

NRD Employee Years of Service!

Congratulations to Natural Resources Districts board members and staff on **20, 25, 30, 35** and **40** years of service. Your hard work, dedication and loyalty is appreciated!

NRD Board Members

Jim Keller, UENRD (30); Bill Meyer, LENRD (40); N. Richard Hadenfeldt, LLNRD (25); Ken Regier, UBBNRD (35); Phyllis Johnson, TBNRD (20); David Nickel, TBNRD (25) Keith Stafford, CPNRD (20); Ladd Reeves, CPNRD (20); Steve Kelley, LBBNRD (20); Bob Lorenz, LBBNRD (20)

NRD Staff

Marlene Faimon, LBNRD (25); Vickie DeJong, LENRD (35); Linda Unkel, LENRD (30); Tammi Loberg, LENRD (25); Julie Wragge, LENRD (20); Glenda Bates, NNRD (20); Marlin Petermann, Papio NRD (40); Jim Becic, Papio NRD (30); Keith Butcher, Papio NRD (30); Paul Zillig, LPSNRD (35); Donna Reid, LPSNRD (20); Rita Hoblyn, UBBNRD (20); Rod DeBuhr, UBBNRD (40); Tom Backer, CPNRD (30); Sandy Noecker, CPNRD (35); Deb Hayes, URNRD (20); Becky Spady, URNRD (20); Wilma Zimbelman, URNRD (35); Dave Clabaugh, LBBNRD (35)

2014 NARD Conservation Award Winners

- Director of the Year – David Kadlecek
Nominated by Upper Niobrara White NRD
- Educator of the Year – David Berens, Morton Elementary School
Nominated by Little Blue NRD
- Outstanding Grassland Award – Matt and Mia Varra
Nominated by South Platte NRD
- Outstanding Community Conservation – Sam Gingerich
Nominated by South Platte NRD
- Outstanding Tree Planter – Lowery Land and Livestock, Sandy Lowery
Nominated by Lower Loup NRD

2014 Master Conservationist Award Winners

- Agriculture Award: K & W Farms—Stewart, Nebraska
Kurt and Wayne Kaup
- Community Award: Lou Allgayer—Elmwood, Nebraska

Events Hosted by The NARD

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



Washington D.C. Conference, 2014

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.

Terry Martin from the Upper Republican NRD is the current NARD President. Martin has served on the Upper Republican NRD board for 13 years, on the NARD board for six years and previously held the Vice President and Secretary/Treasurer positions.

Jim Bendfeldt from the Central Platte NRD is the current NARD Vice President. Bendfeldt has served eleven years on the CPNRD Board and currently is Board chair. He has served three years as an NARD Board representative. Bendfeldt previously served as the NARD Board Secretary/Treasurer.

Larry Reynolds from the Tri-Basin NRD is the current Secretary/Treasurer. Reynolds has been on the Board for two years.

NARD executive committee members, include the president, vice-president, secretary/treasurer and the following three individuals; Jim Meismer from Twin Platte NRD, chair of the Legislative Committee; Jim Johnson from South Platte NRD, chair of the Information and Education Committee, and Joe Anderjaska, past NARD President.

Contact NARD!

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NARD Annual Report 2014

Notes from Terry Martin, NARD Board President



This year, the accomplishments by the NRD system here in Nebraska were pretty much “business as usual.” That’s saying a lot, because “business as usual” is a steady stream of remarkable achievements year in and year out. Of course there are those large projects that stand out because of their size, their impact, and the importance of each in filling a specific need, but there are two things I see as being the most important.

First and foremost, the NRD’s continue to protect, preserve and improve the natural resources that are the backbone of society, those being our soil and our water. This includes the thankless and mundane job of maintaining those existing improvements so that we don’t lose the progress we’ve made over the last 40-plus years.

Second, is how the NRD’s continue to support and assist each other, both as neighbors and as a unified NRD system across the state. Many times I have heard a director or staff member from an NRD say, “If there is an NRD that needs help, then their needs are important to my NRD as well.”

We see that support when special funding is needed, when special legislation is needed, when special technical skills are needed, and when outside interests don’t fully understand how efficient and effective the NRD system can be. I see a great deal of trust and respect within the NRD system and it is well deserved. We each have our own specific challenges that may not be present in other NRDs, but each NRD can rest assured knowing there are 22 other NRDs out there that support them and their efforts.

It has been a real privilege to serve as your President this year, and I am looking forward to next year’s “business as usual.” It’s pretty easy actually; all I do is stand back and watch the remarkable accomplishments all of you do all year long as each district continues to protect our property, protect our lives and protect our future. Please remember, the State Association is here to assist in any way we can.



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 FY 2013-14, more than \$55,000 were raised for the NARD Foundation to support programs where people of all ages can learn more about natural resources. Funds were raised through a variety of activities including the Ron Bishop Memorial Golf Tournament, a 5K run and a live and silent auction at the NARD Annual Conference. More than \$47,000 was dispersed in FY 13-14 to fund the following programs:

*Raising Nebraska exhibit at the Nebraska State Fair: The 25,000 sq. ft. exhibit provides hands on experiences for all ages to learn more about agriculture and natural resources in Nebraska. Twenty-two districts each contributed \$1,000 to help fund a \$25,000 contribution to the exhibit.

*Nebraska Agricultural Youth Institute : A weeklong conference held each July for juniors and seniors in high school to learn more about agriculture and natural resources in Nebraska.

*Ag Day on the Hill: NARD Foundation sponsored five Nebraska college students to attend National Ag Day in Washington D.C. to learn about agriculture and natural resources issues.

*Agriculture Issues Academy and awards at Annual State FFA Convention: NARD Foundation sponsored three awards and the Convention held in Lincoln in early April. The awards were Outdoor-Recreation Proficiency, Natural Resources Chapter Award and the Environmental and Natural Resources Management Career Development Event (CDE).

*Nebraska Envirothon: An agriculture, wildlife and science competition for grades 9-12.

*Nebraska Foundation for Agricultural Awareness: Spreads a positive agriculture message to teachers, students and parents about the importance of agriculture.

*Adventure Camp about the Environment (ACE): The camp is open to sixth through eighth grade students who learn about natural resources.

*Nebraska LEAD (Leadership, Education, Action and Development) Program: Provides young adults with skills and experiences needed to become leaders and advocates for agriculture.



