City vies for $308,301 in trust grant funds.

The city has been blessed in its efforts to find funds to pay for the restoration of Lake Helen.

Every grant city officials have applied for has been awarded to help finance the $1.5 million project.

City officials recently learned that the last piece of the funding puzzle looks likely to slide into place.

In a preliminary report, Nebraska Environmental Trust Foundation officials ranked the Lake Helen project sixth on a list of 154 other proposals throughout the state.

If awarded, which Lake Tech Inc. consultant Paul Brakage said is likely, the city will receive $308,301.

The final selection will be announced after a public hearing on April 4.

“It’s excellent news given how high Lake Helen was ranked,” Brakage said. “Typically, the final rankings follow the recommendations of those ranked in the preliminary process.”

In 2012, Region Five (a 13-county area in southwestern Nebraska that includes Dawson County) received $3,520,361 for projects from the foundation.

City administrator Bruce Clymer agreed, said he's excited about the possibility of more funds for the project.

**ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST'S TOP PROJECTS**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Metropolitan Utilities District (Omaha) | $497,000 |
| 2. Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo | $23,333 |
| 3. The Nature Conservancy (Niobrara fire) | $154,932 |
| 4. Habitat for Humanity of Omaha | $485,000 |
| 5. Omaha Children's Museum | $30,000 |
| 6. City of Gothenburg (Lake Helen Water Quality Project) | $308,301 |
| 7. Friends of Heron Haven, Inc. | $30,231 |
| 8. City of Lincoln Parks & Recreation | $500,000 |
| 9. City of La Vista | $525,000 |
| 10. Lauritzen Gardens | $600,000 |

Brakage, who was hired to help the city obtain grants for the project and administer them, said he thinks the high ranking is based on the participation of the  agencies involved and because Lake Helen is a highly used resource.

"And the condition of the lake," he noted. "It's a public safety concern."

Getting rid of waterfowl that contribute to the lake's high phosphorous levels through their feces has been a priority of the Gothenburg City Council for years.

The city began draining the lake in mid December, before geese start migrating this spring, to give the lake bottom time to dry out.

A pump was recently installed in the southwest corner of the lake to help the process along.

How long it will take is anyone's guess since some of the process is weather dependent, Clymer said.

Once the final grant is secured, Brakage said bid packages will go out around June 1 with construction slated to begin in August.

A noticeable change will be the filling in of the north lobe of the lake with dirt.

**GUARANTEED FUNDING**

| | |
|---|---|
| Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality | $416,431 |
| Nebraska Game & Parks Commission | $460,831 |
| Nebraska Environmental Trust Foundation | $308,301* |
| Central Platte NRD | $50,000 |
| City of Gothenburg | $294,761 |
| Total | $1,529,324 |

*Nebraska Environmental Trust Foundation funds have been applied for but not yet awarded.

The process will shrink Lake Helen from about 27 to 20.7 acres and make it more manageable, city officials said.

Tentative completion is set for March 1, 2014, after which the lake will be refilled.

Game fish will be added in August of 2014 followed by an alum treatment to seal phosphorous into the bottom.

The Nebraska Environmental Trust was established in 1992 to conserve, enhance and restore the natural environments of Nebraska.

Annual grants are funded through a share of Nebraska Lottery proceeds. In fact, about 44% of the money remaining after the payment of prizes, operating expenses and transfer of funds to the Compulsive Gamblers Assistance Fund are transferred to the NETF.

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