

Nebraska Association of Resources Districts ANNUAL REPORT

2022



**YEARS OF PROTECTING
LIVES, PROPERTY AND
THE FUTURE!**

#SINCE1972

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Welcome to Kearney and the NARD annual meeting! Along with normal activities, we will celebrate 50 years of having NRDs in Nebraska. Yes, It's a big deal! The leaders who established this unique system in 1972 should be honored and remembered at our birthday party. They did something that no one in the country has been able to duplicate. Many states are envious of our system to manage natural resources.

In 1937, the first soil conservation district was founded in North Carolina. Later, soil and water conservation districts spread across the country to fight erosion. Our NRDs were tasked with

12 responsibilities to broaden the conservation mission. Today, with more people concerned about environmental issues and, now climate mitigation, NRDs are looked to for practical solutions. The locally led boards and talented managers and staff across the state have proved time and again they are reliable problem solvers.

Fifty years ago, my dad lost a recall election for mayor of Nebraska City. A friend told him since he had free time now, he should consider serving on this new board in Tecumseh called the Nemaha NRD. Dad loved the board and the mission. I have been

able to watch NRDs for 50 years and I am amazed and proud of what they have done and are continuing to do. Lots of good people who love Nebraska and the bounty of natural resources we have been blessed with. Hopefully, this meeting will be a chance to reflect, learn new things, recharge our batteries, and, yes, brag a little about NRDs.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your president.

P.S. Dad served eight years on the Nemaha NRD board and then won reelection in a crowded field as a write-in candidate for mayor of Nebraska City.



Dr. Orval Gigstad
NARD President
Syracuse, Nebraska
Director, Nemaha NRD



NACD recognizes states that have achieved 100% participation in dues. Nemaha NRD Director and NARD President Dr. Orval Gigstad accepted the award on behalf of Nebraska in February.



From left, NARD Past President Jim Eschliman (Lower Loup NRD), NARD Executive Director Dean Edson, NARD President Dr. Orval Gigstad (Nemaha NRD), NARD Secretary/Treasurer Joel Hansen (Lower Elkhorn NRD), and NARD Vice President Martin Graff (Middle Niobrara NRD).



From left, NARD Executive Director Dean Edson, former Lower Platte South NRD Director/NARD Director Roxanne Smith, NARD President and Nemaha NRD Director Dr. Orval Gigstad, Nemaha NRD General Manager Kyle Hauschild and Lower Platte South NRD Director Bruce Johnson celebrate Arbor Day (April 29) at the Nebraska State Capitol. In honor of Arbor Day's 150th anniversary, two Red Oaks were planted on the northeast Capitol lawn.

MEET THE NARD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The NARD Executive Committee includes the NARD president, vice president, secretary/treasurer, past president, and chairs from the Legislative and Information & Education Committees. The NARD Board of Directors includes representation from each of the 23 NRDs and meets five times annually to help guide the Association. To avoid duplication of costs, the same members serve on the NARD Risk Pool Board, which governs the health insurance program.

NARD President Dr. Orval Gigstad has served on the Nemaha NRD Board since 1993 and the NARD Board

since 1996. He also serves as chair of the National Association of Conservation Districts Northern Plains Region. A practicing veterinarian for more than 45 years, he operates the Arbor Valley Animal Clinic in Syracuse.

NARD Vice President Martin Graff has served on the Middle Niobrara NRD Board 26 years and on the NARD Board since 2018. He farms with his wife, Brenda, and sons near Ainsworth. Off the farm, Graff serves on the East Woodlawn Cemetery Board and is active in the Elks Club helping with youth sports.

NARD Secretary/Treasurer Joel Hansen

has served on the Lower Elkhorn NRD board 15 years and represents the board on the Wau-Col Rural Water System Advisory Committee. Hansen brings a unique perspective to the board as the Street & Planning Director for the City of Wayne where he has worked for more than 27 years.

NARD Past President Jim Eschliman has served on the Lower Loup NRD Board 16 years and the NARD Board since 2016. Eschliman also serves on his local co-op board and the Cattleman's Beef Board. After

selling his dairy cows in 2018, he considers himself retired and resides near Ericson with his wife, Deb.

James Meisner of the Twin Platte NRD serves as the Legislative Committee chair, and Jim Johnson of the South Platte NRD serves as the Information & Education Committee chair.



2022 NARD Executive Committee



Dr. Orval Gigstad
President



Martin Graff
Vice President



Joel Hansen
Secretary/Treasurer



Jim Eschliman
Past President



James Meisner
Legislative Chair



Jim Johnson
I&E Chair

MEET THE NRD MANAGERS COMMITTEE

The NRD Managers Committee includes managers and assistant managers from all 23 districts. The committee meets five times annually to coordinate NRD activities with state and federal agencies, conservation partners and other parties to

protect Nebraska's natural resources.

Lower Republican NRD Manager Todd Siel is chair and Lower Big Blue NRD Manager Scott Sobotka is vice chair.

The Managers Committee elects a new chair at the March meeting.



Todd Siel
Chair



Scott Sobotka
Vice Chair

NRD CONSERVATION AWARD WINNERS

Nebraska's NRDs have a history of recognizing landowners, producers and partners for being great stewards of the land and our natural resources.

The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD) coordinates an annual recognition program to provide awards for outstanding efforts in conservation. Districts nominate individuals for the various awards and the NARD Board of Directors select the winners in June.

Award nominations are due

to the NARD on May 1. To learn more about the individual awards, visit: www.nrdnet.org/news/conservation-awards.

Once winners are selected, the awards are presented at the NRD Annual Conference each September.

Congratulations to our 2022 award recipients and thank you for your dedication to preserving and protecting Nebraska's natural resources for the next generation.



Dennis & Teri Taylor
Tree Planter of the Year

Since 1989, the Taylors have planted more than 39,500 trees on their ranch north of Newport. More than 20 shelter belts have been added in the last 50 years.



Project Grow - City of York
Community Conservation

The City of York has taken great steps to protect their wellfield by implementing soil health techniques, pollinator habitat, community gardens and an orchard, all while using the site as a community education tool.



Larry Moore
Director of the Year

Moore has served on the Upper Big Blue NRD board since 1975 providing essential institutional knowledge and a deep understanding of the issues, both as a director and as a member of the local ag community.



Dave & Alex Daake
Soil Stewardship

This father-son duo no-till farm in Seward County. Using a variety of BMPs they have increased soil organic matter measurements on many of their fields up to 5%, reducing the need for fertilizer inputs.



John Krohn
Water Conservation

Krohn farms near Albion and his active involvement in Lower Loup NRD's IMP stakeholder's group and drought management planning shows his commitment to conserving our precious resource.



Laura Cooney
Educator of the Year (K-6)

An Arthur County educator for more than 30 years, Cooney emphasizes the importance of the unique Sandhills grassland ecosystem. She is known for teaching courses on range to all ages.



Kelly Guggenmos
Educator of the Year (7-12)

Guggenmos has taught more than 22 years at Wheeler Central (Bartlett). Her students have excelled in Range Judging and developed skills through her natural resources and environmental science classes.

NRD HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

Hall of Fame - Director



Jim Bendfeldt
Kearney, NE
Central Platte NRD

During his 17 years and counting on the Central Platte NRD Board, Jim Bendfeldt has had a significant impact by bringing awareness of District problems along with viable solutions. In 2007, Bendfeldt initiated the idea to implement the first water bank in Nebraska and donated 2.4 acre-feet to start the first transaction. This idea and the Board's foresight was the catalyst for the NRD's transfer program and the first irrigation certification website in the state.

Bendfeldt was one of the first in Kearney to successfully implement conservation practices providing reductions in soil moisture loss, fuel needs, soil erosion and irrigation scheduling. Now retired, his son Shane continues the practice by trying new technologies and practices, and providing land for University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension trials.

Bendfeldt has also served on the NARD Board since 2012. He was NARD president from 2016-2018; vice president from 2014-2016; and secretary/treasurer from 2012-2014. He continues to be active on the Board.

Hall of Fame - Employee



Marlin Petermann
Omaha, NE
Papio-Missouri River NRD

Before his untimely death in December 2021, Marlin Petermann worked for the Papio-Missouri River NRD 47 years, the majority as assistant general manager. He was passionate about his job, and his degrees in civil and agricultural engineering enabled him to combine his love of problem-solving with nature.

He had an important job that directly impacted communities, especially public safety. He was an institution in Nebraska's flood mitigation efforts. For decades, he worked tirelessly with local, county, state, and federal governments and created countless public/private partnerships that not only made communities safer but enhanced quality of life.

It's impossible to put into words the legacy that Petermann's nearly 48 years of leadership, dedication and service leave to the Papio NRD and beyond. His footprint on the District is deep and wide...and timeless.

Hall of Fame - Supporter



Susan Olafsen-Lackey
Winside, NE
UNL Conservation and Survey Division

Susan Olafsen-Lackey is a research hydrologist with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Conservation and Survey Division (CSD). She began her career with CSD in 1991 and has used her knowledge and experience to help Nebraska communities and agencies protect and manage water resources.

Olafsen-Lackey holds a Nebraska professional geologist license and a water well and pump installers contractors license. Her main research emphasis is the groundwater flow system in northeast and north-central Nebraska including determining subsurface geology, as well as collecting and analyzing water level and water chemistry data. She has logged more than 78,000 feet of test holes for northeast Nebraska and is highly regarded by CSD and her colleagues.

Olafsen-Lackey serves on many water-related boards and committees and has authored or co-authored numerous publications, maps and presentations. Her CSD service area encompasses part or all of seven NRDs.

NRD 50th Anniversary

PROTECTING LIVES, PROPERTY & THE FUTURE #SINCE1972

Throughout 2022, Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) have been celebrating 50 years of protecting lives, property and the future. We will continue to commemorate breakthroughs and achievements in conservation.

"In the past 50 years, NRDs have adapted while facing changes in technology, funding, legislation, agencies and society," said Jim Eschliman, Nebraska Association of Resources Districts past president. "Nebraska's locally led conservation model has been a successful legacy because of our ability to adapt to the local needs of our communities."

After the devastation of the Dust Bowl, special purpose districts were developed to solve local soil and water-

related problems. But the puzzle of overlapping authorities and responsibilities provided confusion at best.

In 1969, Senator Maurice Kremer introduced legislative bill 1357 to combine Nebraska's 154 special purpose entities into 24 Natural Resources Districts by July 1972. In 1989, The Middle Missouri Tributaries NRD and the Papio NRD merged to become the Papio-Missouri River NRD resulting in today's 23 Natural Resources Districts.

Today, Nebraska's unique system of locally controlled, watershed-based conservation is widely admired throughout the nation. In recent years, at least 11 states ranging from Washington to Arkansas and Illinois to California, have inquired

about applying a similar system for natural resources management. Despite being the No. 1 irrigated state in the nation, Nebraska's statewide groundwater levels have been sustained at levels less than a foot below pre-irrigation development in the 1950s. In many areas, groundwater levels are higher.

"Many states are facing massive groundwater declines with almost depleted aquifers," Eschliman said. "NRDs work with irrigators to monitor water use, establish groundwater recharge projects, and implement water-wise programs. Depending on rainfall, Nebraska's groundwater levels often rise above pre-development levels."

Across the state, NRDs construct projects, implement programs and offer a major source of assistance to landowners in conservation and natural resources management. When necessary, they enact regulations to protect our resources. While all NRDs share the 12 main responsibilities, each district sets its own priorities and develops its own programs to best serve and protect Nebraska's natural resources.

Eschliman noted that



The February 2022 Irrigation Leader Magazine featured the NRDs' 50th anniversary.

Nebraska's NRDs will continue to build upon, refine, and adapt as they look to the future.

"Conservation is something that impacts us all and we need to pitch in and be good stewards of our land and water," he said. "Locally elected NRD boards across the state are uniquely positioned in their communities to help manage our natural resources for future generations."

To join in the 50th anniversary celebration and follow the Natural Resources Districts' special activities throughout 2022, visit nrdnet.org and follow #Since1972 on social media.



Gov. Pete Ricketts declares July 11-15, 2022, as NRD Week! From left, NARD Executive Committee Jim Eschliman (LLNRD), Gov. Ricketts, Dr. Orval Gigstad (NNRD), Joel Hansen (LENRD) and Martin Graff (MNNRD).

