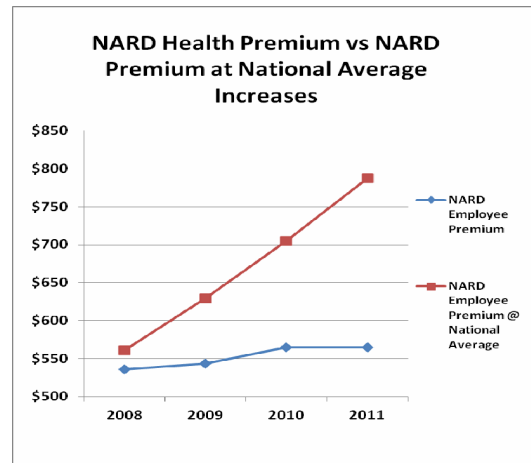
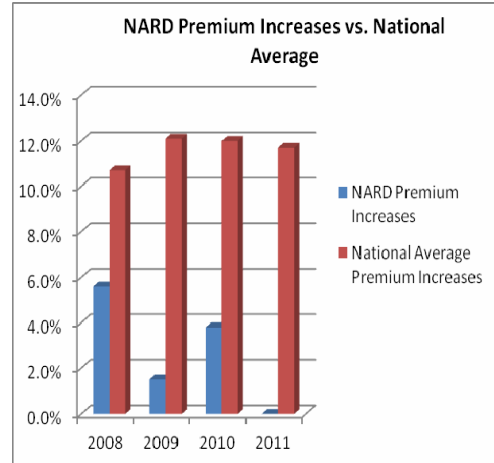
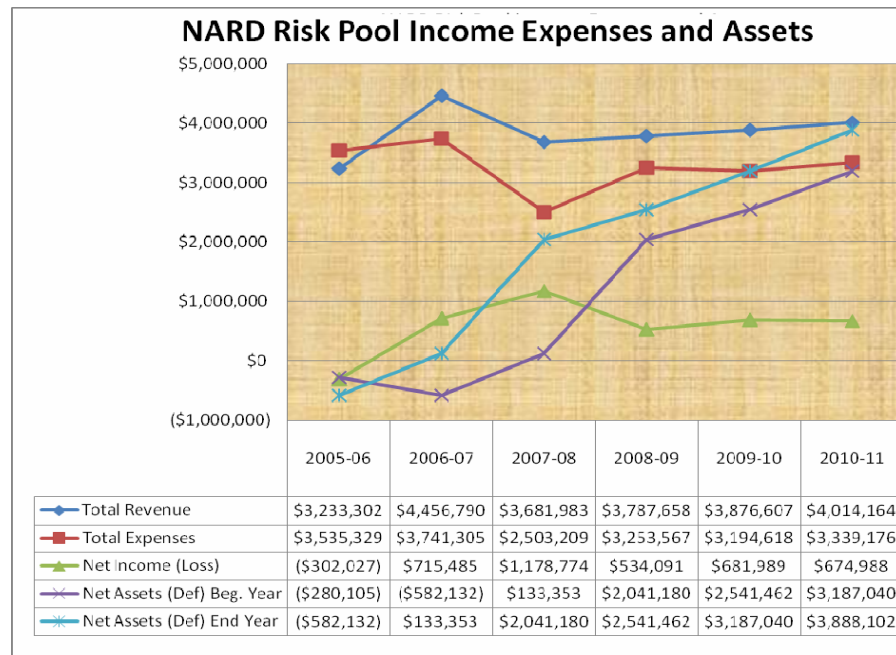


# NARD Health Insurance Program

The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts has operated a licensed health risk pool for NRD employees since 2006. The last four years annual health insurance premiums increases have been below 5% while the national annual averages have been between 10.7 and 12.1%. NRD employees involvement in wellness activities and programs reduces health care cost to local NRDs and taxpayers.



