

# MINUTES

## LOWER LOUP NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

March 27, 2025

Ord, Nebraska

The March 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 March 27, 2025. Chairman Thoene called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

### CALL TO ORDER

#### Directors in attendance:

Rollie D. Amsberry, Treasurer  
James Eschliman  
Randy Kauk  
Thomas L. Knutson  
Larry Mohrman, Secretary  
Chad J. Podolak  
Gerald Smith  
Alexander L. Vlach

Robert L. Bauer  
Jeremy Eschliman  
Justin W. King  
Gary A. Kruse  
Todd Nitsch  
John Shadle  
Henry J. Thoene, Chairman  
Rick Vlach, Vice Chairman

#### Directors absent:

Timothy E. Bartak  
Matt Lukasiewicz

Colton R. DeBower  
Alan Petersen

#### Staff in attendance:

Russell G. Callan, General Manager  
Irene Kreifels, Administrative Assistant  
Alan Bartels, I & E Coordinator  
Dell Harris, Water Resources Specialist  
LeeAnn Smith, Water Programs Assistant  
Aron Lewis, Conservation Forester

Tyler Naprstek, Assistant General Manager  
Kim A. Lyons, Financial Secretary  
Brant Bechtold, Information Specialist  
Makenzi Woollen, Financial Assistant  
Kevin Gustafson, District Engineer  
Ann Freeman, Water Programs Secretary

#### Guests in attendance:

Miles Anderson, DC, NRCS, Albion

## EXCUSED ABSENCES

Thoene stated that Directors Bartak, Lukasiewicz, and Petersen had asked to be excused, and it was noted that DeBower had not been heard from.

**James Eschliman motioned, seconded by Smith, to excuse absent Directors Bartak, Lukasiewicz, and Petersen. Motion carried by electronic vote. Directors voting yes: Amsberry, Bauer, Jeremy Eschliman, Kauk, King, Knutson, Kruse, Mohrman, Nitsch, Podolak, Shadle, Smith, Thoene, A. Vlach, R. Vlach. Director Not Voting: James Eschliman. Directors Absent: Bartak, DeBower, Lukasiewicz, Petersen.**

## MINUTES

Thoene asked for corrections and/or additions to the February 20, 2025, Board meeting minutes. With no changes being heard, Thoene announced that the minutes would stand approved as presented.

## TREASURER'S REPORT

Russell Callan, General Manager, highlighted expenditures of \$9,920.00 to Trees Are Us for new tree planting equipment; \$1,307.00 to WISH Nebraska, Inc, and \$1,321.28 to Agri-Inject for chemigation supplies; \$40,000.00 to Olsson, Inc for the GET model; \$27,479.00 to LRE Water, Inc for the Buffalo County Groundwater Model project; \$19,692.36 to JEO Consulting Group, Inc for work on the WFPO projects and Sargent Flood project; and \$52,917.98 to NLC, LLC for the Davis Creek Entrance Road project. Callan also highlighted additional expenditures of \$6,347.70 to Miller Power Sports for purchase of an ATV; \$91,950.00 to UNL NE Mesonet Weather Stations for vadose zone weather stations; and \$4,600.00 to Split Ear Ranch, LLC for fence posts to be used on new property at Pibel Lake.

Knutson asked if the buffer strip payments going out were the normal amounts. Callan stated that they were and added that Rich Woollen keeps track of the program. Kauk asked if payments were once a year. Callan stated they are made in the Spring and Fall.

**Jeremy Eschliman motioned, seconded by Knutson, to approve the March 27, 2025, Treasurer's Report. Motion carried by electronic vote, all present voting yes.**

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.

## FORESTER'S REPORT

Aron Lewis, Conservation Forester, reported that the new tree planting equipment was here and available for everyone to view. He stated that trees sales are at about 50,869, which is comparable to last year. He added that he has talked to other Districts and they aren't having a good year for tree sales. Lewis reported that, as of earlier, there were 11,950 coconut mats sold, and he has had other Districts ask if we have any extra because they have sold out.

Lewis added that he is keeping busy with prescribed burns. He stated that he had just completed the Loup River Trex, a two-week training course. He stated that he went for 5 days and that there were participants from six states and Canada present. Lewis added that they burned 300 acres, 90 of which were at night. He stated they recently burned 700 acres for Randall Gydesen.