Go West! BASIN TOUR FEATURES PANHANDLE NRDS

Approximately 50 directors and staff from Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) convened in Scottsbluff for the annual NRD Basin Tour hosted by the South Platte, North Platte and Upper Niobrara White NRDs June 6-7, 2022.

"We get far less rain than the rest of state, which makes for unique challenges in natural resources management," said Scott Schaneman, North Platte NRD general manager. "The Panhandle NRDs have diverse responsibilities and programs that include water conservation, forestry, range management and even flood control. The annual basin tour is a great opportunity to highlight our efforts and showcase western Nebraska."

Schaneman, along with South Platte NRD General Manager Galen Wittrock and Upper Niobrara White NRD General Manager Pat O'Brien, led the two-day tour showcasing several projects that protect lives, property and the future in western Nebraska including water recharge, habitat restoration and forestry in the Pine Ridge.

Traditionally, the educational tour includes NRD directors and staff and conservation partners.

"Basin tours give NRD directors a unique look at the conservation challenges that are being faced around the state," said Jim Eschliman, Nebraska Association of Resources Districts past president

and Lower Loup NRD director. "It is interesting to see the diversity of the NRDs and how local boards meet the challenges to benefit their communities and the state."

The tour included several stops and tours of conservation projects that protect both urban and rural natural resources. Some of the 2022 tour highlights included:

- Enterprise Canal Diversion Project (Mitchell)
- Tri-State Surface Water Diversion at the North Platte River (Henry)
- Sidney Bioretention Project (Sidney)
- South Platte River Compact and Canal Project Overview (Sidney)
- Chimney Rock (Bayard)
- North Platte NRD Greenhouse (Scottsbluff)
- Minatare Diversion Project (Minatare)
- Lake Minatare Lighthouse (Minatare)
- Nine Mile Creek Rehab and Hatchery (Minatare)
- Pine Forest Restoration and Thinning in Chadron State Park (Chadron)

The NRD Basin Tour explores a different water basin each year. The hosting NRDs showcase conservation projects, partnerships and the local communities in which they live and work.

NRD Basin Tour attendees experience Chimney Rock near Bayard, Nebraska.



From left, Foresters Bryce Gerlach and Doak Nickerson, and Upper Niobrara White NRD General Manager Pat O'Brien discuss the Ponderosa Pine reforestation.



Lower Niobrara NRD Director Marvin Liewer asks a question at Lake Minatare.



Farmers Irrigation District Manager Kevin Adams explains how drought is impacting the North Platte River flows and irrigation in western Nebraska.

Conservation Tree Program

MILESTONE PLANTED WITH 100 MILLIONTH TREE

NRDs sold nearly 616,000 conservation trees and shrubs in 2022, which is more than the previous three years. This year also marked the 100 millionth tree for the Conservation Tree Program!

NRDs expect to plant more trees through partnerships with NRCS, Nebraska Forest Service and Executive Travel.

The Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) is heading up the Nebraska Forest Restoration Partnership, which brings together NFS, NRDs, and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to address declines in the state's forests and

windbreaks. Using a \$4.3 million grant from NRCS, partners will work directly with landowners to increase the scale and pace of forest restoration statewide. This includes planting 1.5 million trees, providing new management of 30,000 acres of declining forests, increasing the health and resiliency of 7,000 acres of vulnerable forests and restoring 250 linear miles of agricultural windbreaks.

Executive Travel, a Lincoln-based travel management company, has committed to planting a tree for every airline

ticket they sell with a goal of planting one million trees. Through the initiative, the company hopes to offset the carbon footprint from their clients' airline travel. In 2022, NRDs were able to plant an additional 48,000 trees with Executive Travel cost-share funding (\$50,000). In 2023, Executive Travel will provide additional cost share (\$75,000) to plant more trees in Nebraska.

Upper Niobrara White NRD hosted the annual NRD Forestry Workshop July 27-28, 2022. More than 30 attendees from 13 districts participated in the two-day

workshop. The agenda included round-table discussions, partner updates, and a tour highlighting logging and forestry projects in the Upper Niobrara White NRD.

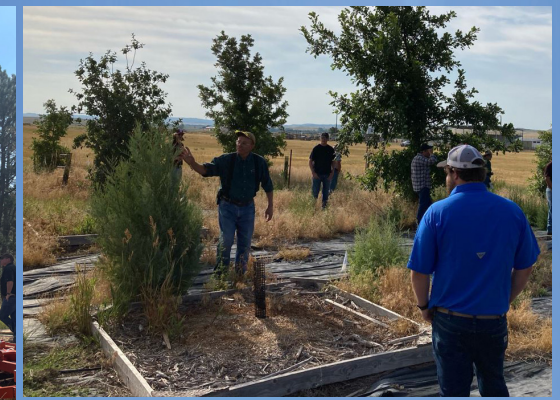
Promotion of the NRD Conservation Tree Program continues with advertising on Big Red Wrap-Up during the Husker football season and booths at various events including the Grazing Conference, Husker Harvest Days, Nebraska Ag Expo and the Women in Ag Conference.



Landowner Andy Jacobsen, right, took part in the Papio-Missouri River NRD's cost-share program to plant a windbreak.



Above and Left: Middle Niobrara NRD demonstrates their saw mill by cutting boards in the Pine Ridge south of Chadron during the Upper Niobrara White NRD tour July 28, 2022.



District Forester Doak Nickerson tests the survivability of different tree species at the Dawes County Fairgrounds arboretum in Chadron.



Nemaha NRD directors and staff plant a tree on the front lawn of Arbor Lodge in Nebraska City to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Arbor Day and the 50th anniversary of the Natural Resources Districts. From left, Chuck Wingert, Eldon Snoke, Kyle Hauschild, Randy Fox, Tomas Chalè Akè, Rob Bohling, Mark McDonald, Jane Kuhl, Dan Hodges, Russel Moss, Ken Hatten, Orval Gigstad, Junior Speers, Steve Bartels, Kevin Thorne, Dan Stukenholtz and Ashley Rippe.



Forestry Workshop participants host a round-table discussion on various Conservation Tree Program topics.

Background: Papio-Missouri River NRD crews planted more than 3,000 trees in Douglas, Sarpy and Washington counties.

Background: Forestry Workshop participants got to see the Pine Ridge near Chadron, where many trees have been destroyed due to wildfires.

Ceremonious 100 Millionth Tree

NORTHEAST CAPITOL LAWN HOME TO CONSERVATION MILESTONE

Natural Resources Districts' staff and directors planted the ceremonious 100 millionth NRD conservation tree – a Sugar Maple – on the northeast lawn at the Nebraska State Capitol Friday, Sept. 2, 2022. The Sugar Maple is part of the original 1934 capitol landscape plan. For the last 25 years, the Capitol Commission has been planting the same species

back in the original locations according to the landscape plan established almost 90 years ago. Since their inception in 1972, NRDs have been planting conservation trees and shrubs for windbreaks, erosion control, wildlife habitat and other conservation purposes. This spring, the NRD Conservation Tree Program planted their 100 millionth tree – that's approximately 50 trees

for each Nebraskan. "Nebraska has a proud history of planting trees, and putting the 100 millionth tree in the ground reflects Nebraskans' willingness to invest in the future," said Dr. Orval Gigstad, Nebraska Association of Resources Districts president. "Our tree planting success is owed to the forward-thinking vision of landowners." Each year, the NRD Conservation Tree

Program provides hundreds of thousands of low-cost, bulk trees for planting across the state. Gigstad noted that extreme weather events, diseases and invasive insects have impacted Nebraska's tree population, but recent public-private partnerships demonstrate Nebraska's tree planting spirit. For more information, visit www.nrdtrees.org.



Nemaha NRD Field Representative Mark McDonald and UNL Forester Laurie Stepanek investigate sudden adolescent death in an Eastern Redcedar windbreak. Stepanek is a forest health specialist and helps people across Nebraska with tree insects, diseases, and environmental issues.



Lewis & Clark NRD I&E Technician Reed Trenhaile discusses trees with Bloomfield kindergartens for Arbor Day.



Upper Elkhorn NRD Water Resource Technician Kelly Kloppenborg speaks to district grade schoolers about tree planting.



The Lower Republican NRD tree planting crew plants rows of windbreaks.



NRD directors and staff from across the state met at the Capitol Friday, Sept. 2, 2022 to plant the ceremonious 100 millionth tree.



From left, NRCS State Forester Ritch Nelson, Lower Republican NRD General Manager and NRD Managers Committee Chair Todd Siel, Central Platte NRD Director Jim Bendfeldt, Executive Travel Chairman Steve Glenn and NARD President Dr. Orval Gigstad plant a Sugar Maple at the State Capitol.



NARD President Dr. Orval Gigstad, left, and Executive Travel Chairman Steve Glenn at the 100 millionth tree ceremony.

Above: Middle Niobrara NRD Natural Resources Technicians Kyle Temple and Kaleb Puncoschar plant trees on Arbor Day in western Cherry County. The Middle Niobrara NRD machine planted 16,000 trees, sold an additional 37,000 handplants, and laid 10 miles of weed barrier. The District office also installed a woody biomass boiler to heat the space with Eastern Redcedar chips.

Carving Out a Tree Planter

NRD Tree Planter Award recipients receive more than recognition at the annual NRD awards luncheon, they take home a piece of art. The Tree Planter of the Year Award is hand-carved by Ken Adams of Lincoln. Adams, a member of the Capitol City Carvers for 35 years, usually spends two weekends carving the award. Adams' preferred wood is basswood

(linden tree), and his specialty is character carvings like Santa

Claus and angels for Christmas, and rifle stocks with realistic

animals. After a 36-year career with Lincoln Telephone and Telegraph, Adams says that carving is a hobby and something he does for fun out of his garage workshop. The Capitol City Carvers was founded in 1975 by a few individuals with a mutual interest in wood carving. The club holds a monthly business meeting which may include a guest speaker and show and tell where members display recently completed carvings. Learn more at capitolcitycarvers.org.



Lincoln native Ken Adams hand carves the Tree Planter of the Year award for the annual NRD awards luncheon each September.

STATE ENVIROTHON TAKES TO THE HILLS IN COZAD

High schoolers from across Nebraska met in Cozad for the 30th annual Nebraska State Envirothon April 27. Concordia Lutheran of Omaha took home the championship along with \$1,500 and represented Nebraska at the National Conservation Foundation (NCF) Envirothon in July.

Envirothon is an environmental education program for high school students that combines classroom learning and outdoor activities. This year's competition was hosted at Camp Comeca near Cozad. "Envirothon allows students to get outdoors and learn about natural resources in a hands-on environment," said Orval Gigstad, Nebraska Association of Resources Districts

president. "The activities are designed to help students become environmentally aware, action-oriented adults, but also exposes them to many exciting career opportunities."

During the state competition, five-member teams were tested on their knowledge of aquatics, forestry, policy, range, soils and wildlife, as well as prepared and delivered an oral presentation focusing on a current environmental issue.

The 2022 oral presentation theme "Waste to Resources" challenged teams to propose a solution on a complex problem before a panel of judges.

The NARD Foundation awarded cash prizes to the top three teams at the state competition:

- **First Place (\$1,500):** Concordia (Omaha)
- **Second Place (\$1,000):** Norris
- **Third Place (\$500):** Milford

Additional prizes were awarded to the top teams in each testing category:

- **Aquatics:** Concordia and Dawson County Envirothon Club
- **Forestry:** St. Paul and Milford
- **Policy:** Loup City
- **Range:** Burwell
- **Soils:** St. Paul and Concordia
- **Wildlife:** Norris
- **Oral Presentation:** Omaha Zoo Academy

Seventy-five teams competed in the regional contests in February and March and 14 teams qualified to participate at the state competition.



Central Platte NRD Director Jay Richeson of Gothenburg welcomes teams to Cozad and discusses the natural resources challenges faced in the area.



The Milford Envirothon team gives their oral presentation on "Waste to Resources" to the judges during State Envirothon.



The Dawson County Envirothon Club team prepares to take the aquatics test during the State Envirothon April 27.

Below: Norris students problem solve at the Envirothon range station. Norris took second place and a top score in wildlife.



Above Left: Omaha Zoo Academy students cheer on teammates after winning the Oral Presentation award. Above Right: Zoo Academy students work to identify a snake. The Zoo Academy were first-time Envirothon competitors and qualified two teams for state.



