

Sandhills offer Nebraska underground water

by Duane Leibhart

Some eastern Nebraska residents are losing sleep pondering how to utilize huge underground water supplies in Nebraska's water-rich sandhills. Biologist Gilbert L. Adrian told an audience at Bessey Hall earlier this week.

Adrian, from Hastings College, joined Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Biologist Bruce McCarraher in discussing the ecology of Nebraska's sandhills lakes.

The Hastings professor said the sandhills are one of the world's largest natural aquifers (water bearers). Underground water in the 20,000 sq. mile sandhill's area has been estimated at 1,678,800,000 acre ft., he said, enough to cover the entire state in 18 feet of water.

Water used in irrigation in the sandhills is not enough to affect the recharge rate there, he said, which is estimated at 12,000,000 acre ft. per year. In eastern Nebraska, on the other hand, irrigators are using up more underground water than

is naturally recharged, Adrian said.

McCarraher estimated there are 1,640 sandhills lakes over ten acres in area with an additional 850 natural permanent lakes of less than ten acres. The average depth of the 1,640 lakes is about 3.2 ft.

The sandhills have one of the highest concentrations of underground lakes in the world, he said. Although in the west sandhills have no outflow, there are many lakes maintained by overland run-off water, the biologist said.

Some of these highly alkaline lakes are almost devoid of plant and animal life, he said. At present, 58 per cent of sandhill lakes support fish life.

According to McCarraher,

Sacramento perch and the fathead minnow seem to be the most suited to water with high alkaline levels. Sandhill lakes support 20 species of warmwater fish life but the water is too warm for trout, the biologist said.


"We could single out 15 to 20 per cent of these that are real good for ducks," he said. "It seems the ducks know why these lakes are better than the others, but we don't," the biologist said.

He said literature shows Nebraska Indians didn't frequent the sandhills much. This he tied to the scarcity of buffalo there. The biologist said there may have been grass fires that burned off large grazing areas.

UNL zoologist Harvey Gunderson, speaking from the audience, said sandhills lakes dry up in a severe drought, so buffalo herds stayed close to waterways like the Platte River. Estimates of buffalo population in Nebraska indicate there were about 60 million, but I would guess it was 10 million at the tops," the zoologist said.

Early buffalo population figures obtained by using numbers of buffalo around the Platte for a guide, he said, which wouldn't be representative of other Nebraska areas. "Contrary to what many people think, I don't believe there were ever wall to wall buffalo in Nebraska," Gunderson said.

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NWU schedules visitation meeting

UNL campus residents aren't the only people in Lincoln complaining about housing and visitation regulations.

Nine hundred of Nebraska Wesleyan's 1,200 students live on campus and the Wesleyan visitation policy is more restrictive than UNL's, according to Charles Albers, vice-president of the Centennial Hall Governing Council.

Wesleyan President Vance D. Rogers has received the power to administer his college's open hours program from the Board of Governors and will meet with students, alumni and faculty this week to determine a new policy, according to Bob Bartle, editor of *The Wesleyan*, the college's newspaper.

Present policy permits a maximum of 20 hours weekly for open house; guests must sign in and be accompanied by a resident at all times, Albers said. The hall's resident assistant must be in the dorm, but policy does not require a student assistant on the floor or a scheduled function, as UNL policy states.

Hopefully, Bartle said, Rogers will determine a policy similar to the Hastings College program which permits up to eight hours a day visitation, with a maximum of 40 hours weekly.

Albers sees the reaction of donors as the main force preventing implementation of a liberalized policy; the school could lose money from alumni, especially those out-state, he said.

Concern over the security of the dormitories and the position of Wesleyan as a Methodist institution are other arguments that have been used against inter-visitation, Albers said.

In determining open house hours, 75 per cent of the hall residents must vote, with a two-thirds majority approval. Visitation regulations also apply to Wesleyan's Greek houses.

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