



NEBRASKA ASSOCIATION OF RESOURCES DISTRICTS

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TO: NARD Board, NRD Managers and Conservation Partners
FROM: Dean E. Edson, NARD Executive Director
RE: March 16 NARD UPDATE

NARD Officers Elected – Ted Hughes, Upper Elkhorn NRD, was elected to serve a second one-year term as President of the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts at the board meeting last week. Mr. Hughes served the past year as NARD President having previously served two years as NARD Vice-President, and two years as Secretary-Treasurer. Ted is the Dispatcher for Agronomy Services Incorporated of Norfolk and Neligh. In other officer elections, Dan Steinkruger, Lower Platte South NRD, was elected to serve a second one-year term as Vice-President. Mary Ann Wortmann, Lewis and Clark NRD, was elected to serve a second one-year term as Secretary-Treasurer.

Mr. Hughes also appointed Jim Meismer, Twin Platte NRD, to serve as Chairman of the Legislative Committee. Jim has served as chairman for the past 5 years. Mr. Hughes also filled the following appointments: Jim Johnson, South Platte NRD, was appointed Chairman of the Information and Education Committee and Judy Ridenour, Lower Loup NRD, was appointed as Chair of the Native Vegetation and Forestry Subcommittee.

Legislative Committee Action

DNR Agency Hearing – Jasper Fanning, Upper Republican NRD Manager, presented testimony to the Appropriations Committee in support of the Department of Natural Resources budget this week. Fanning outlined that Republican Basin districts will manage our water such that on average Nebraska is within our allocation. The short-term portion of the plan must then allow us to deal with the drought periods and lower allocations under the compact. Thus, we must do the things that will increase our allocation or reduce our use of streamflow in an immediate time frame. Surface water leases or buyouts and vegetation management are two of those components of the plan. As good stewards of the taxpayers' dollars, however, we want to be sure that the expenditure of funds to accomplish this will deliver substantial benefits of more water in the Republican River.

LB 391 -- Copies of records and speaking at public meetings, Mines. This bill was put on General File by the Government Committee with pending Amendment 678. The amendment would take place of the original bill, and proposes the following changes to open meetings laws. First, the amendment proposes requests for public records made during specific time must contain a specific subject matter. Second, the bill sets up a process for citizens to request an item be placed on the agenda for future meetings. Third, the amendment would not require members of the public to be on the agenda to speak on agenda items.

Bills Indefinitely Postponed

LB7 IPP – Nebraska Litter Reduction and Recycling Act. This bill eliminates some duplication by providing that NDEQ will report on activities under the act for the previous state fiscal year, and that this report shall be presented to the Governor as well as the Clerk of the Legislature. This bill was indefinitely postponed on March 12th by the Natural Resources Committee.

LB704 – Adopt the Fishable and Swimmable Waters Act, Preister. This bill attempts to ensure that all Nebraska streams, lakes, and public reservoirs meet state and federal standards by January 1, 2027. It requires the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality to develop, publish, and put in place a plan by January 1, 2008. This bill was indefinitely postponed on March 9th by the Natural Resources Committee.

Priority Bills & Floor Action

LB488 – Income Tax Credit for Perpetual Conservation Easement Donations, Wallman. Provides an income tax credit for donated conservation easements on areas designated as a quick response water shortage areas in over appropriated basins and areas subject to interstate compacts, agreements, and decrees on areas designated as biologically unique landscapes in the Nebraska Natural Legacy plan. This bill was made a priority of Senator Wallman's on March 9th.

LB 530 – Change the allocation formula for the Storm Water Management Plan Program, Nantkes. The bill adds a requirement that, for distributing grant funds to a county, the proportion shall be based on the county population, less the population of city applicants within that county. The bill was declared a Speaker Priority on March 12th.

LB 622 – Open Meetings Act Training Sessions, Pirsch. The bill requires any public officer, public records coordinator, or public employee to complete a training course regarding the powers and duties of a public body and its members under the Open Meetings Act no later than one year after the day the member (a) takes the oath of office, or (b) assumes his or her duties as a member of a public body. On March 12th, this bill was placed on General File and declared a Speaker Priority.

