

What cities are currently affected by the federal mandate on stormwater?

There are 17 cities and a number of counties in Nebraska that must develop plans to deal with this issue. Two cities, Omaha and Lincoln, must develop plans as soon as possible. The other communities that will soon be impacted include Beatrice, Bellevue, Columbus, Fremont, Girls and Boys Town, Grand Island, Hastings, Kearney, LaVista, Norfolk, North Platte, Papillion, Ralston, Scottsbluff, and South Sioux City.

What is the goal of the federal mandate?

The Clean Water Act has a number of programs that include requirements like the need for major cities to obtain permits before constructing stormwater systems and that developers obtain permits to ensure erosion and sediment control measures are included at construction sites of one acre or more.

Do the local cities and NRDs cooperate now on different water issues?

Yes. In the Omaha area a special partnership of nine cities, two counties, and the Papio-Missouri River NRD are working together on a number of water issues regarding the Papillion Creek Watershed. And the City of Lincoln and Lower Platte South NRD are working together to develop master plans for several watersheds in the area. This should result in cost-effective program development through shared resources. This cooperation will be instrumental in developing stormwater management plans in these areas.

Why can't this money be collected as part of our current property taxes?

By implementing a fee specifically dedicated to stormwater management and improvements, local communities have a dedicated source of funds that could only be used for specific stormwater issues. If the funds are included in general property tax revenues, they could be diverted for other projects other than stormwater efforts.

When would the fee start?

No fees can start until after the Nebraska Legislature approves the fee legislation. It then must be approved by the local governing board such as a city council or NRD board of directors, following public hearings. Remember, this legislation only allows local governing boards to start the fee. It does not mandate that they create it, so in some cities the fee may never be initiated.

What can I do to help?

If you believe this fee is in the best interest of your community, visit with your State Senator and let them know how you feel about this proposed legislation.

For more information on the stormwater fee, please contact:

- Ben Higgins, City of Lincoln Public Works, 402-441-7589
- Mike Arends, City of Omaha Public Works, 402-444-3908
- Ed Ubben, Lower Platte South Natural Resource District, 402-476-2729
- Marlin Petermann, Papio-Missouri River Natural Resource District, 402-444-6222

Or contact your local city public works department or Natural Resource District office.



Certain communities in Nebraska have experienced tremendous growth in the past 30 years, with new housing and commercial developments replacing agricultural fields. As a result, stormwater runoff following heavy rains could potentially cause serious flooding problems and degrade the quality of our water for personal and recreational use.

The Nebraska Legislature is considering legislation to allow local government entities to work together and implement a special stormwater utility fee to provide cities, counties, and Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) the funds required to implement stormwater management plans and improvements.

What will this fee mean for you? This brochure provides answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about this issue.

What is a stormwater utility fee?

A stormwater utility fee would be a charge to property owners for their contribution to surface water runoff. Funds collected would be dedicated exclusively to dealing with the problems regarding the increasing volume of water flowing into our storm drainage systems and natural waterways following heavy rains. It will help ease flooding problems and improve water quality in local communities.

Why do we need a special fee?

The continued growth of new residential, shopping, and business developments has placed significant strains on the current storm drainage infrastructure of many communities. As a result, heavy rains are causing significant water runoff problems, which can result in flooding and water quality degradation. The stormwater fee would be used to develop stormwater management plans and build the infrastructure needed to meet the growing needs of communities.

Just how serious is this problem?

Problems associated with stormwater runoff such as flooding, channel degradation, aquatic and riparian habitat loss, and water quality deterioration are becoming increasingly common as new development continues. The federal government has now mandated that first-class cities, of which there are 17 in Nebraska, develop and carry out stormwater management plans. Estimates of the cost associated with this need could reach hundreds of millions of dollars here in Nebraska.

Is Nebraska the only state facing stormwater problems?

No. In fact, a number of communities around the country have already implemented a stormwater fee to address this very need. Midwest communities such as Des Moines, Topeka, Wichita, Kansas City, Boulder, and Denver now have dedicated funds to deal with this situation in their communities.

How will the money raised from the fee be used?

Any dollars raised from the fee must go toward stormwater management plans and improvements. Dollars will help local communities and the Natural Resources Districts better plan for meeting the water quality and flood control needs of future developments, as well as make badly needed infrastructure improvements.

Isn't this just an example of the state imposing a fee on local taxpayers?

It's important to note that the state legislation being considered is "enabling" legislation, which means the state simply gives approval for local governing boards to actually design and implement a specific fee for their community. Locally elected officials in each community will decide whether or not to enact a fee.

Would a homeowner pay the same fee as a large business?

The fee takes into account where the stormwater is coming from, so it treats everyone equitably. The fee for developers, businesses, homeowners, and organizations would be based on the amount of paved land or other impervious area under their control, so the owner of a large paved parking lot would pay more than a typical homeowner.

Why shouldn't developers pay the entire fee?

Every owner of property contributes in some way to stormwater runoff, so it is only fair that every property owner contribute to the fee. It has been structured so it treats each group fairly, based on their contribution to the problem.

How would the conservation work of farmers be considered with this fee?

Most agricultural land is already very low in impervious cover and may even be exempted for this very reason.

What if a business had developed a stormwater runoff system on their own?

Businesses and organizations that have proactively developed best management practices, such as stormwater detention basins and erosion control measures would be credited for their own efforts to reduce stormwater runoff.

Is there any idea what the fee would cost?

In most other cities where the fee has been enacted, the cost to a local homeowner has been between \$3 a month and \$10 a month, which is a small price to pay for better flood control and water quality in their community.

Who would administer the fee?

That would be decided at the local level. In most cases, the city, county, or Natural Resources District would administer the plan.

What if a city, county, or NRD all want to charge a fee in the same community?

The legislation specifically states that no parcel of land can be charged by more than one entity, so that could not happen. Cities and NRDs must work together to determine what to do in their community.

Why can't cities, counties, and the NRDs do this work with existing funds?

Funds for flood control, water quality, and conservation efforts are already in short supply and the costs to create stormwater master plans and make infrastructure, long-term water quality improvements, and flood control improvements are in the millions of dollars. A fee would provide a dedicated amount of funds to meet the stormwater needs in each community.