



*“Making the Sandhills a Better Life”*

Nebraska

*Resource Conservation and Development*

**Area Plan  
2011 ~ 2015**

*Prepared by the Sandhills RC&D  
July 27, 2010*

Assisted by  
The United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

And other  
Federal, State, Local Agencies and Groups

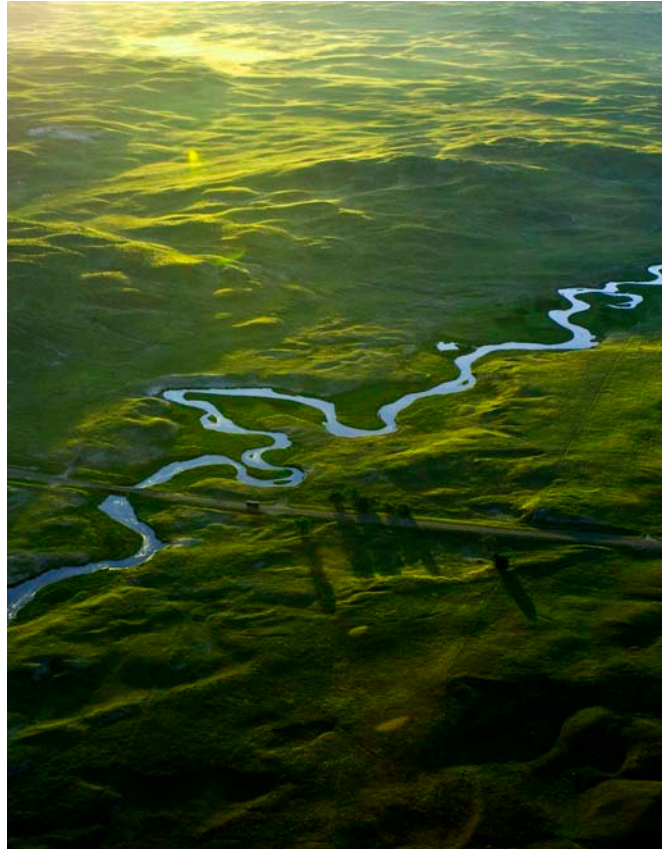
## Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	2
Introduction.....	3
Organizational Overview .....	4
Mission and Vision Statement .....	4
Council Background .....	5
Sandhills RC&D Projects Highlights.....	6
Structure of the Council .....	8
Council Contact Information .....	9
Staff.....	10
Overview of Sandhills RC&D Area .....	11
Geography.....	11
Demographics .....	13
Population Change Chart .....	13
Natural Resources .....	14
Agriculture .....	16
Agricultural Data Chart.....	16
Socio-Economics .....	17
Income Profile Chart.....	18
Resource Needs and Opportunities.....	19
Public Participation.....	19
Planning Process .....	19
Summary of Findings by RC&D Program Element .....	20
Land Conservation .....	20
Land Management .....	22
Water Management.....	24
Community Development.....	26
Goals, Objectives & Strategies .....	30
Current and Potential Partnerships with USDA and Others .....	37
Linkages to the USDA NRCS Strategic Plan .....	40
Required Clauses, Statements, and Signatures .....	41
Appendix.....	42
Letter from the Governor of Nebraska.....	42
Message from the President.....	43
Estimated Cost Projections and Staffing Needs.....	44
Documentation of Public Participation.....	46
Sample Survey Questionnaire.....	46
Survey Results .....	49
Outreach Efforts to Gather Public Input .....	58
Resources and References.....	61

## Introduction

The purpose of the strategic planning process is the development of organizational goals and an action plan that will drive the activities of the Sandhills Resource, Conservation and Development Council (RC&D). The area plan will provide a roadmap for the organization to determine its future in a proactive and decisive manner.

The Sandhills RC&D is named for the largest stabilized area of sand dunes in the Western Hemisphere. The area is generally referred to as the Nebraska Sandhills. Our natural resources are at the heart of the local economies and life in the Sandhills. The Sandhills RC&D will work to serve the communities and improve the lives of those who live and work in the eight county area of Arthur, McPherson, Grant, Thomas, Hooker, Keith, Lincoln, and Logan Counties. The communities in this region rely on volunteers for assistance with projects. An important role of the RC&D is to coordinate volunteer efforts in these communities, to offer guidance, and to obtain technical assistance from outside sources. Members of the



Sandhills RC&D will continually solicit broad-based public input. Council members will keep abreast of regional and state needs and mandates through membership in the Nebraska RC&D Association, Western Association of RC&D, and National Association of RC&D; and through participation in regional groups. Partnering with other developmental groups will be paramount to the success of the Sandhills RC&D 5-Year Area Plan. No other regional agency, organization, or entity currently exists to serve this region with economic development or has the flexibility to address the problem areas that have been enumerated and further described in the body of this plan. Coordination of efforts requires the sustained presence of a coordinator that can provide the leadership necessary to assist residents in solving common issues and needs in the area. Continued support of the Sandhills RC&D is an investment in the social capital necessary to keep rural agricultural communities alive.

## **Organizational Overview**

### **Vision**

Citizens of the area collaborating to create a healthy rural economy along with sustainable communities and environment.

*Vision Statement developed in 2002, reviewed in 2010*

### **Mission**

The mission of the Sandhills RC&D is to create an environment where all the citizens of the regions work together to revitalize the rural economy, enhance and protect the natural resources, improve community infrastructure, and improve and increase tourism opportunities.

*Mission Statement developed in 2002, reviewed in 2010*

The Sandhills RC&D Area consists of eight counties in west central Nebraska.

Arthur, Grant, Hooker, Lincoln, Logan, Keith, McPherson, and Thomas

## Council Background

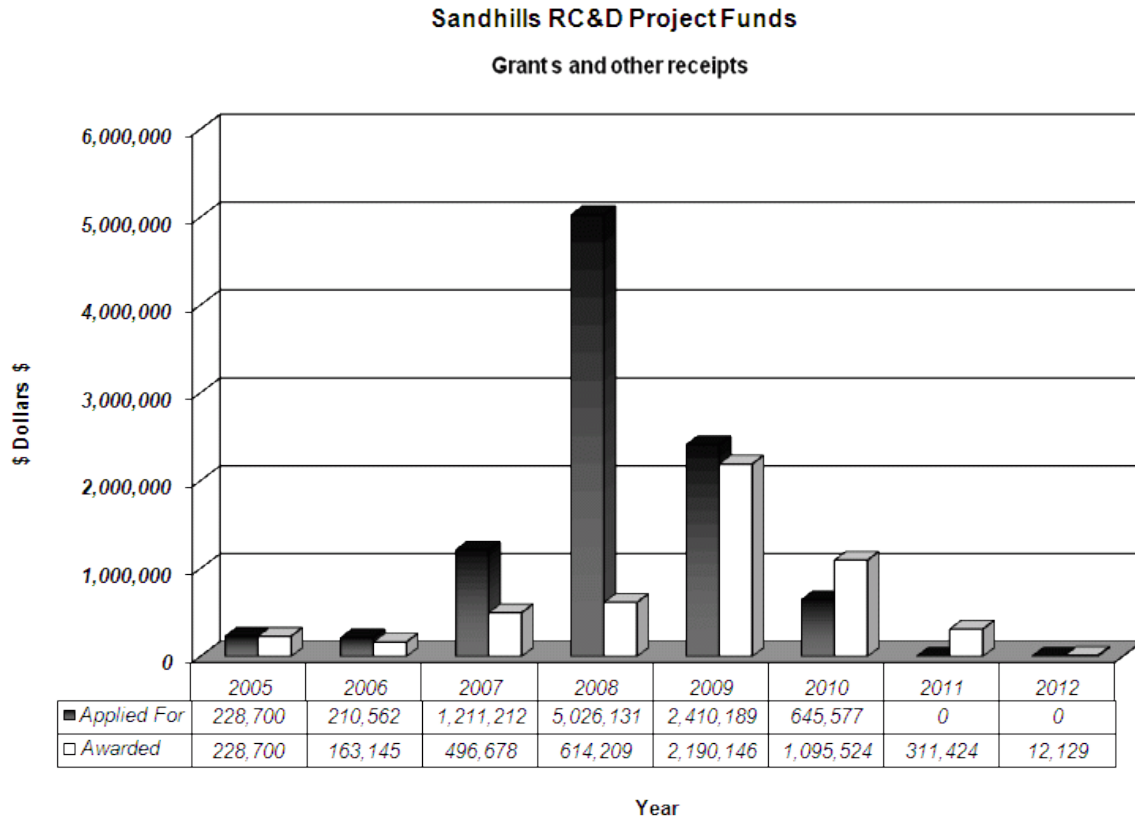
On August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2001 the formal decision was made to pursue authorization by USDA. Individuals and groups from the area were determined and committed to establishing a RC&D that will meet many of the essential needs in the eight counties. On July 21, 2003 the Sandhills RC&D was announced for authorization and support by the USDA.

- 2001 \*Steering Committee was formed, and decided to make request for authorization.
  - \* Area: Arthur, Grant, Hooker, Keith, Lincoln, Logan, McPherson and Thomas Counties
  - \* Submitted application for USDA RC&D Authorization
  - \* By-Laws and Articles of Incorporation developed
- 2002 \* Board of Directors formed
  - \* Re-submitted application for USDA RC&D Authorization
- 2003 \* Awarded USDA RC&D Authorization
- 2004 \* Moved into permanent location in Mullen
  - \* USDA-NRCS RC&D Coordinator and Program Support Assistant assigned to assist Council
  - \* Received 501c3 non-profit status with IRS
- 2006– 2010
  - \*Implementation of first 5-Year Area Plan
- Present \* Numerous partnerships have been formed to accomplish the goals and objectives defined by the local people.



*Sandhills RC&D office building in Mullen opened in 2004*

## Sandhills RC&D Projects Highlights

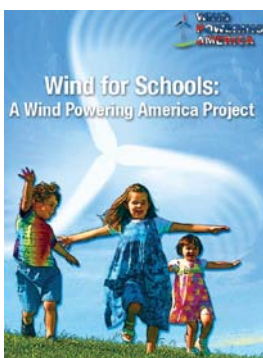


### *Housing Rehabilitation Project*

The Sandhills RC&D is pleased to serve as a regional housing resource provider and continues to offer funds for the rehabilitation of owner-occupied houses. When the Sandhills RC&D began its planning for this housing rehabilitation program, the long-term goal was to make the funds available to all areas of the six target counties. This project initially started in three communities, but over the past 3 years it has expanded to cover all areas in the six counties of Thomas, Hooker, Grant, Arthur, McPherson and Logan.



Since the beginning of this project in 2005, the Sandhills RC&D has been awarded \$500,000 for the Nebraska Affordable Housing Program through the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. Additional funding is available for more rehab project homes and the program administrators are taking applications in the expanded service area.



### *Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Project*

To assist the RC&D area in renewable energy development, the RC&D Council adopted an ongoing energy project. One strategy is

to assist schools that wish to install small wind turbines as a teaching tool in hopes of developing student interest in the emerging wind industry in Nebraska. Two area schools, Hyannis and Mullen, have been selected and will be awarded funds to complete the construction of the schools turbines in the fall of 2010.

Other facets of the project include assisting small business owners and agricultural producers as well as qualified home owners to access USDA Energy Efficiency funding to reduce energy costs.

The Sandhills RC&D recently assisted the Pioneer Memorial Rest Home in the application process for a Federal Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG). Total cost of the project will be \$59,000 and Pioneer Memorial Rest Home was awarded a \$47,200 grant to assist in the completion of this undertaking. The project will increase energy efficiency, reduce energy consumption and reduce energy costs through efficiency improvements in the building.

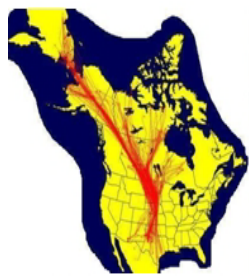
### Platte River Restoration Project Continues in Lincoln & Keith Counties

The Platte River Restoration Project is a long-term strategic project that will improve river flow conveyance and restore critical habitat for migratory water fowl and other wildlife species as well as reduce flooding potential to communities along the river.

## Central Platte River Restoration

### Phragmites – Nebraska's new noxious weed

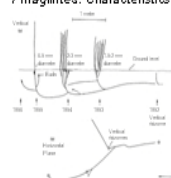
For more information visit  
[www.plattevalleymma.org](http://www.plattevalleymma.org)



#### North American Central Flyway

The annual migration is said to be one of the greatest wildlife spectacles on the continent. The North American Central Flyway is a bird migration route that generally follows the Great Plains. The main endpoints of the flyway include central Canada and the region surrounding the Gulf of Mexico; the migration route birds follow is considerably in the Platte River valley of central Nebraska, which accounts for the high number of bird species found there. Some birds even use the flyway to migrate from the Arctic Ocean to Patagonia. Routes used by birds are typically established because no mountains or large hills block the flyway over its entire extent. Good sources of water, food, and cover also factor into their length.

#### Phragmites: Characteristics



The Good: grazing herbivores find phragmites nutritious and palatable during the early growing season, so the plant can be controlled with grazing.



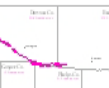
The Bad: hybridized phragmites, also known as common reed, is an aggressive invader and spreads from large infestations with potential to grow over one foot daily. "Clonal" populations can completely take over plant communities and destroy the Platte River's natural habitat, used by many wildlife species. Recreation potential is reduced and flooding potential is greatly increased as river channels become clogged.

The Ugly: phragmites has infested thousands of acres of Platte River habitat along a 250 river mile stretch between Ogallala and Columbus.



#### Long-term Management

"Take a Bite Out of Invasive Weeds"



#### Project Funding

2007	\$514,000
2008	\$795,000
2009	\$597,000
2010	\$400,000
2011	\$200,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,506,000</b>

#### Partners

West Central Nebraska Weed Management Area

Platte Valley Weed Management Area



TWIN PLATTE  
NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT



UNK

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA KEARNEY

Nebraska  
Lincoln



USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer

## **Structure of the Council**

### **Membership**

Membership includes representatives from Arthur, Grant, Hooker, Keith, Lincoln, Logan, McPherson, and Thomas counties in Nebraska. There are three levels of membership: appointed, associate, and at-large.

Appointed membership consists of ten members, one appointed by the each County Board of Commissioners for the eight respective counties and an appointed member from the Twin Platte Natural Resources District and the Upper Loup Natural Resources District.

Associate members consist of any number of individuals, groups, organizations, communities, or businesses. Associate members have no voting privileges at Council meetings with the exception of voting for the selection of an at-large representative for their county.

At-large membership consists of one representative from each of the eight counties and elected from the individuals county's Associate membership.

### **Board of Directors, Council and Executive Committee**

The Board of Directors consists of all voting members and is referred to as the Council and carries out all official business of the Sandhills RC&D.