NARD I&E Chair and South Platte NRD Director Jim Johnson congratulates St. Paul on top scores in forestry and soils.



NARD I&E Chair and South Platte NRD Director Jim Johnson congratulates Burwell on a top score in range.



CONCORDIA HEADS TO NCF-ENVIROTHON IN OHIO

After taking the top spot at the State Envirothon, Concordia Lutheran High School from Omaha, went on to represent Nebraska at the NCF-Envirothon July 24-30, 2022, at Miami University in Oxford,

Ohio. The NCF-Envirothon included 40 teams from the U.S., Canada and China. Nebraska finished 21st taking 10th in Wildlife; 12th in Soils and 14th in the Oral Presentation.

"Our goal for this team was to be in the top half and we just missed that by one place and less than two points," said Concordia Coach Mike Ellis. "We were very happy for such a young team!"

Top places went to the following states:

- **First:** Massachusetts
- **Second:** Maryland
- **Third:** Florida

The 2023 NCF-Envirothon will be hosted in New Brunswick, Canada.



Concordia Lutheran High School from Omaha named Nebraska Envirothon Champions April 27, 2022, in Cozad.



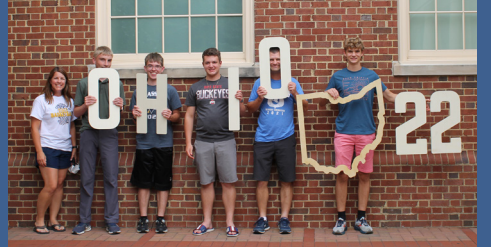
Left: Concordia students work together on their Aquatic Ecology test during the international NCF-Envirothon in Oxford, Ohio, July 26, 2022



The 2022 NCF-Envirothon brought together 40 teams from the U.S., Canada and China to compete for scholarships and bragging rights in Oxford, Ohio. Nebraska was represented by Concordia Lutheran High School from Omaha, Nebraska.



Left: During the opening ice breaker, Concordia students trade Nebraska-themed items with students from across the globe. Items included Kool-Aid, Baker's Chocolates and Dorothy Lynch dressing.



The Nebraska team at the NCF-Envirothon competition in Oxford, Ohio, July 24-30, 2022. Over the years, Concordia Coach Mike Ellis has qualified multiple teams for the international competition.

HUSKER HARVEST DAYS: LEGACY OF FREE TREES

Nebraska's NRDs have a history of greeting Husker Harvest Days attendees with free trees each September.

While tree seedlings have been the main draw to the NRD setup, additional presentations have included windbreak demonstrations and the soil wizard.

In 2012, the NRDs upgraded from a tent to a permanent building known as the Natural Resources Hub. Today, the Hub continues to offer free trees and water, and host conservation agencies that promote maintaining and protecting Nebraska's natural resources.

This year, NRDs handed out approximately 3,500 Colorado Blue Spruce trees at Husker Harvest Days.



Above: The Soil Wizard does a card trick in the Natural Resources tent at Husker Harvest Days. Below: NRD Staff demonstrate how a windbreak works inside a small wind chamber.



A family picks up a free tree (and drink) from the Natural Resources tent at Husker Harvest Days. Free trees and water are still offered.

RECREATION

Investments Across the State

As Nebraskans continue to seek the peace and tranquility of the outdoors, Nebraska's NRDs continue to invest in recreation area improvements throughout the state.

Central Platte NRD Crane Viewing Decks

Central Platte NRD completed upgrades on the Richard Plautz Crane Viewing Deck near Gibbon and upgrades at the Alda site are in the works. Upgrades at both sites were partially funded by the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) administered by the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission.

The Richard Plautz Crane Viewing Deck consists of two elevated wooden viewing decks, a 1,650-foot trail, and a parking lot. The deteriorated trail was upgraded to an 8-foot-wide concrete path and the parking lot was

paved. Additional work included streambank repair, erosion control and seedling plantings.

The Crane Viewing site near Alda upgrades include a 1,047-foot concrete recreational trail, replacing the 30-year-old wooden viewing platform, and paving the three existing gravel parking lots to make the area fully ADA accessible. Central Platte NRD was a partner in building the Alda site in the mid-1990s to increase public safety by reducing the extra in-flow of traffic and cars parking on nearby county roads, which are heavily used by residents. The site also increases public awareness of Platte River wildlife.

Lower Platte South NRD Wabash Trailhead

In February, the Lower Platte South NRD board approved funding for a trailhead at Wabash that includes a concrete

vault restroom and parking lot. The new trailhead will give trail users a safe place to park and will increase their planning options as they enjoy the MoPac East Trail.

The 22-mile crushed limestone trail offers year-round recreation for hikers, joggers, bicyclists, horseback riders, cross country skiers and wildlife watchers. The Missouri Pacific Railroad corridor was active until 1984, when heavy rains destroyed a portion of track near Elmwood. The Nebraska Trails Foundation and the Great Plains Trails Network raised the funds to purchase the trail property. The property was then deeded to the Lower Platte South NRD in 1991.

The MoPac East Trail connects to the MoPac Trail in Lincoln near 84th and O streets, linking it to the more than 130-mile city trail network.

The trail is completed from Lincoln to Wabash – 22 miles. Eventually it will reach the Platte River Connection and Lied Platte River Bridge, a bridge over the Platte River at South Bend, with connections to the Omaha trail network. This year, the legislature approved funding to link Lincoln and Omaha via the trail network.

Little Blue NRD Prairie Lake Recreation Area

On April 1, Little Blue NRD hosted a grand opening at Prairie Lake Recreation Area south of Juniata to celebrate 20 new concrete RV pads with electrical hook-ups.

After issues with vandalism, the board decided to invest in facilities to serve more people and generate more traffic through the rec area. In 2016, improvements included running electricity into the rec area, installing a well for drinking water,

and building a picnic shelter and concrete restrooms.

In all, the Little Blue NRD has invested more than \$200,000 in recreation improvements at Prairie Lake over the past several years. That includes \$80,000 spent in the past year to develop the 20 RV pads, which have 30–50-amp electrical capacity. Each has its own fire ring and tree to someday provide shade.

The Prairie Lake Recreation Area, which

opened in 1980, wraps around a 65-acre body of water formed five years earlier when a flood control dam was constructed on Thirty-Two Mile Creek.

Lower Elkhorn NRD Riverfront Revitalization

In 2018, Lower Elkhorn NRD voted to support the North Fork Riverfront Development Project with \$1.032 million in funding.

The City of Norfolk has raised millions in grants and matching funds to transform the city's downtown riverfront

district to bring more recreation to the north fork of the Elkhorn River and aims to make the river more accessible to the public.

"The plan to develop the Norfolk Riverfront is not new to the district," said Mike Sousek, LENRD general manager. "The first stages of the original project were studied by the city and the District in 1974. In the last decade, the study found new life and is finally becoming a reality."

Project plans include rebuilding Johnson Park;

whitewater rapids-style drops for kayakers; a beach; amphitheater with a permanent stage; festival space and entertainment spaces for young people, including playground-style equipment.

The City of Norfolk broke ground on the \$14 million project Aug. 2, 2022.

Allowing these outdoor spaces for the public to enjoy our natural resources is critical to quality of life for Nebraskans.



Lower Big Blue NRD puts the finishing touches on a major rehab of Cub Creek recreation area near Plymouth. The project is the culmination of nearly a decade of efforts to remove it from the impaired waters list due to E. coli and nutrient loading. District staff have also added new restroom facilities, parking lots, electrical camping hookups and a boat dock.



Lower Elkhorn NRD General Manager Mike Sousek, Chairman Mark Hall, Projects Manager Curt Becker, and Directors Anthony Wisniewski, Joel Hansen and Scott McHenry present Norfolk Mayor Josh Moenning with a \$1.032 million check for the North Fork Riverfront Development Project. The \$14 million project broke ground on Aug. 2, 2022.



NRD Information and Education staff try out kayaking during their summer quarterly meeting hosted by the Papio-Missouri River NRD. Middle Republican NRCS Clerk Colleen Stone paddles to shore at Flanagan Lake.



In April, Little Blue NRD directors cut the ribbon and celebrated the grand opening of 20 concrete RV pads with electrical hook-ups at Prairie Lake Recreation Area south of Juniata. The Prairie Lake Recreation Area, which opened in 1980, wraps around a 65-acre body of water formed five years earlier when a flood control dam was constructed on Thirty-Two Mile Creek.



Far Left: Cyclists ride Lower Platte South NRD's MoPac East Trail for the Nacho Ride. The ride welcomes area cyclists to travel from Lincoln to Eagle and back every Tuesday throughout the summer.

Left: Birdwatchers gather at Central Platte NRD's Alda crane viewing site, which is scheduled for upgrades.

BRIGHT FUTURE FOR RANGE & LAND JUDGING, PARTICIPATION UP

In September 2021, Middle Niobrara NRD hosted state Range Judging near Valentine with 42 schools competing. Teams from West Holt took top honors in the Senior Division while St. Paul led in the Junior Division.

2021 was a record year for Land Judging with 100 schools and 1,727 students participating in regional competitions.

Tri-Basin NRD hosted state Land Judging near Bertrand in October 2021 with 39 schools competing.

Five teams – Hampton, Fullerton, Heartland, Holdrege and Adams Central – took honors at state Land Judging and went on to compete at national Land Judging May 3-5, 2022, in Oklahoma City.

In the last 10 years, FFA chapters in the state

have nearly doubled. This has led to large increases in student participation for Land and Range Judging, which we expect to only grow. Going forward organizing committees are looking at ways to increase efficiency and scoring to handle more contestants with fewer volunteers.

Special thank you to our NRD hosts, NRCS range specialists and soil scientists, and the Nebraska Society for Range Management, who help make Range and Land Judging possible. This year, state Range Judging will be hosted by Upper Niobrara White NRD Sept. 28-29, 2022, and state Land Judging will be hosted by North Platte NRD Oct. 19, 2022.



Students work to find the slope near their soil pit at State Land Judging near Bertrand in October 2021.



Chadron High School students compete at State Range Judging in Cherry County September 2021.



Hampton and Heartland students visit the Upper Big Blue NRD in July to share more about their experience competing at national Land Judging. Students from Hampton and Heartland schools pose with their teachers, Joel Miller and Stephanie Miller, as well as Board Chair Lynn Yates (far right) and General Manager David Eigenberg (far left).



Background: Nebraska high schoolers compete at the South Central Region Land Judging Competition in the Central Platte NRD.

LOWER REPUBLICAN NRD HOSTS MANAGERS RETREAT & TOUR

Managers visited Harlan County Dam & Reservoir during the annual managers retreat hosted by Lower Republican NRD in Alma Aug. 29-31.

Highlights included a tour of Harlan County Dam, which was dedicated in 1952. The two-mile wide dam on the Republican River was built after a disastrous flood in May 1935 claimed 100 lives and caused \$26 million in damages. The dam, 13,250-acre lake and additional 17,750 acres of land around the lake are managed

by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Harlan County Dam controls a drainage area of 7,164 square miles and is part of a network of Corps lakes that help control flooding on the Republican, Kansas, Missouri and Mississippi Rivers.

Managers and partners also enjoyed a boat tour of Harlan County Reservoir, Nebraska's second largest lake.

The reservoir now provides irrigation and recreational opportunities for south-central Nebraska.



During the annual managers retreat hosted by Lower Republican NRD, managers and partners toured Harlan County Dam in Republican City.

KNOW YOUR WELL PROGRAM BOOSTING PARTICIPATION

During the past several years, the Know Your Well (KYW) program has been funded by grants from the Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) and NDEE and carried out by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The program allows high school students and teachers to conduct groundwater quality

testing from private domestic wells in rural areas near their city or town. Duplicate samples are also tested by the UNL Water Sciences Laboratory and results are sent back to each school and the participating well owners. Students are educated about the importance of

groundwater quality testing and in turn help educate others in their community.

In 2022, NET approved a grant in the amount of \$531,000 for Phase III to expand the program across Nebraska over the next three years. The Papio NRD is the administrator for all grant funds, and

16 NRDs agreed to participate in Phase III by dedicating some funding or in-kind services as a match for the grant.

Throughout the summer, NRD I&E staff received training on how to roll out the Know Your Well Program with their local school districts.



From left, Reed Trenhaile, Lewis & Clark NRD; Marcia Lee, Central Platte NRD; and Jessica Hedges, Little Blue NRD, practice doing a water test to train for administering the Know Your Well Program in their districts.



