



Chadron workshop focuses on unique challenges

Due to the proximity of South Dakota and Wyoming, and similarities in topography and density, residents of northwestern Nebraska are apt to identify more closely their neighbors than the people of eastern Nebraska. Many in the area travel to attend meetings in other parts of the state, often resulting in their either having to drive over twelve hours for a two-hour meeting or resulting in their resignations from those committees.

The 14th installment of the Nebraska Sustainability Leadership Workshop drew participants primarily from Chadron, but attendees came from as far as Lakeside and Gordon.

Families are breaking up their property and selling and leasing their houses. Acreages are popping up and SMAC, or small acreage challenges,



Land use was a big topic of discussion in Chadron

become a greater issue. Conservation and good stewardship of the land have long been the norm here, but as new landowners move to the area, management issues present themselves alongside the challenge of accommodating rural development.

As Scott Cotton, Dawes County Extension Educator, notes, a community experiencing 0-3% population

increase is sure to experience a 10-30% increase in operating that city. In contrast, Cotton went on, "A 2005 study of all counties in Wyoming and Colorado found that traditional agriculture creates a dollar net, whereas rural development costs a dollar an acre due to those new infrastructure requirements."

[Read more >](#)



Scofield offers a crash course in infrastructure

Sandy Scofield, Executive Director of the UNL Rural Initiative, was a speaker at our workshops in Chadron and Alliance. Scofield is a former state legislator, as well as Chief of Staff to the Governor and head of the State Budget Office. She made a strong case for Nebraskans to learn more and advocate strongly for improving infrastructure in their communities.

"Soon the Legislature will be reconvening, and the current large surplus will draw the attention of lots of well-meaning people with ideas to spend it," Scofield said. "When the economic future is uncertain, it is a good strategy to spend surplus funds on one-time programs rather than those that will create ongoing demands for tax support. Many infrastructure projects are one-time expenditures. Now is the time to assess our infrastructure priorities for the future—statewide, regionally and locally—and get them on the Legislature's list. The more we can collaborate rather than compete as communities on these issues, the more likely we will be able to fund what we need. Likewise, as more rural states collaborate and advocate for federal funding that is good for rural areas, the chances improve for obtaining what we need for a viable future. If we don't act now, the future will be very difficult in both rural and urban Nebraska."

Scofield discusses all types of infrastructure—from broadband to wastewater treatment and everything in between in her paper, *A Crash Course in Infrastructure: Expensive but Essential Components for Rural (and Urban) Nebraska's Future*. You can download a PDF of the paper on our website, on the documents page.

www.nslw.org/documents.html

Regional barriers discussed at Alliance workshop



Sandy Scofield, UNL Rural Initiative, talks about rural development resources available

Leaders in the Nebraska panhandle expressed a desire for visioning and to better communicate, collaborate, and raise commitment on sustainability issues at the 15th NSLW workshop in Alliance on June 14 and 15.

Communication was found to be a regional barrier to sustainability in multiple ways. First, infrastructure and access need to be strengthened

in the area in order to draw business and young people into the area communities need to be able to offer up to date internet and wireless technologies.

Second, the Panhandle region seems to experience a disconnection to state media outlets with much of their newspaper and television service coming from neighboring

states instead. Although the region is in closer proximity to, has similar landscapes, and share many sustainability issues with their Colorado, South Dakota, and Wyoming neighbors, citizens continue to need to be informed about Nebraska programs and legislation. Participants named food, energy, land and water as contributions they make that cut across the intrastate boundaries.

Third, the need for more collaboration among regional organizations, city, county, and state agencies, and local civic groups in order to solve problems and achieve common goal was shared by participants. In rural America, the decision-making process often takes places outside formal boardrooms. Participants grappled with how to get commitment from local leaders and citizens in order to facilitate change. [Read more >](#)

Leadership, policy dominate Lincoln workshop

Recognizing change as a constant and learning to be more adaptive in our public policy were at the heart of discussions at the 16th Nebraska Sustainability Leadership Workshops, held August 20 and 21 in Lincoln.

"My concern is that we are not making enough progress quickly enough," said W. Cecil Steward, CEO and President of the Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities, sponsor of the workshop. Community food systems, he said, are just one enormous concern. "The latest analysis on climate change is that growing seasons are going to change. Are we talking enough in our communities about the growing crises so that we can make change? How can we demonstrate the economics of it? Whose role is it to bring this to a public policy level?"



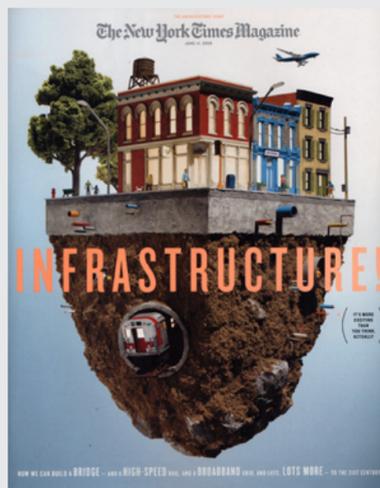
Effecting public policy quickly and nimbly is crucial to addressing sustainability issues

Change is a natural system, whether biological or social, said Jim Powell of Juneau, Alaska.

Participants agreed we must be able to respond to change quickly, nimbly, and sustainably before things reach a crisis level. These are characteristics of a sustainability leader, noted Mary Ferdig, facilitator.

The group agreed that some of

the other characteristics of a good sustainability leader include vision and revisioning, listening, facilitating, trust, integrity, speaking from a base of knowledge, using and providing tools, experience, courage, humility, open to expanded views, risk-taking, experimentation, understanding complex interdependencies, and expecting change. [Read more >](#)



More on infrastructure

The June 14 edition of The New York Times Magazine had a series of articles about Infrastructure, including broadband, bridges, transportation, and more. Next time you're in the library, it's worth reading.

In addition, Nebraska Educational Television has been running a series called *E2*, and this season's segments have dealt with how various cities around the world are finding new solutions to old infrastructure problems. Great TV.

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