ACE Camp—UNWNRD

Notes from Dean Edson, NARD Executive Director

The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD) staff is honored to be working for the NRD directors and staff while celebrating the 42nd anniversary of the NRDs. The NARD staff is dedicated to providing assistance to the NRDs with legislation, tree programs, water management, youth programs, benefit programs and public relations. For the 18th year in a row, the NARD has balanced its budget and added to the reserves. This is thanks to member involvement from the NRD Board members and staff. To all of you, thank you very much!

The NARD manages the Health Insurance Risk Pool and Retirement Programs for the benefit of NRD staff. While FY 2011-12 ended in substantial losses, the program ended up \$1.2 million in the black for FY 2013-14. The previous year's addition to reserves allowed the program to withstand the loss in FY 11-12 and lower premiums by 2.5% in FY 2014-15. Lowering rates is unheard of in the insurance industry. The NARD also manages the retirement program which continues to grow even in a sluggish economy.

The NARD also manages the NARD Foundation which has grown significantly over the past 13 years. What started out as a small foundation in 1997 with \$4,100 in assets and helped fund only one program has grown to more than \$341,000 in assets that provides funding to eight educational programs, a NRD Building at Husker Harvest Days and participation in the new Ag Experience Building at the Nebraska State Fair. The fundraisers at the annual meeting and member involvement help grow the program each year.

There will be more challenges for NRDs in the future. However, the local districts are poised to handle them. Major infrastructure has been built and rehabilitated by the local NRDs. Thanks to the Republican Basin NRDs and Twin Platte NRD, the N-CORPE project, a \$125 million project was completed in less than three years, kept Nebraska in compliance with the Republican River Compact and protected irrigation in Southwest Nebraska. The Central Platte NRD worked out agreements with four irrigation canals in Dawson Count to protect irrigators in the area. So far the CPNRD provided \$15 million to finish the projects on three of the four canals. The last canal should be completed in 2015. That's just a few of the accomplishments of the NRDs. The NARD staff is excited to assist the local NRDs in their efforts to protect lives, protect property and protect the future!

NDEQ/NRD Liaison Activities

The NRD/NDEQ Liaison position was created to work collaboratively with the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ) and the Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) regarding environmental issues. This position has a specific focus of working on water quality issues throughout the state. Also, this position communicates any changes related to regulation or funding for various programs at the NDEQ to the NRDs. For example, in 2014, LB 272 made changes to the Chemigation Act resulting in all 23 NRDs being required to update their Chemigation rules and regulations. The Liaison worked with the NDEQ, NRDs, and legal services to assist the NRDs in updating their Chemigation rules and regulations.

Additionally, this position will write and review grants for the NRDs and NDEQ and assist with 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution Projects. In 2014, this position wrote two different grants for an Ag BMP assessment and effectiveness tool. The Liaison also reviewed a number of different grants for the NRDs. Additionally, the Liaison sat on the selection committee for 319 grants and source water grants.

Other activities associated with this position include coordinating training events and conferences which provide Continuing Education Units (CEU) opportunities for NRD staff, writing annual reports, assisting with Envirothon and Husker Harvest Days, developing monitoring plans and quality assurance project plans, and representing the NARD on several work groups.



N-CORPE—URNRD, MRNRD, LRNRD, TPNRD

Information and Education

Public Relations—The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts has made significant strides to enhance their public image in 2014. NARD has found its slogan, "Protecting Lives, Protecting Property, Protecting the Future" is being incorporated into more NRD press releases which in turn is ending up in more media coverage.



Jim Bendfeldt,
NARD Vice-President
KLKN-TV Forum, Lincoln, NE

NARD is sending out press releases across the state, booking live television interviews/forums on a regular basis and making new updated factsheets and information easily available to the public.

NARD is also updating www/nrdnet.org daily to promote the NRDs by posting their latest press releases on its website. NARD has tripled its day to day social media use and it's paying off. The NARD Facebook page has seen a nearly 70% spike in followers. NARD is also cross-promoting positive NRD stories on its Twitter page. These posts are being re-tweeted by others.

The newest social media venture we have; Pinterest! This is where you can find amazing recipes and tips on conservation.

One of the biggest changes coming to NARD is the use of video and editing systems. The NARD is purchasing equipment that will tell each NRD's story about its latest project, recreational lake or bike path, etc. and help visually explain sometimes complicated conservation efforts in a way the public can easily understand.



John Winkler,
PMNRD General Manager
WOWT TV Forum, Omaha, NE

Many I & E members are doing their part in promoting the NRDs. In several districts, they're increasing popularity by sending out more press releases.



Junk Art—UBBNRD

Some districts are holding more public meetings. They're conducting more face-to-face meetings with farmers, ranchers, local businesses, political leaders and community members to make sure they get the facts and understand the NRDs are here to help. We're hoping to increase this effort even more. Tours open to the public have also been conducted this past year in several districts as a way to connect with each community.

Education Programs—NARD sponsors, promotes, hosts and assists with many programs to educate our youth and adults about conservation and natural resources. NARD educates teachers and citizens on educational opportunities offered by the NRDs. The NARD helped coordinate state and regional Land Judging and Range Judging Contests and promoted them on their website.

In 2014, about 500 students, grades 9-12, participated in Nebraska Envirothon regional competitions. The Nebraska Envirothon State Championship team was from Concordia High School. The state competition was held at the Crane Trust Nature Center near Alda.



Envirothon Champions, 2014

NRD/DNR Liaison Update

NRD Tree Program

Natural Resources District field staff was busy this year assisting landowners with tree planting, as the NRD tree program saw an uptick in activity. Collectively, the NRD's helped Nebraska landowners plant more than 800,000 tree and shrub seedlings in 2014.

The effort of promoting the work NRDs do to establish trees for conservation also saw an uptick in activity. Over the last year, NARD attended several conferences and programs to reach different audiences to highlight the benefits and promote the NRD tree program. NARD will look to expand on these efforts and work to increase the exposure of the tree program over the coming year.

NARD also worked with the South Platte NRD to host the NRD Forestry Workshop this past August in Sidney. The



Tree Planting—LCNRD

workshop provides a resource for NRD staff and program partners to network and learn more about issues across the state. Several Districts and forestry partners were in attendance. Activities

included a roundtable discussion and an extended tour and demonstration. NRD staff investigated the potential long term impacts of weed barrier.