Lewis reported that he has been attending forestry improvement meetings. He added that the Forest Stand Improvement funding is wrapped up in the Federal freeze. He stated there is about \$75,000 out of \$300,000 Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) money left with about 4-5 projects in the making. He added that the WUI funds are used to protect communities from wildfire, including home protection, fuel breaks, egresses, etc. He added that the recent fire in Broken Bow was on a property with fuel breaks that stopped it from spreading further.

Lewis reported that he and other staff would be picking up trees from Bessey Nursery on April 7<sup>th</sup> and the second load will be picked up the 18<sup>th</sup>. He said machine planting should begin the third week of April.

## NRCS REPORT

Miles Anderson, DC, NRCS, Albion, reported that staff is writing EQIP contracts for producers. He added that in the western portion of the District there was about \$400,000 approved for cover crops and burning/brush management. He added that they are leaning towards funding more contracts this year.

In the eastern portion of the District there has been a couple of pivot conversions and 5 brush and burning applications approved for about \$590,000.

Anderson stated they have requested more funds but are unsure of how much they will get. He added that staff is preparing to start Farm Bill compliance reviews. He stated they will be done in late April when producers are in the field.

Anderson added that CSP ranking will begin mid-April with contracting beginning in May. He stated there are more CSP applications in the West than on the East side of the District and are hoping to balance that out next year.

Anderson stated that the DCs and Callan had meetings on the RCPP grant and stated that it sounds like the official contract should be ready tomorrow. He stated they are planning on

having sign-up in May and writing contracts in June. There are quite a few EQIP applications that can be pushed into the RCPP grant but will also have another sign-up period for others.

Callan added that he will be going to Lincoln tomorrow to sign the agreement.

## INFORMATION & EDUCATION REPORT

### Washington D.C. Conference

Alan Bartels, I&E Coordinator, reported that the conference is next week and that some attendees were leaving tomorrow, and the rest would leave Sunday.

### Nebraska Envirothon State Contest

Bartels reported that St. Paul is heading to State Envirothon and that a team from Ord is in as a wild card. He added that the contest will be held April 30<sup>th</sup> at Chalco Hills.

## ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

### Flow Meter Cost-Share – Quantity Areas 18, 19, & 20

Tyler Naprstek, Assistant General Manager, reported that Harold Benton and Ed Drozd, NRD Technicians, and himself, had reviewed field in Areas 18 & 20 and plotted flow meter locations. He added that they went through the list and there are 96 remaining to be installed in Areas 20, and 181 remaining in Buffalo County. Naprstek stated that a letter will be sent stating that they have until February, 2026, to get them installed. He added that a letter also went out to all 152 landowners in Area 19.

Naprstek reported that cost-share applications are steadily coming in. He added that the NRD will continue to promote the program by advertising in newspapers, newsletters, etc. Reminder letters will be sent this winter and cease-and-desist orders will be issued if they are still out of compliance by 2026. He added that Areas 18 & 20 have until February, 2026, and that Area 19 has until March, 2027, to follow the flow meter requirements.

### Davis Creek Recreation Area

Naprstek reported that the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission had a meeting in Ord on the 21<sup>st</sup>. He stated that staff updated them on the improvements being made. Naprstek also added that staff has been keeping the status up to date on the website and that camp host letters have gone out.

### Nitrogen Training

Naprstek reported that Mike Lorenz and Neal Fulton, Agronomists, and Ryan Hellbusch, Water Quality Technician, hosted a nitrogen certification training class on March 13<sup>th</sup> in Duncan.

He stated that producers must certify every 4 years. He added that out of 27, there were 10 people in attendance, and there are still 7 that haven't done their recertification.

### Drought Monitoring

Naprstek reviewed the drought monitor and compared current levels to where levels were last year at this time. He stated there is not much change; however, staff is taking static water level readings now, so the map will be updated showing the readings. He added that the results will be taken to the Water Resources Committee for review.

Naprstek also showed the long-term drought outlook and added that it is looking like the drought conditions will persist.

