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Middle Republican Natural Resources District

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For Immediate Release

NRD Responds to Concerns about Trail Projects

Curtis – What do walking trails have to do with natural resources? This question was posed to the NRD Board of Directors during the open forum session of the October 11, 2005 Board Meeting. Marvin Henry of Maywood expressed concern over the recent community assistance grants offered to the McCook and Culbertson trails projects. Manager Dan Smith responded to the question. “Recreational and park facilities have always been an authority of the district, one of the purposes the Nebraska State Legislature charged NRDs with in 1972.” Smith also said that there are a variety of factors the board considers when deciding to fund a community assistance grant. A big factor in supporting the McCook Trails Project was that the area lies in one of the drainages maintained by the NRD. The project will ultimately allow the District to spend less time and funds maintaining this site. The board chose to support the Culbertson Trails projects in part because to date they had not supported a park or recreational facility in this community. Director Anderjaska, who had originally opposed funding for the McCook Trail Project, spoke about his recent visit to the trail. “I sat there for thirty minutes and saw at least 10 folks walk by. One of them had a trash bag and was picking up trash as he went. It’s nice to see that not only are people using the trail, but are making a personal investment in maintaining it.”

Community Assistance Grants can be used for any number of projects that relate to the twelve NRD responsibilities, which are: erosion prevention and control; prevention of damages from flood water and sediment; flood prevention and control; soil conservation; water supply; development, management, utilization, and conservation of ground water and surface water; pollution control; solid waste disposal and drainage; drainage improvement

and channel rectification; fish and wildlife habitat; recreational and park facilities; and forestry and range management. There are limited funds available for such grants and the NRD will fund no more than 20% of any one project, up to \$3000.

Following a presentation by the Loess Hills Rangeland Alliance, represented by Gordon Gosnell and Stan Pilcher, the board granted a Community Assistance Grant to the Loess Hills Rangeland Alliance. The Alliance consists of a group of farmers wanting to build and purchase \$30,000 worth of fire equipment for control burns. They currently have 5000-7000 acres in northern Frontier and southern Lincoln counties that need to be burned due to cedar trees. Doug Whisenhunt, District Conservationist, discussed NRCS' activities with the group, saying, "NRCS can provide technical assistance but we can't provide the equipment. The area that they are talking about is a special use area targeted for this type of project."

The group has been awarded a federal grant for half of the amount and needs to come up with approximately \$8000 in cash. A number of the landowners have agreed to donate funds. The board approved spending up to \$3000 for the purchase of burn equipment.

The Directors held a public hearing, the purpose of which was to receive testimony for a variance from the District's Ground Water Management Area Rules and Regulations. Smith reviewed the variance request for Homer Houser. The request is for 220.5 acres in sections 17, 21, and 25 of township 7 range 27. The board approved the variance, with the condition that the acres be adjusted to FSA measurements and restricted to a 26-inch allocation over the next two years.

Doug Whisenhunt reviewed NRCS activity. NRCS is under a hiring freeze. EQIP 2006 first signup ends November 30. The second signup ends February 28. Whisenhunt reviewed CREP contract numbers. Surface water issues have slowed some applications. Average cost share costs will increase by 10%. Three advance burn schools have been approved. Discussion was held on the impact of the FSA offices closing on the NRCS offices. District Manager Dan Smith indicated that he will respond to the State committee and request that they not close all offices in one District.

Information and Education Coordinator Kara Gall reviewed the 2005 Long Range Implementation Plan. The plan was approved by the directors as presented.

Assistant Manager Bob Merrigan reported that meter readings have begun. Karre will read meters in October and then begin repairs in November. The staff will look at laptops for the pickups for mapping. Smith reviewed a meeting with the other Districts in the Basin and DNR that he attended along with Directors Fornoff and Dodson. There are concerns with the information, or lack of information, coming from DNR and the model runs. Smith reported that 2006 has been designated as a water short year. The district is not planning any changes in ground water allocation or any reductions in certified acres.

The directors reviewed a copy of a crop insurance presentation that was given at the Water Issues Workshop held for bankers and insurance representatives. Discussion was held on preventive planting and whether the water restrictions qualify ground for preventive planting. The presentation given at the workshop indicated that it does not.

Merrigan reviewed two quotes for tree planting. The board approved a quote from John Jaeger of Imperial for tree planting and mulch installation for 2006. Trees will be ordered through the NRD as they have been in the past.

The next regular meeting will be on November 11 at the McCook Fairgrounds Community Building at 6:30 p.m.

Full text of the meeting minutes, kept current, is available during regular business hours at the NRD office in Curtis or on the web at www.mrnrd.org.

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