

MINUTES

LOWER LOUP NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

April 24, 2025

Ord, Nebraska

The April 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 April 24, 2025. Chairman Thoene called the meeting to order at 5:11 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER

Directors in attendance:

Rollie D. Amsberry, Treasurer
Robert L. Bauer
James Eschliman
Justin W. King
Todd Nitsch
Henry J. Thoene, Chairman

Timothy E. Bartak
Colton R. DeBower
Jeremy Eschliman
Gary A. Kruse
Gerald Smith
Rick Vlach, Vice Chairman

Directors absent:

Randy Kauk
Matt Lukasiewicz
Alan Petersen
John Shadle

Thomas L. Knutson
Larry Mohrman, Secretary
Chad J. Podolak
Alexander L. Vlach

Staff in attendance:

Russell G. Callan, General Manager
Irene Kreifels, Administrative Assistant
Alan Bartels, I & E Coordinator
Dell Harris, Water Resources Specialist
Kevin Gustafson, District Engineer
Brian Kolar, Projects Technician
Derek Vogt, Agronomist

Tyler Naprstek, Assistant General Manager
Kim A. Lyons, Financial Secretary
Brant Bechtold, Information Specialist
Makenzi Woollen, Financial Assistant
Aron Lewis, Conservation Forester
Ann Freeman, Water Programs Secretary

Guests in attendance:

Brooks Bechtold, NRCS, Ord

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 Kauk, Knutson, Lukasiewicz, Mohrman, Petersen, Podolak, Shadle, and Alex Vlach had asked to be excused.

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

MINUTES

Thoene asked for corrections and/or additions to the March 27, 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 \$5,836.23 to AM Leonard Company for coconut mats; \$4,025.70 to JEO Consulting Group, Inc. for work on the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Plan; and \$3,753.31 to Flatwater Group, Inc. and \$319,888.12 to NLC, LLC for work on the Davis Creek Road Project. Callan also highlighted additional expenditures of \$7,565.34 to Giddings Machine Company, Inc. for soil probe equipment for the Giddings rig; and \$30,638.25 to In-Situ, Inc. for transducers used for static water level monitoring.

Jeremy Eschliman asked about miscellaneous uncategorized income and doing a trend analysis to show financials.

Smith motioned, seconded by R. Vlach, to approve the April 24, 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 most of the hand plant orders have been picked up. He added that there are two tree planting crews and that 36 of 68 plantings have been completed. Lewis stated that 62,847 trees and 15,000 coco mats were sold this year. He reported that we are 9,147 more trees sold than what was sold last year, adding that other NRDs were showing decreases in sales. Lewis stated that he ordered more coconut mats, so the NRD has some for use at the Aagaard Farm, arboretum, and for resale. Lewis reported that there are 38 drip systems being installed by Dan Ruterbories, Rangeland Management Specialist, and Derek Domeier, Parks & Maintenance Technician, this year and that 24 are done at 18 different sites.

Lewis reported that he and Alan Bartels, I & E Coordinator, attended the Arbor Day celebration held at Auble's Pond for 4th graders. He added that he and Bartels both gave speeches. A serviceberry tree was planted near the restroom.

Lewis also reported that he and Bartels did an interview about the National Champion Eastern cottonwood tree at Pibel with *PURE Nebraska* that will air tomorrow. He stated that Meat Eater Radio also did an episode on the tree.

Lewis stated that he will be attending an oak management workshop in Kansas on May 14th. He added that the Nebraska and Kansas Forest Services are trying to figure out the best way to manage oak woodlands.

Lewis stated that the National Forest Restoration Program (NFRP) funding was on hold but has been released. He added that he has also been working on getting more forest stand improvement projects going on around the District and also getting sign-ups for the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) funds. Lewis stated that he has another \$300,000 in grant money coming in in August to continue Wildland Urban Interface projects.

Lewis reported that there is a statewide burn ban due to the Plum Creek fire by Valentine in which 24,000 acres were burned. He stated that the National Guard, planes from South Dakota and Wyoming, as well as 50 fire departments have been working to extinguish the fire, which started from a controlled burn.

Jeremy Eschliman asked how far west natural oaks are present in Nebraska. Lewis stated there are some in Custer County and Valley County, adding that Chadron has planted some to study. He stated that they will also grow in Colorado; however, they are mostly in eastern areas.

NRCS REPORT

Brooks Bechtold, NRCS, Ord, reported that they have been working on wrapping up new EQIP contract obligations and CSP rankings and obligations. He added that they should be done by next week.

Bechtold reported that the RCPP Project is up and going and that sign-up will be held in May, with rankings by June 13th, and obligations by August 8th. He said there has been good interest in the program so far.

Bechtold also reported that NRCS staff will be working on HEL and wetland compliance reviews in May; however, there are less this year.

Bechtold added that the eastern part of the District has been working on about the same things. He said that NRCS will be sending staff to Grand Island on April 30th for RCPP contract training.

Callan added that Bartels is putting together a flyer on the RCPP program that will be sent to all mailboxes in the District.