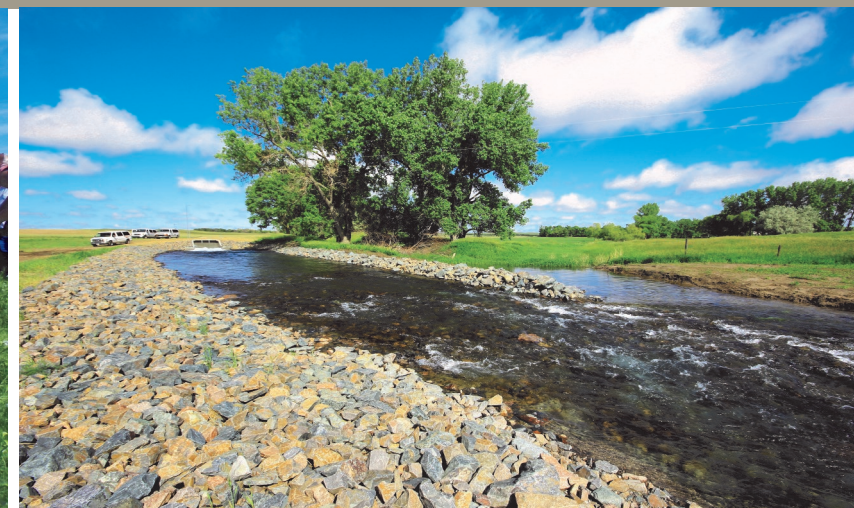
NARD is already working with the NRDS to plan next year's workshop and is excited to build off the momentum from this past year and continue the work of promoting and growing the NRD's tree program.



Tree Planting 2014



No Till Field Tour in Panhandle—SPNRD



Medicine Creek, Downstream of NCORPE Outlet—Republican Basin NRDs

As articles out of our neighboring states continue to portray the economic and environmental hardships caused by vastly depleted aquifer systems, it's refreshing to reflect on our situation here at home, where Nebraska's aquifers remain overall sustainable. While this can be attributed to many factors, it's primarily driven by two big dynamics. The first being Nebraskans making a conscious effort to do their part to protect our water for the future. The second driver has been Nebraska's decentralized water management, spearheaded by our NRD system. The approach of local management and control has enabled Nebraska to avoid a one size fits all management system, addressing issues locally and in a manner that ensures both economic sustainability and water sustainability are balanced and protected for all future Nebraskans.

It's these same two key drivers that make working in the field of water management in Nebraska such a rewarding job. Working to build off of these key factors is also what will ensure Nebraska is able to address all challenges moving forward, and this past year has been a perfect example. Many Districts in the over appropriated areas that were the first to complete Integrated Management Plans continue their partnerships with the Department of Natural

Resources (DNR) and local irrigators to build on those plans to meet the goals and objectives. Despite being only half way through the 1st increment of the PRRIP, by utilizing unique and effective conjunctive management projects, Districts in the Upper Platte Basin have already accomplished requirements of the program. Fully appropriated Districts in the Republican basin also continue to build on their IMP's. Cooperation amongst all Districts in the basin and DNR has allowed projects such as NCORPE to be constructed, assisting to ensure that Nebraska remains in compliance with terms of the Republican River Compact, while avoiding crippling economic impacts to the region.



Irrigation Center Pivot—LNNRD

This past year has also seen the completion of the first voluntary integrated management plans. With three districts working corporately with DNR to preemptively enact IMP's to protect existing water uses, while subsequently allowing for well managed future uses. The past year also brought the state's first voluntary effort by NRD's to engage in basin wide planning. NRD's in the Lower Platte Basin partnered with DNR to engage in building a management plan for the basin that will work to collaborate discussion and efforts for projects that will have an impact on the basin as a whole. As another example of the NRD's and DNR working together to engage in proactive planning, a voluntary basin plan similar to that in the Lower Platte is in the preliminary stages of planning by Districts in the Niobrara Basin.

Despite the progress over the last year, the coming year holds even more potential. More NRD's are working to partner with DNR to complete voluntary IMP's. Basin-wide planning efforts will continue and ensure both local and regional concerns are addressed. The progress of the new Natural Resources Commission and the state's monetary commitment to water sustainability projects will also likely contribute to continued progress in implementing conjunctive management projects. DNR will continue to work to improve INSIGHT and begin the process of adopting new rules and methods for the 2015 evaluation. Thanks to the cooperation from DNR and all the partners across the state, including all Nebraskans doing their part, these new efforts will work to strengthen the already successful NRD system, and continue to ensure our economic and water sustainably is protected, not just for 2015, but for future generations of Nebraskans.

Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts HALL OF FAME

The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD) has created a Hall of Fame award for those individuals who have made significant contributions through Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts.

Inaugural inductees recognized include: Walter Fick, Hall of Fame Natural Resources District Board Member, Dan Smith, Hall of Fame Natural Resources District Employee and Warren D. Fairchild, Hall of Fame Natural Resources District Supporter.

Hall of Fame inductee Walter Fick posthumously was nominated by the Upper Elkhorn NRD in O'Neill.



Walter Fick

Fick worked with the Upper Elkhorn Natural Resources District and NARD.

Fick's expertise on tree planting, grass seeding and range judging dates all the way back to 1958.

He contributed to the Upper Elkhorn NRD for more than 27 years and to the NARD for more than 20 years.

His immeasurable contribution as a Board member for the NRD and Board member for the NARD allowed him to spread awareness of sound management of Nebraska's grassland resources, something he was extremely passionate about.

He won numerous awards, both local and national.

Fick's knowledge and talents became well known across the state and nation before his death in 2004.

Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts HALL OF FAME

(Continued...)

Hall of Fame inductee Dan Smith was nominated by Middle Republican NRD Board member, Joe Anderjaska of Hays Center.



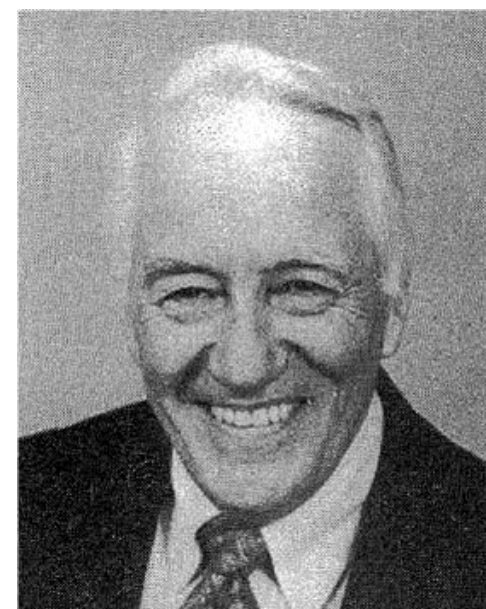
Dan Smith

Smith was part of the Middle Republican Natural Resources District for nearly 35 years.