The chart above and to the left show the NARD insurance premium increase compared with the national premium average for the past four years. The chart above and to the right shows the actual NARD insurance premium cost compared to what the NARD insurance premium would be with the national average increases. The chart below explains NARD Risk Pool income, expenses and assets over the past six years.



## NRD Retirement Program

Thanks to the hard work of the NARD/NRD Employee Benefits Committee, the NRD Employee Retirement Program continues to grow and make improvements. The NARD 414 (h) retirement program fund grew 33% over the past fiscal year to \$19,179,345 fund balance as of June 30, 2011. The defined contribution program allows each employee to determine their own investments, providing the flexibility for the employee to determine the amount of risk and potential rate of return they feel most comfortable with.

The voluntary NARD 457 program grew 48% over the past fiscal year to \$1,635,497 fund balance as of June 30, 2011. This program allows NRD employees to set aside additional pre-tax income for retirement and has the same investment options as the NARD 414(h) Plan. Mark Geist and Jonathan Buekelman with UBS Financial Services provide the nationwide investment platform for the plans. Since they have been involved in the NARD plans, the investment levels have more than tripled.

## Notes from Mary Ann Wortmann, NARD Board President

The last year certainly has provided opportunities for Nebraska's NRDs to showcase how local projects and programs are protecting lives, protecting property and protecting the future. Winter and spring brought above average precipitation to the Missouri and North Platte River Basin followed by, flooding in the lower basins. The Papio-Missouri River NRD levees along the Missouri River held back the flood waters, protecting many residents and businesses. On the North Platte River, the North Platte and Twin Platte NRDs worked with local irrigation districts to divert water earlier than usual. This action not only reduced the impacts of the high water, it also recharged groundwater for use by future generations.

Compacts and agreements require unique approaches to resource management in order to maintain compliance while at the same time meeting the needs of the area. The Upper Republican NRD made an investment in the future of the basin and protected property values by purchasing approximately 4,000 acres for the purpose of reducing consumptive water use and Republican River augmentation.

The Central Platte NRD made history by buying out and closing the Six-Mile Canal near Gothenburg that had been diverting water since 1894. The purchase will protect water supplies, future users and endangered species by returning water to the Platte River. Once completed several other irrigation companies have expressed interest in working with the NRD to return water to the river.

NRD projects often do not receive the credit that is deserved and over the last year other flood control structures, levees, soil and water conservation and programs have protected lives and property across Nebraska. Education programs are ensuring future Nebraskans are attentive to our natural resources. As we move forward the challenges of resource management will continue to arise and the NRDs will be in the forefront to address these challenges while protecting lives, property and the future for Nebraska.

### Contact NARD!

Nebraska Association of Resources Districts  
601 So. 12 St., Suite 201  
Lincoln, NE 68508

Phone: (402) 471-7670 Email: [nard@nrdnet.org](mailto:nard@nrdnet.org)  
Fax: (402) 471-7677 Website: [nrdnet.org](http://nrdnet.org)

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter!

## In this issue >>>

- ◆ 2011 Legislative Recap
- ◆ Notes from Dean Edson
- ◆ NRD Tree Program
- ◆ TSP Update
- ◆ NARD Foundation
- ◆ Info & Education
- ◆ Liaison Activities
- ◆ NARD Executive Board
- ◆ NRD Insurance Program
- ◆ NRD Retirement Program
- ◆ Notes from Mary Ann Wortmann



## Notes from Dean Edson, NARD Executive Director

In this report you will find summaries of the programs carried out by the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD) on behalf of Nebraska's 23 natural resources districts. This report contains highlights on the 102nd Legislative Session, NARD programs and activities

NARD staff proudly serves the district's directors and staff and works hard to provide assistance with legislative issues, tree programs, water management, education programs and public relations.

NARD manages the Health Insurance Risk Pool and Retirement Programs for the benefit of NRD staff and board members and has helped in the creation of the NRD Wellness Program. For the last four years the Health Insurance Risk Pool assets have continued to grow while keeping premiums low and maintaining quality health care for members.