INFORMATION & EDUCATION REPORT

2025 Basin Tour Sign-up

Alan Bartels reported that the Basin Tour will be held June 9-10th in Valentine and is hosted by the Middle and Lower Niobrara NRDs. Information will be emailed.

Arbor Day Programs

Brant Bechtold, I & E Specialist, reported that he and Bartels have been hosting Arbor Day programs for schools in the District. He added that this year they focused on the western part of the District. Bechtold stated there were 250 total students from 10 schools in attendance at the programs. He added that another 10 schools turned them down due to lack of time from prior missed snow days. Bechtold added that this year they offered in-class presentations and also at Pibel Lake. He stated that Riverside School in Cedar Rapids came to Pibel.

Bechtold added that the first program was on April 14th and the last will be tomorrow, Arbor Day.

ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

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

Tyler Naprstek, Assistant General Manager, reported that there is a lot of cost-share being utilized, especially in Areas 18 and 20, but expects it to slow down with planting season approaching. He added that staff conducts site visits to ensure meters are installed properly and that staff has also done some inspections before installation to check piping. Naprstek added that reminder letters will be sent out at the end of the month to those that are in the process of transferring or variances, etc., that the meter needs to be operational before that well can be run.

Davis Creek Recreation Area

Naprstek stated that Davis Creek Recreation Area will be opening soon.

Chemigation Permits

Naprstek reported that 3,262 chemigation permit renewals were sent out the end of March to everyone who had a chemigation permit last year. We have received 643 back.

GWQMA Violations

Naprstek reported that there were three producers out of 528 fields who are in pre-complaint status that ignored the warning to get the soil sample and reporting done. He stated they have been moved to full complaint and must sign a *Plan and Schedule of Compliance* going forward. He stated he has heard back from two, and one of them is taken care of, adding that there will be a tentative hearing in June to cease and desist if the others are not remedied by then.

WATER RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Static Water Level Report

Nitsch reported that they were given a preview of the infographics in the 2025 Static Water Level Report. He stated they were shown current data in comparison to well levels from the 1982 baseline readings – 25 years ago, 10 years ago, 5 years ago, and 1 year ago with 2024 data. He added that the full report will be available in May. A draft report will be sent to tablets around May 9th.

Drought Update

Nitsch reported that the entire state is currently in “Moderate” or “Severe” drought status through winter into spring.

Naprstek added that, as of this morning, there was an area back to “Severe” drought, after the excess snow calculations were taken out.

Buffalo County Model

Nitsch reported that the Committee was shown some models and discussed management practices that could be implemented in the future. The main item of interest was the comparison of different irrigation allocation totals and how they could affect the outcome for areas of continuing groundwater drawdowns.

Callan added that the map on the wall shows what has been modeled.

Lower Platte River Basin Coalition Report

Nitsch stated that the Committee reviewed depletion data from all NRDs involved in the LPRBC. He said Callan, Naprstek, and Vlach had attended the LPRBC Board meeting in Wahoo to discuss the next five-year increment.

Vlach stated that, at the meeting, they were given the history of what the Coalition was for and how it came together. He said that Jesse Bradley gave information on what they are working on in his department. LPRBC is given 5-year increments of allocations, but it has been extended to a 6-year allocation for now, awaiting the results of the Missouri River Model, before starting on the next 5-year allocation.

Nutrient Management Plan Report

Nitsch stated that Neal Fulton, Agronomist, presented on the three Water Quality Management Areas and gave the totals of commercial nitrogen applied vs. manure applied, and how it relates to corn yields and nitrogen use efficiency. He added that Derek Vogt, HQ Agronomist, had also presented data on pre-plant and post-plant emergent nitrogen applications and discussed how the nitrogen recommendation is generated by the LLNRD staff.

Irrigated Acres Violations

Nitsch reported that Naprstek gave a report on the irrigated acres violations, stating that there were 24 violations and all had contacted the NRD.

Vadose Sampling

Nitsch reported that Jason Moudry, Water Programs Specialist, discussed vadose soil samples and that they have been taking 30-foot samples and that over 300 samples had recently been delivered to Ward Labs. Moudry has given an update on first-year findings from the vadose zone study work at the March 24th meeting with UNL. He stated that Moudry also presented at the Groundwater Monitoring Council at NDEE in Lincoln. Callan noted that the study continues to get more and more attention.

PROGRAMS/PROJECTS COMMITTEE

Twin Loups Irrigation District – Davis Creek Project

Kruse reported that the Board had previously discussed the Twin Loups Irrigation District's Water Sustainability Fund grant for bank stabilization and provided a letter of support to go with their grant application. He added that they are now requesting financial participation and will be at the May Committee meeting to discuss more details.

Davis Creek Road Project

Kruse stated Kevin Gustafson, District Engineer, will provide an update.

Pibel Dam Erosion

Kruse reported that there is some erosion taking place on the southern and western sides at Pibel Lake and that the Committee will have more discussion in the future.

Mud Creek WFPO – Ansley

Kruse stated there has been no change.

Mira Creek WFPO – North Loup

Kruse stated there has been no change.

Sargent Flood Project

Kruse reported that JEO is expected to submit a 90% design in June.

