



Water Sustainability Report

April 1, 2026

Bow Creek Watershed Project, Lewis & Clark NRD

Application # 10079

Progress up to April 1, 2026

March 31, 2026

Since the last annual report in April 2025, the Bow Creek Watershed Project (BCWP) has accomplished many tasks.

A summer field day focusing on BMPs in organic transition system was co-hosted with the Bazile Groundwater Management Area at Junior Pfanstiel's farm near Magnet, NE. The field day had a great turnout where producers learned about using hairy vetch and rye mixture for weed suppression and nutrient management. Specialized equipment that can interseed between rows and roll the rye and vetch down for termination without tillage or chemicals was discussed. UNL extension specialists also spoke about soil health, and soil structure was displayed in a soil pit.



Left: An in-row roller crimper used to roll the rye-vetch mix was displayed at the field day next to a Hiniker interseeder.

Below left: Attendees learn how cover crops and corn are part of Junior's system at the 2025 joint field day.

Below: Soil structure is examined in the soil pit during the field day.



UNL 2025 Capstone students traveled to the area for their annual 3-day Bow Creek Watershed visit in August. The trip included stream assessments with local Nebraska Game and Park Commission biologists, field soil assessments lead by local NRCS conservationists, and heartfelt conversations with farmers, ranchers and local business owners. This year the students stayed in cabins along Lewis & Clark Lake where they experienced the unique connection between the agriculture community and the recreational opportunities in the watershed. This experience helps them appreciate the ripple effects and interdependence of both industries.

The 2025 student enrollment was less than previous years so only two improvement plans were written instead of three. The Kincaid and Uhing Farms volunteered to work with students again this year. Succession planning was an emphasis this year as both farms are multi-generational. This aspect of agriculture is vital to the continued survival of family farms and rural America but often not addressed by agronomists. Students learned valuable lessons on looking at the whole farm by including this aspect in their planning. In December the students returned to Hartington and presented their farm reports to both families, LCNRD staff and board members, and agency partners. The farmers were impressed with the reports and had good questions and discussions with the students about suggested management changes.



Far left: Students learn about Agri-tourism and wine growing from Tim Nissen, Nissen Wines. Left: NRCS staff lead student assessments of cropland health in an alfalfa field on the Uhing farm.

Far Right: Students measure fish during the Bow Creek stream assessment lead by Nebraska Game and Parks biologists.

Right: Nebraska Game and Parks biologist, Cassidy Wessel, facilitated the kayak trip on Lewis & Clark Lake for UNL students.



BCWP joined with the Bazile Groundwater Management Area (BGMA) Project to host the 2nd annual Northeast Nebraska Ag Conference (NNAC) in Norfolk, NE. This event was held at the Northeast Community College Lifelong Learning Center. Over 250 people attended the low-cost event featuring speakers **Glen Rabenberg, who filled in for John Kampf who could not attend due to illness, Todd Zehr, Bazile Groundwater Management Area staff, and** other local and regional farmers, industry leaders, and educators. This year for the producer panel, Nebraska Strategic Ag Coalition supported the creation of short producer videos. These videos were shown before a discussion between the panelists was facilitated. They also facilitated Mike



Glen Rabenberg filled in at the opening keynote speaker at NNAC.

Kamm, UNL, to video record some of the sessions and have made those videos available online. A link to the videos is available on the LCNRD/Bow-Creek page. In addition to the opening session and local farmer panel, speakers conducted concurrent breakout sessions. In total the event offered 17 hours of educational content. This replaced the BCWP winter meeting's 12 hours of education content. Co-hosts for the event were LENRD, LNNRD, and UENRD as part of the BGMA. Other agencies that helped facilitate the event by planning or taking an active role in the event included, Papio NRD, USDA NRCS, UNL, UNL Extension, local farmers, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and NDWEE. The event also received sponsorships from many ag businesses.



Left: 2025 NNAC Producer Panel featured farmers from the four NRDs sharing their conservation story.

Right: Another large attendance at the Northeast Nebraska Ag Conference.



The soil health curriculum has been developed and the first lesson was facilitated on March 17, 2025. Four local producers attended the first session that focused on the need for changing the way we look at soil. The second session of the first cohort will be conducted on April 14th. If enough interest is created a second cohort will start in the fall of 2026.