The association strives to balance our operating budget while maintaining quality programs available to districts and their members. For the 14<sup>th</sup> year in a row the NARD has balanced our budget and has continued to add to the general reserve fund.

As we move forward the challenges will be different and the NARD is prepared and excited to assist NRDs in their efforts to continue to protect lives, protect property and protect the future.

## 2011 Legislative Recap

Nebraska Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) worked together with the Natural Resources Committee and other state senators during the 102nd Legislative Session to protect the future of Nebraska's natural resources. Senators approved and the Governor signed 19 bills that affect NRDs. The following provides just a few of the key bills enacted this year.

**LB 28** – The bill simplified annual reporting requirements and allows for the electronic submission of information on chemigation applications. The bill was sponsored by Senator Langemeier.

**LB 154** - The bill requires that when a vacancy occurs on a natural resources board, prior to August 1st of the if the vacancy occurs during the term prior to August 1 of the second year of the unexpired term, the appointee would have to run for election for the remaining term. The bill was sponsored by Senator Janssen.

**LB 229e** - The bill provides for a process for the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources to apply for a grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund (NETF) to fund water programs. The bill was a result of compromise from the NETF, State Senators, environmental groups, and agriculture groups. This is what the compromise does:

\* Allows the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to apply to NETF for a three-year \$9.9 million grant for fully/over-appropriated river basins and gives that grant 50 bonus points in the ranking.

\* Provides an annual match of \$3.3 million in General Fund dollars that will be appropriated to the Water Resources Cash Fund (WRCF).

\* Adds intent language to apply for an additional three-year grant provided that benchmark criteria are met.

\* Requires natural resources districts to provide a 40 percent matching fund requirement. The bill was sponsored by Senator Fischer, Senator Larson also declared it his Priority Bill for the session.

**LB 248** - The bill allows local fire departments to develop standards rather than rules and regulations for burning permits. The bill also eliminated the term "range management" and replaced it with an expanded definition of "land management". The bill was sponsored by Senator Dubas.

**LB 400** – The bill incorporated language from LB 528 to change the sunset date for the NRD three-cent levy for ground water management activities and integrated management activities in fully and over-appropriated areas from 2011-12 to 2017-18. Senator Carlson introduced LB 528 and LB 400 was sponsored by Senator Janssen. Speaker Flood declared LB 400 a Priority Bill for the session.

## NRD Tree Program

In 2011 the NARD's Tree Program made some new strides in several areas including partnership development, education and networking.

Approximately 1.22 million tree and shrub seedlings were sold by all NRDs to Nebraska landowners in 2011. Of this number, over 19,000 tree seedlings purchased from the National Arbor Day Foundation were distributed free to school children across Nebraska to help foster awareness of natural resources conservation. A comprehensive historical NRD seedling sales database is maintained and updated annually by the NARD.



(NRD staff managers examine tree seedlings during a tour at Bessey Nursery.)

NARD and Lower Loup NRD hosted a Forestry Workshop in June with NRD staff, Nebraska Forest Service employees, and U.S. Forest Service employees in attendance. Topics included federal funding sources for conservation tree planting, tree pests and diseases, a facility tour, equipment demonstrations, and a roundtable discussion. Upper Niobrara-White NRD will host the workshop in June 2012.

The NARD has become the newest member of the Nebraska Forestry Stewardship Coordinating Committee (NFSCC). This will help allow us to work together with NFSCC on long-term forestry planning for Nebraska.

This year the NARD and Bessey Nursery are expanding client's day to include an evening networking dinner and half-day education conference on October 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. The conference will educate participants on local and regional forestry issues.

The NARD teamed up with the Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD), Omaha Public Power District (OPPD), and Lincoln Electric System (LES) to help inform landowners about hazards created when trees are improperly planted near electric utility infrastructure. All NRD have educational material available for landowners.

