

MINUTES

LOWER LOUP NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

November 21, 2024

Ord, Nebraska

The November meeting of the Board of Directors of the Lower Loup Natural Resources District was held at the Headquarters Office, 2620 Airport Drive, Ord, Nebraska, on November 21, 2024. Chairman Thoene called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER

Directors in attendance:

James C. Adams
Darwin B. Anderson
Robert L. Bauer
James Eschliman
Randy Kauk
Thomas L. Knutson
Larry Mohrman, Secretary
Chad J. Podolak
Henry J. Thoene, Chairman

Rollie D. Amsberry, Treasurer
Timothy E. Bartak
Colton R. DeBower
Jeremy Eschliman
Justin W. King
Gary A. Kruse
Alan Petersen
Gerald Smith
Rick Vlach, Vice Chairman

Directors absent:

Matt Lukasiewicz
Alexander L. Vlach

Todd Nitsch

Staff in attendance:

Russell G. Callan, General Manager
Irene Kreifels, Administrative Assistant
Alan Bartels, I&E Coordinator
Dell Harris, Water Resources Specialist
Ann Freeman, Water Programs Secretary
Cacey Wilken, Water Modeling Coordinator
Dan Ruterbories, Rangeland Mgt. Spec.
Derek Vogt, Agronomist
Brian Kolar, Projects Technician

Tylr Naprstek, Assistant General Manager
Kim A. Lyons, Financial Secretary
Brant Bechtold, Information Specialist
Kevin Gustafson, District Engineer
Jason Moudry, Water Programs Specialist
LeeAnn Smith, Water Admin. Assistant
Aron Lewis, Dist. Conservation Forester
Harold Benton, Water Resources Technician
Neal Fulton, Agronomist

Guests in attendance:

Bryce Bauer, DC, NRCS, Ord
Chris Hobza, USGS, Lincoln
Brenda Densmore, USGS, Lincoln (via GoTo)

Chuck Abel, Lammers, Abel, Kaps, CPA's, PC, Ord
Mikaela Cherry, USGS, Lincoln

VERIFICATION OF MEETING NOTICE AND ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Chairman Thoene asked for verification of the meeting notice. General Manager Russ Callan stated that the agenda was current with revisions, and that the meeting notices were properly published in all newspapers, posted at the NRD Headquarters office in Ord, on the NRD website, and in the eight field office locations.

EXCUSED ABSENCES

Thoene stated that Directors Lukasiewicz and Nitsch had asked to be excused.

Smith motioned, seconded by Eschliman, to excuse absent Directors Lukasiewicz and Nitsch. Motion carried by roll call vote. Directors voting yes: Adams, Amsberry, Anderson, Bartak, Bauer, DeBower, James Eschliman, Jeremy Eschliman, Kauk, King, Knutson, Kruse, Mohrman, Petersen, Podolak, Smith, Thoene, R. Vlach. Directors absent: Lukasiewicz, Nitsch, A. Vlach.

MINUTES

Thoene asked for corrections and/or additions to the October 24, 2024, Board meeting minutes. With no changes being heard, Thoene announced that the Minutes would stand approved.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Russell Callan, General Manager, highlighted expenditures of \$20,531.25 to LRE Water for the Buffalo County groundwater model; \$7,792.50 to MTech for the slide in units for the Forest Service; and payments totaling \$2,513.24 to various producers for the Wildlife Habitat cost-share. Callan also highlighted additional expenditures of \$8,329.13 to B-Systems Inc. for new computers; \$12,322.44 to JEO for WFPO work; \$8,000.00 to Trees Are Us for partial payment on new tree planters; and \$3,342.52 to Capital One for the Loup Public Power District invoice for electricity for the Columbus Recharge Project.

Jim Eschliman motioned, seconded by Kruse, to approve the November 21, 2024, Treasurer's Report. Motion carried by roll call vote. Directors voting yes: Adams, Amsberry, Anderson, Bartak, Bauer, DeBower, James Eschliman, Jeremy Eschliman, Kauk, King, Knutson, Mohrman, Petersen, Podolak, Smith, Thoene, R. Vlach. Director abstaining: Kruse. Directors absent: Lukasiewicz, Nitsch, A. Vlach.

The Treasurer's Report Approval Policy states that the approved expenditures are to be published and each director who has per diem and/or reimbursement of expenses included in such financial reports, abstains from voting for the approval of his or her own per diem and/or expense reimbursement.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Thoene asked for public comments. None were heard.

