NEBRASKA GREAT PLAINS RC&D

Butler, Cass, Douglas, Lancaster, Polk, Sarpy, Saunders, Seward and York Counties

"Helping Communities Help Themselves"

Lower Platte Weed Management Area

Billboards promote the efforts of the LPWMA in eastern Nebraska.

The Lower Platte Weed Management Area (LPWMA) has been a project of the Nebraska Great Plains RC&D since it's inception in 2004. The LPWMA works to control noxious and invasive plants in the 10 counties of the area, and provides educational assistance to landusers and to the general public on how these invasive plants use up valuable drinking water, increase flood damage risks to private and public property by clogging up river channels, and damaging at-risk wildlife habitat. Originally created to control purple loosestrife along the Platte and Missouri Rivers, the group has expanded their role to include control of Phragmites, salt cedar and other water using plants to improve river flow and protect pristine nesting habitat of the least tern and the piping plover.

Helicopter spraying Phragmites along the Platte River

Airboat crew works to spray Phragmites in hard to reach areas of the river.

Landowners check out thistle control at a field day sponsored by the LPWMA.

Field technician sprays a stand of Phragmites along the Platte River channel.

A KMC 1100 Hydrostatic Mulcher, with Ben Bowman of Ballinger, Texas, in the driver's seat, chews up stands of reeds and trees 10 to 15 feet tall with its 48 teeth. It can cut an 8-foot swath. The foliage was sprayed with an herbicide last year so that it could be removed. ALYSSA SCHUKAR/THE WORLD-HERALD

Some 250 acres of Platte River sandbars between Fremont and the mouth of the Elkhorn River are got a makeover last summer from a 24-ton mulcher that is more at home clearing forests of underbrush. Officials of the Papio-Missouri NRD and the Lower Platte Weed Management Area brought in the huge machine from South Dakota after eight years of drought left behind sandbars clogged with trees and reeds. The river had been so low the past several years that the seeds from cottonwood and willow trees were never scoured away. The stands of trees, many now 10 to 15 feet tall, and other vegetation contribute to flooding by causing ice jams during the spring thaw. Up to 40% of the channel is sometimes blocked by the "New Growth Islands", when ice flows begin. 100% percent of the ice is trying to move through 60% of the river. The potential is there for some major ice jam flooding.

Vegetation on the sandbars also soaks up a great deal of the water flow during the growing season, and prevents endangers species from nesting, such as the piping plover and the least tern. These birds want to nest on clean sandbars.

To begin the project, helicopters sprayed the unwanted trees and reeds on the rivers sandbars with herbicide at a cost of about $120,000. This is a very expensive herbicide that kills the vegetation but is not harmful to fish or wildlife. The second part of the project required chewing up the vegetation killed by the herbicide with the mulcher.

Finally, the downed vegetation would be ploughed into even smaller pieces, just as a farmer disks old corn stalks, before being washed away buy the river, leaving behind smooth sandbars.

Norm Hanson, President of the Nebraska Great Plains RC&D, accepts the 2008 Guardian Award from Mike Reed, Douglas County Weed Control Superintendent and President of the Lower Platte Weed Management Area, in recognition of exceptional contributions to the Lower Platte River Weed Management Project and ongoing efforts.