LB 568 Tire Recycling - Senators advanced LB 568 to Final Reading this week after adopting an amendment that would require the Department of Environmental Quality to do a survey of litter problems in the state. The results of the survey would be submitted to the Governor. The other provisions of the bill remain which extends the grant program for recycling tires under the Waste Reduction and Recycling Incentive Fund from June 30, 2007 to June 30, 2009.

2007 NARD Washington DC Trip – Forty-seven NARD members, representing 13 NRDs, were in Washington DC this week attending the annual NARD Washington DC Trip. After participating in the two-day sessions to learn more about the issues of concern at the national level, the NARD members spent a day on the hill visiting the Nebraska Representatives and Senators. Following is a brief summary of the sessions:

- **Secretary Mike Johanns** – The highlight of the conference was a visit from Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns. Secretary Johanns reported strong farm economic news outlining that 1) Farm income is up, 2) Exports are up 1.3 billion this year, 3) Debt/asset ration is the lowest in recorded history, and 4) Most farmers are working for themselves rather than relying on government support. He also reported the design of the new program will center on conservation programs with a \$7.8 billion increase in conservation funding. Also, funding and promotion of renewable energy supplies will be important.
- **Other NRCS Updates** - NRCS staff members Gary Mast, Carole Jett and Jack Carlson provided updates to the group on several issues. Mr. Carlson reported on technology issues relating to Information Systems and Technical Service Providers (TSP). Total cost for information systems are \$85 million and \$10 million in support to the employee, which equates to about 11% of the NRCS budget. Security compliance and protection of personal records is crucial and includes 1) Background check to maintain the privacy of the information, 2) Annual security awareness training, 3) Passwords reset very frequently, 4) Encrypting laptop and workstation files, and 5) Incident and theft response plans. Mr. Carlson also outlined plans to help streamline the TSP process and incorporate the private sector. Part of the 5-year Information Technology Plan is to optimize partnerships and leverage private sector opportunities, similar to the Turbo-Tax software programs for taxpayers. As an example, farmers may be able to work with the local John Deere dealer and a private TSP to develop and implement conservation plans.
- **Updates from National Organizations** -- Kris Polly, Director of Government Relations for the National Water Resources Association outlined the changes in the leadership for key committees. Krysta Harden, Executive Director of the National Association of Conservation Districts, provided key insight on lobbying congressional members and developing working relationships with agencies and staff. Thomas Kimmell, CEO for the National Irrigation Association, outlined that 84% of water used in the US is for irrigation. Using pivots provide more efficient use of irrigation and Nebraska is ahead of the national average with 74.1% from sprinklers as compared to 56.1% nationwide. Ernie Shea, Executive Director for the 25X25 initiative, outlined their organizations goal of obtaining 25 % of the energy used in the US by 2025 to come from domestic sources. A diverse group of people are coming together to help support the initiative, which includes ethanol promotion as well as other alternative energy sources. David Tuft, Natural Resources Defense Council, told the group about the need to reduce carbon emissions to address global warming.
- **US Army CORP of Engineers, the Water Resources Development Act and Watershed Resource Management** – Larry Prather, US ARMY CORP Of Engineers, and Bob Weaver, Attorney, Kelly and Weaver PC, outlined CORP budget issues and the Water Resources Development Act. The CORP Budget has proposed increases, however new language is also being considered to require the CORP to provide more assistance to states that have water management plans. States with watershed-based management could be positioned to receive additional funding if the proposed language is adopted. There are also several Nebraska projects in-line to receive funding if the WRDA bill is approved. Mike Sykes, with the National Watershed Coalition, provided a summary of activities and programs of the coalition. The coalition provides advocacy for local conservation district programs. Mr. Sykes stressed that Congress and various agencies are looking for ways to encourage states to manage resources on watershed or river basin basis rather than looking only at the county or city level.