FY 2024 AUDIT REPORT

Chuck Abel of Lammers, Abel, and Kaps, gave an explanation and review of the audit to the Directors and answered questions that were presented. He stated the audit turned out well with no discrepancies. The full audit report can be viewed at the office of the Lower Loup Natural Resources District during regular business hours.

R. Vlach motioned, seconded by Knutson, to accept the FY 2024 Audit Report. Motion carried by roll call vote, all present voting yes.

FORESTER'S REPORT

Aron Lewis, District Conservation Forester, reported that a request was received from Ravenna Public Schools for a \$10,000 windbreak renovation. He showed the location on a map and explained the issue with the existing windbreak. He stated that the inner row consists of many old, dying trees that are starting to fall towards the playground. He said that a plan has been worked up for replacements and that NRD Community Forestry funds will be used towards the project.

Lewis reported that tree sales began November 1st, and that there are around 4,000 trees sold thus far. He added that he has a list of people wanting to install windbreaks that he will be meeting with to create a plan.

Lewis reported that he attended the Eastern Wildland Fire Academy for a fire behavior and weather course. He is also currently working on eight Wildland Urban Interface projects.

Lewis stated Nebraska Forest Restoration Program funds are available again this year and can be used for windbreak renovation, planting design, etc. He stated there are six NFRP forest stand improvement projects right now.

Lewis added that the Nebraska Forest Service had Forest Health staff here and 15 bur oaks were planted to do a 10-year study on their resistance to various illnesses/conditions. He added that drip and coco mats were installed on them. Lewis also stated that the Forest Service will have a Community Forester coming to look at a couple city park projects around Ord and that there are also trees at the golf course that will need to be replaced. He said the golf course wants to start a small nursery in preparation for the tree replacements.

Lewis stated that there will be a Nebraska Prescribed Burn Fire meeting December 4th in Kearney and that all prescribed burn people from around the state will attend.

Callan added that the work that Lewis has been doing with Ravenna schools will come from NRD Community Forestry budgeted funds.

NRCS REPORT

Bryce Bauer, NRCS, reported that staff is working on getting EQIP and CSP payments made and that site visits and 2025 burn plans are being finalized.

Bauer reported that a DC has been hired for the east portion of the District but does not know who will be filling the position. The DC will be based in Albion.

Bauer added that he does not have any news on the RCPP program yet and is waiting for the state to finalize things.

INFORMATION & EDUCATION REPORT

Newsletters

Alan Bartels, I&E Coordinator, reported that the fall issue of the District's "In The Loup" newsletter is at the printer now and he is working on *Water Matters*. He added that the printer has informed him that there is a 7–10-day delay across the board from when the mailings may reach different mailboxes.

2024 Educational Activities Update

Bartels reported that there have been 3,016 youth interactions during 53 educational events so far in 2024, which is an increase of 500 from last year. NRD also interacted with approximately 1,133 adult members of the public.

2025 Legislative Conference

Bartels reported that the Legislative Conference will be held in Lincoln January 28th and 29th and registrations will be taken care of soon. He added that lodging is already reserved.

USGS VADOSE STUDY UPDATE – CHRIS HOBZA, USGS

Chris Hobza and Mikaela Cherry with USGS were present to discuss the vadose sampling project.

Hobza reviewed the project timeline stating the project began in the Fall of 2022 and with an NRD hearing in January of 2023 on new rules that were adopted in February, except for the fall fertilizer ban that was to be reviewed in one year. He stated that people were signed up to be in the sampling program and that ten producers were selected that use various fertilizer

application methods. He stated the study focuses on fall anhydrous, manure, and side-dress application methods. Hobza also added that all the sites are Nora-Crofton-Moody soils with a silty loam or silty clay loam texture and high infiltration rate. Hobza explained that Nora-Crofton soils are derived from Peoria loess, which is wind-blown silt deposited during the last glacial period.

Hobza reviewed the sampling process and explained that 30-foot samples were taken at the beginning of the growing season at planting and again post-harvest after the crops were harvested. Throughout the growing season 8-foot samples were taken. He added that soil cores were collected to continue to track nitrogen and ammonium movement in three separate locations in each field. Also, a bromide tracer was applied to mimic nitrate movement in all ten study fields.

Hobza added that soil moisture monitoring was continuous at three sites, as they wanted to see how deep the rain and the water applied for irrigation would infiltrate into the soil.

Hobza reported that there was above average precipitation during the planting season. He reviewed and explained the readout logs and stated that this year the root zone is limited to the upper 2 feet of soil.

