



O'Neill workshop addresses land use issues

Land use, water, rural health care and public policy were among the topics discussed by participants in the NSLW workshop held in O'Neill on May 14 and 15. Participants from Atkinson, Bassett, Butte, O'Neill, and Santee, among other towns, attended the day-and-a-half workshop, sponsored by the Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities, with the support of the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

They talked about the Ogallala Aquifer, the second largest aquifer in the world and its dominant position beneath Nebraska soil, and how much of the land in the area is being purchased by "absentee landlords".

"There are large tracts of land being bought up in Nebraska," said Vicki Cork, O'Neill City Council member. "We have seen Montana and Wyoming get bought up. Nebraska is next. We are already seeing this in the area. When you have this number of people buying land for recreational



The need for public policy regarding land use is critical in Nebraska

purposes, who owns the water?"

Don Hahlbeck, Holt County Supervisor, agreed. "Increasingly, fewer people are owning more land," he said. "Look at Ted Turner [who outbid a Nebraska rancher for 26,300 acres of prime ranch land in the Sandhills, at a cost of nearly \$10 million in 2007]. Who owns the water: the land owner or the state?"

"We need public policy, certainly at the state level, if not the federal level," said W. Cecil Steward, Joslyn Institute President and CEO.

Hahlbeck said that one-third

of the irrigable land in the Niobrara Natural Resources District jurisdiction has been purchased by out-of-state people in the last year.

"Nebraska is one of the only states without restrictions on land sales, and people are beginning to notice," he said. "These particular parcels sold at 20 to 30 percent above market value.

"Land use issues are hugely significant—whether you use the land for urban sprawl development or food production and processing," Hahlbeck added. [Read more >](#)

Self-sufficiency topic at Culbertson workshop



Self-reliance and sustainability can improve regional partnerships, attendees decided

Elected officials and civic leaders from McCook, Culbertson, Imperial, Stratton, Trenton, Palisade, Ogallala, Hayes Center and Venango who attended the Nebraska Sustainability Leadership Workshop in Culbertson on June 2 and 3 talked about both the disconnection and the commonalities between the western and eastern parts of the state, and about what western Nebraska communities can do to become more self-sufficient and sustainable.

Richard Bernt, Vice President of McCook National Bank in Stratton, summarized the frustration of many participants: "There's a real disconnection between us and the 'centers of power' in Lincoln and Omaha," he said. "They act like we don't exist. Even the Omaha World-Herald has abandoned this part of the state; they don't deliver west of Holdrege now and they don't cover this part of the state. It is the state's newspaper of record, the 'state' newspaper, and we

may as well not exist anymore as far as they're concerned."

Bernt said the state has plans to drain Swanson Lake and end state maintenance of the nearly 10,000-acre lake and wildlife area on the Republican River near Trenton. The 56-year-old reservoir stores water to irrigate some 17,000 acres of land and provides recreation to 25,000–30,000 boaters, campers, fishermen, and hunters each year. The lake is a source of tourism revenue to the region and its loss would be keenly felt, Bernt said.

State Sen. Mark Christensen spoke up for self-reliance, regarding Swanson Lake. "We have to do things for ourselves," he said, "find our own answers. It's thinking outside the box.

"We could take over the maintenance and ownership of the lake from the state, for example," he said. "That way we could both provide jobs and keep more of the revenue here in the area." [Read more >](#)

Collaboration, water dominate in North Platte

Sustainable development—in terms of business, people, communities, housing, and water resources—was explored by leaders from Lincoln and Frontier counties at the 13th Nebraska Sustainability Leadership Workshop in North Platte on June 4 and 5.

While most area residents and officials see a need for growth and change, there is a concomitant fear of change, said Molly O'Holleran, Director of the Board of Education for North Platte Public Schools. "How do you overcome that fear of change?" she asked. "There is such a strong clinging to the status quo."

"There's no such thing as the 'status quo'," replied Gerald Huntwork, Frontier County Zoning Administrator. "There's either moving forward or moving backward."

Moving forward, said Terri Burchell, Director of Institutional Advancement at Mid-Plains Community College, would include cultivating new leaders. To build new leadership



Workshop participants discussed public-private partnerships to change policy

could mean creating more involvement between the college and its constituencies to increase the level of social capital in the region, she said. More collaboration between students and the community could help to mitigate the loss of young people in the area.

This kind of collaboration also could result in increasing workforce competencies and capabilities, as well as building an "entrepreneurship mentality," participants agreed.

"If you have community- or

county-based collaborations to identify the area's needs, you are far better off," said David Harrold, Chairman of The Original Town Association. "It's always better, for example, in housing development, if the community decides what kinds of housing are needed and where than if some big developer drives the housing planning for a town. Community involvement is essential for good decision-making, and we have to include young people in that equation if we're going to retain vitality." [Read more >](#)



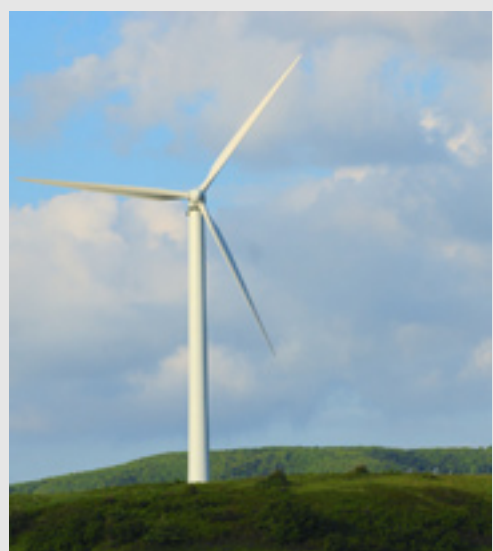
Build Nebraska Housing Summit

The non-profit Nebraska Housing Developers Association knows that affordable housing builds strong communities, and that strong communities build. The NHDA will be holding a Build Nebraska Housing Summit from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesday, August 4, at the Cornhusker Marriott in Lincoln. All interested parties are encouraged to attend.

The Summit is intended to help Nebraskans address housing needs statewide. Included will be information on resources and opportunities to influence the way those resources are needed; facilitated table discussions to identify shared concerns and develop joint strategies for action; identify priorities for the allocation and use of resources for housing development, and participation in an interactive process that includes keypad polling to develop policy change and housing development innovation.

For more information, visit the NHDA's website:

www.housingdevelopers.org



Broken Bow, Petersburg on short list for wind farms

Nebraska Public Power District has narrowed the list of potential sites under consideration for wind generators to places near Petersburg and Broken Bow.

NPPD plans to generate 10 percent of its energy from renewable resources by 2020. One way to achieve this goal is to add at least 80 megawatts more of wind energy every other year.

NPPD received 22 project proposals in April, and six proposals were determined to have the best finances, transmission lines, and environmental considerations. The six sites under consideration are east of Broken Bow or in the Petersburg area.

As part of its review, NPPD talked to the Nebraska Game and Parks Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about potential interference with migratory bird habitat, especially endangered whooping cranes.

NPPD hopes to sign a power purchase agreement that will result in the construction of at least one 80-megawatt wind farm by 2010. NPPD would purchase the electricity via a power purchase agreement with the developer.

NPPD plans to announce the successful developer(s) this fall.

NSLW consultants are available for your group

To arrange for a custom program, call

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