



## COTTONWOOD PARK LAKE

### Community ...

**V**olunteers built Wolbach's Cottonwood Park Lake in the mid-1970s. It has a surface area of about three acres, with an island on the north end. The lake is fed by underground springs, with overflow draining through a series of culverts into nearby Spring Creek. Park facilities include a playground, rodeo arena, sand volleyball court and picnic area. The lake was a popular picnic area and fishery with bullhead, carp and sunfish being abundant. Since 1991, Wolbach students have used the lake as a living laboratory for science classes. Students collect water quality data and organize annual cleanups as a community project.

### Challenges ...

Over the years, silt accumulated in the lake. Vegetation such as duckweed and algae became abundant. It was dredged in 1995 using grant funds from the Nebraska Environmental Trust. An aeration system was also installed and equipment was purchased to help local students monitor water quality. However, dredging only excavated the lake to three to six foot depths, not enough to sustain fish.

### Solutions ...

In 2001, Wolbach received lake renovation funds through CLEAR. The renovation project's main component was excavating the lake to remove sediment, providing improved fish habitat and improving lake aesthetics through reduced aquatic vegetation growth and algae blooms. Before dredging, the aeration system was



removed and cleaned. Existing fish were removed and as much water as possible was drained. Sediment was removed to the point that at least 25 percent of the lake had depths of 10-15 feet. Once dredging was finished and the lake was refilled, it was restocked with largemouth bass, bluegill and channel catfish. The aeration system was reinstalled and shoreline was seeded and landscaped to prevent erosion.

### **Results ...**

Renovating the lake was an example of community involvement and participation; for example, over 30 people volunteered to drive dump trucks to remove dredged soils, which were then used to build a shoreline walking path. Park improvements included a bridge built by high school students for access to the island, electrical hookups for campers, improved playgrounds, picnic shelters and a softball diamond. The cost of this one-year project was approximately \$63,000. CLEAR provided \$43,000 and the community \$20,000. Project partners included Wolbach Public Schools and the Lower Loup Natural Resources District.