Hobza showed slides and reviewed the bromide tracer data for each site, showing a summary of results. He showed the depth of the bottom of the bromide and the maximum rate of movement. He also went over soil coring results and the nitrogen and ammonium samples that were taken throughout the year. A chart from all three application methods were shown, including fall-applied anhydrous, fall-injected manure, and side-dress applications.

Hobza also reviewed the plant tissue results and preliminary observations. He added that the next steps will be to continue to monitor nitrogen transport rates through the vadose zone. This report summarized the first-year results of a three-year study.

Hobza answered questions of the Board about the movement of bromide and how it compares to the movement of nitrogen. Lengthy discussion was held on the data logged thus far.

It was questioned whether there was documentation showing that bromide moves through the soil similar to the way nitrates do. Hobza stated there is documentation on it and he would locate and provide it.

Callan added that there are two years left of the study and that more testing will be done; however, preliminary data is leaning towards discussions about not applying fertilizer before planting and only applying during ideal conditions.

ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

Nutrient Management Meetings

Tylr Naprstek, Assistant General Manager, stated that the nitrate vulnerability model was conducted over the summer, analyzing three years of nitrate data, and looked at the residual amounts of nitrogen in the soil. Approximately 50 fields comprised of 20 producers were identified with high rates of nitrates that will require nutrient management plans going forward. He added that, to date, everyone has contacted the office; however, there are no completed plans.

Naprstek reported that the NRD is promoting signing up for the Nitrogen Reduction Act and that he and Callan went to Columbus last week and met with landowners.

Drought Update

Naprstek showed the drought impact model readouts which showed there are still some areas considered to be in "Severe" drought. He added that in Spring, technicians will begin taking water level readings. Naprstek showed the long-term drought outlook and stated that drought is expected to persist; however, the surface water basins are within normal range. Naprstek added that the instream flow status is consistent with no local reporting.

Naprstek stated there will be a meeting on December 9th in Fullerton.

Fall Field Work

Naprstek stated that static water levels have been read and letters will be sent to landowners showing the Spring and Fall readings and dates collected. He added that staff is starting to check domestic wells and, at the same time, working on outreach to the producers.

WQMA

Naprstek stated that WQMA postcards with reminders on annual reports and soil sampling have been mailed and that we are now in the process of getting our annual reports generated. Staff is working on mapping Areas 28, 29, & 30, as well as 2024 water samples and 2024 pumping amounts. These will go out to the producers for them to fill out what their expected and actual yields were, as well as any fertilizer application numbers.

ENGINEER'S REPORT

Potential Future Projects

Kevin Gustafson, District Engineer, stated that there are several sites identified throughout the District that could be used for potential future recharge and/or flood mitigation projects. He ran through a brief description of each and added that he has identified nine different watersheds that can be used.

The sites included one along East Sand Creek by Callaway in Custer County, Ash Creek Canyon in Custer County, Powell Canyon near Arnold and Merna, Cottonwood Creek by Callaway, Spring Creek in Custer County, Dane Creek in Ord, Plum Creek in Nance and Boone Counties, Oak Creek in Howard and Sherman Counties, and Spring Creek in Howard and Greeley Counties.

Mud Creek WFPO – Ansley

Gustafson reported that NRCS funding for the Mud Creek WFPO planning portion of the project has been applied for. We will be ready to move onto the design stage of the project soon.

Mira Creek WFPO – North Loup

Gustafson reported that there will be a public open house meeting on December 4th in North Loup. He added that we should have public review comments by mid-January, an agreement in March, and be able to respond to comments in April, with submission for authorization in May. He added that the current agreement ends June 30, 2025, and he will be working with JEO on design costs so funding can be arranged.

PROGRAMS/PROJECTS COMMITTEE

Kruse stated there were no action items, only reports.

Future Potential Project Locations

Kruse reported that Gustafson gave his presentation to the Committee on potential project locations.

Completed Projects Recap

Kruse reported that Projects Technician Brian Kolar gave the Committee a recap on past projects as well as some that have obtained approval but have not been completed.

Among the projects discussed that have previously been Board approved were the restrooms at the Garfield County fairgrounds, the Kevin Brown Trail at Taylor, Callaway Pool updates, the Columbus Flood Study, Broken Bow Levee, Hike and Bike Trail in Ravenna, Fullerton Selenium study, Pibel Lake Expansion, Bowman Lake Maintenance, Monroe Recharge Study, Ericson Lake Scada Upgrades, Loup Public Power Fishing Pier on Lake North in Columbus, Belgrade Bank Stabilization, Valley County Water Trail, Davis Creek Road Construction, and St. Edward Bric Grant.

