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## **Senators give first-round approval to bill to clean clogged rivers**

By NANCY HICKS / Lincoln Journal Star  
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A 1911 law that requires landowners along riverbanks to keep their land clear of weeds and rubbish may be a relic of another era, according to Omaha Sen. Tom White.

But that doesn't mean landowners made wealthy from using the water for irrigation don't have a responsibility to help with the cleanup costs, White said during debate on a riverbank-related bill.

Senators gave first-round approval to the measure (LB98) that continues the \$2 million-a-year program to kill invasive vegetation clogging some rivers. The action came after White stopped his delaying tactics.

The program successfully has cleared vegetation along the Republican River over the past two years and has helped the state save millions of dollars in payments to Kansas, according to Sen. Tom Carlson of Holdrege, sponsor of the bill and creator of the river cleanup program. The cleanup program for vegetation such as Russian olive trees, phragmites and salt cedar trees would continue for another four years under Carlson's bill.

White objected to what he called a "bailout" of wealthy landowners who got rich in the first place using the water for irrigation and then wanted taxpayers to pay for cleaning up invasive river-clogging vegetation.

The attitude of the rich that they can push additional costs onto taxpayers is wrong, he said.

"If the state is going to step in when landowners fail to keep banks clean, why aren't you going to pay for the cost of mowing my yard?" White asked.

White backed off his argument that landowners along river banks should pay for the cleanup after learning that one senator had gotten in trouble cleaning up his bank.

Sen. Mark Christensen of Imperial said that when he tried to clear the family land on the Republican River, he was told by the U.S. Game and Wildlife Commission not to, because it would destroy wildlife habitat.

“The riverbed is ecologically sensitive,” White said, and the government doesn’t want landowners to kill fish with herbicides or destroy habitat for sandhill cranes. But the state needs “a new business strategy,” something beyond simply “dumping costs off on taxpayer whenever we can,” he said.

Carlson said he’s not opposed to revisiting that 1911 law. But there are other interpretations, he said. The law may apply only to drainage ditches that flow into rivers, he suggested.