

NRCS-Assisted Watershed Projects



Aowa Creek Flood Control Project Dixon County, Nebraska and Antelope Creek Flood Control Project Cedar County, Nebraska

There are 2,100 watershed projects in the nation established by local units of government with the assistance of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Watershed Program (Public Law 78-534 and Public Law 83-566). These projects consist of over 11,000 flood control structures and thousands of conservation practices that provide over \$2 billion in annual benefits in flood risk reduction, water supplies, recreational areas, and other benefits. The following is just one example of how the Watershed Program is benefiting local communities and the nation.

The Aowa Creek federal PL-566 Watershed Project was initiated by Dixon County authorities and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Sponsorship of the project was later transferred to the Lewis & Clark Natural Resources District (LCNRD).



The primary purpose of the project is flood risk reduction for 55,000 acres including the communities of Newcastle and Ponca, and the rural residents of the Aowa Creek Watershed and its tributaries. Secondary benefits include erosion control, sediment retention, wildlife habitat creation, and recreation opportunities.

At the time of initial project consideration in 1969, there were 230 family farms in the watershed with an average farm size of 240 acres.

Fifty structures were installed as part of the project including 10 flood retarding structures and 40 grade stabilization structures.

The Nebraska Natural Resources Commission, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and other partners assisted with funding and technical support for the construction of Buckskin Hills Lake (1980), and Powder Creek Lake (2003). These dams located in Dixon County not only provide flood risk reduction but also public recreation opportunities. These facilities are managed with Nebraska Game and Parks as Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs).

Buckskin Hills Wildlife Management Area

The project was designed and engineered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). It is operated and maintained by the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission as a Wildlife Management Area (WMA)

The Lewis and Clark Natural Resources District sponsored construction of Buckskin Hills WMA in 1980 as an erosion and flood control structure for the Aowa Creek Watershed Project.

Buckskin Hills WMA includes 340 acres of public use land. The dam is 57 feet high with a 75-acre lake. The lake is stocked with Largemouth Bass, Bluegill, Channel Catfish, Black Crappie, and Walleye.

For the hunter there is excellent habitat with pheasants, quail, deer, waterfowl and dove. Other amenities include a boat ramp, public restrooms, and ample areas for hiking around the lake.



Powder Creek Wildlife Management Area

The Lewis and Clark Natural Resources District sponsored construction of Powder Creek WMA in 2003 as an erosion and flood control structure for the Aowa Creek Watershed Project. The Wildlife Management Area (WMA) covers 467 acres including a 107 acre lake.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission manage Powder Creek as a Wildlife Management Area. There are primitive camping sites and public restrooms on site. A boat dock makes this lake good for fishing.

The lake has been stocked with Bluegill, Channel Catfish, Largemouth Bass, Walleye, Black Crappie, and Flathead Catfish. Hunting opportunities include pheasant quail, deer, waterfowl and mourning dove.



Chalkrock Wildlife Management Area

Chalkrock Wildlife Management Area (WMA) located in the Antelope Creek Watershed of Cedar County is a 130-acre wildlife area with a 44-acre lake located near Menominee in northern Cedar County. The lake was constructed in 1986 as a flood and erosion control structure. The structure drains 11,500 acres, is 61 feet high, and has a flood storage capacity of 181 acre-feet above normal pool level.

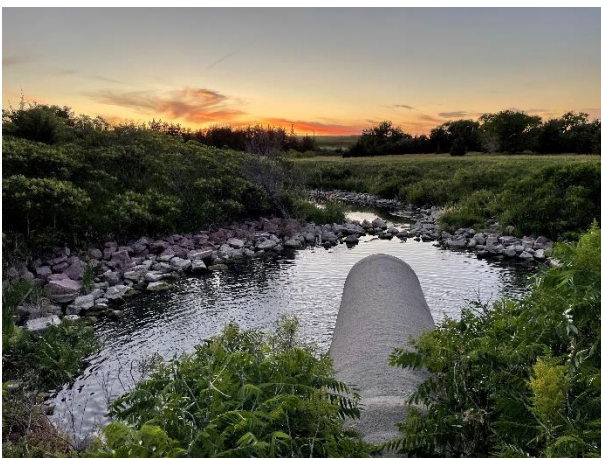


Chalkrock Dam was constructed in 1986 and was made possible by donations of land by the landowners. The Lewis & Clark NRD sponsored the project along with the Cedar County Commissioners who provided funding for 25% of the cost. Grants from the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (NDNR) Resources Development Fund provided funds for 75% of the project. The total project cost was \$503,438. Annual benefits to county roads, farmland, and public use are approximately \$14,400 per year.

The structure provided significant protection to the downstream county road and downstream landowners when the March 2019 Bomb Cyclone impacted the area. The emergency spillway of the structure functioned as designed and diverted large amounts of water that exceeded the capacity of the primary spillway.

The project was designed and engineered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). It is operated and maintained by the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission as a Wildlife Management Area.

The Chalkrock WMA is open to boating, hunting, and fishing. Hunting opportunities includes deer, pheasants, and waterfowl. Fish stocked include Largemouth Bass, Bluegill and Channel Catfish.



The information provided here was partially taken from the Lewis and Clark Natural Resources District web page: <https://lcnrd.nebraska.gov/water-resources/flood-control-recreation> Photos and assistance with this article was provided by Annette Sudbeck, General Manager for the Lewis & Clark Natural Resources District. August 2023