Amanda Shepperd with North Platte NRD, left, and Sydney Abbott with Lower Platte North NRD use a water hardness test to learn the Know Your Well Program concepts.



Adam Sutton with the Lower Platte South NRD measures out the perfect amount of water to administer his chemistry test. NRD educators will be recruiting additional schools to participate in Know Your Well.

A GLIMPSE OF ACTIVITIES IN THE *natural resources districts*



Upper Elkhorn NRD Agronomy Resources Technician Brett Sholes collects soil samples in Groundwater Management Phase III areas to test for residual nitrogen.



Lower Platte South NRD Water Resources Coordinator Dick Ehrman presents during the Groundwater Technician Training at the NARD office May 26, 2022.



Lower Platte South NRD Forester Jay Seaton, right, promotes the NRD Conservation Tree Program on Market Journal July 1, 2022.



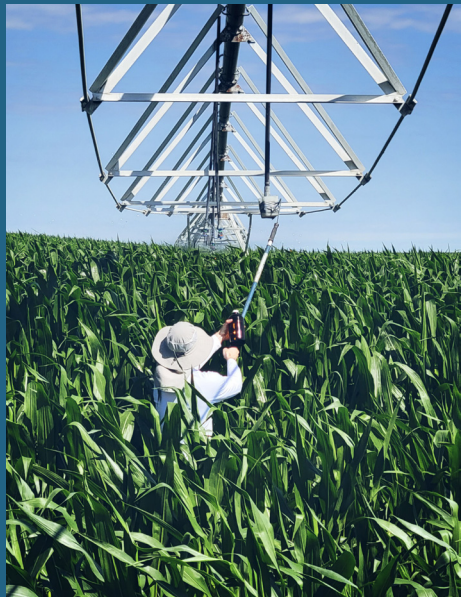
Lower Big Blue NRD Data Specialist Nick Schroeder, left, installs telemetry in dedicated monitoring well #18 near Diller with Ken Quandt of McCrometer, right.



NRD Information & Education staff at the 2022 State Envirothon. From left, Marcia Lee (CPNRD), Colleen Stone (MRNRD), Yolanda Hruska (SPNRD) and Kaylyn Kelley (PMNRD).



Lower Niobrara NRD hosts a 50th Anniversary open house July 14, 2022. From left, Administrative Assistant Becky Meritt, General Manager Terry Julesgard, Water Resources Coordinator Wade Ellwanger and Programs Assistant Connie McCarthy.



Twin Platte NRD GIS Manager Phil Heinmann takes a water sample in a cornfield. There were no leaks or a spigot, so an extendable pole reaches a nozzle to collect a sample. The water was field tested and sent to the lab to measure nitrate.



Nemaha NRD Field Representatives Mark McDonald, left, and Tomas Chalè Akè measure depth to groundwater this spring during a well blitz.



UBBNRD Water Resources Technician Erinn Wilkins, left, works with UNL graduate student Farzana Rahman to test water samples collected on-site in York.



Nebraska delegation in San Juan, Puerto Rico, for the National Association of Conservation Districts Summer Meeting. From left, Lower Platte South NRD Assistant Manager David Potter, Carolyn Gigstad, and NARD President and Nemaha NRD Director Dr. Orval Gigstad.



From left, the late Lower Loup NRD Information/Education Coordinator Larry Schultz; Upper Elkhorn NRD Information & Education/Chemigation Coordinator Beth Walsh; Lower Platte South NRD Environmental Education/Communication Coordinator McKenzie Barry; Lower Elkhorn NRD Information and Education Specialist Julie Wragge; and Central Platte NRD Information/Education Specialist Marcia Lee.



The Lawrence Volunteer Fire Department performed a prescribed burn on 60 acres around Little Blue NRD's Liberty Cove Recreation Area. The photo on the left is two days post burn and the photo on the right is five months post burn. Beneficial grasses will continue to fill in the area.



The Tri-Basin NRD annual board tour included a stop at Cottonwood Ranch Well #5. Directors Larry Reynolds, left, and Rob Hinrichs, right, check out the well.



Middle Republican NRD's flood control dam (P2) near Culbertson is being rebuilt after it was damaged.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!

20 YEARS

- Joe Anderjaska, Middle Republican (director)
- Gary Darnall, North Platte (director)
- Todd Dorshorst, Upper Niobrara White (director)
- Edwin J. Harris, Tri-Basin (director)
- Dean Jochem, Middle Niobrara (director)
- Dave Kadlecek, Upper Niobrara White (director)
- Cherryl Lovejoy, Middle Niobrara (director)
- Mike McNaney, Papio-Missouri River
- Amy Oberst, Twin Platte
- David Potter, Lower Platte South (staff, previously director)
- Don Siske, Nemaha
- Ranay Smith, North Platte
- Lynetta Snelling, Lower Republican
- Craig Uhrig, North Platte

25 YEARS

- Ann Dimmitt, Twin Platte
- Curtis Gotschall, Upper Elkhorn (director)
- Don Jacobsen, Lower Platte South (director)
- Marcel Kramer, Lewis & Clark (director)
- Barry Obermiller, Central Platte (director)
- Alan Petersen, Lower Loup (director)
- Mary Tidyman, Middle Republican
- Lynn Webster, Upper Niobrara White

30 YEARS

- Tomas Chalè Akè, Nemaha
- Jack Engelhaupt, Lower Niobrara (director)
- Kristi Heft, Lower Republican
- Shirlee Poyser, Lower Republican
- Jason Schnell, Papio-Missouri River
- Terry Schumacher, Papio-Missouri River
- Rich Tesar, Papio-Missouri River (director)
- Diane Wieseler, Lewis & Clark

35 YEARS

- Jim Adams, Lower Loup (director, previously staff)
- Henry Thoene, Lower Loup (director, previously staff)
- Dave Slattery, Twin Platte
- Bob Heimann, Lower Platte North

40 YEARS

- Jane Kuhl, Nemaha

45+ YEARS

- Darwin Anderson, Lower Loup (director) (47)
- Kent Miller, Twin Platte (49)
- Larry Moore, Upper Big Blue (director) (47)
- Bev Smedra, Lower Loup (45)

IN MEMORIAM

- Larry Angle, Lower Platte North
- Marvin Atkinson, Lower Niobrara (director)
- Joseph Citta Jr., Lower Loup (director)
- Lawrence Gronewold, Lower Big Blue (director)
- Joe Hergott, Little Blue (director)
- John Jefferson, Central Platte (director)
- Kurt Kline, Central Platte (director)
- Richard Ladine, South Platte (director)
- Roy Lyles, North Platte
- Arden Miller, South Platte (director)
- June O'Neill, Central Platte (director)
- Marlin Petermann, Papio-Missouri River
- Robert Poppen, South Platte (director)
- Larry Schultz, Lower Loup
- John Tarrell, Central Platte (director)
- Ray Winz, Tri-Basin (director)

PROGRAMS THAT MAKE A *difference*

2022 NRD PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

• • • UPPER NIOBRARA WHITE • • •

The UNWNRD will complete the Box Butte Creek WFPO in December 2022. The NRCS grant-funded plan calls for 10 structures to capture flood water to protect pastures, crop ground, roads, and other structures. The project will also provide recharge benefits. The District and Nebraska Forest Service completed the fifth year of Ponderosa Pine reforestation in burned areas of the Pine Ridge. The project has replaced nearly 250,000 Ponderosa Pines.

• • • NORTH PLATTE • • •

As NPNRD faces drier conditions, the emphasis is on water quality and drought. Water quality planning focuses on the use and overuse of nitrates and is ongoing districtwide. To encourage reduction of consumptive water use, the NPNRD works with producers to sign up for the Encouraging Producer Innovation through Conservation (EPIC) programs as well as the Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Cost-Share Program (NSWCP).

• • • SOUTH PLATTE • • •

Galen Wittrock now serves as SPNRD general manager. The Joint East Sidney Watershed Authority Project was approved and completed. Oliver Reservoir fishing piers were repaired, and the rec area experienced another great year with 75% of registered visitors coming from outside the district primarily Colorado and Wyoming. Oliver Reservoir is listed on one social media app as being as a top 10 destination for free camping.

• • • UPPER REPUBLICAN • • •

URNRD continued efforts to provide data to water users to aid in efficient water-use decisions. The District's new website will provide irrigators with dashboard access to real-time water use, evapotranspiration data, allocation reports, area water levels, variance applications, precipitation data, and more. URNRD also saw another successful year for the soil moisture probe cost-share program with all funds administered.

• • • MIDDLE NIOBRARA • • •

MNNRD updated its 10-year master plan and regulations, which allowed for applications of new irrigated acres for the first time since 2014. MNNRD installed 14 new water quality/quantity wells at seven new sites. Long Pine Creek Watershed as well as two EWP projects and five WFPO planning efforts continue. The Sandhills Interactive Natural Resources Education Complex (SINREC) is hitting mid-stride and starting to host trainings and educational events.

• • • UPPER LOUP • • •

The District's drought mitigation plan is expected to be completed in December and the Groundwater Management Plan was also updated in 2022. The ULNRD recycling program has expanded to accept glass and electronics.

• • • TWIN PLATTE • • •

The District's Water Data Program (WDP), that began in 2019, now has 100% of certified irrigated acres voluntarily enrolled. As part of the Integrated Management Plan (IMP), the program partners with GiSC, Olsson, and Paige Wireless to obtain accurate real-time water use online and on a mobile app. It also creates the required groundwater models needed for the robust review of the IMP. The daily data reduces water use and is a financial benefit for the producer.

• • • MIDDLE REPUBLICAN • • •

MRNRD is using a WaterSMART grant from the Bureau of Reclamation to update telemetry meters on all district wells. The goal is to provide all producers with real-time information on water use, soil moisture and others useful information. The NRD will control the data providing producers a password-protected log-in to view their specific water data.

• • • LOWER LOUP • • •

LLNRD completed the Columbus Area Recharge Project to augment groundwater levels. AEM flights were conducted over Nance County to map subterranean geologic structures including sand and gravel aquifers. LLNRD technicians measured static water levels in 454 wells, inspected 1,255 chemigation systems, and sold 58,000 trees. Work continues on the Mud Creek and Mira Creek WFPOs. District recreation areas (Pibel and Davis Creek) continue to see increased use.

• • • TRI-BASIN • • •

TBNRD is working with the NeDNR, CNPPID and neighboring NRDs to develop drought management and mitigation plans for the Platte and Republican River basins. Tri-Basin constituents in Gosper County suffered property and crop damage from wildfires this spring caused by high winds and drought conditions. The District is helping with disaster recovery and to ensure that everyone is better prepared for a drought and its impacts on land and people in the future.

• • • LOWER REPUBLICAN • • •

In May, LRNRD received a \$2 million WaterSMART grant. This collaboration between LRNRD, NeDNR and the Bureau of Reclamation installs new telemetry flowmeters across one-third of the District to provide near real-time water usage and weather information to producers. Development of alternatives has been completed for the Turkey Creek and Thompson Creek WFPO projects. The Flag Creek WFPO PIFR was submitted to the NRCS National Water Management Center with expected approval in 2023.

• • • LOWER NIOBRARA • • •

LNNRD has opened up 500 new irrigated acres again this year. The District is working toward compliance with Phase II reporting and has presented the summary of results. West Knox Rural Water is working with NEMA to finish 2019 flood repairs. An NET grant for six monitoring wells is near completion.

• • • LEWIS & CLARK • • •

LCNRD is working with farmers, students, conservation partners, and agriculture professionals in the Bow Creek Watershed to promote BMPs to positively impact surface water quality. Bow Creek has high E. coli and is on the list of impaired water bodies. The project has partnered with NDEE, NET, UNL, NRCS and NGPC to host several learning opportunities. LCNRD is monitoring stream water quality to evaluate the results of conservation practices applied on the land.

• • • UPPER ELKHORN • • •

UENRD's data analysis from crop reports in phase areas show a general trend toward less over application. The amount of nitrogen over application per field has decreased over time as well as the percentage of fields that are over applying throughout the reported area. Phase III areas where soil samples examine residual nitrogen has been well received by producers. Producers work with staff to see how their practices can impact the amount of residual nitrogen left in the soil.