## WATER RESOURCES COMMITTEE

### Legacy Nitrate Report – Water Sustainability Fund

Nitsch reported that Chris Hobza, USGS, gave a Legacy Nitrate report to the Committee on the work on the nitrate/isotope study being done in Areas 28 & 30. He added that there are 24 monitoring and domestic wells between Lower Loup and Lower Platte North NRDs that were analyzed to age-date the water. Nitsch stated that Hobza explained the process used and added that the samples taken with the highest concentration of nitrates were less than 5 years old.

Naprstek showed the USGS slideshow and explained the range of nitrate concentrations from 0.04 to 57.0 ppm. He stated that samples were pulled and ranked from varying depth and ranked according to concentration and depth. He added that well depths ranged from 18 feet to 160 feet. Naprstek briefly reviewed the denitrification process that happens to nitrates when bacteria are in oxygen-poor environments that essentially returns nitrogen to the atmosphere, preventing accumulation in soil. A majority of all high nitrate samples are younger than 5 years. He added that all the Lower Loup NRD samples came from dedicated monitoring wells, designed for testing the aquifer, whereas Lower Platte North NRD used domestic wells.

Podolak asked why the three with the highest readings are so close in age. Naprstek stated they may be close to Area 28 where there is extreme sand and shallow depth to groundwater, adding that we have also been finding that nitrates are moving faster than what was previously thought. Naprstek showed a graph of the age and nitrate concentration for the sites near the Genoa/Columbus area, adding that Area 30 has a shallow well with the highest ranking of 57.4 ppm.

Naprstek added that tracers are used to track movement and added that all samples taken were in the same isotopic range. Callan added that the results are showing that recharge is done more during growing season than down season. Naprstek added that the seasonality of groundwater recharge was calculated using stable isotope results and that summer precipitation and high-density groundwater irrigation has increased recharge rates and the likelihood of increased rate of nitrogen leaching.

Naprstek stated that the final report for this study, which has been financed by LLNRD, LPNNRD, USGS, and the WSF will be presented to the Board once completed.

#### Lower Platte River Basin Coalition Annual Report

Nitsch reported that Naprstek had presented the Lower Platte River Basin Coalition Report to the Committee. Nitsch reviewed some of the things included in the report and stated that Jason Moudry, Water Programs Specialist, reported on municipal water use. Naprstek stated that a lot of staff work is involved in putting the information together for the report – LeeAnn Smith, Water Programs Assistant, works on transfers and variances, etc.; Dell Harris, Water Resources Specialist, deals with acre certification; Moudry addresses municipalities; Kevin Gustafson, District Engineer, covers instream flow; and Brian Kolar, Projects Technician, handles Columbus Recharge, which all goes into the report.

Callan stated that in the past it has come up about municipal water uses, adding that in the report we reference “industry and commercial use.” Starting next year we will have proprietary water use rules. Callan also pointed out the water use per person which is included in the report.

**Nitsch motioned, seconded by Smith, to approve the Lower Platte River Basin Coalition Report. Motion carried by electronic vote, all present voting yes.**

Callan added that the Lower Platte River Basin Coalition management committee made a recommendation for the budget next year, to hire a consultant to get the next iteration of allocations done. He added that there will be a meeting held April 16<sup>th</sup>.

#### Nutrient Management Plan - Update

Nitsch reported that the Committee discussed the nutrient management plans given to producers in water quality management areas. He stated that several examples were given to the Committee and that there was a slight increase in water nitrates in the management areas. Naprstek added that there is one new producer in the Humphrey area and will meet with him soon.

#### Irrigated Acres Violations

Nitsch reported that Naprstek gave an update on 2024 irrigated acres violations based on infrared readings. He added that there were 24 violations found, and none were repeats. Naprstek stated that out of the 24, there are 5 who haven’t responded and that some have been resolved already.

#### Vadose Sampling - Update

Nitsch reported that Moudry updated the Committee on the vadose sampling being done. He added that producers met with staff at the NRD on February 26<sup>th</sup> and there was a lot of interest in results. Nitsch stated that presentations were given at the NARD Conference in Lincoln and the Annual Water Programs Conference in Kearney. It was added that UNL is doing

soil analysis for the project. It was also reported that there was a meeting March 24<sup>th</sup> with UNL researchers and staff and that they are working to expand to more sites.