The Executive Committee consists of the elected officers of the Council and includes a President, two (2) Vice Presidents, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. They are elected annually from within the voting membership of the Council.

### **Meetings**

An annual meeting of the Council is held in January to receive a "State of the Area Report" and to adopt a budget for the coming year. Election of officers for the Executive Committee occurs at the September business meeting. Newly elected officers assume their duties at the annual meeting in January. The Council meets no less than six (6) times per year and generally meetings eleven times each year.

A quorum consists of a minimum seven (7) voting members of the Council. Meetings can be conducted using audio/visual communications and include conference calls for official council business.

## **2011 Executive Committee:**

### *President:*

Willis Roethemeyer  
Lincoln County Commissioner  
9009 S. Maloney Drive  
North Platte, NE 69101  
Home: 308 532-0969

### *1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President:*

Berva Arensdorf  
At-Large McPherson County  
100 S. Arensdorf Road  
Tryon, NE 69167  
Home: 308 587-2436

### *2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President:*

Tom Witt  
At-Large Thomas County  
P.O. Box 225  
Thedford, NE 69166  
Home: 308 645-2715

### *Treasurer:*

Mitch Glidden  
P.O. Box 368  
Mullen, NE 69152  
Home: 308-546-2206

### *Secretary:*

Tammy White  
P.O. Box 155  
Sutherland NE 69165  
Home: 308-386-2417  
Work: 308-534-4350 ext 182

## **Directors:**

Virginia Sizer – past president  
At-large – Arthur County  
P.O. Box 118  
Arthur, NE 69121  
Home: 308 764-2474

Eric Hansen - past president  
Twin Platte NRD  
3723 West Foothill Road  
North Platte, NE 69101  
Home: 308 534-1312

Stan Pettit - past president  
Thomas County Commissioner  
HC 2 Box 9C  
Stapleton, NE 69163  
Home: 308 587-2239

Cliff Welsh - past president  
At-Large Keith County  
1225 Road West 40  
Brule, NE 69127  
Home: 308 287-2251

Dan Deibler - past president  
Hooker County Commissioner  
HC 4 Box 14  
Mullen, NE 69152  
Home: 308 546-2838



Toni Ring – past treasurer  
Grant County Clerk  
P.O. Box 344  
Hyannis, NE 69350  
Work: 308 458-2488

Carl Rundback  
McPherson County Commissioner  
400 Rundback Road  
Tryon, NE 69167  
Home: 308 636-2459

Lonnie Peters  
Keith County Commissioner  
924 W D St.  
Ogallala, NE 69153  
Home: 308 284-6890

Dr. Steve Boyer  
Upper Loup NRD  
P.O. Box 4  
Mullen, NE 69152  
Home: 308 546-2431

Merlin Ring  
At-Large – Grant County  
P.O. Box 344  
Hyannis, NE 69350  
Home: 308 458-2554

Rex Lanka  
Logan County Commissioner  
HC 2 Box 26  
Stapleton, NE 69163  
Home: 308 636-2247

## **Office Contact Information**

Sandhills RC&D  
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Mullen, NE 69152  
Phone: 308-546-0636  
Fax: 308-546-0637  
[www.sandhillsrccd.org](http://www.sandhillsrccd.org)  
Email: [info@sandhillsrccd.org](mailto:info@sandhillsrccd.org)

## **Staff**

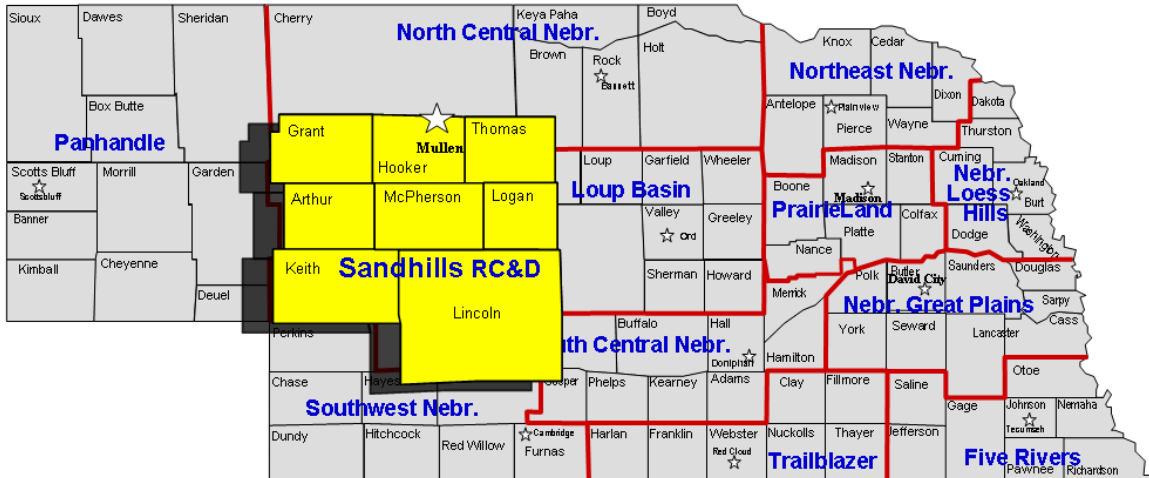
### *Executive Secretary:*

Twila Phillips  
Email: [twila@sandhillsrccd.org](mailto:twila@sandhillsrccd.org)

### *Coordinator:*

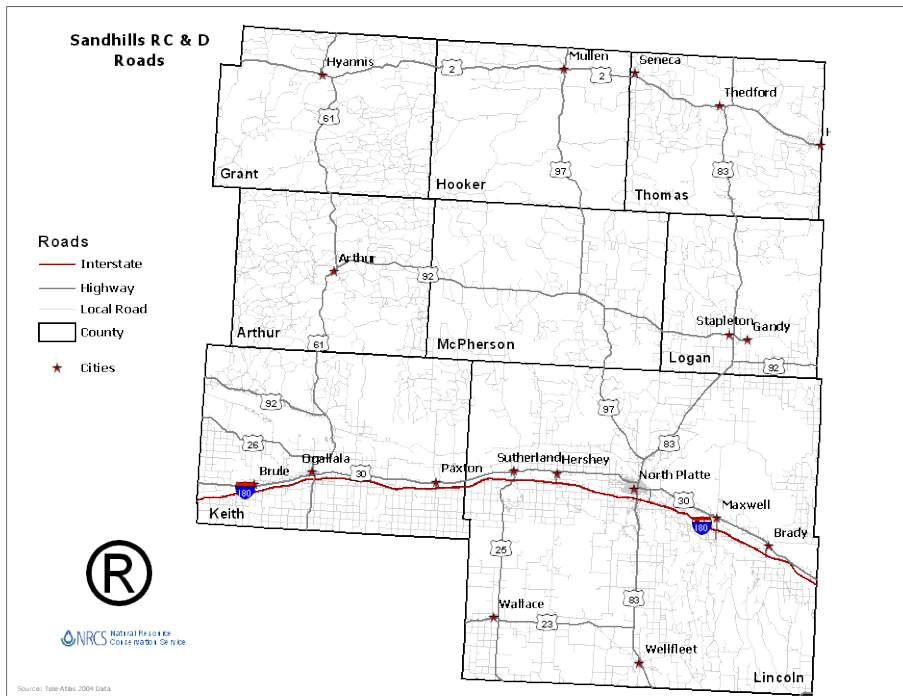
Bob Broweleit  
Email: [bob.broweleit@ne.usda.gov](mailto:bob.broweleit@ne.usda.gov)

## Overview of Sandhills RC&D Area



### Geography

The Sandhills RC&D is located in central Nebraska in the heart of the Sandhills. The area includes the eight counties of Arthur, McPherson, Grant, Hooker, Thomas, Keith, Lincoln, and Logan. This is a large region physically consisting of over 8,000 square miles with an area larger than the three combined states of Delaware, Connecticut and Rhode Island. The area is crossed by US Highway 83 running North to South and by Nebraska Highway 2 running East to West. Other highways across the area include Nebraska Highways 97, 92, 30, 23, 25 and 61. Interstate 80 cuts through the south side of the region connecting the two population centers, North Platte and Ogallala. Unpaved roads serve as transportation links across the remainder of the area.



Within the region, there are two profoundly different landscapes and environments. One region is defined by the North and South Platte Rivers which cut across the region from west to east and join at North Platte, this region is defined by its extensive river valley environment. The other region is north and south of the Platte River, and is the internationally unique region of the Sandhills (only other similar area is found in China). Vast sand dunes now stabilized by grasses, running in a series of ridges and hills oriented with the prevailing winds when deposited eras ago, provides rich grazing for cow/calf operations. The valleys often connect with the vast Ogallala Aquifer creating lakes, marshes and sub-irrigated hay meadows. Another feature of this region is its system of reservoirs and irrigation canals. This region is part of the Central Nebraska Irrigation System with Lake McConaughy, Sutherland Reservoir and Maloney Reservoir.



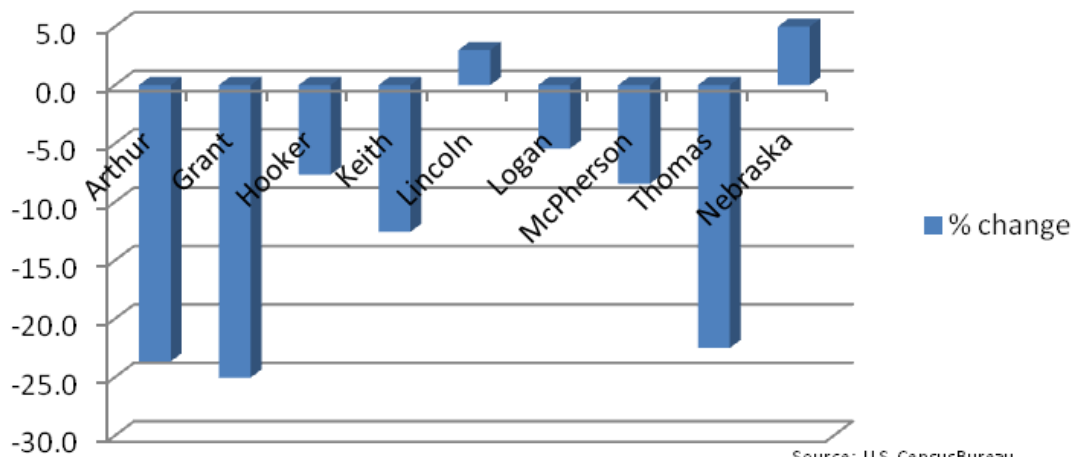
*Vast sand dunes stabilized by grasses occupy over 13 million acres in Nebraska.*

## Demographics

The total population is 45,134 with the largest population centers being North Platte and Ogallala, the two largest cities in the region, having about 61% of the total population of the area. The remainder of the Sandhills RC&D area is sparsely populated with less than one person per square mile. By national standards, the Sandhills qualifies as a frontier area (U.S. Census Bureau defines a Frontier area as having 6 or fewer residents per square mile).

County name	Population 2000	Population Estimates 2009	Percent Change
Arthur	444	358	-23.6 %
Grant	747	606	-25.0 %
Hooker	783	727	-7.7 %
Keith	8,875	7,803	-12.6 %
Lincoln	34,632	35,672	3.0 %
Logan	774	720	-5.4 %
McPherson	533	515	-8.4 %
Thomas	729	583	-22.5 %
<b>Total</b>	47,517	46,837	

## % population change 2000 ~ 2009



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The historical trend for the eight counties in the Sandhills RC&D area is consistent population loss due to out-migration. The Sandhills RC&D area averages **355 %** more people leaving the Sandhills RC&D area than the Nebraska average.

## **Natural Resources**

Valuable natural resources in the eight-county area include: Lake McConaughy, Sutherland and Maloney Reservoirs, the Middle Loup, Dismal, North Platte and South Platte Rivers, the Sandhills mixed grass prairies, the Nebraska National Forest, excellent groundwater from the Ogallala aquifer, abundant wildlife, historical sites and cultural activities, and proud, independent people. Great potential exists to conserve, develop, and promote the area, its people, and its natural resources.



*Lake McConaughy*



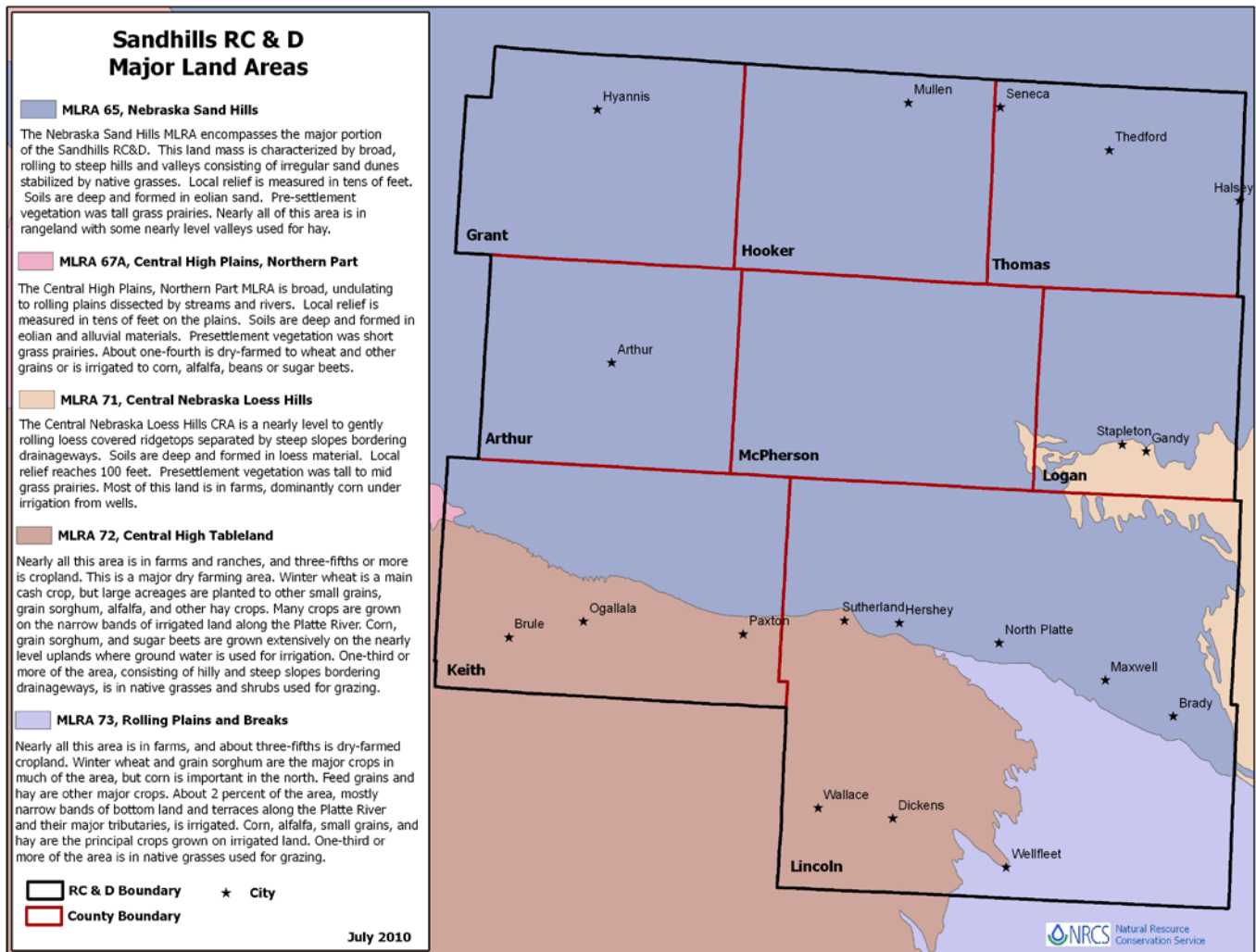
*Abundant wildlife*



*Hundreds of miles of spring fed rivers*

## Major Land Resource Areas

The RC&D area is composed of five Major Land Resource Areas (MLRA), the Central High Tableland (MLRA 72) in the southwest, the Rolling Plains and Breaks (MLRA 73) in the southeast, portions of the Central Nebraska Loess Hills (MLRA 71), a small portion of the Central High Plains (MLRA 67A) and the majority remainder composed of Nebraska Sandhills (MLRA 65).