Podolak asked what the next steps will be with potential project areas. Callan stated that we will have to look at each location and consider the plausible options. He added that the one near Wolbach and here in town would be of most interest to him right now, as well as the one near Dannebrog. Gustafson added that those three locations have the best potential.

WATER RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Smith stated there were no action items, only reports.

Nitrate Reduction Incentive Act – Promotion

Smith stated the Committee reviewed the Nitrate Reduction Incentive Act and the criteria of the program.

Area 19 – Drought Update and Public Outreach

Smith stated there was a meeting held in Palmer with good interactive conversation and that another would be held December 3rd in St. Paul.

Large Water User Rule Update

Smith stated the Committee discussed the rule and HDR is still working on changes.

Vadose Study

Smith stated the Committee reviewed the vadose study information.

Groundwater Management Plan – RFP Status

It was reported that the plan is in review and will be uploaded. Smith added that there will be a 60-day wait to sign people up and that there should be more information by February or March.

VARIANCE COMMITTEE

James Eschliman reported that there were two variance requests heard for the second time.

Nagorski Variance

Dell Harris, Water Resources Specialist, stated that this variance deals with comingled acres. He added that the irrigation district wants to take the surface water rights to a different site to develop a bigger piece. He added that the location is near Sargent and would help with the excess water problem there. It was added that it was staff recommendation to allow the variance, and the Committee voted to recommend approval.

James Eschliman motioned, seconded by Adams, to approve the Nagorski variance request, requiring a flow meter installation and recertification of acres. Motion carried by roll call vote, all present voting yes.

Reinke Variance

Harris stated that this variance deals with surface and groundwater acres that are comingled, and some are not certified. He added that the variance requests converting acres to groundwater and developing some south of the current locations. He stated they also want to put in a well and develop the land. It was added that it was staff recommendation to allow the variance, and the Committee voted to recommend approval.

James Eschliman motioned, seconded by Kruse, to approve the Reinke variance. Motion carried by roll call vote. Directors voting yes: Adams, Amsberry, Anderson, Bartak, Bauer, DeBower, James Eschliman, Jeremy Eschliman, Kauk, King, Knutson, Kruse, Petersen, Podolak, Smith, Thoene, R. Vlach. Director abstaining: Mohrman. Directors absent: Lukasiewicz, Nitsch, A. Vlach.

James Eschliman added that there was another request received; however, it was the first time hearing it, so there will be information and a vote at the next meeting.

MANAGER'S REPORT

Water Strategies Update

Callan stated a Water Strategies update was handed out to each seat.

Litigation Update

Callan stated there is still no news on the Platte Republican Diversion. He added that there are some legislative bills that will be discussed at the January meeting and that one involved electronic payment.

New Hires

Callan stated that Makenzi Woollen was hired as a financial assistant at Headquarters, Neal Fulton was hired as an agronomist in Fullerton to help Mike Lorenz with work in that area, and Julian Delley was hired to work on the Phoenix database for the District.

Non-action Reports

Callan reported that there is a new "Nitrate and Health" brochure out from UNMC.

Bauer asked if the pumps were done running on the Columbus Recharge Project. Callan stated that they are down. Kolar added that they were shut down last week.

NARD REPORT

Thoene reported that he and Callan attended the meeting held in Valentine. He stated that there is talk about NDEE/DNR combining and that there were breakout sessions on parliamentary procedure.

Callan added that Governor Pillen is pushing hard for statewide metering with telemetry and is concerned with large water users coming in.

NRC REPORT

Amsberry reported that the next meeting will be held in February.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/FUTURE MEETING TOPICS

Brenda Densmore, USGS, via GoTo, announced that she sent over two journal articles on bromide and nitrate movement through undisturbed soil for the Board and staff to view.

It was also announced that the annual awards banquet would be held following the December meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business before the Board, Chairman Thoene declared the meeting adjourned at 6:32 p.m.

Roster for attendance of this meeting and tally of votes cast on motions at this meeting are being filed with the official minutes of this meeting at the Lower Loup Natural Resources District's Headquarters Office, 2620 Airport Drive, Ord, Nebraska. Publication notification of this meeting was made via a newspaper in each county within the district. The next Board of Directors meeting will be held December 19, 2024, at 4:00 p.m., at the Headquarters Office in Ord, Nebraska.

Larry Mohrman
Secretary