Throughout the decades, the determined manager took on major legislative issues and found solutions to tough lawsuits between Nebraska and bordering states. He's also credited for helping develop the 'Integrated Management Plan' which moved water policy/programs forward in maintaining an irrigated-based economy for southwest Nebraska.

One of Smith's biggest accomplishments is assisting with the creation of the Nebraska Cooperative Republican Platte Enhancement Project (NCORPE), a stream flow augmentation project sponsored by four NRDs. The project is a cost-effective way to aid and protect the Republican and Platte Rivers, the tax base and agricultural economy of the region, and taxpayers statewide by ensuring long-term compliance with interstate water agreements. Lacking the project, severe and sudden reductions in water allocations might have to be imposed.

Hall of Fame inductee Warren D. Fairchild posthumously was nominated by the Upper Big Blue NRD in York.



Warren D. Fairchild

Fairchild graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1949. Throughout his life, he led the state of Nebraska on flood control management issues.

He helped develop Nebraska's first "State Water Plan", designed so water management comes at the local level.

He worked with countless state senators on conservation projects, eventually consolidating the natural resources districts into the 23 there are today.

Fairchild didn't stop there. He also worked at the national level, helping formulate national water policy and took his knowledge to Pakistan, North Africa and the Middle East to help governments in those countries identify suitable irrigation projects for possible financing.

He passed away in September of 2001.

Nebraska NRDs Protecting Lives, Protecting Property, Protecting the Future!

The **Upper Niobrara White NRD** recently approved amendments to Ground Water Management Area Rules and Regulations which include reduced ground water allocations of 65 acre-inches over the five-year allocation period running 2015—2019 for the two current allocation areas. The district is incorporating data from the Upper Niobrara Ground Water Model to guide future management decisions for protection of the water resources. UNWNRD has collected about 800 ground water samples and sold more than 140,000 trees and shrubs in 2014.

The **Middle Niobrara NRD** is addressing threats to water quality and infrastructure within the Long Pine Creek Watershed. A successful open house meeting was held this summer on the issue. A watershed advisory group is being formed to develop a plan and engage the public.

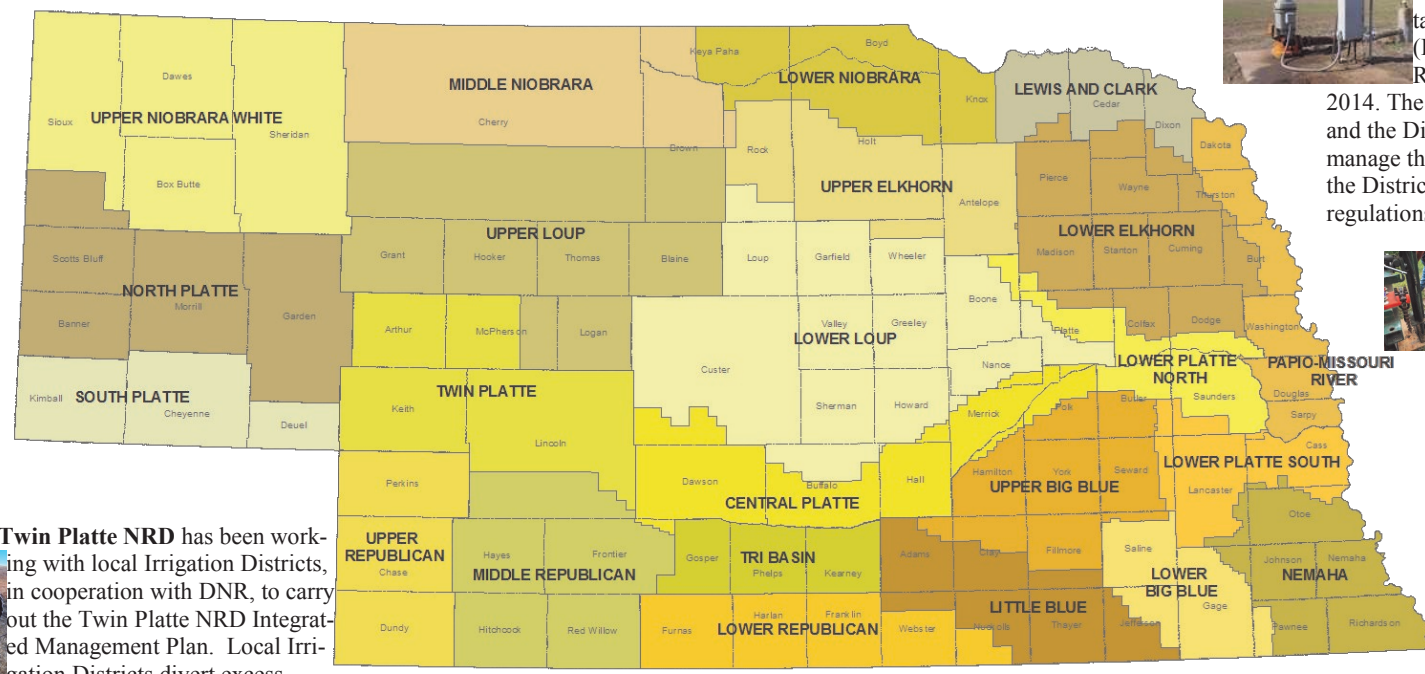
The **Upper Loup NRD** received a grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust for the Groundwater Management Program to install over 70 flowmeters on older existing wells. It's important that long-term water usage is managed in a sustainable way with accurate water use measurements. The Trust is helping to provide funds to qualified flowmeters.

The **North Platte NRD** takes its job of protecting the quantity and quality of groundwater very seriously. With nearly 800 monitoring wells, the District's monitoring program is the most extensive in Nebraska and is one of the most extensive systems in the country. The District has incorporated the data into an interactive map that provides hydrographs for all the monitoring wells and a nitrate graph where applicable.

The Western Water Use Management Model (WWUMM) developed by the **South Platte NRD** and neighboring North Platte NRD, takes into account information specific to the area including historic creek flows, irrigation and crop types, rainfall and other information that can have effects on ground water.

The **Upper Republican NRD** in 2013 expanded its Rock Creek Augmentation by purchasing approximately 2,000 additional acres in Dundy County. Those acres were retired from irrigation in 2013 and, along with more than 3,200 acres purchased in 2011 and retired from irrigation, offset water pumped into Rock Creek to increase Republican River stream flows to maintain compliance with the Republican River Compact. Water is being pumped into Rock Creek to prevent an irrigation shutdown on thousands of acres.

