing concrete boat ramp will be enhanced with improvements to the adjacent parking area and addition of a sidewalk. A new fishing node will be constructed near the boat ramp and grading will be performed to create a launch pad for kay-

(continued on p. 4)

The Communicator

Published by The Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District
415 Lincoln St., P.O. Box 740
Holdrege, NE 68949-0740
(308) 995-8601

Editor: Jeff Buettner. Writer: Holly Rahmann
The Communicator is published by CNPPID to inform its customers and interested parties of District activities and issues.
© CNPPID, 2017

On the Lakefront



Boating season: Learn and remember the rules

As you get ready to have a fun and safety summer on the water, keep Nebraska's boating laws in mind. They're designed to help make boating a safer activity for everyone sharing the water.

Boating education is the key to safe boating. Educated boaters are far less likely to be involved in boating accidents. Anyone born after 1985 is required to complete a safety course and possess a course certificate while operating a boat or personal watercraft. To find dates and locations for classes, visit the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission's web site at:

[www.outdoornebraska.com/
boatereducation](http://www.outdoornebraska.com/boatereducation)

Boat owners who complete a boating education course are often eligible for insurance discounts.

All motorboat operators under the age of 18 (including operators of personal watercraft (e.g., Jet Ski, Sea-Doo, etc.) must complete a boating safety course and carry proof of completion when operating a motorboat anywhere in Nebraska. The minimum age to operate a motorboat is 14. There is no provision for persons under 14 or those without a boating safety course to operate a boat or personal watercraft, even under adult supervision.

Beginning in 2016, all resident and non-resident boaters are required to pay a small fee in addition to their 3-year boater registration fee to acquire an Aquatic Invasive Species Stamp. Funds from the additional fee are used to help prevent the introduction of such species as zebra mussels into Nebraska's waters.

There are many rules and regulations concerning the operation of boats and personal watercraft in Nebraska. There are too many to list here, so a good way to become familiar with them is to

visit NGPC's web site for a comprehensive list.

As noted above, most regulations are designed with safety in mind. For example, all children under the age of 13 must wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (PFD or life jacket) any time they're on any type of boat. Make sure it properly fits the child. Putting adult-sized life jackets on little kids is illegal and can be dangerous. Life jackets must be readily accessible for all others of any age, and must be worn by anyone on a personal watercraft.

Speeds in excess of 5 mph are prohibited when your boat is within 30 yards of swimmers, docks, and other vessels.

Not only is this the law, but it is common courtesy. Give plenty of room to other people around you. If you have to approach within 30 yards of another boat, shoreline, dock, etc., slow to a 5 mph/no wake or idle speed.

Personal watercraft must be at least 50 yards behind a boat to wake jump, and wake jumping behind a boat with anyone in tow (skier, tuber, wakeboarder, etc.) is prohibited. When towing a skier, tuber, or any similar device behind your boat, be sure to give yourself extra space, have your orange flag ready, and have an observer watching the person



behind the boat so the driver can concentrate on driving.

Before you hit the water for the first time, ensure that your vessel is equipped with all equipment (life jack-

ets, throwable PFD, fire extinguisher, bailing device, sound-producing device, paddle/oar, registration) as required for your size and type of vessel. Consult the 2017 Nebraska Boating Guide for information on what is required for your boat.

If you have questions about boating safety, please contact your local NGPC conservation officers, or boating safety officers at the Kearney Office, 308-865-5310, or the North Platte office at 308-535-8025. Contact your local conservation officers or Sheriff's Dept., to report any violations you observe, or to report a boating accident (call 911 if emergency assistance is required).

Have fun and be safe!

Speaking of safety: Exercise caution around docks

Water can cause wear on your dock's electrical equipment. It is recommended that ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCI), electrical equipment and bonding wires be inspected and tested monthly. Electrical equipment that worked well during the prior season should be inspected before the dock is used during the next season.

Have both the dock and the power supply to the dock regularly inspected by a qualified electrician. Electrical problems can be life-threatening!

Never swim around a dock where breakers or GFCIs are tripping. Something's wrong and swimming around docks is unsafe until the problem is fixed.

Never attempt to energize, engage a breaker or reset a GFCI while someone is in the water around a dock.

Do not touch any part of the dock or adjacent docks if a tingle or shock is felt. Exit the water away from the source of the shock, preferably by swimming or wading to the shoreline.

The Central Nebraska Public Power
and Irrigation District
P.O. Box 740
Holdrege, NE 68949-0740

Return Service Requested

Bulk Permit
U.S. Postage

PAID

Permit No. 217
Holdrege, NE

Central, NGPC begin recreational access improvement project at District lakes (cont. from p. 2)

aks and canoes. Additional shoreline protection will also be added. The site is located on the east side of the reservoir just south of the outlet and is accessible from Brady-Moorefield Road.

All improvements will be in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act

Central will contribute \$10,000 and 80 hours of labor and will furnish a bulldozer and excavator to perform the earthwork. The NGPC will provide the remaining funds necessary to complete the projects and select a contractor to design and construct the improvements. NGPC also was responsible for acquiring the necessary permits and approvals from various state and federal agencies prior to project construction.

Both projects are a result of a recent statewide inventory on needed im-

provements to boat launch facilities and will be financed through the NGPC Capital Maintenance Fund and a federal grant of Sport Fish Restoration dollars. Total expenditures by NGPC on the projects will not exceed \$200,000.

General Manager Don Kraus said that Central and NGPC share a desire to improve recreational access to waters within Central's project area.

"We appreciate the NGPC's willingness to take the lead on these improvement projects," Kraus said. "They will make it easier for more people to enjoy recreational opportunities at Plum Creek Canyon and Jeffrey Lakes."

Olsson Associates of Lincoln will coordinate both construction projects. Construction is expected to begin on the Plum Creek project in early July and on the Jeffrey Lake project in mid-September.

Central helps sponsor celebrations in area communities

To thank local communities for their support during 75 years of delivering irrigation water from Lake McConaughy to the area, Central helped sponsor the "Ribfest" during Holdrege's Swedish Days and the BBQ lunch during the Bertrand Days celebration. Plans are in the works to help sponsor an event during the Kearney County Fair.

<http://www.cnppid.com>

On the Web

Check out Central's blog on the web site for interesting, off-beat, historical, topical, useful ... well, you get the picture; you'll find a little bit of everything among the various blog posts.

Also, don't forget to check out Central's Facebook page to learn the latest about happenings around the project and to share your "likes" with others. If you've got a favorite photo related to irrigation or recreation,