This year the NARD sponsored a grant proposal to the Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) for \$550,000 over the period 2012-2015. Titled *Living Snow Fences to Provide Habitat and Protect Highways*, the goal of the proposed project is to establish windbreak plantings across Nebraska to develop wildlife habitat, protect natural resources, and to control blowing and drifting snow at strategic locations along Nebraska highways. Partners in this proposal include all NRDs, the NARD, Nebraska Department of Roads, NRCS, Nebraska Forest Service, and Pheasants Forever. The NET will announce grant awardees in February 2012.

## NARD Foundation

The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts' Foundation was established as a way to support students with a desire to enter the field of natural resources. In 2010 over \$15,000 dollars were raised for the NARD Foundation to support youth education and programs where young people can learn more about natural resources. Funds were raised through a variety of activities including a live and silent auction at the Annual Conference. The NARD Foundation supports the following programs:

\*The Nebraska Agricultural Youth Institute is a weeklong conference held each July where juniors and seniors in high school gather to learn more about agriculture and natural resources in Nebraska.

\*Co-sponsored a Nebraska college student with Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation for Ag Day on the Hill. The Nebraska representative spent National Ag Day in Washington D.C. learning about agriculture and natural resource issues.

\*Sponsored three awards at the 84<sup>th</sup> Annual State FFA Convention held in Lincoln in early April. The three award areas were Outdoor-Recreation Proficiency, Natural Resources Chapter Award, and the Environmental and Natural Resources Management Career Development Event (CDE).

\*The Nebraska Envirothon, an agriculture, wildlife and science competition for grades 9-12. This year's winning team, Superior High School, represented Nebraska at the Canon Envirothon, which includes students from across the United States and Canada.

\*The Nebraska Foundation for Agricultural Awareness to spread a positive agricultural message to teachers, students and parents about the importance of agriculture.

\*Connecting Young Nebraskans which is a forward-looking organization that provides opportunities to shape the state's future by educating young Nebraskans on the importance of being involved in communities.

\*Adventure Camp about the Environment (ACE) in 2011 drew 30 campers from across the state, and many of the campers received scholarships from their local NRD. The camp is open to sixth through eighth graders and focused natural resources.

These programs are a great opportunity to recognize Nebraska's youth for their interest and hard work in helping to protect our natural resources.



(The 2011 Nebraska Envirothon Team from Superior High School placed 15<sup>th</sup> at the Canon Envirothon in New Brunswick.)

## Information and Education

**Public Relations-** The NARD has assisted NRDs with public relations, communication, education, developing partnership, and training needs as the districts pursue their natural resources management responsibilities. The NARD has developed and outlined priorities and a short-term and long-term plan for public relations efforts for Information and Education (I&E) staff and NRD managers and directors.

The NARD continues to promote NRDs and NRD projects through statewide press releases, print materials, website, and presentations and direct communication with partners. Newsletters, statewide factsheets, legislative reports, and social media have been developed to promote Nebraska NRDs. NARD uses "Protecting Lives, Protecting Property, Protecting the Future" for promotion and to tell the NRD story and encourage its use by all NRDs.

Public relations and communications training sessions have been provided to I&E staff, NRD managers and board members. Trainings session included: Grassroots public relations; building partnerships with other organizations; sharing public relations strategies and education activities; and learning from other organizations success. The NARD continues to hold message development group discussion sessions and trainings throughout the year with individual NRDs' board members, managers and employees to continue improving the image of the NRDs.

**Education Programs-** The NARD sponsors, promotes, hosts or assist with a variety of projects and programs to educate both youth and adults about conservation and natural resources. Throughout the year NARD promotes and educates teachers and citizens on education opportunities offered by NRDs. Over the past year the NARD helped coordinate and promoted the state and regional Land Judging and Range Judging Contest and provides educational information about contests on their website.