The **Middle Republican NRD** purchased storage water, has successfully gotten N-CORPE running and has met Compact Compliance. An MRNRD economics study found a \$363-million loss to local economy if didn't have irrigation within district. MRNRD has a new manager and added a Public Relations position. MRNRD built a new website which has been a great new tool for area producers.



The **Twin Platte NRD** has been working with local Irrigation Districts, in cooperation with DNR, to carry out the Twin Platte NRD Integrated Management Plan. Local Irrigation Districts divert excess flows into their canals and area pits for intentional ground water recharge of the aquifer to provide for accountable offset water.

The Upper Republican, Middle Republican, Lower Republican and Twin Platte NRDs began construction of the **N-CORPE (Nebraska Cooperative Republican Platte Enhancement Project)** augmentation project in late 2013. The project includes 30 high capacity wells and about 30 miles of pipeline. In February 2014, water began to be discharged into Medicine Creek. Operations to benefit the Republican Basin prevented a complete irrigation shutdown on approximately 300,000 acres in the Republican Basin to maintain compliance with the Republican River Compact. A 42" main transmission pipeline will be constructed in 2015 to increase Platte River flows and benefit the Twin Platte NRD and the Platte Basin. Nearly 15,800 irrigated acres have been retired on N-CORPE property.

Tri-Basin NRD expanded its North Dry Creek Augmentation Well Project with the drilling of a second augmentation well for the Platte River Recover Implementation Program. The district worked to recharge groundwater supplies in the Platte River and re-time excess streamflows. In the Republican Basin, Tri-Basin NRD is focusing on an augmentation project on Turkey Creek in Gosper County.

The **Lower Republican NRD** reports in February of 2014, the N-CORPE project began its first phase of operation. By mid-April, all 30 wells were up and running and pumping 85 cubic feet per second into the headwaters of Medicine Creek. LRNRD will obtain 15,045 acre feet of off-set water from N-CORPE in 2014 to meet Compact Compliance.

The **Lower Loup NRD** is the state's largest in geographic land area, encompassing all or part of 16 Nebraska counties. The LLNRD continues proactive groundwater management, tackling quality through a mandatory flow meter program in its Phase III management area and quantity through a comprehensive study of the South Loup Basin.

The **Central Platte NRD** completed the rehabilitation of three Dawson County irrigation canals to undertake conjunctive water use of the canals. The projects provide groundwater recharge that enhances surface and groundwater supplies and flows to the Platte River, protects water quality and helps meet endangered species requirements of the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program and LB 962 requirements to return the river back to its 1997 level of use.

The **Little Blue NRD** Board of Directors revised the District's Groundwater Rules to mandate: flow meters, certification of irrigated acres, annual water use reporting and certification. A well district-wide operator training and certification. A well drilling stay was also placed on 362,240 acres of lands with poor aquifers within the District. The total stay area of the district now includes 486,400 acres.

The **Lower Niobrara NRD's** Voluntary Integrated Management Plan (IMP) with the Department of Natural Resources went into effect in May of 2014. The Plan outlines how the Department and the District will work together to better manage the surface water and groundwater of the District. The District updated its rules and regulations, making five significant changes.

The **Upper Elkhorn NRD** has partnered with other NRDs and developed a Bazile Ground Water Management Plan to address nitrate-nitrogen issues in northeastern Nebraska. Funds are being utilized to implement/install best management practices towards the efforts of reducing nitrogen levels in the ground water.

Papio-Missouri River NRD continues construction on the WP-5 Flood Control Reservoir and related outdoor recreational features (Prairie Queen Recreation Area). The 135 acre reservoir is expected to open in 2015. It's surrounded by 335 acres of public parkland in Sarpy County. Land rights are being purchased for an additional reservoir, DS 15A, in northwest Omaha. Federal funding has been secured for completion of the Western Sarpy/Clear Creek Platte River Levee. Planning has started for major improvements to Missouri River levees south of Bellevue.

The **Upper Big Blue NRD** is working on the Blue River Basin Sub-Regional Model that will determine an accurate representation of current basin conditions. Pioneer Trails Recreation Area's lake was sealed with soda ash and has been restocked with fish. A well was drilled to keep lake levels from fluctuating.

The **Lower Platte North NRD**, partnering with Schuyler and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, continues to work on the Shell Creek Levee. The 2 1/2 mile project will remove 20% of the city from the 100 year flood plain. At the end of August the project was 65% complete.

The **Lower Platte South NRD** completed its voluntary Integrated Management Plan for ground water and surface water early in 2014 and is beginning to implement the plan. Several rehabilitations to drainage structures along Lincoln's Salt Creek Levee have been completed. Partnering with the City of Lincoln, the District continues to construct prioritized projects in watersheds throughout the city.

The **Lower Big Blue** completed the five-million dollar Wymore Rural Project in 2013-14. The system has 230 hookups and over 150 miles of pipeline served by a 100,000 gallon water tower in eastern parts of Gage County. The fifth flood control structure of the seven planned in the Lower Turkey Creek Project was completed. The town of Wilber also received flood protection this year due to the Wilber Watershed Dam.

Nemaha NRD completed rehabilitation work on Wilson Creek 8-H in November, 2013 to protect the relocated Nebraska Highway 2. Work included increasing the height of the dam, replacing the metal tube with a concrete principal spillway tube and realigning the auxiliary spillway. Federal funds picked up 65% of the \$500,000 project with the NRD supplying 35%.

The **Lewis and Clark NRD** administers the Cedar-Knox Rural Water Project which provides quality drinking water to 834 rural customers and four communities. The surface water source is from Lewis and Clark Lake and the water is treated and softened for distribution at a surface water treatment plant located in the Devils Nest region of Knox County. The project has a nearly one-million dollar annual operating budget and is self-supporting without NRD tax revenue.

This year, the **Lower Elkhorn NRD** celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Willow Creek State Recreation Area. It's located near Pierce. The recreation area covers 1,633 acres, including a 700-acre flood control reservoir. The William J. Meyer Recreation Trail covers more than nine miles. The \$5.2 million flood-control project was built by LENRD. It offers camping, fishing, boating and swimming.

Land agents use rich stores of groundwater beneath Nebraska as a selling point to attract homesteaders.

Much of Nebraska and the Great Plains are devastated by the twin catastrophes of the Great Depression and Dust Bowl.

Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts are formed across Nebraska, county by county.