## Agriculture

Agriculture is the lifeblood of the area. Livestock grazing is the primary source of income within the rural Sandhills region. This area is one of the world's premier cow/calf production regions. Approximately 75 percent of the RC&D land area is pasture and rangeland with 25 percent being cropland. In the cropland areas corn, soybeans, and alfalfa are the major crops. Industry is minimal except in the large population centers.

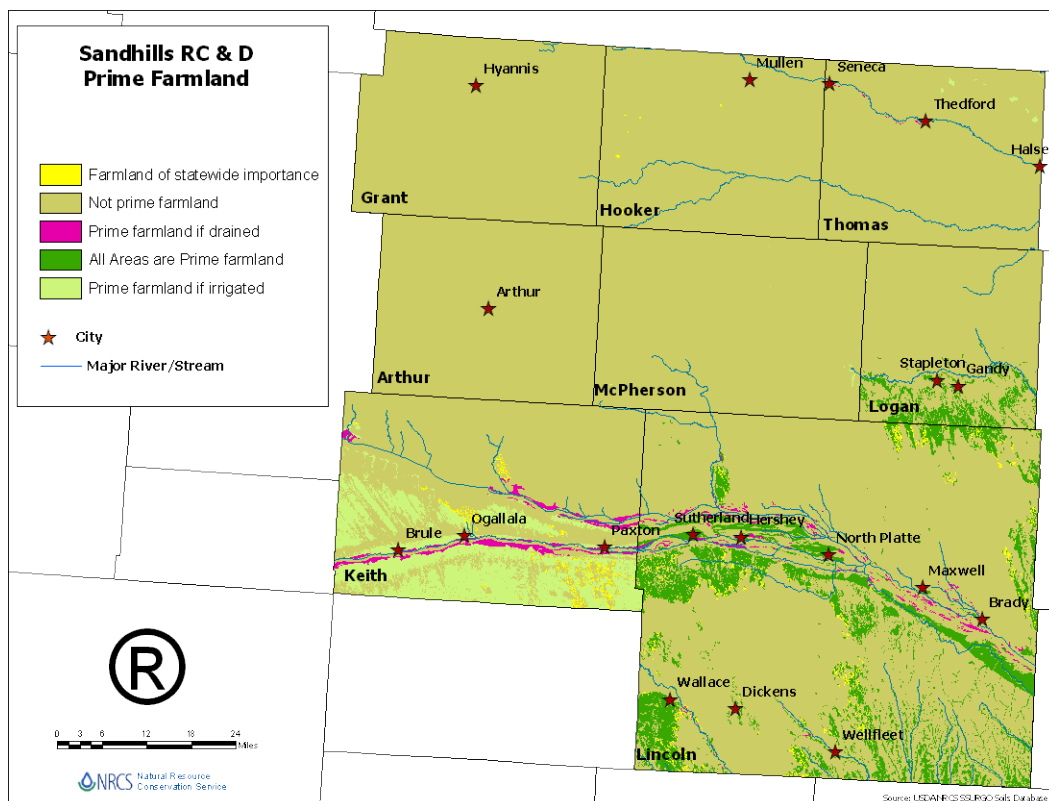
*Nebraska Sandhills are home many of the nation's premier cattle ranches.*



### Most Recent Agricultural Data

County	Cattle inventory	Hay acres	Corn acres	Soybean acres	Sugarbeet acres	Sunflower acres	Wheat acres
Arthur	33,000	23,000					
Grant	63,000	40,000					
Hooker	40,500	14,900					
Keith	72,000	21,000	91,500	13,100	1,600	500	46,200
Lincoln	307,000	93,000	208,000	47,200			29,200
Logan	52,000	21,400	22,300	4,900			
McPherson	62,000	19,600					
Thomas	46,000	8,500					
<b>totals</b>	<b>675,500</b>	<b>241,400</b>	<b>321,800</b>	<b>65,200</b>	<b>1,600</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>75,400</b>

\*data provided by USDA - National Agricultural Statistics Service



## Socio-Economics

Income is a key indicator of economic well being. The income profile is divided into three groups to estimate the number of low, middle and upper income households. The Sandhills RC&D area averages 25 percent more people in poverty than the Nebraska average. Over 36 percent of the households in this region fall into the low-income category. When compared to Nebraska averages, the region has significantly more low income households – 36% to 27% for Nebraska, or 37% more low income households. The higher number of lower income households reflects three important realities for the region. First, the region has a large number of fixed income elders. Second, agricultural incomes have struggled during this period. Finally, there are relatively few wage and salary jobs within the region and most of these jobs tend to pay below state averages.

However, the region has slightly more middle income households – 50% compared with 46% for Nebraska. This information strongly suggests that the region continues to have a strong middle class rooted in ranching operations, agri-businesses and main street enterprises. Jobs within government, whether a teacher at the local school, a forester at Halsey or a county official, also contribute to a stronger middle class.

Finally, the region has considerably fewer upper income households – 15% compared with 27% for the state of Nebraska or 45% fewer upper income households. Most of Nebraska, particularly rural Nebraska, has fewer upper income households.

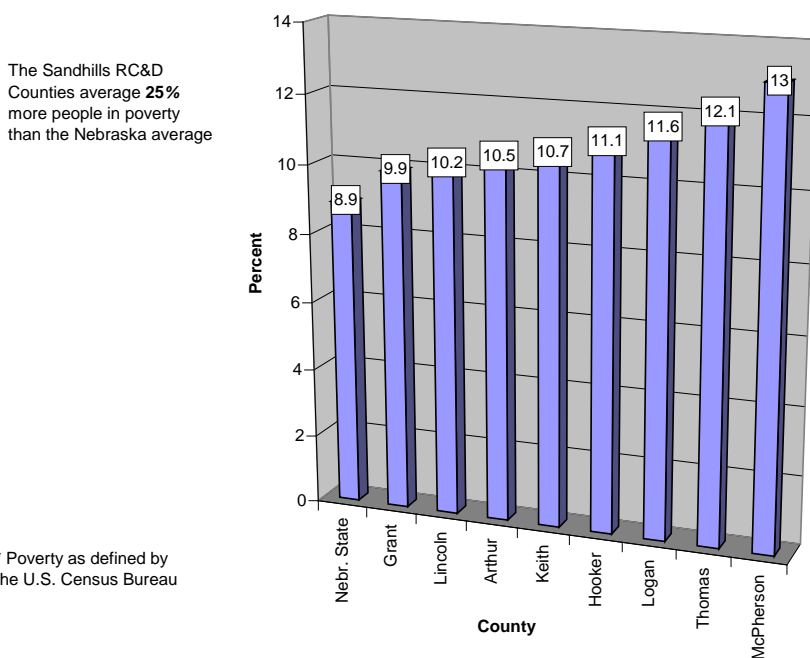
## Income Profile

County	Low Income	Middle Income	Upper Income
Arthur	36%	53%	11%
Grant	37%	50%	14%
Hooker	39%	49%	12%
Keith	29%	54%	17%
Lincoln	35%	42%	23%
Logan	34%	55%	12%
McPherson	42%	39%	19%
Thomas	38%	54%	9%
<b>Region Average</b>	36%	50%	15%
<b>Nebraska</b>	27%	46%	27%

**Yellow** highlighted counties, **more low income people** than Nebraska average  
**Green** highlighted counties, **fewer high income people** than Nebraska average

The Sandhills RC&D area tends to have lower income levels than the average for Nebraska as a whole. In Nebraska, upper income households tend to be concentrated in the metropolitan counties of Lancaster, Douglas and Sarpy Counties. All Sandhills RC&D counties have larger percentage of people in poverty than the Nebraska average. The RC&D area averages **25 percent greater poverty** than the Nebraska average.

**People in Poverty \***  
Sandhills RC&D Counties



## **Resource Needs and Opportunities**

### **Public Participation**

The goals and objectives of the Sandhills RC&D reflect the interests of the public. The Sandhills RC&D will continue to seek input from the public through planned outreach activities. Conservation and protection of our natural resources, economic development for the small communities, infrastructure and community services, and tourism development have all been identified as priorities for the Sandhills RC&D.

In order to discover the needs and opportunities of the area the Sandhills RC&D continued to work with the partnerships they have developed in the past. Public meetings were publicized and conducted in the Sandhills RC&D area in 2009 and 2010. Public input was recorded to gather local participation regarding needs and opportunities for the area planning process.

In early 2010, a Regional Planning Survey was developed with input from Nebraska Department of Economic Development and Sandhills RC&D Council members. The survey was mainly conducted online with hardcopies distributed to participants without internet access. An invitation to participate in the survey was publicized by local media. The survey was tabulated and the respondent's data results are represented in the Appendix.

### **Planning Process**

The council used the survey information and other resources to develop the Sandhills RC&D needs assessments for the basic Area Plan Elements: Land Conservation, Water Management, Community Development, and Land Management. The needs information was used to formulate a set of current Goals, Objectives and Strategies which will guide the Sandhills RC&D Council over the next 5 years.

Pertinent information and insight for the Sandhills RC&D Area Plan was also gleaned from other recent documents that have been developed using local input and current data. Documents reviewed during development of the Sandhills RC&D Goals, Objectives and Strategies for 2011 through 2015 included: Upper Loup Natural Resources District Long Range Master Plan, the Twin Platte Natural Resources District Ground Water Management Plan, Nebraska National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, and the Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan.

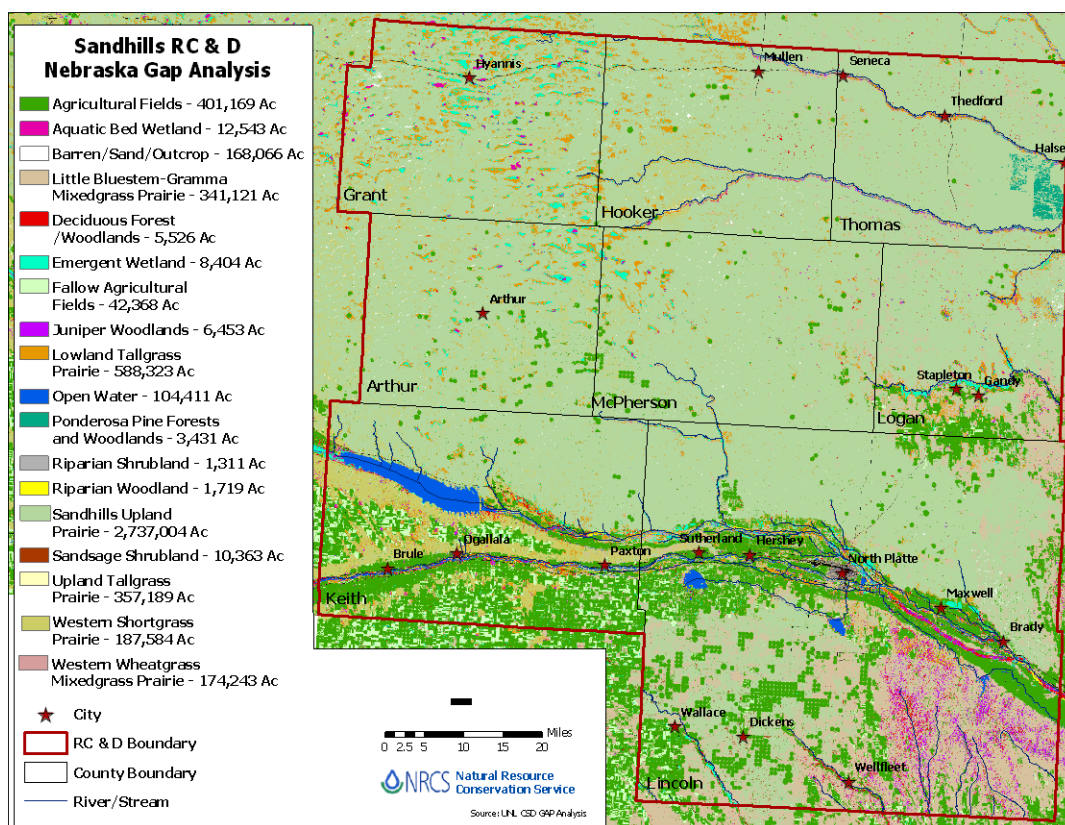
The goals, objectives and strategies of this plan have been developed through consensus of the RC&D Council members and their partners. The plan will be monitored and adjusted as the RC&D Council works with partners and local citizens to conserve and develop the natural and human resources in the Sandhills RC&D area. The Sandhills RC&D Council will monitor this Area Plan annually and will determine if any changes or revisions are needed that reflect concerns and needs of the people living in the area. These changes will be made according the RC&D Program Manual.

## Summary of Findings by RC&D Program Elements

### Land Conservation

#### Soil Erosion

Rangeland is a major resource of the RC&D area both in terms of land area and economics. Approximately 47 percent of the area is classified as rangeland. Agriculture income derived from rangeland and livestock generally accounts for a significant amount of the area's total. Over the past decade some years have experienced low amounts of precipitation in the area while other years were above normal. During the dry years, grazing pressure on the area's rangeland has increased. In many cases this increased pressure has decreased the condition of the rangeland vegetation in the area, thus impacting the resources for years to come. The evidence of changing range condition can be seen in the sandy soils as "blowouts" appear on the range landscape. Application of range management tools and proper planning are imperative for sustained rangelands. The Sandhills RC&D in partnership with the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition will present multiple opportunities to private land managers that can improve management strategies, resulting in higher range condition and greater drought tolerance.