• • • CENTRAL PLATTE • • •

CPNRD is developing a program to enable producers to compare UNL's recommended nitrogen rate with the actual nitrogen applied on fields. The NUET Dashboard shows all available nitrogen sources to calculate total Nitrogen Use Efficiency (NUE) and calculates cost of actual nitrogen applied vs the recommended. NUET aims to bring awareness and education in high-nitrate management areas.

• • • LITTLE BLUE • • •

LBNRD in cooperation with Fairbury City Council are working to find a source of clean water for Fairbury and the surrounding area. During the winter, LBNRD completed an office remodel, to construct offices for employees. The District added 20 electrical RV pads at Prairie Lake rec area and installed two concrete vault restrooms at Lone Star rec area. In the last year LBNRD has hired four new employees, General Manager Scott Nelson, Operation Manager Lucas Slieter, Resources Technician Tim Hecke, and Media and Communication Specialist Jessica Hedges.

• • • PAPIO-MISSOURI RIVER • • •

The Papio NRD has reached substantial completion of repairs to the Missouri River Levee System that protects Offutt Air Force Base. The District celebrated the grand opening of the Western Douglas County Trail Pedestrian Bridge in Valley, which serves as a major community connection point. Construction is anticipated to start in spring 2023 on flood mitigation reservoirs WP2, WP4 and WP1. The District has started to acquire right of way for dam sites 7, 12, 19.

• • • LOWER ELKHORN • • •

LENRD presented the City of Norfolk with \$1.032M for the North Fork Riverfront Development Project, which includes a water trail, allowing tubers/kayakers to access the river and float directly to downtown. Other extensive park improvements, walk/bike trails, and an outdoor amphitheater are also planned. The District held open houses for the Maple Creek and Battle Creek Watershed Plans aimed to reduce flooding in northeast Nebraska.

• • • LOWER PLATTE NORTH • • •

The LPNNRD continues to work with landowners in the Shell Creek and Wahoo Creek watersheds to implement land improvements, increase cover crop plantings and upgrade septic systems to improve water quality. Cameras were placed along the Platte River to monitor ice jams and flooding thanks to a partnership with Dodge County, Papio-Missouri River NRD, the City of Fremont and USGS.

• • • UPPER BIG BLUE • • •

UBBNRD is collaborating on projects concerning water quality measurement. A vadose zone study with UNL examines the amount of nitrate in district soils compared to historic data. A study with UNMC tracks nitrate and other contaminants in Nebraska's watersheds to see how the data compares with locations of pediatric cancer incidents. USGS is reviewing the NRD's current Groundwater Management Area #2 well network to ensure the wells being sampled fit their original criteria. This study could be the first phase of a larger study on the monitoring network and the parameters and contaminant data collected.

• • • LOWER BIG BLUE • • •

LBBNRD is wrapping up a major rehab of Cub Creek near Plymouth. The project is the culmination of nearly a decade of efforts to remove it from the impaired waters list due to E. coli and nutrient loading. During Phase I, land treatment practices were applied to 80% of the watershed, which reduced nutrient loading by 47% exceeding the 30% goal. During Phase II, in-reservoir management measures included wetland development, shoreline stabilization, deepening and the management of storm water.

• • • LOWER PLATTE SOUTH • • •

LPSNRD rehabilitated Upper Salt 3-A, constructed in 1955, to high hazard standards. There was increased grassland management utilizing controlled burns on NRD properties. Construction was completed on the Salt Creek Levee trail for the Rosa Parks overpass, and a trailhead was added on MoPac East Trail trailhead at Wabash.

• • • NEMAHA • • •

The District requested FY2022 watershed planning assistance through USDA's WFPO funding on three of the oldest watersheds in the district. Most structures in these watersheds are more than 50 years old. Repairs continue on Steamboat Trace Trail with an anticipated opening date of summer 2023.

PARTNERSHIPS SPUR IDEAS, SOLVE PROBLEMS

NRDs and NDEE seek to improve working relationship and collaboration



Jennifer Swanson
NRD/Dept. of Environment
& Energy Liaison

two-day Kaizen Event. “Kaizen” is Japanese for “continuous improvement.” Kaizen events are an effective implementation technique to improve processes and introduce small improvements that can be implemented immediately. The Kaizen event is scheduled for Oct. 18-19, 2022, and will

“ *Partnership is not a posture but a process—a continuous process that grows stronger each year as we devote ourselves to common tasks.* ”
— John F. Kennedy

focus on how the NRDs and NDEE can work together in a coordinated effort to mitigate high nitrate in groundwater.

According to the Groundwater Management and Protection Act, the Natural Resources Districts have authority to regulate activities which contribute to declines in groundwater levels and nonpoint source contamination of groundwater. The Department of Environment and Energy have the authority to regulate sources of

contamination when necessary to prevent serious deterioration of groundwater quality. The power given to the NRD and NDEE should be used to stabilize, reduce, and prevent the increase or spread of groundwater contamination.

Coming together as a group will allow us to see problems in new ways and craft

solutions that haven't been considered. Through this process everyone in the group will both have wisdom to share and wisdom to gain. The diversity and differences from the group will enhance the outcome.

Collectively we are stronger together and can accomplish more when we work together and leverage resources. But what truly creates a strong partnership is the alignment of core values, long-term shared purpose, complementary strengths, proactive

and intentional communication, and scheduled strategic planning.

The NRDs' mission is to protect lives, property and the future of our natural resources aligns with NDEE's mission to protect and improve human health, the environment, and energy resources. It is only through collaboration that we can preserve air, land, water and energy resources both now and for future generations.

As the NRD/ NDEE Liaison, I am committed to supporting the partnership between the NRDs and NDEE by facilitating communication and collaboration.



Lower Platte North NRD Landowner Tom Sprunk, located in the Shell Creek Watershed, worked with the LPNNRD and NRCS, with funding from NDEE, to place a toewall structure in a wetland pasture. The structure will help with the flow of excess water and improve streambank stabilization.

REFLECTING ON OUR HISTORY, PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

NRDs continue to demonstrate the value of local leadership solving local problems



Dustin Wilcox
NARD Programs and
Partnerships Director

It's often said that history is the best guide to the future. And while fast-paced progress often makes finding time for reflection difficult, the celebration of a 50-year milestone provides a great opportunity to reflect on our history.

If we pause to consider the history of natural resources management in Nebraska, it's easy to develop a deep appreciation for the monumental action our unicameral legislature took more than five decades ago. Undoubtedly it wasn't easy action, and as is well documented, some questioned if the concept could work. But over the last 50 years, the Natural Resources Districts

(NRD) system has gone on to prove that entrusting local Nebraskans with the responsibility of protecting their natural resources stands the test of time.

For 50 years, Nebraskans have been successfully electing local leaders to direct Nebraska's NRDs. These locally elected directors, working on behalf of their communities, and with the trust of their neighbors, have successfully set policy and developed programs and projects that continue to protect lives, property, and the future. The NRD system has demonstrated that the best solutions for local natural resources challenges are generated when local people are

directly involved in developing solutions.

Reflecting on NRD history also leads to a deep appreciation for the success NRDs have had in developing and maintaining partnerships with other local, state, and national partners, from both the public and private sectors. History has demonstrated the value these partnerships provide our communities. Across the state, NRDs have leveraged local resources to form partnerships leading to programs and projects that otherwise would be unachievable by any one entity.

From multi-jurisdictional partnerships to construct large flood control projects

protecting major metropolitan areas, to multi-NRD partnerships to develop augmentation projects protecting entire basins, or joint partnerships with NeDNR to draft Integrated Water Management Plans that protect water users. Across the state NRDs have demonstrated the ability to bring multiple partners together to address natural resources challenges.

While we pause to reflect and celebrate this 50-year milestone, it's important to recognize that our history continues to be written. Every year, every season, and every day, NRDs are being presented with new management challenges.

Fortunately, we have history to guide us, and with a proven NRD system reliant upon local control and established partnerships, future generations will be able to celebrate milestones by reflecting on what will continue to be an extended history of NRDs working to protect lives, property, and the future.



In 1972, the Lower Niobrara NRD meets for one of their first board meetings in Butte. Locally elected leaders serving on Nebraska's 23 NRDs work to protect lives, property and the future.

COMMUNITY CORNER



Lower Loup NRD Information Specialist Alan Bartels shows a snake to Sargent Elementary.



NRD President and Nemaha NRD Director Dr. Orval Gigstad distributes awards at the Nebraska FFA Convention.



Little Blue NRD General Manager Scott Nelson, left, and Chair Alan Wiedel, right, present scholarships to Jayden Isernhagen and Katelyn Karr, two of their six recipients. NRDs across the state offer college scholarships to students in their districts.



Left: Lower Elkhorn NRD staff talk with Nucor teammates and their families -- Nucor in Norfolk planted a forest (250 trees) in observance of Arbor Day!

Right: Nemaha NRD General Manager Kyle Hauschild gives a hayrack tour of Duck Creek rec area during the Watershed of Wonders Day Camp June 15.



Left: Tri-Basin NRD General Manager John Thorburn demonstrates a stream table during the District's 50th Anniversary open house.

Below: Upper Niobrara White NRD hosts first graders from Sheridan County for a field trip.



PJ Holmes and Travis Fischer wait for more tires to unload during a Lower Republican NRD recycling event.



Central Platte NRD Range Management Specialist David Carr discusses the importance of safety equipment for a prescribed burn at the Nebraska Children's Groundwater Festival May 17, 2022. More than 700 fifth graders from across Nebraska attended the festival, which was back after a two-year hiatus.



Lewis & Clark NRD Bow Creek Watershed Coordinator Becky Ravenkamp, right, explains the importance of surface water quality and the implications of poor water quality to Hartington-Newcastle high school students.



Papio NRD staff and directors help cut the ribbon for the Western Douglas County Trail Pedestrian Bridge in Valley. The \$7 million project added a 450-foot pedestrian bridge and trail system.



Tri-Basin NRD NRCS Secretary Tami Reese quizzes students at the Water Wheel of Fortune in the Water Carnival during Water Jamboree hosted this spring.



Middle Niobrara NRD hosted a tree planting with Valentine Elementary and the Nebraska Forest Service to plant 44,000 reforestation pines in wildfire footprints.



Upper Republican NRD Water Programs Specialist Julia Strand shows SCORE campers how to build the most effective water filter using every day, household items. SCORE is a science camp for 1-6 graders hosted in Imperial, Nebraska.



Papio-Missouri River NRD Education Programs Supervisor Austen Hill and Finn the Barn Owl during the District's Chalco Summer Series. The Owls of Nebraska presentation also included dissecting owl pellets.

Left: Lower Platte South NRD field trips reach 40,000 students in the district annually.



Right: Lower Loup NRD hosted the Columbus Area Research Project open house Aug. 24. Partners include City of Columbus, Platte County, ADM, and the Christopher's Cove Homeowners Association. The project uses ingenuity and science to solve water quantity issues instead of regulatory authority.



The Village of Hadar was awarded a grant from the Lower Elkhorn NRD to install two camper pads with electrical boxes in their park. Lower Elkhorn NRD Director Jay Reikofski, right, provides a check and sign to Hadar Board Chairman Mark Craft. The funding was provided through the District's Recreation Area Development Program.



SECOND SESSION OF 107TH LEGISLATURE SPENDS \$1B+ IN FEDERAL FUNDING

The second session of the 107th Legislature adjourned sine die April 20, on day 60 of the 60-day session.

The first session of the 108th Legislature is scheduled to convene on Jan. 4, 2023. Regular sessions generally last 90 legislative days in odd-numbered years and 60 legislative days in even-numbered years.

The availability of \$1.04 billion in funds allocated to the State of Nebraska from the federal Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund pursuant to the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) meant the Legislature had an unusual amount of money to appropriate.

This session, senators passed 146 bills and several other bills were incorporated by amendment. No bills will be carried forward to the 2023 session, so all bills that did not receive final approval by the Legislature, or were postponed by committee, are indefinitely postponed. This year, the NARD tracked 64 bills and three constitutional amendments. The breakdown of those

are as follows:

- Support and Passed: 16
- Oppose and Passed: 0
- Support and Died: 6
- Opposed and Died: 10
- Monitor and Passed: 11
- Monitor and Died: 24

The following are a few key bills of interest to Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts.

LB 805: Change provisions of the Black-Tailed Prairie Dog Management Act, the Nebraska Wheat Resources Act and the Noxious Weed Control Act (Hughes)

The Legislature gave final approval to the bill on a 39-1-9 vote April 13. The bill was signed into law by Gov. Ricketts April 19.