Use of groundwater to irrigate crops expands dramatically with the development of the center pivot and other technologies.

NRDs create groundwater management plans to protect the quantity and quality of Nebraska's groundwater.

Water, and effective policies to manage and protect it, is a major focus for NRDs.

1870

1920

1930

1940

1950

1960

1970



1980

1990

2000

2012

In 1872, Nebraskan J. Sterling Morton creates Arbor Day, the first holiday devoted to natural resources conservation.

In 1935 the U.S. Soil Conservation Service is established to assist farmers and help foster a new conservation ethic across the United States.

Devastating floods during the 1950's cause massive property damage and spur major flood control projects across Nebraska.

In 1972, Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts form and begin taking action to address a wide variety of natural resources challenges.

Because of it's value to farmers and urban centers, groundwater is commonly recognized as the state's most precious natural resources.

NRDs continue to play a leading role in addressing local natural resources concerns.

NARD Health Insurance Program

The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts has operated a licensed health risk pool for NRD employees since FY 2006-07. The program is governed by the NARD Risk Pool Board of Directors, which are the same as the NARD board members. The NARD Risk Pool Stop/Loss Committee meets four times a year to review details of the program and suggest changes to the program. This committee is made up of the NARD Risk Pool Board and 13 NRD employees representing all areas of the state.

Over the last eight years of the program, the annual health insurance premiums increases have been below 4.65% while the national annual averages have been 11.4%. However, in FY 2011-12 we had a “drought year” with almost five times the number of people with high claims which resulted in over \$663,000 in losses for the fiscal year. In FY 12-13 and FY 13-14, claims were down which resulted in a \$2.1 million gain over the two-year period.

The NARD Risk Pool board was considering leaving the rates at current levels for the next fiscal year. However, since there were two good years in a row, the board approved the committee recommendation to lower rates by 2.5%. This is very rare in the insurance industry. The national average increase for 2014 is 16%. The NRD employee’s involvement in wellness activities and programs reduces health care cost to local NRDs and taxpayers.

Under ObamaCare, there will be premium taxes that have to be paid to the federal government based on the number of employees and family members under the plan. These taxes will be almost \$60,000 in 2014-15. The NARD Risk Pool Board is paying the taxes out of the reserves rather than assessing each employee or district for the tax.

Chart 1 shows the NARD insurance premium increase compared with the national premium average for the past several years.

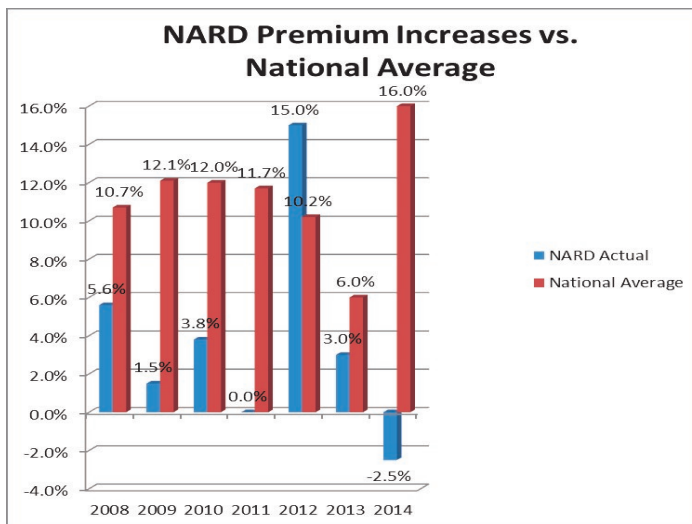


Chart 1

Chart 2 shows the actual NARD insurance premium cost compared to what the NARD insurance premium would be with the national average increases.

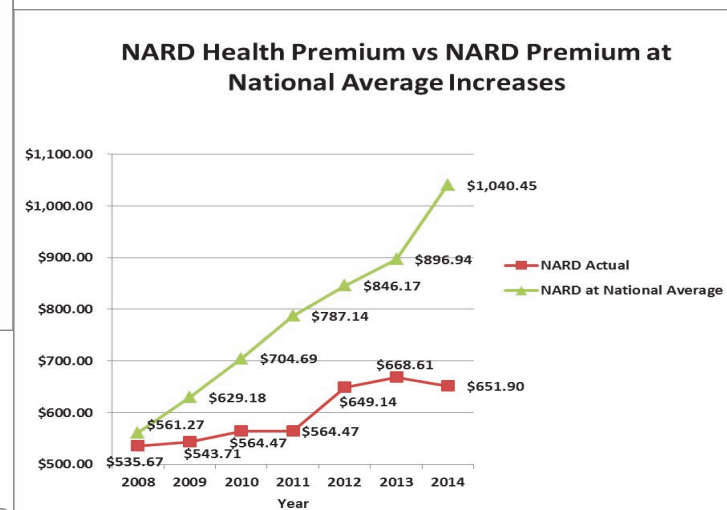


Chart 2

Chart 3 explains NARD Risk Pool income, expenses and assets over the past fiscal years.

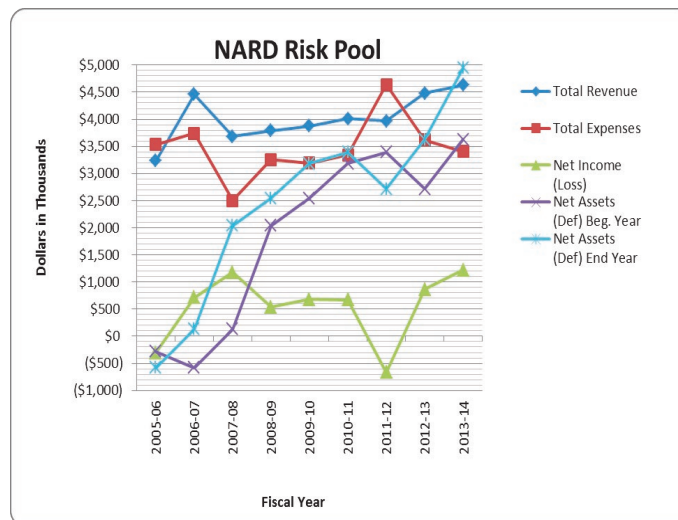


Chart 3

Even though it was a bad year financially in fiscal year 2011-12, the program worked as it was set up to do – work off reserves built up in the “good years” to cover losses in the “bad year”. Mid-American Benefits provided the third-party claims processing. Milt Willnerd, Willnerd and Associates, works with NARD to make sure all state and federal reports are filed correctly and in a timely fashion.