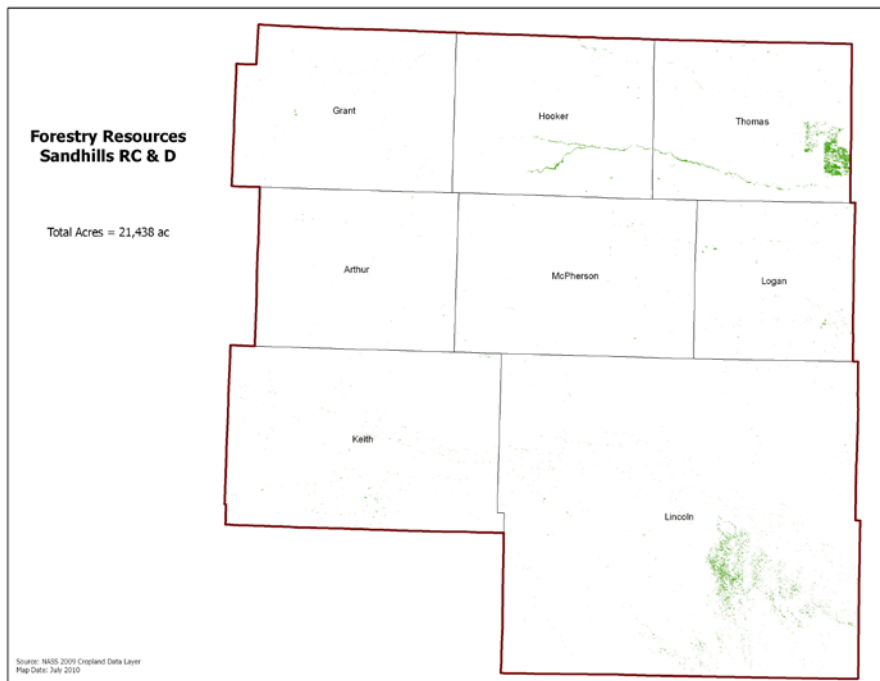
Top soil depletion, and limited seasonal rainfall (16-20 inches) are hazards in using and managing the soils on all land uses. Application of no-till and other high residue cropping systems are vital to sustaining the soil resource base in the Sandhills RC&D cropland areas. There is a continual need to educate local landowners and managers about the need reduce soil erosion on range and cropland acres and increase awareness of

opportunities to plan and practice long term soil conservation measures. Natural Resources Districts, Irrigation Districts, and the local citizens have shown strong interest in working together to reduce soil erosion and address many resource issues. Sandhills RC&D will partner with the NRDs and others to increase the use of high residue cropping systems with a goal to increase no-till cropping systems on five percent more acres in the RC&D area by 2015.

### ***Forest Resources***

Sandhills RC&D ranchers, farmers and landowners have long demonstrated a strong tree-planting heritage and have completed establishment of many impressive windbreaks and other tree plantings. Many of these older shelterbelts are in need of renovation and replacement to restore their value for windbreaks, living snowfences, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, erosion control, bank stabilization and other uses.

Additionally, the Bessey Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest is located in the Sandhills RC&D area and encompasses over 90,000 acres in Thomas County. This portion of forest is unique to the Nation as it is the largest human-made forest in the United States with over 20,000 acres of hand-planted trees. Annually the forest draws over 10,000 visitors to this portion of the Sandhills RC&D area which has a strong economic impact on the region.



Sandhills RC&D in partnership with the state-wide Aronia Berry working group is interested in promoting alternative value added enterprises such as the production of Aronia and other edible fruits in Nebraska. The Sandhills RC&D plans to work with the tree nursery at the Nebraska National Forest to propagate varieties of edible fruits with high production potential as well as high value for wildlife.

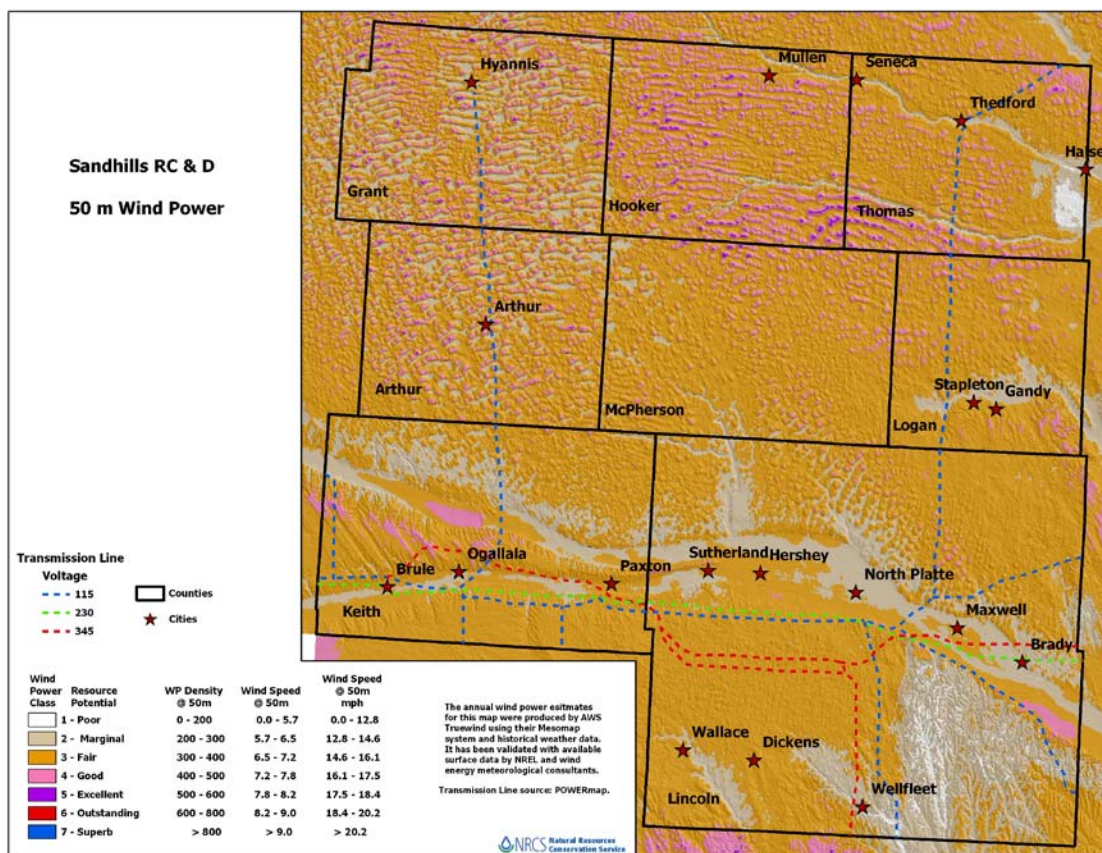
## Land Management

### *Energy conservation*

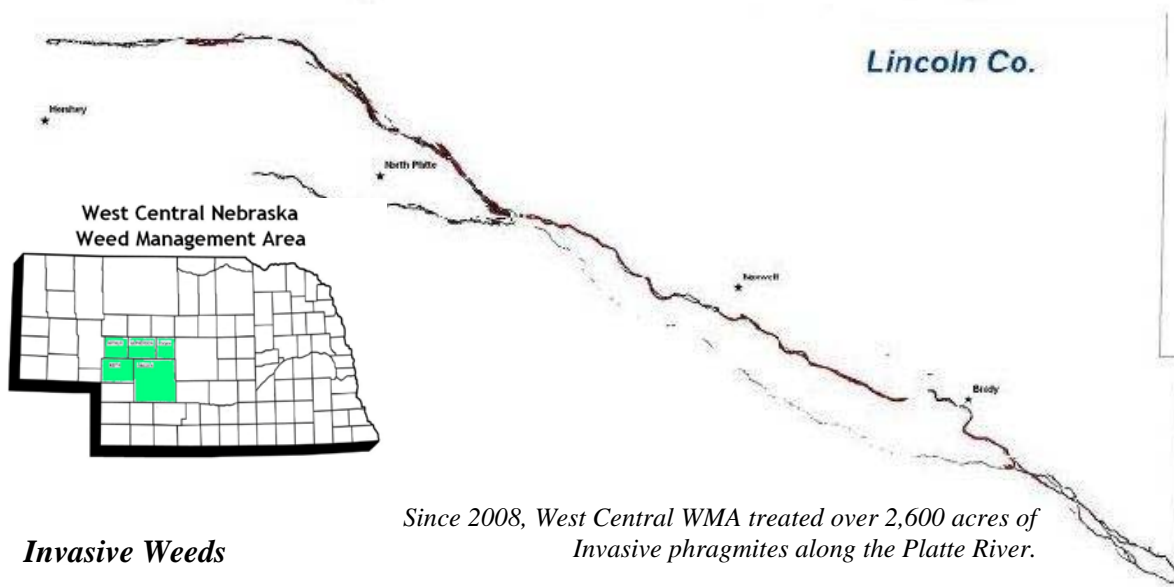
Energy conservation has been identified as a critical element to the sustainability of the region. Utilization of corn for ethanol production can be made much more cost-effective by widespread adoption of no-till planting systems. More widespread adoption of continuous no-till planting systems would save tremendous amounts of energy and reduce erosion rates dramatically. Sandhills RC&D will work to increase the use of residue management techniques that reduce energy consumption and increase soil cover on crop land.

### *Renewable Energy Development*

Wind energy resources are relatively untapped through out much the Sandhills RC&D area. One strategy the RC&D council has identified to influence work force career development in the field of wind energy is to partner with area high schools to promote and implement Wind for Schools projects. To date, two schools in the area have been approved for the state-wide Wind for Schools program. The council is interested in expanding this opportunity to other locations in the area with a goal to double Wind for Schools sites in the RC&D area by 2015.



*Wind Resources Graphic for the Sandhills RC&D Area*



### ***Invasive Weeds***

*Since 2008, West Central WMA treated over 2,600 acres of Invasive phragmites along the Platte River.*

Noxious and invasive weed species such as Canada thistle, purple loosestrife, leafy spurge, and musk thistle continue to be a growing concern in the Sandhills RC&D area. Efforts are underway to educate citizens about the need for control of Phragmites, Purple Loosestrife, Saltcedar and other problem species in the reaches of the Platte River Basin which includes Lincoln and Keith counties. There is also a need to organize additional weed management efforts in the Loup Rivers and Dismal River basin areas of the Sandhills RC&D. Reducing the threat of invasive plants in rangeland and riparian areas is a priority within the Sandhills RC&D area and partnerships will continue to take action with regard to control of invasive weeds.

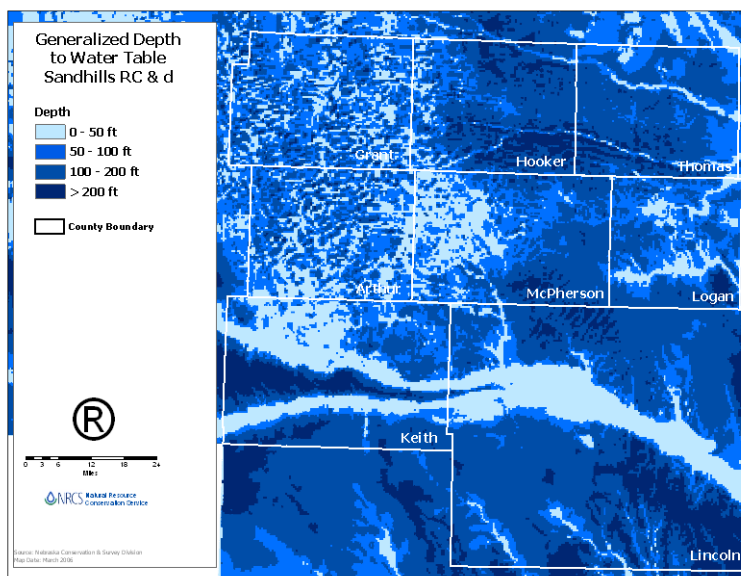


*Recent rainfall in this part of Nebraska caused the Platte River to rise considerably, but because of the efforts of the Weed Management Area's along the Platte to control and remove Phragmites, especially in the North Platte area, the excess water was able to be conveyed on down the system. There is no good way to account for the benefits of the WMA's projects for "the flood that did not happen". Needless to say, the benefits are priceless.*

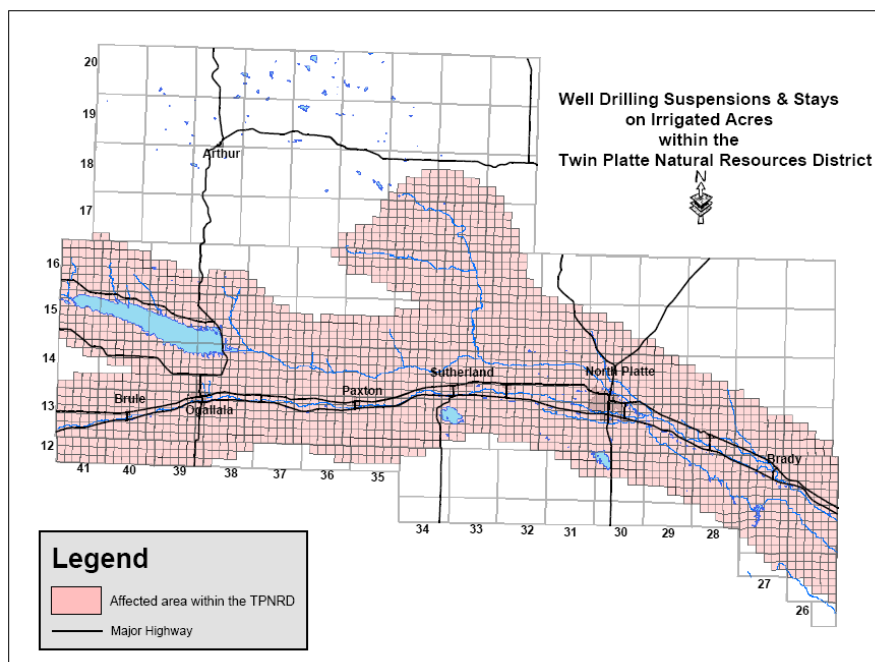
## **Water Management**

### ***Groundwater***

Ground water supplies are associated with the Ogallala Aquifer which underlies the RC&D area. Groundwater supplies for domestic use are generally adequate. Sandhills RC&D is blessed with an abundant supply of high quality ground water and the Council is committed to sustaining this valuable resource. There are 471,000 acres of irrigated cropland in the Sandhills RC&D area that require proper management to insure the aquifer is protected from over utilization and contamination by pollutants. Local Natural Resources Districts have used their ongoing water quality testing programs to identify isolated areas of pollutant concern. Twin Platte Natural Resources District has imposed regulations restricting irrigation development in certain areas of potential over-use. Land-users need education and technical assistance to achieve proper management of irrigation water, crop nutrients, livestock waste, and pesticides.