Twin Platte NRD General Manager Kent Miller provides background information on the Perkins County Canal project that was proposed to the Legislature this session.

Beginning in FY 2022-23, the bill increases the appropriation from \$1 million to \$3 million annually for vegetation management programs that have as their primary objective improving conveyance of streamflow in natural streams.

The corresponding appropriations bill, LB 805A, adds \$2 million to the program from the ARPA funds in each of the next three fiscal years. Previously, this program was limited to vegetation within the banks of a stream or within 100 feet of the banks. The bill strikes the 100-foot limitation and expands to the floodplain of the stream. The bill maintains the limitation that

such funds shall only be used to pay for activities and equipment as part of vegetation management programs. This program is operated by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

LB 809: Change provisions of the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Act, the Environmental Protection Act, the Game Law, the Waste Reduction and Recycling Incentive Act, and the Wastewater Treatment Facilities Construction Assistance Act (Moser)

Senators gave final approval to the bill on a 46-0-3 vote April 12, and it was signed by Gov. Ricketts April 18. The bill makes several modifications to the use of the funds and the assets of the Safe Drinking Water Act, Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Act and Wastewater Treatment Facilities Construction Assistance Act.

Under the Safe Drinking Water Act, it adds the ability to use the fund to buy or refinance the debt obligation of any municipality for a

public water supply system if the debt was incurred and construction began after July 1, 1993.

Under the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Act, it expands the cost share for public water systems of 10,000 or less from 50% to 75% to provide grants and for the purpose of providing loan forgiveness. The bill also expands the authority to provide grants in addition to loans for this size of system.

It allows for grants and loan forgiveness, for up to 75% of eligible project costs, concurrent with loans to public water systems for lead service line replacement projects in accordance with all federal regulatory and statutory provisions under the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Act.

Under the Wastewater Treatment Facilities Construction Assistance Act, the bill increases the grants from 50% to 75% of the eligible project cost for municipalities with populations of 10,000 inhabitants or less.

LB 925: Adopt the Resilient Soils and Water Quality Act and

state intent regarding appropriations (Gragert)

Senators gave final approval to the bill by a 42-5-2 vote April 12, and Gov. Ricketts signed it into law April 18. The bill adopts the Resilient Soils and Water Quality Act which creates demonstration and research farms across the state to provide demonstration of healthy soil practices in support of the educational and research programs of the producer learning community. Lease agreements would be allowed with private landowners for the purpose of establishing demonstration and research farms.

The appropriations bill (LB 925A) provides \$250,000 from the General Fund for FY 22-23 and \$250,000 for FY 23-24 to the Department of Natural Resources (Program 334) to aid in carrying out the provisions of the bill.

LB 1014e: Appropriate Federal Funds allocated to the State of Nebraska pursuant to the federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. (Speaker Hilgers at the request



Left: From left, Little Blue Assistant Manager Tyler Goeschel, Director Mason Hoffman, Sen. Steve Halloran, General Manager Scott Nelson, and Director Brent Hoops, meet at the NRD Legislative Conference.

of the Governor)

Senators gave final approval to LB 1014e by a 40-4-5 vote April 7. The bill included an emergency clause and was signed by Gov. Ricketts April 13.

The bill directs the appropriations of \$1.04 billion in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. On March 22nd, the Appropriations Committee filed a Committee Amendment (AM 2330), which contained the committee's recommendations for appropriating ARPA funds. The amendment, which replaces the bill, included adjustments to provisions of the bill as introduced by the Governor, and included provisions of 20 additional bills.

Of interest to natural resources, the committee

amendment excluded the Governor's recommendation of \$30 million for drinking water projects. This funding was intended to assist the Lewis and Clark NRD in securing a new water source for rural water districts.

After working with Senators Williams and Dorn, Senator Gragert filed an amendment (AM 2542) to include \$7 million of ARPA funding to provide grant assistance for a rural drinking water project that serves rural water connections and at least four communities in two contiguous counties to convert to a groundwater source and to provide for water system infrastructure and distribution. In turn, the amendment reduces funding by \$6 million for Rural Workforce Housing Investment Act and \$1 million

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for job training and placement grants to nonprofit organizations for employment services for refugees. The amendment was adopted on a 33-0-16 vote.

Other features of the committee amendment (AM 2330) include:

- \$23.1 million for a grant to Gering Irrigation District to satisfy matching requirements for a project authorized by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for construction and repairs on any tunnel or canal. The Gering-Fort Laramie Canal's three tunnels collapsed in July 2019, cutting off more than 100,000 acres from irrigation water for a month until temporary tunnel repairs were made.
- \$4 million in ARPA funds for grants for reverse osmosis systems.
- \$20 million in ARPA funds to provide a grant to a city of the primary class that utilizes more than 30 million gallons per day of water to be used for the design,

construction, and implementation of additional water supply projects.

- \$150,000 in ARPA funds for the University of Nebraska Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources to update the Assessing Climate Change report.

The amendment excluded the Statewide Tourism and Recreational Water Access and Resource Sustainability (STARWARS) special legislative committee and Perkins County Canal from receiving ARPA funds. However, the committee partially offset these exclusions with Cash Reserve and General Fund transfers in LB 1011, 1012 and 1013.

Below are more details on specific appropriations related to natural resources that were advanced with LBs 1011, 1012, 1013 and 1014:

Perkins County Canal Project (LB 1015)

Provides a \$53.5 million transfer from the Cash Reserve Fund to the Perkins County Canal Project Fund within the Department of Natural Resources.

STARWARS (LB 1023)

Provides \$200 million for the recommendations from STARWARS special legislative committee.

This committee was tasked with conducting studies related to economic development and public safety at (1) the Lake McConaughy region of Keith County, (2) Knox County region that lies north of State Highway 12 and extends to the South Dakota border and includes Lewis and Clark Lake and Niobrara State Park and (3) the Platte River and its tributaries from Columbus to Plattsmouth.

The STARWARS proposals were subsequently incorporated into proposed legislation (LB 1023). The Appropriations Committee created two new cash funds and included the corresponding transfers; the Jobs and Economic Development Initiative (JEDI) Fund under NeDNR – \$80 million from Cash Reserve and \$20 million from the General Fund – and the Water Recreation Enhancement Fund

under the Game and Parks Commission – \$100 million from the General Fund.

Included in the funding is \$1 million for repairs to a levy near Schuyler; \$22 million for a new Saunders County flood control project; and \$1 million to contract with an independent consultant to study the consequences of any lake in the Lower Platte River Basin to the public water supply of impacted communities.

University Agricultural Innovation Facility (LB 703)

Provides a \$25 million transfer from the Cash Reserve Fund to the Nebraska Capital Construction Fund (NCCF) with a corresponding NCCF appropriation to the University of Nebraska for the establishment of an agricultural innovation facility at Nebraska Innovation Campus. This would be a companion facility located adjacent to the USDA Agricultural Research Service National Center for Regenerative and Resilient Precision Agriculture. This facility would serve as an incubator providing

an array of support for Nebraska's agricultural entrepreneurs and startup companies.

The project would be funded with \$25 million from the University and \$25 million in private or other matching funds.

Trail Development and Maintenance Fund (LB 813 & LB 981)

Provides a \$8.3 million transfer from the Cash Reserve Fund to the newly-created Trail Development and Maintenance Fund. This funding would be used by the Game and Parks Commission to provide a grant to a Natural Resources District to facilitate the completion of the Missouri-Pacific (MoPac) trail between Lincoln and Omaha.

Surface Water Irrigation Fund (LB 1074)

Provides a \$50 million transfer from the Cash Reserve Fund to the Surface Water Irrigation Infrastructure Fund and corresponding cash fund appropriation to the Department of Natural Resources. The funds will be used to award grants to Irrigation Districts to repair or construct any headgate, flume, diversion structure, check valve, or any other

physical structure used for irrigation projects. NeDNR is allowed discretion in designing criteria and procedures in its grant awarding. Applicants must have a 10% match and no grant may exceed \$5 million.

Governors Emergency Fund (for Peru Levee)

Provides a \$5 million transfer from the Cash Reserve Fund to the Governor's Emergency Cash Fund to assist the Peru levee, which was damaged in the historic flooding of 2019. The levee along the Missouri River was breached and flooded the town of Peru. Since then, the Army Corps of Engineers has designated the Peru levee eligible for federal funding to repair the damages. Peru needs to have funding available up front for this and the transfer would enable the town to qualify for federal funds to help restore the levee.

Program No. 314 - Critical Infrastructure Facilities (LB 1014)

Provides \$23.1 million in ARPA funds to provide a grant to an irrigation district, which is part of an interstate irrigation system that experienced a failure, to satisfy matching

requirements for a project authorized by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for construction and repairs on any tunnel or canal. The Gering-Fort Laramie Canal's three tunnels collapsed in July 2019, cutting off more than 100,000 acres from irrigation water for a month until temporary tunnel repairs could be made

Program No. 319 - Water Projects (LB 1081)

Provides \$20 million in ARPA funds to provide a grant to a city of the primary class that utilizes more than 30 million gallons per day of water to be used for the design, construction, and implementation of additional water supply projects, which shall only be used for such purpose.

Eligible project costs shall include, but not be limited to, costs for a water treatment plant, land acquisition, acquiring permits, a wellfield, pumping, and transportation of water over twenty-five miles for the purpose of providing potable water to the city. The Department of Natural Resources may award a grant to a city of the primary class based on criteria and procedures

established by the department.

Program No. 781 - University - Administration (LB 1014)

Provides \$150,000 in ARPA funds for the University of Nebraska Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources to update the Assessing Climate Change report released in 2014.

Program No. 513 - Environmental Quality (LB 1160)

Provides \$4 million in ARPA funds for the Department of Environment and Energy to provide grants for villages and cities of the second class to install reverse osmosis systems in community water systems where drinking water test levels are above 10 parts per million of nitrate and, if appropriate, provide grant funds for use to install reverse osmosis systems if test levels for nitrate in drinking water pumped from private wells are above 10 parts per million.

Program No. 528 - Drinking Water Facilities Loan Fund (LB 1014)

Includes \$7 million in ARPA funds to provide grant assistance for a rural drinking water project that serves rural water

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connections and at least four communities in two contiguous counties to convert to groundwater sources and to provide for water system infrastructure and distribution.

LB 1015: Adopt the Perkins County Canal Project Act (Speaker Hilgers at the request of the Governor)

Senators gave final approval to LB 1015 by a 42-4-3 vote April 12, and the bill was approved by Gov. Ricketts April 18. The bill proposes to build a canal that would divert South Platte River water from Colorado to Nebraska under a 1923 interstate compact. The compact entitles Nebraska to 120 cubic feet of water per second during the summer. Nebraska also has a right to 500 cubic feet of water per second during the non-irrigation season but only if it builds a canal to divert it from

the river in Colorado to a reservoir system in Nebraska. The Legislature allocated \$53.5 million from the cash reserve to begin design and engineering studies and buy options on land where the canal would be built.

LB 1023e: Adopt the Lake Development Act and the Water Recreation Enhancement Act (Speaker Hilgers at the request of the Governor)

Senators gave final approval to LB 1023e by a 38-6-5 vote April 12. The bill included an emergency clause and was signed into law by Gov. Ricketts April 18. The bill enacts the Jobs and Economic Development Initiative Act (JEDI) and Water Recreation

Enhancement Act to implement the findings of the Statewide Tourism And Recreational Water Access and Resource Sustainability (STARWARS) special committee of the Legislature. The following funds were appropriated for this bill – \$80 million from Cash Reserve and \$20 million from the General Fund for JEDI and \$100 million from the General Fund for Water Recreation. The bill outlines duties for two state agencies to carry out the projects.

The first, which is to be built and managed by NeDNR, is a proposed lake of at least 3,600 surface acres in or near Sarpy County and within the Platte River's floodplain. No dam would be built on the main channel of the Platte River, and no city or village would be flooded in order to build the lake.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

is to carry out the other recommended projects, including new and expanded marinas at Lake McConaughy and Lewis and Clark Lake, and an event center and lodge at Niobrara State Park.

LB 1102: Adopt the Nebraska Environmental Response Act and change provisions relating to enforcement of environmental protection (Bostelman)

Senators gave final approval to LB 1102 by a 46-0-3 vote and the appropriations bill (LB 1102A) by a 48-0-1 vote April 12. The bill was approved by Gov. Ricketts April 18. The bill creates an Environmental Response Cash Fund and response act.