The program is audited annually by independent auditors. In addition, the program is audited by the Nebraska Department of Insurance (NDOI) every four years. The program has been audited twice by the NDOI, most recently in July of 2013. There were no recommendations for changes from the NDOI audits.

NRD Wellness Program



Mid-Summer Night Run—Prairie Lake—LBNRD

NARD, WorkWell Inc and the Nebraska Safety Council offers an employee wellness program to promote a safe and healthy work environment. The wellness program provides tools and resources to NRD employees and Board members to help them be successful in making healthy lifestyle choices.

The wellness program was created as an addition to the NRD’s existing Risk Pool Health Insurance Program administered by NARD. NARD Board members and NRD Managers saw the creation of a wellness program as a way to keep insurance premiums low and continue to save tax-payer dollars. NARD provides assistance to the 23 NRD wellness delegates to help coordinate individual wellness programs. The main objective is to create a fun, friendly, non-intimidating wellness program that challenges employees to meet their district wellness goals.

NARD and the NRDs offer a variety of wellness opportunities and challenges for all fitness levels. Every year at the NARD Annual Conference, the Wellness Committee sponsors a 1 Mile Walk and 5K Fun Run to promote a healthy lifestyle. The committee is also working toward sponsoring a 5K in 2015 which will be open to the public. Be watching for an announcement! The newest venture the Wellness committee created is a NRD Pinterest board! This allows staff to follow NRD boards of healthy meals, exercise routines and many more ideas on Pinterest to help encourage more people to take care of their bodies and share with others. Follow us at www.pinterest.com/nrdnet.



Participants Walk to the Start Line 5K Wellness Run/1 Mile Walk—2013 Annual Conference

Many of the local district wellness programs promote community involvement through a variety of activities including: toy drive, collection for local food banks and health screenings.

Participants in the wellness program have shown improvements in their health, including weight loss, increase in physical activity, healthier eating habits, increase in health screenings and flu shots. As a result of the success of the NRDs wellness program, many of the NRDs have received the Governors Excellence in Wellness Award.

NRD Retirement Program

Thanks to the hard work of the NARD/NRD Employee Benefits Committee, the NRD Employees Retirement Program continues to grow and make improvements.

The NARD 414(h) retirement fund grew 20.8% over the past fiscal year to \$28,757,296 as of June 30, 2014. 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 also grew 27.9% over the past year to \$2,886,117 as of June 30, 2014.

The 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 Beukelman with UBS Financial Services provide the Nationwide investment platform for the plans. Since they have been involved, the NARD investment levels have increased almost four-fold.

Benefit Plans Inc., of Omaha provides the reporting and compliance work for the plans.

2014 Legislative Recap

Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) worked together with the Natural Resources Committee and other state senators during the 2014 Legislative Session to protect the future of Nebraska's natural resources. Senators approved and the Governor signed 20 bills that NARD was involved in. The following provides just a few of the key bills enacted this year.

LB 272 - Change provisions relating to chemigation permits and fees. Carlson. On February 7th, the Legislature gave final approval to LB 272 on a 43-0-6 vote. The Governor signed the bill on February 13, 2014. The intent of the bill is to increase fees for the chemigation program to off-set the cost of administering the program and costs of the annual inspection programs.

The fees for chemigation permits had not changed since the Nebraska Chemigation Act was put into effect in 1986. Current fees are \$30 for new and special permits (\$25 to the NRD and \$5 for NDEQ), \$10 for renewal (\$8 to the NRD and \$2 to NDEQ) and \$100 for an emergency permit (\$80 to the NRD and \$20 to NDEQ).

The bill allows each NRD to set the fees rather than the Nebraska Environmental Quality Council. This allows NRDs to keep the fees at the current level if they wish. The amendment included a cap of no more than \$150 for new or special permits; \$100 for renewal of regular and special permits; and \$500 for emergency permits. The amount sent in to the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality will remain the same as the previous law.

The bill clarifies that emergency permits must be approved within two working days rather than 48 hours. The change is to clarify that emergency permits cannot be issued on Saturday, Sunday or a federal or state holiday. A definition of working day is provided in the bill.

LB 513 - Change notice provisions under the Nebraska Ground Water Management and Protection Act. Carlson. On February 7th, the Legislature gave final approval to LB 513 on a 43-0-6 vote. The Governor signed the bill on February 13, 2014.

The bill changed the notice requirement of a cease and desist order from ten days to three days to enforce any provision of the Nebraska Ground Water Management and Protection Act.

The bill allows a shortened time frame for violators of groundwater rules and regulations to provide corrective action. Several NRDs imposed new rules in areas of their district where severe declines had occurred the last couple of years. If there are water users that are operating illegal wells, under current law the well could run for ten days before corrective action would have to be taken. Shortening this to three days could save a significant amount of water.

LB 814 - Change the distribution of sales tax revenue to provide funding to the Game and Parks Commission. Avery. The Legislature gave final approval to LB 814 on March 27, 2014 by a 43-1-5 vote. Governor Heineman signed LB 814 into law on April 2, 2014. The bill created the Game and Parks Commission Capital Maintenance Fund, funded by the proceeds of the sales and use taxes derived from the sale or lease of motorboats, personal watercraft, all-terrain and utility-type vehicles.



Nebraska State Capitol

2014 Legislative Recap

The bill also changes the point of collection for the sales tax on ATVs and UTVs. Currently the sales tax on ATVs and UTVs is collected and remitted at the retail level. However, there is no way for the county or the state to ensure the sales and use tax is collected and remitted on sales outside of Nebraska, when the ATVs or UTVs are brought into Nebraska for use. By changing the point of tax collection from the retailer to the county treasurer, Nebraska will be better able to collect sales and use taxes due. The change in the point of collection mirrors the same procedure as motor vehicles and motorboats.

LB 844 - Extend the termination date of the Nebraska Litter Reduction and Recycling Act. Schilz. The Legislature gave final approval to LB 844 on March 24, 2014 by a 47-0-2 vote. Governor Heineman signed LB 844 into law on March 28, 2014. The bill extends the termination date of the Nebraska Litter Reduction and Recycling Act from October 30, 2015 to October 30, 2020. The bill was a Natural Resources Committee Priority Bill for the session.