Thoene asked about the erosion at Pibel. Gustafson stated the bank is steep with sand underneath and that he thinks it is mostly wave induced. He added that it will need some type of armoring, rock, or something similar that is cheap and effective. Thoene asked if the fish affect it. Gustafson stated that it was possible. Callan added that muskrats may contribute to the problem.

ENGINEER'S REPORT

Headquarters Garage Bid

Kevin Gustafson reported that five invitations were sent out and that three bids were received -- Quattrocchi Construction for \$176,836.90; G3 Contracting for \$186,250.00; and Hackel Construction for \$514,223.00.

Gustafson reviewed the bids and discussed that Quattrocchi had the low bid which included site prep and soffit, fascia, and gutters. He added that G3's bid did not include those items in their bid.

King asked where the companies were from. Gustafson stated they were local.

Thoene stated that the Board could vote tonight or could carry it over to the Committee meeting next month.

Jeremy Eschliman asked if this was budgeted. Callan stated there is money in the budget that can be used. Callan added that the building would be where the equipment is currently lined up outside and that the Executive Committee started discussion on it about two months ago. LLNRD is looking for a 100'x30' building with four doors, 20' approach out front, and three 36" walk-in doors.

Thoene added that there is a lot of equipment outside and it pays to have them under a roof for storage. Smith added that the price will be higher the longer we wait and that we want gutters on the building.

Jim Eschliman stated it would be better to wait to vote due to the shortage of Directors. Callan stated that staff would see how long the bids are good for and will bring them to the Committee next month.

Davis Creek Road Project

Gustafson reported that the last of the concrete was poured on the entrance road after the last Committee meetings. He showed an aerial view of the construction. The concrete on entrance to the RV dump station was taken out and repoured due to first-pour cracking. He added that next week the dirt work will be completed and that he is hoping to open the first weekend of May.

Gustafson also showed pictures of Nebraska Game and Parks. He said they stocked the lake with 1.2 million walleye fry and installed 4 crappie condominiums in the lake.

Callan stated there was a misinformation post on Facebook of when Davis Creek would be open, adding that NRD staff did an update this morning and in 4 hours it had been viewed 9,000 times. He said many calls had been received about an opening date.

MANAGER'S REPORT

Water Strategies Update

Callan stated he is going to Washington D.C. on Sunday and will return on Wednesday. He said he will be attending an NWRA meeting as well as a meeting with Adrian Smith and Water Strategies.

Litigation Update

Callan stated there is no update and there is not a new DNR Director appointed yet.

New Hires

Callan stated that Steve Hornickel and Dexter Goodner are planting trees this year.

Non-action Reports

Callan pointed out that the Supplemental Agenda contains Dean Edson's legislative update.

NARD REPORT

Thoene stated he did not go to the NARD meeting. Jim Eschliman stated the next meeting will be held at the Basin Tour.

NRC REPORT

Amsberry reported there was a meeting on the 9th and that committee appointments were made, except for the ranking committee, which will be done later.

It was reported that LLNRD and Chris Hobza presented on the LLNRD Legacy Project and Vadose Zone Project.

Callan added that there was a lot of discussion on the applications with a lot of big project applications, maybe 25.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/FUTURE MEETING TOPICS

Thoene asked if there were any comments on the Washington D.C. trip.

Bauer stated there were a couple of speakers that offered sustainability or carbon impact information for farmers, such as cover crops, no-till, and nitrate management, adding that they can receive back a certain amount of money per acre.

There was discussion of DOGE freezing billions of dollars for programs such as these because the funds are being eaten up in overhead costs and not making it to the farmers. It was added that they want \$0.65 of each dollar to make it to the farmer and there was good promotion of sustainability practices. They are not canceling the program, just suspending it. Applicants can still apply for funds, if farmers will receive at least 65%.

Farm Bureau had information on WOTUS definition.

Thoene stated there was talk of biofuel and other specialty fuels and how there will be more demand for water with the new products being introduced. He stated there was also discussion about groundwater quality and nitrates.

Amsberry added that they gave LLNRD a pat on the back for attendance at the D.C. conference, stating that a lot of Districts were not represented.

R. Vlach added that there was discussion among the government officials about the redundancy of paperwork and what can be done to fix it.

Jim Eschliman stated the tour to the Antietam National Battlefield was good, adding that it was the single most deadly day in history for Americans and that the officer Hartsuff was recognized, Eschliman added that Fort Hartsuff is named after him.

Kruse announced that Mohrman's grandson was in a severe 4-wheeler accident and is still in serious condition. Kruse added that he has two broken legs, broken arms, a trach and feeding tube, and has been unconscious most of the time. He added that there was some improvement, and he could raise some fingers. Kruse stated there is a Go Fund Me account set up under Avery Mohrman and a fundraiser at Cornerstone Bank in Monroe, adding that area farmers are making arrangements to do their planting for them.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business before the Board, Chairman Thoene declared the meeting adjourned at 6:18 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 May 22, 2025, at 5:00 p.m., at the Headquarters Office in Ord, Nebraska.

Larry Mohrman
Secretary