

## Airboat to battle phragmites

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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### **'Touch up' planned near Gothenburg.**

Helicopters hovering above the Platte River near Gothenburg this month are not part of the phragmite eradication plan but sightings of an airboat are possible.

Banks and islands between Gothenburg and Elm Creek and near North Platte treated by last year's aerial spraying will be blasted by herbicide from an airboat, according to project coordinator Rich Walters of the Platte Valley Weed Management Area.

What Walters calls "touch ups," by Paulsen Habitat Services of Cozad, should reach the Gothenburg area in the next two to three weeks.

For the rest of the river—primarily from Hershey to the Kingsley Dam and from Elm Creek to Columbus and from the South Platte where it joins the North Platte River west to Deuel County—helicopters armed with herbicide will start attacking phragmites and other invasive plants that clog the Platte.

More than \$1 million in grant money this year means more helicopter spraying along the Platte, according to Platte Valley and West Central Weed Management Area officials.

Last September, the Platte south of Gothenburg was part of a helicopter-spraying campaign targeting phragmites—the newest of Nebraska's noxious weeds.

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The spraying of saltcedar and purple loosestrife was also included in the plan, Walter said, but those plants are not as prolific near Gothenburg as they are in other places.

Walters said he and other officials are pleased with what aerial spraying of the herbicide Habitat did to phragmites last year.

“There was 99% kill on what was sprayed. We were pretty positive it was going to work,” Walter said.

The chemical is absorbed by the leaves of the phragmite plant and carried to its root system, he explained.

Over the winter, Walters said the root system is killed and the plant turns brown—evidence of the effectiveness of the herbicide.

Because the plant remains standing, he said weed officials plan to remove dead phragmites by disking and shredding through mechanical means in 2010.

To finance the project through 2011, Walters said the Nebraska Environmental Trust has stepped up to the plate by approving \$1 million over three years.

The Nebraska Department of Agriculture has chipped in \$500,000 for elimination of invasive plants in the Platte Basin in 2009, he said, while the Central Platte Natural Resources District has given \$117,000.

Walters said a three-state Platte River Recovery Implementation Program is providing \$80,000 to work on a weed-infested area west of North Platte.

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After spraying has occurred, Walters said they hope owners of land adjacent to the river help control weeds clogging the river.

Because phragmites reproduce fast, he said officials don't want the noxious weed to return where they've already spent money applying herbicide.

"Monitoring and maintenance will always be going on but hopefully on a smaller scale once the big projects are done," he said.

Meetings are scheduled in 2011 to tell landowners about cost-share programs to treat weeds and share other information about the project.

Walters said owners of property along the Platte who haven't received notices about spraying or have questions can call him at 308-390-2511 or Dawson County weed superintendent Marty Craig at 308-324-3771.

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