LB 1098e - Change membership and powers and duties of the Nebraska Natural Resources Commission. Carlson. The Legislature gave final approval to LB 1098e and LB 1098A on April 11, 2014 by 48-0-1 votes; the Governor signed the bill on April 16, 2014. Since the bill included the emergency clause, it became effective immediately after the Governor signed the bill. Under the bill, the revised commission will oversee \$11 million in funding for water programs annually as provided in LB 1098A starting in FY 2015-16. The "A" bill also includes an additional \$21 million for FY 2014-15.

The bill expands the Nebraska Natural Resources Commission to 27 members as recommended by the Water Funding Task Force Report in December 2013. The bill maintains all sixteen current members and adds eleven members to be appointed by the Governor.

Appointments, Process, Basin Caucus and Terms



Nebraska State Capitol—Legislative Chambers

The eleven additional appointments would be for staggered four-year terms as determined by the Governor. There are currently three governor appointees representing groundwater users, surface water users and municipalities which would remain in place until the terms are served. Future appointments shall be for four-year terms. The Governor is required to appoint the initial members within thirty days of the effective date of the act, which occurred as soon as the Governor signed the bill.

Currently there are twelve members representing river basins and one additional member representing the metropolitan class elected by caucus of natural resources districts. Under the bill, the caucus process remains. The bill would require the commission to provide notice to the public by issuing press releases for publication in a newspaper of general circulation in each county that comprises the river basin for which a caucus election will be held.



Nebraska State Capitol—14th Floor

2014 Legislative Recap

(Continued)

The additional appointed membership on the commission includes:

- agribusiness interests
- agricultural interests
- groundwater irrigators (current appointment)
- irrigation districts
- manufacturing interests
- metropolitan utilities districts
- municipal users of water from a city of the primary class
- municipal users of water from a city of the first or second class or a village; (current appointment)
- outdoor recreation users
- public power districts
- public power and irrigation districts
- range livestock owners
- surface water irrigators (current appointment)
- wildlife conservation interests

The initial appointments shall be for staggered four-year terms, as determined by the Governor, taking into account the terms remaining of the current members of the commission appointed under such subdivision.

Members whose terms have expired shall continue to serve until their successors have been appointed.

In appointing the members, the Governor shall: (i) Create a broad-based commission which has knowledge of, has experience with, and is representative of Nebraska's water use and economy; ii) Give recognition to the importance of water quantity and water quality; and (iii) Appoint members who represent diverse geographic regions of the state, including urban and rural areas.

After all members have been appointed, the commission shall revise, adopt, and promulgate rules and regulations as necessary to ensure that the commission's funding process establishes and utilizes criteria upon which projects, programs, and activities will be ranked and prioritized according to the water sustainability goals established by the commission.

Finally, the commission is to be required to utilize the resources and expertise of the University of Nebraska, the Department of Environmental Quality, and the Game and Parks Commission relating to funding and planning for water projects, programs, or activities.



Nebraska State Capitol

Goals, Eligibility, Ranking and Scoring Criteria

Under the bill, the goals of the Water Sustainability Fund are to:

- Provide financial assistance to programs, projects, or activities that increase aquifer recharge, reduce aquifer depletion, and increase streamflow;
- Remediate or mitigate threats to drinking water;
- Promote the goals and objectives of approved integrated management plans or ground water management plans;
- Contribute to multiple water supply management goals including flood control, reducing threats to property damage, agricultural uses, municipal and industrial uses, recreational benefits, wildlife habitat, conservation, and preservation of water resources;
- Assist municipalities with the cost of constructing, upgrading, developing, and replacing sewer infrastructure facilities as part of a combined sewer overflow project;
- Provide increased water productivity and enhance water quality;
- Use the most cost effective solutions available; and
- Comply with interstate compacts, decrees, other state contracts and agreements and federal law.

2014 Legislative Recap

Legislative intent was added that the fund be equitably distributed statewide to the greatest extent possible for the long term. Also, intent language was added that distributions from the fund for sewer infrastructure facilities to reduce combined sewer overflow not exceed 10% of the total annual appropriation to the Water Sustainability Fund.

Legislative findings are added that the goals of the fund can be met by giving equal consideration to four categories of projects:

- (1) Research, data and modeling;
- (2) Rehabilitation or restoration of water supply infrastructure, new water supply infrastructure, or water supply infrastructure maintenance or flood prevention for protection of critical infrastructure;
- (3) Conjunctive management, storage, and integrated management of groundwater and surface water; and
- (4) Compliance with interstate compacts or agreements or other formal state contracts or agreements or federal law.

In order for a natural resources district to be eligible for funding from the Water Sustainability Fund, it must have adopted or be in the process of developing an integrated management plan. The bill also allows, with the approval of the commission, to acquire interest in water and related land resources projects in the name of the state utilizing the Water Sustainability Fund.

-Districts that have been or are required to develop an integrated management plan for all or substantially all (85 percent) of the district, such natural resources districts shall, jointly with the department and the natural resources districts within the same basin, develop and adopt a basin-wide plan for the areas of a basin, subbasin, or reach determined by the department to have hydrologically connected water supplies;

-Districts that have developed and implemented a basin-wide plan would be exempt from the new process;

-A basin-wide plan shall be developed using a consultation and collaboration process involving representatives from irrigation districts, reclamation districts, public power and irrigation districts, mutual irrigation companies, canal companies, ground water users, range livestock owners, the Game and Parks Commission, and municipalities that rely on water from within the affected area;

-If an agreement cannot be reached by all parties involved, the basin-wide plan shall be developed and adopted by the department and the affected natural resources districts or by the Interrelated Water Review Board pursuant;

Other Legislative Bills Added: The following other bills of interest were added to LB 1098.

AM 2580 – Christensen. Inserts the Nature Resources Committee amendments to LB 686 - Change a certification date relating to non-irrigated acres, Christensen, and LB 710 - Provide requirements for entering into certain ground water augmentation projects.

Christensen. The amendment changes the date to certify non-irrigated status from March 1 to June 1 for land subject to occupation taxes for the same calendar year, which was the committee amendment to LB 686. The amendment also included the committee amendment to LB 710 which would require that a NRD Board could not vote to enter into a groundwater augmentation project without conducting a public hearing following the 30-day public notice and three consecutive week advertising requirements.

AM 2693 – Davis. Inserts LB 391 - Change water law provisions relating to water storage.

Davis. The bill proposes to modify the requirement of a reservoir and intentional underground water storage facilities when having to release water for direct irrigation or a reservoir facility holding a senior right. Current law does not designate where the facilities are located for the water to be released. The bill outlines that the irrigation ditch or reservoir holding a senior right receiving the water have to be downstream.



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