The Sandhills RC&D will partner with appropriate organizations to offer two water management workshops for farmers utilizing irrigated cropping systems in west central Nebraska by 2015.

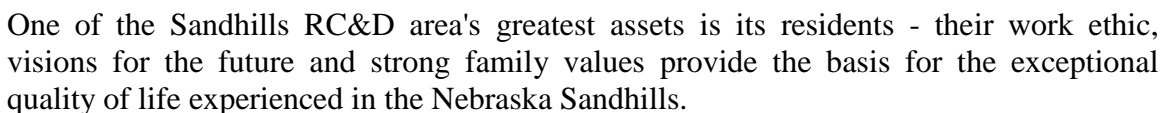


## *Surface Water*

The Platte and Loup rivers are the major river systems and watersheds for the area. The North and South Platte Rivers converge at North Platte to form the Platte River and are located in the southern two counties of the Sandhills RC&D area. The Middle and South Loup Rivers and the Dismal River dissect the northern portion of the Sandhills RC&D area and provide the area with abundant natural resources. Occasional serious flooding is also a concern in the South Platte watershed. Protection of the quality and quantity the area's water supply is a high priority of the Sandhills RC&D.

Plans are underway by Sandhills RC&D partners to perform flyover monitoring of the Loup River Systems for invasive weed threats in a similar manner as has occurred on the Platte River. The basic philosophy of this action is, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". Surface waters of the area will be sustained as long as beneficiaries of the resource remain vigilant.

The Sandhills RC&D Area encompasses 5,134,720 acres with 20 incorporated towns with a total population of 45,134. Small town survival is vital to the area as 40% of the residents live in communities with populations less than 2,000. The RC&D area has experienced a decline in population over the past four decades with projections that similar trends will continue in the future.



26

## ***Agricultural Economies***

Constantly fluctuating commodity prices, steadily increasing input costs, and periodic severe drought can have a devastating impact on the agricultural economy. University of Minnesota data shows that family farmers account for nearly 50% of business sales in small rural towns, while larger corporate farms tend to purchase many inputs outside the community. As farm and ranch numbers continue to decline and farm size continues to increase, more agricultural inputs will be purchased from larger communities. Efforts need to be made to encourage and assist young people getting started in production agriculture to preserve more small family operations and communities. Agricultural producers and small rural communities need to support each other if either is to survive.

Sandhills RC&D council recognizes that agriculture profitability would have a great impact on the region. Potential opportunities exist to promote the production and marketing of alternative crops, livestock or other rural enterprises. To address this opportunity, the Sandhills RC&D will continue to offer business development training in partnership with appropriate resources and build new partnerships within the business community.



*Students at the Youth Range Camp learn range management techniques during one of the outdoor class room sessions. This is an example of one of the many projects adopted by the RC&D Council.*

## ***Community Infrastructure***

The RC&D Council has identified a widespread need for infrastructure improvement and development in most of the area's rural towns. Several communities identify a need for more affordable housing and improvements to supporting infrastructure. Attracting and retaining viable downtown businesses is also an ongoing concern for rural communities. Sandhills RC&D understands the value of current relationships with Nebraska Department of Economic Development and other funding providers and will continue to seek programs and funding sources that support community infrastructure needs as part of the over-all community development plan.

### ***Tourism/Recreation***

The Sandhills RC&D area has great potential to expand and publicize its tourism and recreational development to bring visitors from neighboring counties and states into the area. The RC&D area is blessed with some recreational sized lakes, such as Lake McConaughy near Ogallala, Sutherland Reservoir near Sutherland, and Lake Maloney near North Platte. Also, the Sandhills RC&D area has many smaller lakes which offer some excellent fishing and other outdoor activities. The Dismal, Middle Loup, and Platte Rivers offer several miles of excellent canoeing, fishing and other water recreation activities that are currently underdeveloped and underutilized. The Sandhills RC&D counties have many thousands of acres of land that provide excellent habitat for wildlife and upland game. With limited public lands, such as the Nebraska National Forest, abundant private land exists throughout the Sandhills RC&D area to offer great bird watching, hiking, hunting and other outdoor activities that often go unused.

The Sandhills RC&D area has rich and interesting history that the RC&D can help local residents to share with visitors from across America. The Nebraska National Forest, the Cowboy Capital in Ogallala, and Dancing Leaf Cultural Learning Center offers a unique blend of educational and recreational opportunities and are examples of some of the historic sites in this area that need promoting. There are many established local festivals and other events that can be better utilized to bring tourists into the RC&D area. Some communities are also creating new events, celebrations and attractions that can be promoted by the RC&D Council. The Sandhills RC&D will continue established partnerships with tourism entities and will create or retain at least 10 rural businesses from these efforts.



*Nebraska National Forest – Halsey, NE*

### ***Leadership***

Too often in small communities, the same people are continually recruited to serve in leadership capacity without any specialized training, and quite often we see leadership burnout. The Sandhills RC&D Council recognizes leadership programs can provide local civic and business leaders with skills to better the community in which they live. The programs also provide leadership skills training to prepare participants for advanced leadership roles. While North Platte currently has their Leadership program, there are very few formal programs in place to provide adult leadership training to the smaller rural communities across the Sandhills RC&D area.

The youth are our future. Retaining youth in rural communities and getting them involved in community activities and local economic development is a key priority across the Sandhills RC&D Area. Past research suggests that when youth are involved in community service and leadership roles they are more likely to return to their community and remain active in local business and government as adults.

The Sandhills RC&D will engage youth at various levels and has set action items in the plan to address the need. Including youth in leadership positions on the council will be explored as an avenue to make lasting contributions to the Sandhills RC&D community.

## Goals, Objectives, & Strategies

Needs and opportunities were identified through public input and were grouped into four categories. These included protection and enhancement of natural resources, revitalization of rural economies, improved infrastructure and community resources, and increased tourism. The description of the goals and objectives which follow are those identified and prioritized through public input.

### LAND MANAGEMENT

**GOAL 1: Promote sustainable land management activities that create new land-based business opportunities through the development of 5 projects by 2014.**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Provide education to 100 producers on the economic opportunities of producing alternative agricultural commodities and adding value to current agricultural production by 2015.

**Strategy 1:** Co-host with appropriate partners, two workshops focused on carbon-exchange markets that agricultural producers can benefit from by 2015.

**Strategy 2:** Develop and implement a plan to promote the development of enterprises that add value to agricultural products by 2015.

**Strategy 3:** Develop and implement a plan to assist agricultural producers interested in transitioning to organic production by partnering with on-going efforts that highlight the benefits of organic production by 2013.

**Strategy 4:** Develop a plan to promote the benefits of local food consumption and production as a strategy to boost local economies by 2012.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Assist in the development of 4 area renewable energy projects by 2015.

**Strategy 1:** Work with the "Wind for Schools" program, providing technical assistances to 2 or more area schools to acquire and install wind chargers by 2013 that serve as educational tools for high school students.

## LAND CONSERVATION

**GOAL 2: Protect and enhance land resources of the region by working with 4 conservation activities and related projects throughout the Sandhills RC&D area by 2015.**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Increase use of best management practices for soil conservation by partnering to provide information and education through 10 activities by 2015.

**Strategy 1:** Partner with appropriate organizations to offer three range management workshops for ranchers in the west central Nebraska region through 2015.

**Strategy 2:** Support the SRM Youth Range Camp at the 4-H Camp near Halsey by developing annual grant proposals for funding assistance to the camp through 2015.

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Assist in the increased development of residue management techniques and practices on 5% more acres in the RC&D area by 2015.

**Strategy 1:** Co-sponsor two workshops to educate agricultural crop producers about the benefits of increased residue farming practices by 2015.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

**GOAL 3: Improve economic conditions in the Sandhills RC&D area using economic development activities that assist in recruitment of residents and visitors through business development, community enhancements and promotion of the rural lifestyle by completing 30 community development activities by 2015.**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Strengthen the economy of the Sandhills RC&D area by sponsoring 10 business development programs (2011-2015).

**Strategy 1:** Assist 30 entrepreneurs with businesses expansion/start-up by 2015.

**Strategy 2:** Develop a plan of action with appropriate partners to offer two educational opportunities about direct marketing and e-marketing opportunities by 2015.

**Strategy 3:** Implement a plan with appropriate partners to host four trainings by 2015 that promote advanced technology development, utilization of internet resources, and provide necessary instruction so entrepreneurs can more fully utilize its capabilities.

**Strategy 4:** Provide technical assistance through facilitation and strategic planning that will insure continued expansion of New Frontiers Development Network for entrepreneurs and service providers that assist with community and business development (2011-2015).

**OBJECTIVE 2:** Provide technical assistance to at least 6 area organization's efforts to increase tourism and improve recreational development (2011-2015).

**Strategy 1:** Implement an action plan with the Upper Loup NRD, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission and Nebraska Department of Roads to improve canoe access to the Dismal River off Highway 97 by 2013.

**Strategy 2:** Assist the Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway organization to implement their strategic plan that increases the economic benefits of tourism in the central Sandhills region (2011-2015).

**Strategy 3:** Provide technical information and assistance to the Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway organization to be designated as a National Scenic Byway by 2015.

**OBJECTIVE 3:** Provide technical assist to 8 area community projects to improve or build community facilities and community resources by 2015.

**Strategy 1:** Assist with needs assessments in two communities to develop a report evaluating community development potential by 2015.

**Strategy 2:** Collaborate with Sandhills District Health Department and Clinic in the application process to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, seeking a federally assisted health care center that will improve health care accessibility in the geographically limited region of the RC&D area by 2015.

**Strategy 3:** Provide technical assistance to the Mullen Community Building Committee in project planning and procurement of funds to construct a multi-purpose building by 2015.

**Strategy 4:** Provide technical assistance to implement a plan with the Village of Seneca for the renovation of the village park restroom facility by 2012.

**OBJECTIVE 4:** Continue implementation of current plan with 6 area counties to offer safe and affordable housing (2011-2015).

**Strategy 1:** Continue housing rehabilitation project in Thomas, Hooker, Grant, Arthur, McPherson, and Logan counties using \$150,000 of 2008-set-a-side funds for housing rehabilitation assistance of at least 6 homes by 2013.

**Strategy 2:** Report current project progress and develop application to State of Nebraska for additional funding to expand the housing rehabilitation project beyond 2008-set-a-side funds to target additional residences in Thomas, Hooker, Grant, Arthur, McPherson, and Logan counties by 2014.

**OBJECTIVE 5:** Develop and implement 5 projects with area fire/emergency departments to address need for essential services by 2015.

**Strategy 1:** Provide technical assistance to implement a plan with the Mullen Rural Fire District to acquire two laptop computers and supporting equipment needs of the Emergency and Recue Department by 2012.

**Strategy 2:** Provide technical assistance to implement a plan with the Mullen Rural Fire District to replace one Ambulance by 2014.

**Strategy 3:** By 2015, provide technical assistance that helps the Thomas County Fire District to build a Fire Hall on land they have purchased in Thedford.

**Strategy 4:** Provide technical assistance to the Thomas County Fire District to replace their Ambulance by 2015.

**Strategy 5:** Provide technical assistance allowing the Thomas County Fire District to replace one of their "grass-rig" fire trucks by 2015.

**OBJECTIVE 6:** Assist in the improvement of energy efficiency in 10 area facilities, businesses, and residences by 2015.

**Strategy 1:** Promote USDA Rural Development's Energy Efficiency Improvement Program and other similar funding sources and provide technical assistance to help 10 RC&D area businesses and residences reduce energy costs by 2015.

**OBJECTIVE 7:** Improve recycling opportunities by placing multi bin recycling trailers in 4 area communities by 2015.

**Strategy 1:** Implement a plan of action with the Upper Loup Natural Resources District to provide and place multi-bin trailers in 4 communities for the collection of recyclable materials such as aluminum, glass, paper and plastics by 2015.

**OBJECTIVE 8:** Promote the development of youth leadership qualities through the collaborative development of a minimum of 7 youth leadership activities by 2015.

**Strategy 1:** By 2013, develop and implement an action plan with appropriate entities to provide exposure to the agriculture and related industry that can benefit future generations of agriculturalists through student exchange and/or internship opportunities.

## **WATER MANAGEMENT**

**GOAL 4: Protect and enhance water resources of the region by working with 3 conservation activities and related projects in the Sandhills RC&D area by 2015.**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Partner with appropriate organizations to provide information and education to land owners to help protect their water and land resources from invasive weeds that threaten natural resource sustainability (2011-2015).

**Strategy 1:** Assist the West Central Weed Management Area, highlighting funding opportunities to maintain effectiveness of past invasive weeds treatments from 2011 through 2015.

**Strategy 2:** Partner with the North Central Nebraska RC&D and the Loup Basin RC&D to assist the Sandhills Weed Management Area to inform land owners concerning invasive plant threats in Grant, Hooker, Logan and Thomas counties through 2015.

**Strategy 3:** Partner with appropriate organizations to offer 2 integrated water management workshops for farmers utilizing irrigated cropping systems in west central Nebraska by 2015.

**GOAL 5: Strengthen the Sandhills RC&D program participation and heighten public recognition of the programs benefits by utilizing outreach efforts directed at various populations of the Sandhills RC&D area (2011-2015)**

**OBJECTIVE 1:** Continue an outreach program that will increase awareness of the RC&D program through 6 strategic activities (2011-2015).

**Strategy 1:** Make application to and become an Enhanced Level Member of National Association of Resource Conservation & Development Council's Circle of Diamonds Standards of Excellence Program by 2012.

**Strategy 2:** Maintain a council web site at [www.sandhillsrcd.org](http://www.sandhillsrcd.org) to be available 24 hours per day promoting council activities and awareness of the RC&D program (2011-2015).

**Strategy 3:** Release press articles related to completed and ongoing projects when appropriate (2011-2015).

**Strategy 4:** Produce and distribute an Annual Report highlighting RC&D projects and accomplishment (2011-2015).

**Strategy 5:** Produce and distribute a quarterly Sandhills RC&D newsletter highlighting RC&D project accomplishments and listing upcoming events of interest (2011-2015).

**Strategy 6:** Recruit youth representation to serve in membership or advisory capacity on the Sandhills RC&D Board of Directors (2011-2015).