Callan added that UNL was here on the 24<sup>th</sup> and met with NRD staff. He added that there was a lot of discussion and comments on the 2-foot root zone and that the UNL formula doesn't fit the 2-foot root zone. He added that we need to do more research on root zones and pre-plant applications. He stated that the grant was submitted for the project.

## PROGRAMS/PROJECTS COMMITTEE

### Twin Loups Irrigation District – Davis Creek Project

Kruse reported that Twin Loups Irrigation District is applying for a WSF grant to install riprap on the east shore by the dam. He added that the NRD provided them with a letter of support to go along with the grant application. Callan added that Twin Loups staff asked for financial support, and he advised them to come to the Committee later in the process.

### Davis Creek Road Project – Update

Kruse reported that approaches were being poured, and that Gustafson would have more later.

### St. Edward BRIC Grant

Kruse reported that JEO is working with the city on design and the NRD is involved in the meetings on the project. He added that they are working on the FEMA revised scope.

### Mud Creek WFPO – Ansley

No update.

### Mira Creek WFPO – North Loup

No update.

### Sargent Flood Project

No update.

Callan pointed out a brochure placed at each spot showing a breakdown of ongoing projects. He added that one for the RCPP grant will be provided as well.

## ENGINEER'S REPORT

Kevin Gustafson reported that the approaches at Davis Creek were started two weeks ago. He showed pictures, adding that an additional 1,100 feet of concrete was planned for today.

Gustafson stated that, weather permitting, the construction crew is planning on completing the last 800 feet of road next week, adding that there will be no access for at least a week after it is poured. Once all concrete is poured, there is clean-up and shoulder work that will need to be done.

Mohrman asked what the planned completion date was. Gustafson stated he is hoping for May 1<sup>st</sup>.

Gustafson reported that he has sent out a request for bids for garage parking behind Headquarters. Bid requests were sent to five contractors, and the review meeting will be held April 18<sup>th</sup>.

## MANAGER'S REPORT

### Water Strategies Update

Callan reported that Water Strategies was working on setting up meetings with Senators Ricketts and Fischer for Tuesday of the Washington, D.C. trip.

### Litigation Update

Callan reported that the Platte Republican Diversion is ongoing. He added that Audubon wants to interview him since we filed an order to oppose it.

### New Hires

Callan stated that there are no new hires; however, we are advertising for tree planters.

### Non-action Reports

None

Mohrman asked if pumping has started on the Columbus Recharge Project. Callan stated that Kolar went there today to look at things and they were ripping on the east side. Kauk asked if the elevation is where it usually is at this time. Callan replied that it is close but has been down the last few years anyway.

Bauer asked if there were any updates on LB317 to merge the NDEE and DNR. Callan stated it has some traction and that the plan lays out keeping separate quantity and quality sides. He added that Governor Pillen is putting together a water task force right now that will have between 20-25 people. Knutson asked the objective of the taskforce. Callan replied that nothing specific has been said other than there will be quantity and quality departments.

## NARD REPORT

Thoene stated the last meeting was March 9<sup>th</sup>; however, he was unable to attend.



## NRC REPORT

Amsberry reported that the next meeting will be held April 9<sup>th</sup> in Kearney.

Callan stated that we may have grant material ready to hand out by then, and grant applications go to DNR to review to determine if eligible to be part of the program.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS/FUTURE MEETING TOPICS

Naprstek stated that Tuesday there was a meeting and luncheon in Bartlett with several operators in Wheeler County, specifically larger operators who potentially will be triggered in a new water quality management area. He stated that Smith attended. It was added that there was good communication and that producers were mostly receptive.

Naprstek added that Derek Vogt, Agronomist, was at the meeting and talked about the vadose work being done and discussed the soil type differences and their effect on nitrate movement. Callan stated there was good conversation about how fast water moves. Callan added that what we hear is that movement is usually 8-10 feet per year; however, when wells are turned on, the water moves differently than it would if it were undisturbed.

## ADJOURNMENT

With no further business before the Board, Chairman Thoene declared the meeting adjourned at 5:20 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 April 24, 2025, at 5:00 p.m., at the Headquarters Office in Ord, Nebraska.

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Larry Mohrman  
Secretary