Lewis & Clark NRD General Manager Annette Sudbeck speaks to KETV Omaha Channel 7 about the importance of LB 1014 to communities in her district.

2022 LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTIONS OF INTEREST TO NRDS

LR 330: Determine what percentage should be used to forecast revenue when preparing fiscal notes and determine if state agencies or political subdivisions should use the same percentage when preparing their estimates on the fiscal impact of a specific bill (Linehan)

The Appropriations Committee is charged with conducting the study, which will also examine how the percentage interplays with the Nebraska Economic Forecasting Advisory Board when calculating the increase or decrease in projected revenue.

LR 351: Evaluate the feasibility of the construction, operation, and maintenance of public river port facilities on Nebraska waterways (Clements)

Transportation and Telecommunication Committee is charged with conducting the study, which includes but is not limited to:

- Examining the

feasibility and logistics of the construction of public port facilities on Nebraska waterways, including the Missouri River;

- Reviewing the public benefits of the operation of public port facilities on Nebraska waterways;
- Determining whether commercial transport of goods along Nebraska waterways generates economic benefits to Nebraska citizens;
- Studying environmental, public safety, and administrative issues associated with the operation of public port facilities;
- Examining funding opportunities to construct and operate public port facilities; and
- Reviewing related state statutes and local ordinances

impacting the construction, operation, and maintenance of public port facilities on Nebraska waterways.

LR 362: Examine the costs and benefits associated with the usage of permeable surfaces (McDonnell)

The Natural Resources Committee is charged with conducting the study to determine the water quality and quantity benefits of permeable surfacing and measure the cost of installation and maintenance against the reduced costs for storm water conveyance infrastructure.

LR 383: Explore best practices for the implementation of a consumption tax in Nebraska (Erdman)

The Revenue Committee is charged with conducting the study to carry out the purpose of the resolution.

LR 402: Assess the ranking criteria and practices of the Nebraska Environmental Trust (McCullister)

The Natural Resources Committee is charged with conducting the study. The six-member committee votes on which projects are eligible for grants. This year the committee deemed 82 of the 118 projects eligible for grants, an abnormally low amount. Of those 82, 71 projects were granted funding, so NET only spent around \$14 million dollars out of the approximately \$20 million dollars allocated to spend this year.

NET funding only 60 percent of the project applications and expending only 65 percent of the funds authorized is unprecedented. The rating of the grants this year also raises a concern as rating scores differed wildly and illogically for projects that had traditionally been funded. One project



NARD Intern Presley Wendelin spends a day at the Capitol with Sen. Matt Williams.



Gov. Pete Ricketts addresses the audience at the NRD Legislative Conference in January. He stressed the important of natural resources projects including the Perkins County Canal and South Platte Basin.

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTIONS CONTINUED

that had received funding each previous year it had applied was deemed ineligible, with two reviewers rating it an eleven and another rating it a two.

LR 421: Examine property rights issues. In order to carry out the purpose of this resolution, the committee shall seek the assistance of attorneys with experience in eminent domain (Bostar)

The Judiciary Committee is

charged with conducting the study to evaluate eminent domain. Eminent domain is a process by which the government takes property from unwilling property owners and should be used only as a last resort. An easement taken by eminent domain may permanently alter the character of the land and its surroundings, including impacts on natural resources, and may create liabilities which fall on the property owner.

A NEW CLASS OF STATE SENATORS

This year, 15 state senators finished their last session and 11 were term limited out. These include Senators Curt Friesen, Matt Hansen, Robert Hilkemann, Dan Hughes, Mark Kolterman, Brett Lindstrom, John McCollister, Adam Morfeld, Patty Pansing Brooks, John Stinner, and Matt Williams. Senators Steve Lathrop and Tim Gragert did not seek reelection for a second term. Senator Rich Pals passed away April 27, 2022. The appointment to fill his slot must run in November and has an opponent. Senator Mike Flood is running for U.S. Congress in the 1st District. He won the special election in June and has resigned but must also win the election again in November.

Several other senators are seeking other elective offices. Senator Tony Vargas is running for U.S. Congress in the 2nd District; Senator Carol Blood is running for Governor; and Speaker Mike Hilgers is running

for Nebraska Attorney General. If any of these senators were to win their respective elections, they would have to resign from their current office. In total, this leaves the possibility that more than a third of the legislative body could be in their first year. We thank these senators for their public service and look forward to working with the new class of Senators to be elected in the coming months.



Middle Niobrara NRD General Manager Mike Murphy, left, and Sen. Dan Hughes, right, congratulate Dave Clabaugh on his retirement. Clabaugh retired as Lower Big Blue NRD general manager in January. Sen. Dan Hughes was term limited and will not represent District 44 in 2023.

ACE CAMP

More than 35 middle school students attended Adventure Camp about the Environment (ACE) in Halsey June 26-29, 2022.

Students participated in many educational sessions including water quality, outdoor cooking, forestry, wildlife, nature photography, weather, soils, range, edible plants, archery and wildlife CSI. Traditional camp activities like ziplining, tubing, and bonfires were also enjoyed by campers.



ACE Camper Gavin Mann of Alliance, gives a nervous laugh as Foxy the Fox Snake wraps around his neck. Foxy is one of Papio NRD's many educational critters used during the wildlife session.



Lower Loup NRD Water Programs Specialist Jason Moudry explores the Middle Loup River with his son and first-time ACE camper Chance Moudry. Chance shows off a crawdad he dipnetted during the water quality session.

NARD FOUNDATION SUPPORTS YOUTH EDUCATION

The NARD Foundation builds partnerships to engage young Nebraskans to learn more about natural resources. Through these educational programs, your commitment and generosity inspires and grows the next generation of Nebraska naturalists.

Special thank you to contributors that stepped up to donate \$24,620 when we were not able to host our annual fundraisers due to the pandemic.

Learn more about a few of the programs supported by the NARD Foundation.

Nebraska Envirothon

An environmental competition for high school students designed to test knowledge in seven

areas of ag and natural resources. Top teams receive cash prizes and paid registration to compete at the international NCF-Envirothon. The 2022 Nebraska State Envirothon was hosted at Camp Comeca near Cozad. The 2022 NCF-Envirothon was hosted in Ohio, with 40 teams from the U.S. Canada and China competing. Nebraska was represented by Concordia Lutheran of Omaha. The team finished 21 out of 40.

NAYI

Annually, the Foundation supports the Nebraska Agriculture Youth Institute and participates in the career fair. The event welcomed 200 junior and seniors to UNL

East Campus in July.

NUE Workshop

The Foundation sponsored the 2022 Nitrogen Use Efficiency Workshop Aug. 1-3, 2022, at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The workshop is for graduate students, scientists and stakeholders. Three NRDs were in attendance to speak.

Nebraska FFA

The Foundation sponsors the Nebraska FFA Natural Resources Speaking Leadership Development Event, Building Communities Chapter Award, Environmental & Natural Resources Career Development Event, Outdoor Recreation Proficiency Award, and State Officer Development.

This April, more

than 6,000 FFA students were back in Lincoln for the in-person Nebraska FFA Convention.

ACE Camp

Adventure Camp about the Environment (ACE) is a three-day natural resources camp hosted at Halsey. Targeted at middle school students, campers learn about natural resources during a fun summer camp experience.

Nebraska LEAD

The LEAD program provides young adults with skills and experiences needed to become leaders and advocates for agriculture. Many LEAD graduates go on to serve on NRD boards.



From left, NARD Programs and Partnerships Director Dustin Wilcox, NARD Public Relations Director Megan Grimes (LEAD 37), NARD President Dr. Orval Gigstad (LEAD 8), NRD/NDEE Liaison Jennifer Swanson and NARD Intern Presley Wendelin attend the Nebraska LEAD Banquet at UNL East Campus March 11, 2022.



Nebraska State FFA officers learn more about Nebraska's NRDs during an industry visit June 23, 2022. From left, NARD Programs and Partnerships Director Dustin Wilcox, Jaylea Pope (Shelton), Faith Miller (Mullen), Elizabeth Wilkins (Ainsworth) and NARD Public Relations Director Megan Grimes.

NRD WELLNESS PROGRAM PROMOTES HEALTHY LIVING

NARD, WorkWell Inc. and the Nebraska Safety Council offer 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 existing Risk Pool Health Insurance Program. 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 aids the 23 NRD wellness delegates to coordinate individual wellness programs. The main objective is to create a fun, friendly, non-intimidating wellness program that challenges employees to meet their district's wellness goals.

NARD and the NRDs offer a variety of wellness opportunities and challenges for all fitness

levels. Unfortunately, many of our traditional events like the one-mile walk and 5K fun run continue to be on hold due to the pandemic.

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

Participants in the wellness program have shown improvements in their health, including weight loss, increased physical activity, healthier eating habits, increased health screenings and flu shots. Because of the success of the NRD wellness program, many of the NRDs have received the Governor's Excellence in Wellness Award.



NARD HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM UPDATE

The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD) has operated a licensed health risk pool for NRD employees since FY 2006-07. The program is governed by the NARD Risk Pool Board, which includes NARD board members. The NARD Risk Pool Stop/Loss Committee meets five times annually to review details of the program and suggest changes. The committee includes the NARD Risk Pool executive committee and 13 NRD employees representing all areas of the state.

In the last 15 years, the average annual NARD health insurance premium increase has been 5.2% while the national annual average has been 11.2%. If premium changes followed the national average, premiums would almost be double what they are today. In FY 2014-15, premiums decreased by 2.5% due to a \$1.2 million gain in the previous year. The board used additional reserves to keep premium increases low and pay claims in FY 2015-16 and FY 2017-18. At the end of FY 2015-16, the program showed a loss of approximately \$600,000, using more than half of the profits from FY 2013-14. The NARD board set the rate for FY 2021-22 with a goal to break even. Relying on reserves, the Risk Pool ended the fiscal year with a loss of \$274,650.

The NARD Risk Pool Stop/Loss Committee and Risk Pool board set rates again this year targeting a break-even year. There were some structural changes in premiums for the additional risk on employees that have on-going health issues to save funding on re-

insurance premiums. While it saves funding in premiums, it did result in a smaller increase in premium to the insured. The change for medical in FY 2022-23 is 15% for all coverages. The dental premiums did not change.

The 2022 national average increase for health insurance is 12%. NRD employee involvement in wellness activities and programs reduces healthcare costs to local NRDs and taxpayers.

As part of the Affordable Care Act, an annual federal premium tax based on the number of employees and family members enrolled in the plan is assessed. In FY 2021-22, the tax was \$33,136. The NARD Risk Pool board opted to pay it from reserves rather than assess employees or districts for the tax.

The program operated as it was set up to do – working off reserves built up in the “good years” to cover losses in the “bad year.” The program has built reserves of \$4.8 million to allow for annual premium changes to be limited. Mid-American Benefits provides the third-party claims processing, and Milt Willnerd of Willnerd and Associates works with the NARD to ensure all state and federal reports are filed.

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 four times by the NDOI, with the most recent in 2021. The audits have never found any major operational, structural, or financial problems with the operation of the NARD Risk Pool.

GET THE SCOOP: EMPLOYEE RETIREMENT PROGRAM

The 2022 year has been hard on the markets and retirement funds. The S&P 500 index is down more than 20% year to date due to a variety of factors. Unfortunately, our retirement programs are tied to the market.

As of June 30, 2022, the NARD 414(h) retirement fund equity value dropped by 20% to \$44,322,094.62.

The defined contribution program allows each employee to determine their own investments,

a defined benefit plan, there is no financial liability to the local NRDs or the NARD.

The NRD Employee Benefits Committee meets four times annually to review details of the program and suggest changes in investment options to the NARD Board, which governs the program. The committee includes the NARD Executive Committee and 13 NRD employees representing all areas of the state.