**Strategy 7:** Develop the third Sandhills RC&D 5-Year Area Plan in 2015.

## **Current and Potential Partnerships with USDA and Others**

### **Federal: USDA**

#### **Natural Resources Conservation Service**

Provides primary support in the form of staff (coordinator and program support assistant) to the RC&D Council for the development and implementation of the area plan and annual work plan. Also provides technical assistance from various NRCS staff and funding for the planning and implementation of conservation programs.

#### **Rural Development**

Provides technical assistance and funding opportunities for business development, housing, infrastructure, production agriculture and energy conservation.

#### **Farm Service Agency**

Serves as a source of information on land use, crop data and related information. Also provide information to landowners and operators through a regular newsletter.

#### **Forest Service**

Provides technical assistance and funding opportunities for forest stand improvement projects. Administers the Nebraska National Forest and Grasslands in the RC&D, which provides partnership opportunities for recreation and range land improvement projects.

#### **Economic Research Service**

Provide county level information on demographics, socio-economics and related information used in development of the Area Plan and for individual project plans.

#### **National Agricultural Statistics Service**

Provide agricultural data on crop inputs and yields used in development of Area Plan and individual project plans.

#### **Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service**

Provides assistance with management of invasive plants and animals.

### **Federal: Other Agencies**

#### **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

Provide leadership to the Sandhills Task Force and manage several large land units in the Sandhills for fish, wildlife and recreation.

#### **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

Source of technical assistance on environmental issues and regulatory questions. Potential source of funding for projects.

### **National Park Service**

Administer the Niobrara National Wild and Scenic River and partner in educational projects and promotion of tourism.

### **State of Nebraska**

#### **Nebraska Department of Economic Development**

Provide technical and financial assistance for business development and retention, economic and community development projects, and tourism.

#### **Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality**

Source of funds for water quality and recycling projects, and provide technical resources for variety of community, recreational and agricultural projects.

#### **Nebraska Game and Parks Commission**

Partner on fish and wildlife conservation projects through funding, in-kind match and as a technical resource for fish, wildlife and tourism related projects.

#### **Nebraska Department of Agriculture**

Provide support and serve as a technical resource for several weed management partnerships in the area for the control of noxious weeds.

#### **University of Nebraska**

Tremendous resource for a wide variety of projects, ranging from technical assistance to economic development to feasibility studies. Just a few examples of University programs include Extension, Business Development Center, Cooperative Development Center, Food Processing Center, Water Center and the Nebraska Forest Service.

### **Local, Regional and Non-Governmental Organizations**

#### **Natural Resource Districts**

Partner with NRCS on various conservation activities, providing funds and assistance in implementing land and water conservation actions. Each NRD is a sponsor of the RC&D and selects a representative to the Council.

#### **Counties**

Each county is a sponsor of the RC&D and selects a county commissioner to participate on the Council. Provide assistance through matching funds or in-kind match for various local projects.

#### **Cities**

Provide project assistance through matching funds or in-kind services.

#### **Public Power Districts**

Provide technical assistance for planning and economic development activities, as well as renewable energy projects.

**Sandhills Health District**

Partner on community health issues and other potential projects.

**West Central Nebraska Economic Development District**

Potential partner on community needs surveys and economic development projects throughout the RC&D.

**Current Sandhills RC&D Partners**

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
USDA Rural Development  
USDA Farm Service Agency  
USDA Forest Service  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Federal Highway Administration  
Byways Resource Center  
University of Nebraska Extension Service  
Upper Loup Natural Resources District  
Twin Platte Natural Resources District  
Nebraska Natural Resources Commission  
Nebraska Department of Economic Development  
Nebraska Department of Roads  
Nebraska Division of Travel and Tourism  
Nebraska Forest Service  
Nebraska Game & Parks Commission  
Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition  
Nebraska State Attorney General's office  
West Central Weed Management Area  
Platte Valley Weed Management Area  
Sandhills Weed Management Area  
Mullen Commercial Club  
Hooker County Tourism Board

Thomas County Development Corporation  
Community Development Services, LLC  
Seneca Historical Preservation Society  
Consolidated Telephone Company  
Sandhills EDGE Coalition  
Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway, Inc.  
Mid-Nebraska Community Foundation  
Mid-Plains Center for Enterprise  
Nebraska Center for Energy Science Research  
Nebraska Energy Office  
Nebraska Wind for Schools Program  
Lincoln County Convention and Visitor Bureau  
Thedford Community Foundation  
Hyannis Community Foundation  
Mullen Community Foundation  
Custer County Foundation  
Broken Bow Chamber of Commerce  
New Frontiers Development Network  
Nebraska State 4-H Camp  
Society for Range Management – Nebr. Section  
Sandhills RC&D area FFA Chapters  
Mullen Hospital District  
Pioneer Memorial Rest Home  
Nebraska Association of RC&D Councils  
Western RC&D Association  
National Association of RC&D Councils

## Linkage to NRCS Strategic Plan

Area Plan Strategy	Overarching Strategies		
	Cooperative Conservation	Watershed Approach	Market-based Approach
<b>Land Management</b>			
Carbon-exchange markets workshops			<b>X</b>
Value added agricultural products			<b>X</b>
Organic production assistance			<b>X</b>
Local food consumption and production strategic plan	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
Wind for Schools	<b>X</b>		
<b>Land Conservation</b>			
Range management workshops	<b>X</b>		
Youth Range Camp	<b>X</b>		
Increased residue farming practices workshops	<b>X</b>		
<b>Community Development</b>			
Businesses expansion assistance	<b>X</b>		
Direct marketing and e-marketing education	<b>X</b>		
Internet resources trainings	<b>X</b>		
New Frontiers Development Network expansion	<b>X</b>		
Dismal River canoe access plan	<b>X</b>		
Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway strategic plan implementation	<b>X</b>		
Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway national scenic byway effort	<b>X</b>		
Community needs assessments	<b>X</b>		
Federally assisted health care center collaboration	<b>X</b>		
Mullen Community Building project	<b>X</b>		
Seneca park restroom facility	<b>X</b>		
Housing rehabilitation project	<b>X</b>		
Mullen Rural Fire District laptops	<b>X</b>		
Mullen Rural Fire District ambulance	<b>X</b>		
Thomas County Fire District fire hall	<b>X</b>		
Thomas County Fire District ambulance	<b>X</b>		
Thomas County Fire District "grass-rig" fire truck	<b>X</b>		
Energy efficiency improvements	<b>X</b>		
Recycling trailers	<b>X</b>		
Agriculturalists for the future	<b>X</b>		
<b>Water Conservation</b>			
West Central Weed Management Area partnership		<b>X</b>	
Sandhills Weed Management Area partnership		<b>X</b>	
Integrated water management workshops	<b>X</b>		

## Required Clauses, Statements, and Signatures

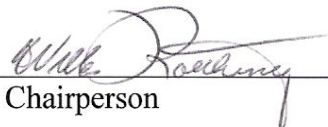
The Sandhills RC&D Council's program will be conducted in compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions as contained in Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (P. L. 100-259) and other nondiscrimination statutes; namely, Section 504, of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and in accordance with regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture (7CFR-15, Subparts A&B) which provide that no person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, marital status, or handicap/disability be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subject to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial (or technical) assistance from the Department of Agriculture or any agency thereof.

The Sandhills RC&D Council agrees that the signing of this document constitutes agreement to comply with federal laws concerning restrictions on lobbying, a drug-free workplace, and responsibilities for procurement, suspension, and disbarment.

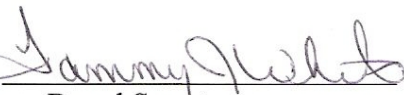
The Sandhills RC&D Council has had this application reviewed by the state. Comments made through the state single point of contact have been considered prior to submission of the application and that all applicable procedures have been followed. An environmental impact statement will not be prepared during the development of the area plan, but an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement will be prepared concurrently with the development of each project, when applicable, in accordance with federal procedures.

The Sandhills RC&D Council hereby adopts the RC&D Area Plan and agrees to use effectively the assistance provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to realize the goals and objectives outlined herein.

Sandhills RC&D Council, Nebraska

By:   
Chairperson

Date: July 29, 2010

Attest:   
Board Secretary

Date: July 29, 2010

This action authorized at an official meeting of the Sandhills RC&D Board of Directors on July 29, 2010.

U.S. Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation Service

The State Conservationist Hereby acknowledges the attached Area Plan of Sandhills RC&D as meeting requirements under Public Law 97-98 to receive assistance from USDA.

Acknowledged by:

  
State Conservationist

Date: 8/16/2010

## Appendix



Dave Heineman  
Governor

### STATE OF NEBRASKA

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
P.O. Box 94848 • Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-4848  
Phone: (402) 471-2244 • dave.heineman@nebraska.gov

July 29, 2010

Willis Roethemeyer  
Sandhills RC&D  
P.O. Box 28  
Mullen, NE 69152

Dear Mr. Roethemeyer:

It is my pleasure to endorse the Sandhills Resource Conservation and Development Council's area plan for 2011-2015.

Please accept my thanks and encouragement for the work that the Sandhills RC&D has undertaken. Your efforts are important to the success and future of this region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dave Heineman".

Dave Heineman  
Governor

## **Message from the Council President**

The Sandhills RC&D Area Plan is the product of citizen volunteers and community leaders coming together to mold a vision that sets goals and objectives intended to benefit their communities, area wide. These goals and objectives were created as a result of numerous hours of analyzing and evaluating the area's needs in resource conservation, water and land management, agriculture, and community development.

The following plan provides steps toward the development of our many resources. Although it must be flexible, this plan will serve as a firm foundation upon which to build and strengthen our future.

The next five years promise to be an exciting and challenging time for the Sandhills RC&D. We look forward to being an active participant in our area, and to helping address the challenges facing our area and its people. The continual need for stewardship of our natural resources, the aging infrastructure in our communities, and the constant need for economic development in our communities are issues we pledge to respond too through partnerships and collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Please join us in making the Sandhills RC&D Area an even better place to live, raise a family and do business.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Willis Roethemeyer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending from the end.

Willis Roethemeyer  
Sandhills RC&D President

## Estimated Cost Projections & Staffing Needs

**GOAL: Promote sustainable land management activities that create new land-based business opportunities through the development of 5 projects by 2014.**

Project	Estimated Cost	Projected Staffing Needs
Carbon-exchange markets workshops	\$3,000	0.15 FTE
Value added agricultural products	\$10,000	0.50 FTE
Organic production assistance	\$5,000	0.25 FTE
Local food consumption and production strategic plan	\$5,000	0.25 FTE
Wind for Schools	\$80,000	0.10 FTE
Sub-Total	\$103,000	1.25 FTE

**GOAL: Protect And Enhance Land Resources Of The Region By Working With 4 Conservation Activities And Related Projects Throughout The RC&D Area By 2015.**

Project	Estimated Cost	Projected Staffing Needs
Range management workshops	\$9,000	0.50 FTE
Youth Range Camp	\$2,000	0.10 FTE
Increased residue farming practices workshops	\$4,000	0.20 FTE
Sub-Total	\$15,000	0.80 FTE

**GOAL: Improve Economic Conditions In The Sandhills RC&D Area Using Economic Development Activities That Assist In Recruitment Of Residents And Visitors Through Business Development, Community Enhancements And Promotion Of The Rural Lifestyle By Completing 30 Community Development Activities By 2015.**

Project	Estimated Cost	Projected Staffing Needs
Businesses expansion assistance	\$40,000	2.0 FTE
Direct marketing and e-marketing education	\$6,000	0.30 FTE
Internet resources trainings	\$6,000	0.30 FTE
New Frontiers Development Network expansion	\$1,000	0.05 FTE
Dismal River canoe access plan	\$95,000	Contract labor
Sandhills Scenic Byway strategic plan implementation	\$350,000	Contract labor
Sandhills Scenic Byway national scenic byway effort	\$50,000	2.0 FTE
Community needs assessments	\$5,000	Contract labor
Federally assisted health care center collaboration	\$300,000	2.0 FTE
Seneca park restroom facility	\$5,000	Contract labor
Housing rehabilitation project	\$300,000	Contract labor
Mullen Rural Fire District laptops	\$10,000	0.05 FTE
Mullen Rural Fire District ambulance	\$50,000	0.10 FTE
Thomas County Fire District fire hall	\$250,000	Contract labor
Thomas County Fire District ambulance	\$50,000	0.10 FTE
Thomas County Fire District "grass-rig" fire truck	\$40,000	0.10 FTE
Energy efficiency improvements	\$70,000	0.50 FTE
Recycling trailers	\$100,000	0.50 FTE
Agriculturalists for the future	\$50,000	0.75 FTE
Sub-Total	\$1,778,000	6 Contracts 8.75 FTE

**GOAL: Protect And Enhance Water Resources Of The Region By Working With 3 Conservation Activities And Related Projects In The RC&D Area By 2015.**

Project	Estimated Cost	Projected Staffing Needs
West Central Weed Management Area partnership	\$500,000	3.0 FTE
Sandhills Weed Management Area partnership	\$15,000	0.5 FTE
Integrated water management workshops	\$2,000	0.7 FTE
Sub-Total	\$517,000	4.2 FTE

**GOAL: Strengthen The Sandhills RC&D Program Participation And Heighten Public Recognition Of The Programs Benefits By Utilizing Outreach Efforts Directed At Various Populations Of The Sandhills RC&D Area (2011-2015)**

Project	Estimated Cost	Projected Staffing Needs
Enhanced Level: Circle Of Diamonds	\$2,000	0.10 FTE
Council Web Site	\$1,000	0.05 FTE
Press Release Articles	\$500	0.025 FTE
Annual Report	\$2,000	0.10 FTE
Quarterly Newsletter	\$1,000	0.05 FTE
Youth Advisory	\$1,000	0.05 FTE
Sandhills RC&D 5-Year Area Plan (2010)	\$2,000	1.10 FTE
Sub-Total	\$6,500	0.325 FTE

Five Year Total	\$2,419,500	6 Contracts 15.325 FTE
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## Sandhills RC&D Area Planning Survey Questionnaire

Sandhills Resource Conservation & Development Council - Planning Our Future

Which of the following issues/needs in your community are priorities that must be addressed over the next 3-5 years? Check up to 4 issues/topics in *each* of the following *four* categories.