In 2011 over 540 students from 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades participated in the Nebraska Envirothon regional competitions. The 2011 Nebraska Envirothon State Championship team was from Superior High School. The state competition was held May 6<sup>th</sup> at the Trails West YMCA Camp near Scottsbluff. Students from across the state participated in five-member teams, and competed against 14 other Nebraska high school teams. Nebraska placed 15<sup>th</sup> out of 54 teams at the Canon Envirothon Contest in New Brunswick, Canada which is the best the Nebraska has placed while competing in Envirothon.

Campers from across the state participated in the second annual Adventure Camp about the Environment (ACE) at the State 4-H Youth Camp near Halsey June 5-8. The camp was sponsored and organized by Nebraska NRDs and the NARD. The four-day adventure drew 30 campers from across the state. The camp focused on water resources, soil and land, forestry, range, grassland and wildlife.

## NARD Executive Board

The NARD executive committee consists of the NARD board officers and the chairs of the Information and Education and Legislature committees. The NARD board consists of representation from each of the local 23 NRDs. The board members meet five times throughout the year and help guide the association.

Mary Ann Wortmann from the Lewis and Clark NRD is the NARD board president. Wortmann has been on the Lewis and Clark NRD and NARD boards for six years and previously held both the vice president and secretary/treasurer position. Wortmann is the first female to be elected president of the NARD board. Wortmann is president of the Nebraska Mothers Association and received the 2003 Nebraska Mother of the Year award.

Joe Anderjaska from the Middle Republican NRD serves as vice president. Anderjaska has served on the Middle Republican NRD board for nine years, on the NARD board for seven year's and previously held the secretary/treasurer position. Anderjaska is a member of the Hays Center school board.

NARD executive committee members, along with the president and vice president, include Terry Martin from Upper Republican NRD, the NARD secretary/treasurer; Jim Meismer from Twin Platte NRD, chair of the legislative committee; and Jim Johnson from South Platte NRD, chair of the information and education committee.

### Events Hosted by The NARD

- Annual Conference
- NARD Board Meetings
- NRD Manager Meetings
- Legislative Conference
- I&E Meetings
- Washington D.C. Conference
- Public Relations Trainings
- Technician Trainings
- Basin Tour



(Members learn about the North Platte River Systems on annual Basin Tour)

## NRDs and NRCS Work Together

The NRDs' working relationship with the Nebraska NRCS entered its seventh year in 2011. Since 2004, NRDs have assisted the NRCS to complete a wide array of resource conservation practices across Nebraska. The NARD's ongoing agreements with the NRCS enable NRDs to fulfill a large number of conservation planning, construction, maintenance and management requests by landowners using federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The NARD's role is to direct funding from the NRCS to many NRDs via a monthly reimbursement request process. Fiscal year 2010-2011 began with \$400,000 in available funds. This spring \$369,000 in additional funding was amended into the NARD's contract with the NRCS. Nebraska's NRDs and the NRCS work together in a strong and unique partnership to accomplish common goals and establish natural resource conservation practices on the ground.



## Liaison Activities

The NRD/NDEQ Liaison position was created to assist in matters dealing with NDEQ and other state and federal agencies such as the University of Nebraska, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Department of Natural Resources and the Environmental Protection Agency. One of the roles is to ensure consistency among the NRDs and assist with regulatory compliance matters. Regulation review and updates are periodically undertaken by the NDEQ in response to changing state or national environmental laws. When NRD programs are impacted it is necessary that all the NRDs are provided the information to determine the extent of the impact. In other situations regulation modifications are requested by the NRD as was the case with the Chemigation Program. During the legislative session and during the summer of 2011, the NARD through the Liaison worked with NDEQ staff to develop language in both the statutes and regulations to simplify the chemigation program application and reporting process, thus saving the resources that can be better used to protect lives, property and the future.

Another role of the position is to ensure training is set up to meet the requirements of ground water well monitoring licensures. This past year several events were held that provided both classroom and hands-on instruction to attendees. As a result, approximately 800 hours of initial certification training and continuing education were obtained by NRD staff and conservation partners.