A mentor group meeting was held March 12th at Jeff Steffen's shop. Twelve mentor group members gathered to share information they learned at winter conferences and discuss adding carbon sources to commercial fertilizer to increase nutrient use efficiency. Positive feedback from the NNAC was also shared with the consensus of continuing the event. The next mentor meeting will be in April 9th with the topic to be determined.

One Comprehensive Soil Health Management Plan was drafted by the BCWP coordinator and shared with the farmer. Ongoing communication with the farmer is planned in April to create a final draft.

A one-day bus tour to Green Cover's field day was taken. Besides the learning that happens from the formal talks at the event, these experiences allow local farmers to increase their personal network to include farmers from across the region. On the way home the bus stopped at Kip Heinrich's farm. Kip has planted most of his acres to a forage mix and grazes cattle on the fields. The financial impact of that on the farm along with the environmental benefits were discussed.

Three local farmers were sent order forms for BCWP conservation signs. These signs highlight the conservation efforts of local farms and increase visibility of the Bow Creek Watershed Project.

The LCNRD grain drill was used on 2124.4 acres in 2025. The drill was used to seed small grain crops like oats, millet and alfalfa, along with cover crops and forage crops. These 2124.4 acres help us to reach the goal of 5,000 acres impacted by the project. With the increased knowledge of how cover crops and alternative cash crops added to the corn-soybean rotation improve water quality and the access to a 30-

ft no-till drill to seed those crops we anticipate more than 2,000 acres will be impacted in 2026 and beyond.

Due to the change in NRCS contract payments no Bow Creek Watershed Project contracts were offered. An updated process was approved by WSF to create stand alone contracts.

Work to evaluate water quality data from 2021-2023 as part of the updated Water Quality Management plan has begun.

Working with specialist at UNL, a plan for evaluating the impact of BCWP outreach and educational events is being developed. This includes design of a retrospective evaluation and evaluation process.

Activities Planned from now until next Annual Report April 1, 2027

Continue education events including workshops, field days, soil health curriculum meetings, and mentor meetings. Work with the other three NRDs to host the 2026 NNAC.

The UNL Capstone students will visit the Bow Creek Watershed again in August 2026.

BCWP will plan and organize a bus-trip through northeast Nebraska/South Dakota for mentors and farmers to visit innovative farms in the area. Partners will include NeDNR, other NRDs and ag businesses.

The Water Quality Management Plan will be updated in 2026.

Gain approval for evaluation of BCWP education and outreach activities, schedule and complete producer interview training from UNL specialists and conduct producer interviews.

Anticipated Cashflow for remainder of the project

While WSF has been billed less than originally budgeted at this point in the grant, an increase in reimbursement requests is anticipated for the next year. Other grant funds were exhausted before billing to WSF started. Now that those grants are completed more expenses will be billed to the WSF. A majority if not all the WSF budgeted funds are expected to be expended by the end of the grant agreement.

Updating the Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP) has started with the water data analysis and other updates will continue. The \$20,000 budgeted for that will be expended in 2026.

BMP payments to support NRCS EQIP contracts are expected to total more than the \$43,333 budgeted.

Producer outreach evaluation training is expected to cost \$1500.

UNL Capstone Student Visit is expected to bill between \$3,000 and \$5,000.

Likelihood that benefits projected in application #10079 will be realized:

There is a high likelihood that benefits projected in application #10079 will be realized.

At this point the project is on track to achieve the benefits projected in the application which include:

- Increase producer knowledge about environmental and agronomic benefits of BMPs

- Increase producer confidence in successfully implementing BMPs
- Increase producer networks of knowledge, resources, and technical assistance for BMP implementation
- BCWP will continue demonstration farms and host local education events including field days and workshops
- Facilitate mentoring groups to support successful adoption of BMPs
- Meet with up to 60 producers to discuss the BCWP incentive and education program
- Develop two soil health management plans with producers in the BCWP area
- Develop a soil health training curriculum for producers, crop advisors, agronomists, and other agriculture professionals.
- Incentive and education payment contracts will be offered to increase BMP implementation on 5,000 acres.