### Land Management

- ☐ Agriculture sustainability
- ☐ Value added agriculture
- ☐ Alternative agricultural opportunities
- ☐ Energy Conservation
- ☐ Renewable energy development
- ☐ Protection of fish and wildlife habitats
- ☐ Conservation easements
- ☐ Grassland health & management
- ☐ Other:

### Water Management

- ☐ Agricultural water management
- ☐ Municipal water conservation
- ☐ Public water supply protection
- ☐ Storm water management
- ☐ Water quality improvement
- ☐ Reducing non-point source pollution
- ☐ Riparian corridor protection and management
- ☐ Watershed planning
- ☐ Wetland protection and development
- ☐ Other:

### Land conservation

- ☐ Environmental education
- ☐ Soil erosion protection
- ☐ Noxious weed management
- ☐ Grassland management
- ☐ Farmland management
- ☐ Air Quality
- ☐ Other:

### Community Development

- ☐ Broadband communication
- ☐ Development of natural resource based industries
- ☐ Business creation and retention
- ☐ Workforce Development
- ☐ Development of recreation facilities
- ☐ Adequate health care & educational facilities
- ☐ Tourism promotion
- ☐ Waste management
- ☐ Recycling
- ☐ Rural Fire & Flood protection
- ☐ Water systems – delivery & treatment
- ☐ Waste disposal systems
- ☐ Affordable housing
- ☐ Emergency preparedness
- ☐ Promotion of food security
- ☐ Historic & natural heritage preservation
- ☐ Other:

**Of the issues selected above, LIST your top issues/needs below and describe *for each* what you feel needs to happen to meet that issue or need. *This information is very important to us.***

Need or issue:

Strategies to meet the need:

Need or issue:

Strategies to meet the need:

Need or issue:

Strategies to meet the need:

Need or issue:

Strategies to meet the need:

**Of the community and/or organizations that you represent, which of the following services are needed but unobtainable? Please check all that apply.**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grant writing assistance   | <input type="checkbox"/> Loans for businesses                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grant searches             | <input type="checkbox"/> Grant administration                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seminar/workshop planning  | <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Planning                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitation of meetings   | <input type="checkbox"/> Referrals to financial resources     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Retreat planning           | <input type="checkbox"/> Referral to technical resources      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising assistance     | <input type="checkbox"/> Training opportunities (List topics) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Project coordination       |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational development |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coalition building         |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forming cooperatives       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other                                |

**Please provide any other feedback that can assist us as we plan for the future.**

Survey responses will be grouped for reporting purposes and will be used to develop the RC&D Council's strategic plan. Information that identifies individual responses will not be released. We ask for your contact information so that 1) we can determine when we have gathered information from a broad cross section of the community/region and 2) we may want to ask you for additional information to help us meet the priority needs you identified.

*Optional*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Representing: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ email: \_\_\_\_\_


Thank you for your participation in our effort to prepare Sandhills RC&D Council for the future!

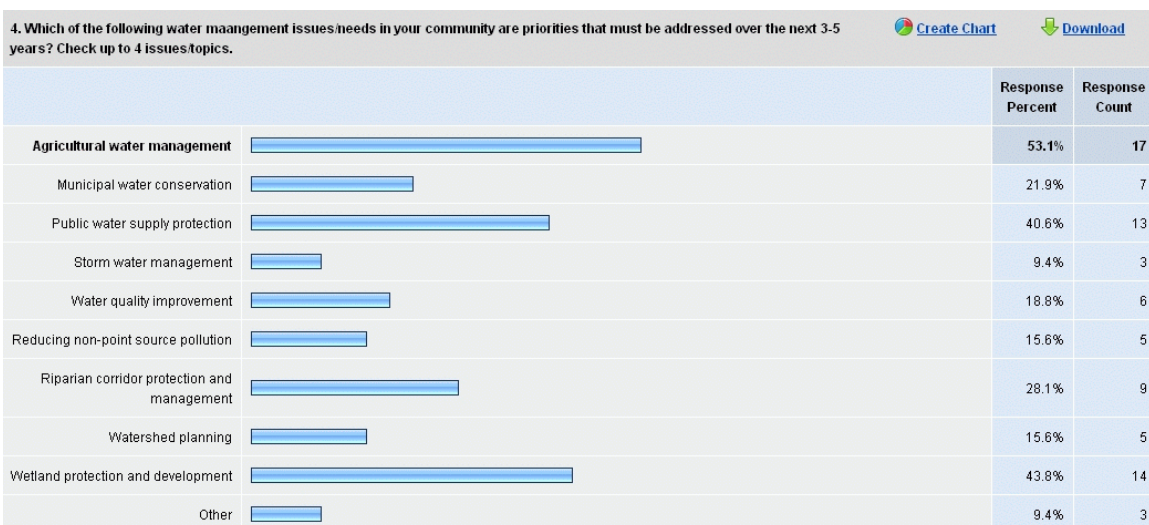
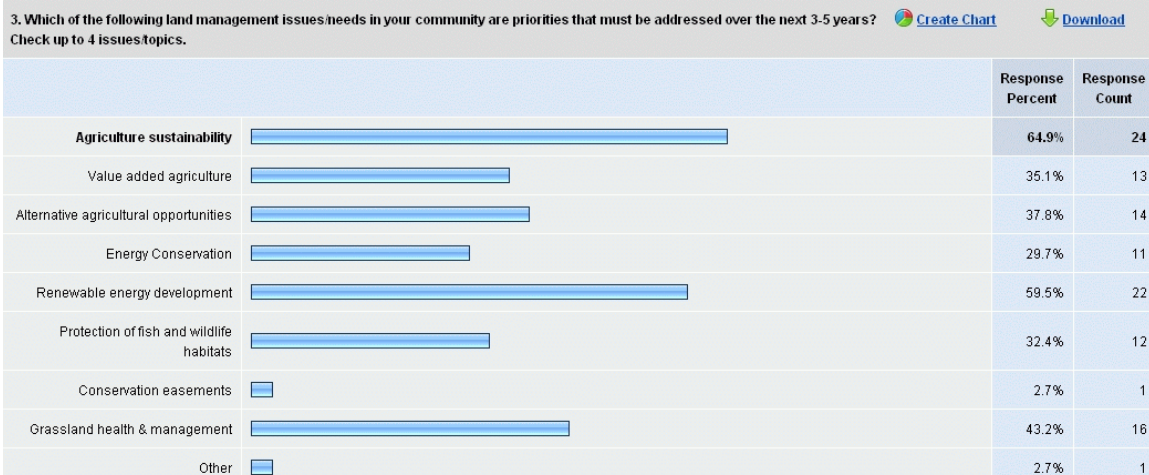
## Survey Results

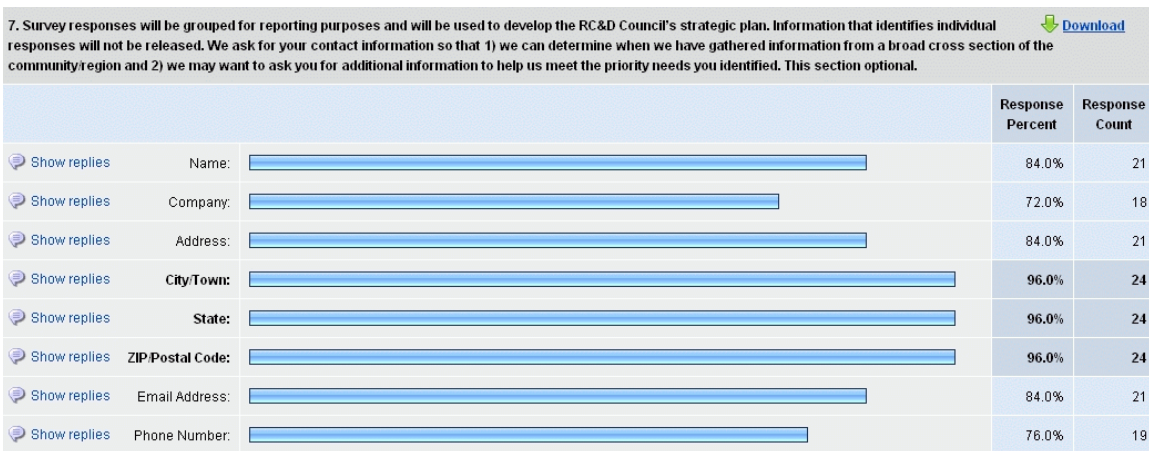
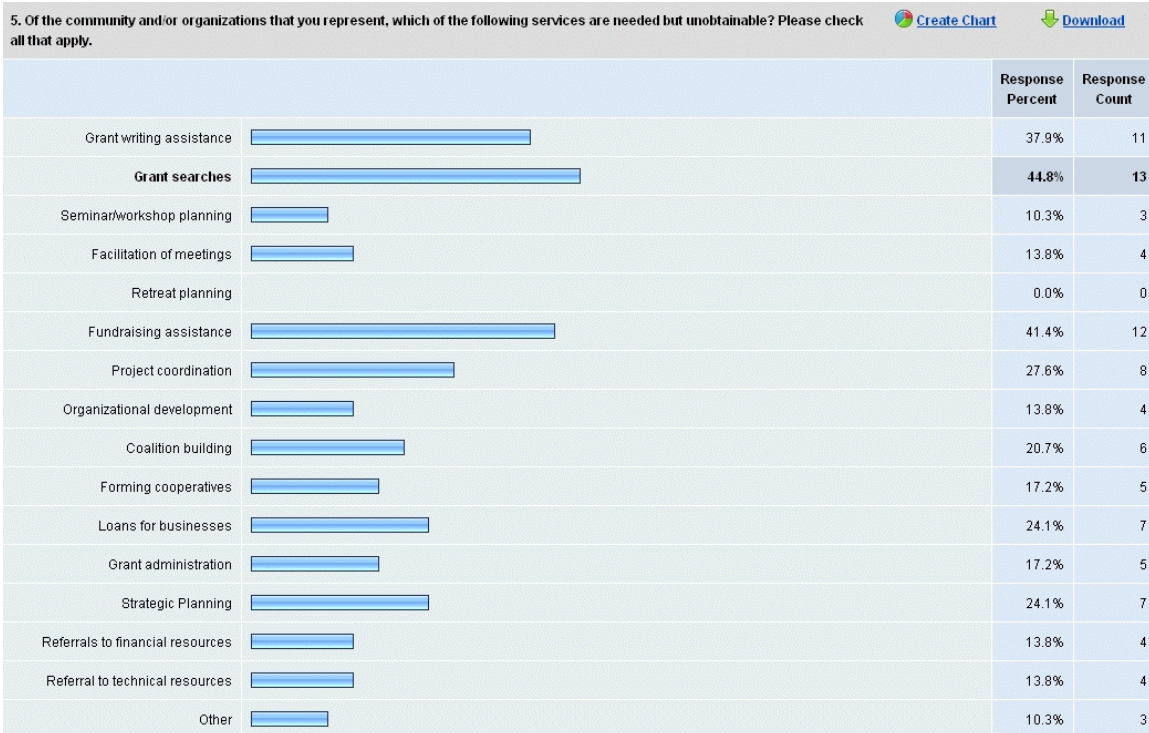
1. Which of the following community development issues/needs in your community are priorities that must be addressed over the next 3-5 years? Check up to 4 issues/topics. [Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Broadband communication		39.5%	15
Development of natural resource based industries		34.2%	13
<b>Business creation and retention</b>		86.8%	33
Workforce Development		36.8%	14
Development of recreation facilities		31.6%	12
Adequate health care & educational facilities		26.3%	10
Tourism promotion		34.2%	13
Waste management		2.6%	1
Recycling		28.9%	11
Rural Fire & Flood protection		5.3%	2
Water systems – delivery & treatment		10.5%	4
Waste disposal systems		10.5%	4
Affordable housing		36.8%	14
Emergency preparedness		13.2%	5
Promotion of food security		5.3%	2
Historic & natural heritage preservation		13.2%	5
Other		5.3%	2

2. Which of the following land conservation issues/needs in your community are priorities that must be addressed over the next 3-5 years? Check up to 4 issues/topics. [Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
<b>Environmental education</b>		67.6%	23
Soil erosion protection		44.1%	15
Noxious weed management		35.3%	12
Grassland management		64.7%	22
Farmland management		23.5%	8
Air Quality		5.9%	2
Other		11.8%	4
<a href="#">Show replies</a> List your top issue/need below and describe what you feel needs to happen to meet that issue or need.			19
answered question			34
skipped question			4





## Question 1 Replies

- Broadband (affordable): Qwest and Charter have a stronghold on this market and the cost, even to local government, is 1.5 times the average cost on the East side of the state. I don't know if competition would help, I do know that some of the facilities to serve this need should be updated to take advantage of newer, better, faster technology. Even if you are within a block or two from the central POP, you cannot obtain a higher upstream than 384Kbps and down is maxed at 7Mbps. This becomes a problem for businesses who do maintain a local web presence due to the slow speed of serving it upstream to the Internet. We will never attract an internet server farm business with this level of broadband. The City installing fiber should help, but we'll see.
1. Broadband (affordable): Qwest and Charter have a stronghold on this market and the cost, even to local government, is 1.5 times the average cost on the East side of the state. I don't know if competition would help, I do know that some of the facilities to serve this need should be updated to take advantage of newer, better, faster technology. Even if you are within a block or two from the central POP, you cannot obtain a higher upstream than 384Kbps and down is maxed at 7Mbps. This becomes a problem for businesses who do maintain a local web presence due to the slow speed of serving it upstream to the Internet. We will never attract an internet server farm business with this level of broadband. The City installing fiber should help, but we'll see.
  2. Community leaders need to decide what their priorities are, but if you are going to draw people to your area to live/ work there must be a place for them to live & play. Recycling is important to sustain the water quality & scenic integrity of the Sandhills area. Education, "engineering", enforcement.
  3. Business creation and retention
  4. Business creation and retention. It would be nice if a program could be started for business students like what is offered to medical professions. For example a portion of a business students education would be paid for if the student agreed to come back to a small rural community and be willing to either start or manage a business for a specified amount of time.
  5. I think tourism enhancement should be an issue that can bring more outside dollars into the community. The golf courses bring a lot of outside people to the area, but I think the area really lacks things for these people to do to spend more of their dollars in the community and not at the golf course. Many families come out, but are limited on things to do. I also think a community building should be on the top of the list as well. We are in dire need of someplace to have community functions and with the school helping out with maintenance during the winter in exchange for the use of it as a sports facility, it is a win-win for everyone!
  6. A community building or gymnasium. Enough money raised for this to happen
  7. Downtown revitalization is the top need in Sutherland. Creation and retention of businesses in that district is paramount to the future of the town.
  8. I think that the top issue will revolve around uniform access to wireless/broadband communication methods. Education, employment and general communication methods in countries throughout the world are leveraging wireless methods on a daily basis. The power and potential of this technology is not able to be utilized by many in rural areas due to the lack of infrastructure currently in place. Developing the systems and infrastructure to support this technology is vitally important.
  9. Business creation and retention is my most important. Here we have only a few stable businesses in town. Most are either minimal functioning tax right offs or are transient (a few years) at best. Businesses need to be more diversified and treat customers as people not resources that should be tapped. In the central sandhills we could do a better job of supplying locally but most travel to the larger cities to purchase goods because of prices, availability, and attitude of local businesses.
  10. Business creation and retention--without that, all other issues are secondary. We need to create businesses, which in turn, creates job opportunities for people to move to the area. I don't know what works to meet this issue--perhaps financial incentives??
  11. I think that business creation and retention is likely number one since this is what will keep our population up which in turn will help our schools.