As of June 30, 2022, the voluntary NARD 457 retirement fund equity value also dropped by 20% to \$4,987,597. 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 of 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.



providing the flexibility for the employee to determine the amount of risk and potential rate of return they feel most comfortable with. Because it is a defined contribution program and not

CHART 1

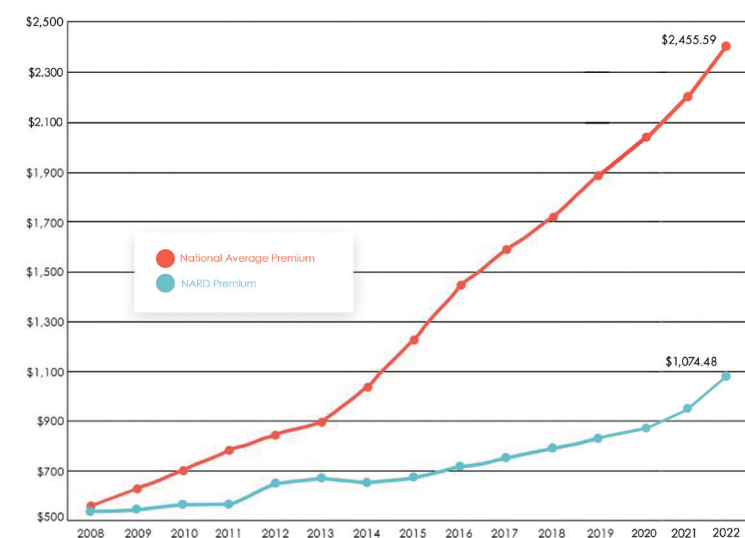


CHART 2

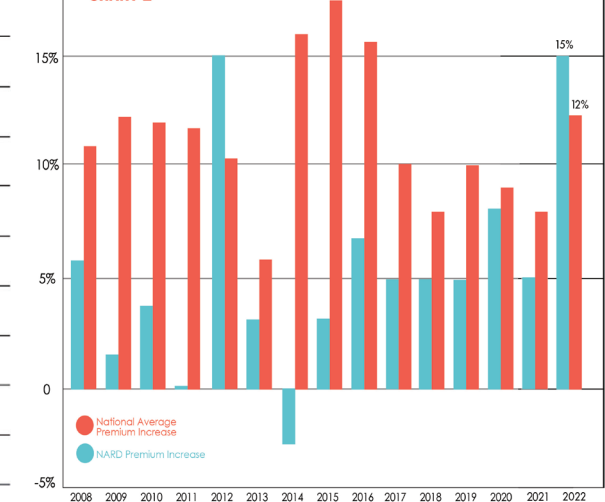


Chart 1: Shows the actual NARD insurance premium compared with the national average.

Chart 2: Shows the NARD annual premium increase (percent) compared to the national average premium increase.

Farewells & Welcomes

We said farewell to many this year – some were well wishes for retirement and others sympathetic words for the departed. Farewells this year resulted in a collective loss of hundreds of years of experience. We wish our directors, employees and partners a fond farewell as they depart for new journeys and adventures in retirement.



Lower Big Blue NRD directors and staff congratulate Dave Clabaugh at the 2022 NRD Legislative Conference in January. Clabaugh retired in December 2021 after a 42-year career with the NRDs. He began his career with the Upper Big Blue NRD in York in 1979 before coming to the Lower Big Blue NRD in 1987. He served as the Lower Big Blue NRD general manager since 2004.



Longtime Papio-Missouri River NRD Assistant Manager Marlin Petermann passed away Dec. 21, 2021. His 47-year engineering career made him "a Papio NRD institution." In February, Sen. Mike McDonnell introduced LR 297 to recognize Petermann's dedication to engineering, passion for natural resources management, and role in public safety.



Upper Big Blue NRD promoted Marie Krausnick to assistant general manager. Krausnick served in the UBBNRD water department for 21 years, most recently as department manager.



Papio NRD promoted Amanda Grint to assistant general manager. Grint was formerly a water resources engineer and has worked for the NRD for 15 years.



Ryan Chapman was hired as the Lower Platte North NRD assistant general manager. Chapman joins the NRD from the Nebraska Dept. of Environment and Energy.



Far Left: J. Scott Sobotka was promoted to Lower Big Blue NRD general manager in January 2022. Sobotka has served the district for 22 years, first as a land specialist and most recently as assistant manager.

Left: Scott Schaneman was promoted to North Platte NRD general manager in March 2022. Schaneman has worked for the district for 14 years.



Roger Nelson of Superior finished out his longtime service to the NRDs in December 2021. Nelson served on the Lower Republican NRD Board 23 years and on the Association Board 19 years. From left, Jeanne Dryburgh, Linda Nelson, Roger Nelson, and Dean Edson.

Far Left: South Platte NRD General Manager Rod Horn retired in December after more than 35 years of service. Left: Galen Wittrock was promoted to South Platte NRD general manager in January 2022. Wittrock, former assistant manager, has been with the district since 1991.



Joseph Citta, Jr., Lower Loup NRD chairman, passed away May 11, 2022. He served as chairman of Nebraska's Environmental Quality Council and was also appointed to the Natural Resources Commission. During the 2021 NRD Annual Conference, NARD Past President and Lower Loup Director Jim Eschliman, left, recognized Citta for 30 years of service to the NRDs.



Lower Loup NRD Information and Education Coordinator Larry Schultz passed away Aug. 8, 2022. Schultz was a 21-year veteran of the Lower Loup NRD and a cherished member of his community.



Lower Platte South NRD Resources Coordinator Dan Schulz retired in December 2021 with 39 years of service.



Lower Platte South NRD Public Information Specialist Mike Mascoe retired in July with 20+ years of service.



We welcomed new NRCS State Conservationist Robert Lawson in February 2022.



Right: Papio NRD Environmental Coordinator Jim Becic retired in July with 38 years of service.



Lower Platte North NRD Assistant Manager Tom Mounford retired in July 2022. During his 36-year career, Mounford also worked for the Little Blue NRD and Nemaha NRD, and served on the NARD Benefits Committee. Lower Platte North NRD and NARD Director Bob Hilger, right, presents a retirement eagle on behalf of the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts.



Little Blue NRD Director Joe Hergott, left, passed away March 24, 2022. He served the NRD 40+ years, his personal license plates exclaiming his love for conservation and the environment stating "Dam Fan." In 2019, Hergott and retired CPNRD hydrologist Duane Woodward, right, volunteer at the State Fair.

Water Quality Focus: Nitrate

Managing groundwater with local control and local solutions continues to be key to the NRD system's success.

High levels of nitrate in groundwater pose challenges now and into the future.

Soil type and depth to water are the main factors in determining groundwater vulnerability. Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as irrigation management and proper nitrogen

application are essential to prevent contamination.

Many NRDs also have additional programming in place including public information, educational programming, field

days, demonstration fields, tabletop exercises, data analysis and data feedback, new technology, and commodity partnerships.



UBBNRD Assistant General Manager Marie Krausnick, right, leads a tabletop exercise for producers as part of nitrogen management certification. The curriculum was created with Nebraska Extension and Lower Platte North NRD and was fun and educational.



The Bazile Groundwater Management Area winter meeting included a session on manure management.

Below: Lower Niobrara NRD Programs Assistant Connie McCarthy presents at Wayne State College's Aquafest. Her lessons explained human impact and effects of nitrate in our groundwater.



Producers Mel and Matt Bailey partnered with NDEE, Lower Platte North NRD and UNL Extension to interseed cover crops on a field near Schuyler. Upper Big Blue and Lower Platte South NRDs are also partners on interseeding demonstrations.



The Lower Platte North NRD released a nitrate risk tool management for the Phase Management Areas of Schuyler/Richland and Bellwood. With the help of this technology, users can select an area of their land and see what Best Management Practice (BMP) can be incorporated to improve the soil conditions and curb nitrate leaching.



Various NRD staff organized and participated in the Bazile Groundwater Management Area (BGMA) Field Day near Creighton, Nebraska, June 30, 2022. From left, Lewis & Clark NRD Information and Education Technician Reed Trenhaile, Lewis & Clark NRD BGMA Resource Technician Colton Krusemark, Upper Elkhorn NRD Water Resources Manager Joslynn VanDerslice, Lower Elkhorn NRD Groundwater Management Area Specialist Connor Baldwin, and Lower Elkhorn NRD General Manager Mike Sousek.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S LETTER

The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts (NARD) staff is honored to work for NRD directors and staff by aiding with legislation, tree programs, water management, youth programs, benefit programs and public relations.

For the 25th consecutive year, the NARD has balanced its budget and added to reserves, which is a testament to involvement from NRD board members and staff. NARD manages the health insurance risk pool and retirement programs, which continue to grow and benefit NRD staff.

The Association also manages the NARD Foundation, which has grown significantly during the last 25 years thanks to annual fundraisers and member involvement. What started out as a small foundation in 1997 with \$4,100 funding an internship in Washington, D.C., has grown to fund 11 educational programs that reach thousands of individuals in Nebraska.

The pandemic limited our ability to

gather in-person at events in 2020 and 2021. Hopefully this year we get back to the normal in-person attendance we had prior to COVID-19!

The interaction and socialization at work is important for learning and gaining contacts, and it is similar when attending conferences or events.

Banner Year for Water Funding

NARD worked with Gov. Ricketts and the Nebraska Legislature to help secure the largest funding for water in Nebraska history.

During the last two years, NARD has worked with the Statewide Tourism and Recreational Water Access and Resource Sustainability (STARWARS) special legislative committee. This committee was tasked with conducting studies related to economic development and public safety at (1) the Lake McConaughy region of Keith County, (2) Knox County region that lies north of State Highway 12 and extends to the South Dakota border and includes

Lewis & Clark Lake and Niobrara State Park and (3) the Platte River and its tributaries from Columbus to Plattsmouth.

On a broader note, there were 64 bills and three constitutional amendments on the NARD watch list. Thanks goes out to the lobbying team of Zulkoski /Weber!

Reference the legislative section of the annual report to see the full breakdown of funding.

Corporate Partners

NARD is taking the lead to develop new working relationships with different organizations to address water quality. We are currently working with Nebraska ag partners including the Agribusiness Association, Cattlemen, Corn Board, Farm Bureau, Pork Producers Association, State Dairy Association, Soybean Association, and Wheat Growers Association to increase awareness with producers.

The group also works with corporations to provide funding for NRD sustainability programs. A couple of districts secured



Dean Edson
Executive Director

corporate funding for water quality programs. Pepsi-Frito Lay and the Illinois Corn Board is working with the CPNRD to promote environmental farming practices. More opportunities exist as we work with ag organizations and corporations.

Recently, we worked with Executive Travel Chairman Steve Glenn to develop a new promotional tree program. In 2022, Executive Travel put \$50,000 toward the NRD Conservation Tree Program. In total, Nebraska's NRDs planted 616,000 trees with more than 48,000 funded by Executive Travel. For 2023, they plan to commit \$75,000 for tree planting.

The NARD staff looks at these challenges as opportunities to learn and grow. Optimism always wins out.

SAVE THE DATE

2023 Events



NEBRASKA'S NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICTS

PROTECTING LIVES. PROTECTING PROPERTY. PROTECTING THE FUTURE.

- Jan. 4, 2023 – Nebraska Legislative Session Begins
- Jan. 24-25, 2023 – NRD Legislative Conference (Lincoln)
- Jan. 25, 2023 – NARD Board Meeting (Lincoln)
- Feb. 11-15, 2023 – NACD Annual Meeting (New Orleans, LA)
- Feb. 23-24, 2023 – Women in Ag Conference (Kearney)
- March 5-6, 2023 – NARD Board Meeting (Lincoln)
- March 6-7, 2023 – Water Programs Conference (Kearney)
- March 19-22, 2023 – NRD Washington, D.C Conference
- March 29-31, 2023 – Nebraska FFA Convention (Lincoln)
- April 26, 2023 – Nebraska State Envirothon (Lake McConaughy)
- May 8-9, 2023 – Water for Food Global Conference (Lincoln)
- June 11-12, 2023 – NARD Board Meeting (TBA)
- June 12-13, 2023 – NRD Basin Tour (TBA)
- June 25-28, 2022 – Adventure Camp about the Environment (Halsey)
- Sept. 12-14, 2023 – Husker Harvest Days (Grand Island/Wood River)
- Sept. 24-26, 2023 – NRD Annual Conference (Kearney)
- Sept. 26, 2023 – NARD Board Meeting (Kearney)
- Nov. 5-6, 2023 – NARD Board Meeting (TBA)

Background: In February, Lower Platte North NRD's Lake Wanahoo became a stopping point for hundreds of thousands of snow geese. The birds caused quite a commotion when they appeared on the National Weather Service's radar.