12. A more directed approach to new business development as well as boosting the already present tourism aspects of the area. I believe there needs to be one voice in the area. Difficult as that might seem we seem to be going in the same general direction but from entirely different directions.
13. Two businesses that I think Mullen would benefit from is a nice restaurant and a convenience store with gas and maybe a carwash.
14. I think a community building would be a great asset also.
15. Development of natural resource based industries. By creating a new industry the other needs listed will be addressed.
16. Creating business and keeping them would be a huge plus. Need to figure out the niche market that would fit with so few people.
17. business creation and retention  
hire a part time economic development person
18. Preservation of Health Care Services/Public Health Services. Without this valuable resource in a rural community development will not occur, disease will result in increased morbidity and mortality thus affecting the overall declining population Available and easy to access Health services will stimulate economic development and in turn keep rural communities healthy and alive.
19. Business retention - We are losing an employer of nearly 500 people out of a town of 4,000. This will be a very hard hit on our community.
20. Business creation.....we need a restaurant, gas station, we need money to get it started.  
Business creation and retention are needed to ensure sustainability for our communities. Providing the basic needs of business, like connectivity will be essential. Understanding what types of businesses would have the greatest opportunity for success is a serious challenge. However, once identified, our communities could focus on strategies to attract new business or rebuild existing businesses.
21. Business creation and retention  
How else are we going to encourage our young people to return?
22. The above checked, in my opinion, would encompass any rural community. I am not sure what needs to happen. We know these are needs but getting from A to B is always the challenge and then getting people on board or active is the other challenge.
23. Natural resource based industries are a natural for this area. How about a wood chip or biofuels factory for all of these excess cedar trees?

## Question 2 Replies

1. Noxious weed management: continued programs to manage the phragmites along the rivers, streams and reservoirs. Also cedar tree management through controlled burns and other programs.
2. If these are priorities, the communities could do a better job in promoting Agri-tourism. Sandhills has one of the largest areas (the largest area?) of native prairie. It's unique & special.
3. Grassland mgt
4. trees or help with shelter belts for smaller sites

5. With the outside 'interests' in the rangeland and ranching (or the lack of, in many cases), many of the new landowners would benefit from education on the environment specific to the Sandhills as well as grassland management.
6. This is not in my area of expertise and will not comment on it.

Farm and grassland management via technology and education advancements will be critical to increasing the world food supply as we continue to see world populations demand increased food supplies.
7. Of the people that I know and work with, most think that because they live on a ranch they know about grassland and farm management. In fact they see the effects but don't know why they do what they do. People are aware of the work around them but they do not seem to understand the interrelatedness of making responsible resource choices and profitability.
8. Soil erosion protection, which in my viewpoint is closely related to grassland management.
9. Overgrazed grasslands clearly lead to soil erosion. I would leave those solutions to, scientists, ranchers, and people who work in the fields of land management in general.
10. I think a broad based approach in environmental education is most important it will encompass all of the other ideas listed above.

you can toss all the other categories into the umbrella of environment, this would include awareness education in the schools.
11. Environmental education that is based on sound, proven science not theories.
12. Rangeland management Quit taking rangeland to pivot irrigation it is a crime.
13. air quality
14. zone so feedlots cannot be within 10 miles or more from the village
15. Environmental education is a priority in our world today. It does not matter where you live you must educate the existing population (new or elderly) on the importance of knowing how to prevent, plan, and keep our environment free of possible bioterrorism events. This includes all biological threats to our environment. It is our earthly duty of mankind to preserve our earth for our children and grandchildren and for all generations to come.
16. Noxious weed management - This has been a very severe problem on the Platte River and we will need to continue to address this issue in the future.
17. Preserving the Sandhills is a top priority. I feel it will be necessary to continue providing education and resources to assist with cedar control, prevent overgrazing and soil erosion. Increasing the recognition of individual efforts within the community may have a positive effect in nudging others to participate. Environmental education linked with tourism opportunities may help bring awareness to the unique and precious nature of the Sandhills.
18. Noxious weed management
19. Noxious weeds are a problem and most people choose to not do anything about them, including the county
20. This is out of my area of expertise. I am not sure of the land conservation issues in my area.
21. Proper grassland management is a necessity for ranchers to stay in business. There are several right in my neighborhood who don't seem to realize that grazing down to the roots is not the way to go. A couple are from hard grass country in Colorado and haven't figured out that you can't graze the same way here in these fragile Sandhills as you can there. What to do? I

don't know other than show by example. If they aren't interested in bettering their rangeland, they sure aren't going to go to workshops or even ask questions. I am working with several guys who have seen the results on my place and are applying improved practices to their operations

### Question 3 Replies

1. Renewable energy development: Solar and wind power generation are two areas we should be doing more to develop local industries. We have plenty of both of these sources and yet to my knowledge we do not even offer power grid credits for individuals or businesses seeking to build more green facilities. There have been a few projects in the community that are using thermal heat generation, but we could be doing so much more.
2. We've got to figure out how to "grow" future farmers & ranchers. Countries don't become "extinct" because of wars, it's because of famine. This country MUST figure out that we CAN NOT allow our food to be imported. Energy options. Be inovative. We should try to maintain/sustain/improve our wildlife & fisheries habitats. We need to recognize that there are new types of "playing" & recreating on the land & in the water: i.e., tanking, OHVing, etc. How about a llama trek? How about ag type demonstrations? Straw-built homes (how to build).
3. Ag sustainability
4. With much of the population in the area growing older, we are going to see a huge shift either to outside ownership, or to uses not tied to agriculture as that is where the money is. Trying to get young ranchers started on the land should be a priority. But if agriculture is not sustainable, young people are not going to come back to the community.
5. Again, not my area of expertise.
6. Ag sustainability will be critical before value added or alternative ag opportunities can be addressed. All of these topics are very important.
7. Agricultural sustainability is something that should be looked at. I know of several operations that are operating at a level that borrows again their children. If they are to pass down a ranch the children will need to buy them out or inherit a tremendous debt load. This is good for neighbors wanting to buy, but not so for family heritage. The management is easier to teach than the attitude.
8. Agriculture sustainability--agriculture is the lifeblood of the area. My background doesn't lend itself to knowing how to address this issue. Again, scientists, ranchers, environmentalists are your best resources.
9. With energy costs increasing I think that we need to focus on renewal energy development for our villages first and then to individuals.
10. This is what it is all about and I understand it is difficult to educate those that need this most. The ones that should be at the meetings aren't.
11. Rangeland management Educate the value of rangelands
12. energy conservation  
retain REA
13. Grassland health & management - Invasion of noxious weeds in our states grasslands will become an even larger problem in the future.
14. See above
15. I am not sure of the need other than I know firsthand my own value added and I see the value in agri-tourism to assist agriculture sustainability. Not sure of the other issues.

#### Question 4 Replies

- Other - Nebraska needs to start considering the interaction of ground and surface water instead of treating them as separate. The DNR governs the surface water and NRD's the ground water which can be very confusing. In much of the Sandhills, they are one and the same.
1. Reducing non-point source pollution: Continued education and research including soil testing to determine exact quantities of fertilizer and nutrients that need to be added to the soil and at what time to apply additives for the best quality product. Home owner education in terms of lawn and garden fertilizer needs. Marketing toward natural lawn products for control of grubs, etc. The goal: reduce the additives in the soil = reduction in run off and table seepage of those additives into the water supplies.
  2. Water is pure & plentiful & easy to come by (relatively speaking) in the Sandhills. Will it always be that way? Who wants it, how to keep it, how to protect it's purity??
  3. ag water mgt
  4. I believe all the above are being managed appropriately at this time
- Protecting our rivers and streams from development should be a priority. Utilizing the beauty and scenic qualities of the rivers as they are should be the main consideration to riparian corridor management. There are very few 'untouched' rivers in the state and we are lucky enough to have 2 very unique rivers. This should be an asset that would fit in with the tourism, etc.
5. Water and its management in our state is one of the most, if not the most, critical issues we face. In order to supply world food demand and sustain economic viability, we must figure out how we will continue to produce increasing volumes of ag products with less water in the state.
  6. I think that people here in this town need some re-education about water use and management. I see that to many people put too much water on their lawns. Is a lawn that valuable of a thing to waste some of the best water on the planet just to keep it green. Maybe we should look at what type of grasses we planted or some other cultural practices to maintain a nice yard.
  7. Agricultural water management--must align usage with availability while looking at long-term implications of overuse.
  8. Public water supply protection should involve education and assistance to villages if needed.
  9. Water is the biggest topic in the state right now, there are longer term goals and concerns but until the water issue is solved it will be upper most on many agricultural people's mind.
  10. Water sovereignty issues. Keeping the Federal Govt's sticky fingers off of our water resources, and preventing federal control of all water sources.
  11. Watershed planning
  12. public water supply protection  
keep this as a proactive priority
  13. Agricultural water management is always a priority. Without adequate water you do not have quality of life. As citizens of this country and responsible stewards of this great land we must ensure that water is available for our families, livestock and crops.
  14. Agricultural water management - As the largest water user in the state, ag use conservation needs to continually be improved.
  - 15.

16. I don't know enough about the issues relating to water management to provide an informed opinion. I do know how important it is to me to preserve and protect our riparian and wetlands areas and keep our rivers clean.
17. I am not sure of these. The village board would be better equipped to answer these specific needs.

### Question 5 Replies

1. At this time, we do not see any of the above services as "unobtainable" in our community.
2. What's needed to run a non-profit entity? Is there a folder or forms put together for where to get started if you want to start a business? (step 1 is this, step 2.....) What is an indicator to know it may be successful?
3. we could use help with all the above - however none of them are "unobtainable"
4. Workforce/employee recruitment and retention may be another service that is currently affecting and has an increased potential to affect rural areas of our state in the future.
5. Resources, real people and hard resources, not fufu people saying I want to help because I want to be famous or make a buck.
6. Nothing I can think of
7. grant searches  
Grant opportunities need to be more visible, accessible
8. Community Leadership with new and innovative ways will make commuities build partnerships and develop strategies to keep growing and going forward. Everyone benefits when you have helpful esources. This will create a postive and strong infrastucture in communities. There is no "I" or "ME" in Tthe word TEAM -WORK !!
9. Grant writing training  
Grant search training
10. succession planning would be a great one. Especially geared towards farmers! Businesses always need information on loans and we are working on a community center so any information on fundraising would be great
11. It was nice to have MarketPlace in North Platte last year. Now it will be in Kearney again next year. How about conferences such as this in our area where we can reach western Nebraska?

### Other Feedback

1. The youth are our future. What can we do to entice them to stay in our rural communities? Ask them. Have a youth or young leader(s) serve on the council. Have this survey passed out to chosen classrooms in the RC & D area.
2. Water, if you talk about alternative ag make it more value added than something out of the blue. Also work with Extension for education. Give me a call if I can help you.
3. have follow-up
4. It is always a good idea to have two or three community leaders(new and old) attend (paid by the community) grant witting workshops or inspiration community development workshops. Even a community grant support group will keep the fires alive and positive.
5. Keep up the good work!! The RC&D's in our state are an under appreciated resource.

## **Outreach Efforts to Gather Public Input**

### **PRESS RELEASE**

**For Release week of April 4, 2010**

#### **Sandhills RC&D**

Contact: Bob Broweleit

Phone: 308-546-0636

Email: [bob.broweleit@ne.usda.gov](mailto:bob.broweleit@ne.usda.gov)

#### **Sandhills RC&D Planning for the Future**

During the spring of 2010, the Sandhills Resource, Conservation and Development Council will be in the process of developing a new 5-Year Area Plan. Various pathways for public input assist the council in creating a plan designed to make the eight county RC&D area a better place for all.

Until April 15th, a public input planning survey is available on the Sandhills RC&D website at [www.sandhillsrcd.org](http://www.sandhillsrcd.org). Your input on this plan is needed help improve the RC&D's development activities for the next 5 years.

The plan will serve to keep the Council focused and on-mission as they strive to meet the area's challenges and opportunities. Please contact the Sandhills RC&D office at (308)546-0636 for more information.

###

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**For Release May 27, 2010**

### **Sandhills RC&D**

Contact: Bob Broweleit

Phone: 308-546-0636

Email: [bob.broweleit@ne.usda.gov](mailto:bob.broweleit@ne.usda.gov)

### **What's On Your Community's "Wish List"?**

The Sandhills Resource, Conservation and Development Council is developing its next 5 year plan and is interested in hearing your thoughts about development needs in your community. If you would like to share your thoughts regarding your "wish list" for your area, give us a call at (308)546-0636 or send an email to [info@sandhillsrccd.org](mailto:info@sandhillsrccd.org).

If you're not familiar with the types of projects the Sandhills RC&D Council has been involved with in the past, visit [www.sandhillsrccd.org](http://www.sandhillsrccd.org) and check out our past annual reports under the "Project Info" tab. We look forward to hearing from you and would be interested to incorporate some of your ideas into our next 5 year plan. A good plan is only as good as the citizen input we receive and will serve to keep the RC&D Council focused and on-mission as we strive to meet the area's challenges and opportunities.

###

The Sandhills RC&D gathered public input for the area planning process through a variety of venues. These venues included two of the Nebraska Rural Development Commission's Listen and Learn sessions were held in the Sandhills RC&D area. One was held in Stapleton and another in Ogallala. Valuable input was gleaned from each of these sessions.

### **Sandhills Summit held in Stapleton**

The Sandhills Summit, the first of the Rural Development Commission's — Listen and Learn sessions was held the evening of October 14, 2008 in Stapleton. Attendees traveled from Thedford, Arnold, Callaway, and Bassett to join the Stapleton meeting.

A variety of local, state, and federal resources participated including the Sandhills RC&D, Nebraska Business Development Center, Rural Enterprise Assistance Program, Nebraska Division of Travel and Tourism, Nebraska Community Foundation, GROW Nebraska, Department of Environmental Quality, Community Development Services, USDA— Rural Development, Nebraska Department of Economic Development, and the Nebraska Rural Development Commission.



The information gathered from the audience was shared with all the resource providers while the highlight of the evening was the meet and greet time where resource providers were available to visit individually with attendees. One person was heard to comment, "who ever knew there were so many resources to help us?"

## **List of References and Resources**

U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 and 2000 Censuses of Population, and 2008 county estimate files

U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Estimates Branch

Land Resource Regions and Major Land Resource Areas of the United States, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Basin (USDA Handbook 296, 2006)

Productive Lands – Healthy Environment, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Strategic Plan, 2005-2010

USDA Economic Research Service

USDA - National Agricultural Statistics Service