

MINUTES

LOWER LOUP NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

July 24, 2025

Ord, Nebraska

The July 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 July 24, 2025. In the absence of Chairman Thoene, Vice Chairman R. Vlach called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER

Directors in attendance:

Rollie D. Amsberry, Treasurer
Colton R. DeBower
Jeremy Eschliman
Justin W. King
Gary A. Kruse
Todd Nitsch
Chad J. Podolak
Gerald Smith

Robert L. Bauer
James Eschliman
Randy Kauk
Thomas L. Knutson
Larry Mohrman, Secretary
Alan Petersen
John Shadle
Rick Vlach, Vice Chairman

Directors absent:

Timothy E. Bartak
Alexander L. Vlach

Henry J. Thoene, Chairman

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
Jason Moudry, Water Programs Specialist

Tyler Naprstek, Assistant General Manager
Kim A. Lyons, Financial Secretary
Brant Bechtold, Information Specialist
Makenzi Woollen, Financial Assistant
Aron Lewis, Conservation Forester
Brian Kolar, Projects Technician

Guests in attendance:

Miles Anderson, DC East, NRCS, Albion

VERIFICATION OF MEETING NOTICE AND ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Acting Chairman R. Vlach asked for verification of the meeting notice. General Manager Russ Callan stated that the agenda was current, 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

R. Vlach stated that Directors Bartak and Thoene asked to be excused, noting A. Vlach was also absent, but had not been heard from.

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

MINUTES

R. Vlach asked for corrections and/or additions to the June 26, 2025, Board meeting minutes. With no changes being heard, R. Vlach announced that the minutes would stand approved as presented.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Russell Callan, General Manager, highlighted expenditures of \$16,658.05 to UNL for test holes; \$44,645.00 to Ward Laboratories, Inc. for vadose project soil sample analysis; and \$38,038.73 total to multiple producers receiving flow meter cost-share.

Mohrman asked why there is such a variation in payments, adding that some are for \$2,000 and others are for \$5,000. Naprstek replied that not all are new meters being installed; some are being re-piped, and others may just need minor repair.

Callan also highlighted additional expenditures for flow meter cost-share payments, totaling \$34,493.70, to multiple producers.

Kauk asked what percentage of cost-share is offered. Callan stated it is 50% up to \$2,000. Smith asked if any included electronic telemetry. Naprstek stated there has not been any yet.

James Eschliman motioned, seconded by Kauk, to approve the July 24, 2025, Treasurer's Report. Motion carried by electronic vote, all present voting yes.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

R. Vlach asked for public comments. None were heard.

FORESTER'S REPORT

Aron Lewis, Conservation Forester, reported that he has been working on NFRP forest stand improvement projects, Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) projects, and windbreak renovations. He said he is waiting for a WUI grant for firebreaks to prevent fires from moving into towns. He stated that the U.S. Forest Service received grant money from the government, so that announcement should be coming soon.

Lewis stated that he got survey equipment for the endangered Northern Long-Eared Bat, adding that he has been on shut-down with no cutting allowed for the last 6 months. He stated that a survey was completed west of Pleasanton, and he is waiting to hear back on the results.

Lewis reported that a Forest Service health specialist was here earlier this month and looked at trees in the area. He stated that there are more fungal diseases this year because of all the moisture we have received. He said that hail damage was also observed from last week's storms.

Lewis added that he will be teaching two windbreak classes, September 11th for NRCS and October 7th for the NRDs. He stated that other NRDs will come the afternoon of October 7th and will attend Client's Day at Bessey on the 8th. He added that the class will cover designing, planting, and plant species selection, as well as anything else that goes into planning. He stated that both classes will take place at NRD Headquarters and Aagaard Farm.

Mohrman asked Lewis what the survey of bats consists of. Lewis stated that it is a microphone that picks up bat frequencies, then the recording gets sent to Colorado for identification of the species that were present.

NRCS REPORT

Miles Anderson, DC East, NRCS, reported that staff has slowed down on contracting and has been getting into the fields with the producers, adding that there is interest for FY26 already. He also stated that staff has been attending different tours and training events by the University and other partners.

Anderson reported that he checked with the East offices, and they have two EQIP contracts waiting to be signed and two that have started the QAR process. He added that there are 29 complete on the East for \$2.3 million in EQIP funds. Anderson added that CRP has both general and continuous signup and they received an announcement that grassland CRP is open through August 8th. He explained that the goal is to find grassland at risk of conversion to cropland, adding that the biggest key is that there must be a grazing plan that is conservation orientated. Anderson added that contracts will be written in September and October.

Anderson also reported that they received reorganization plans today from USDA. He stated that some national staff will be moving to hub locations, but added that he does not know specifically what that will mean for them. He added that there are 4,500 USDA staff in D.C. and they want to move maybe half to hubs.

INFORMATION & EDUCATION REPORT

Educational Events

Alan Bartels, I&E Coordinator, reported that the Valley County Fair is next week and that 8th Grade Field Day will be in August. He also added that planning for MUDFEST and ACE Camp next year is underway.

NRD Annual Conference

Bartels reported that the tentative schedule for the Kearney Conference came in today.

ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

Recreation Areas

Tylr Naprstek, Assistant General Manager, reported that Davis Creek has been cleaned up after the June storm damage. He added that the church camp was at Davis Creek last week and had good comments. Naprstek stated that the water level is at 95% because of recent rain.

Naprstek reported that Pibel Lake looks good. He added that there was some concern about algae bloom; however, sampling is taking place every Monday at Pibel Lake, Davis Creek, and Sherman and Calamus Reservoirs.

Chemigation Inspections

Naprstek reported that 995 inspections have been conducted, adding that typically we do between 1300-1500 per year. He added that the rain has held techs back some, as they do not want to cut across the corn if they don't have to. Naprstek reported that there have been 58 systems suspended or failed, meaning the mainline check valve is leaking or something needs repair. He added that the techs carry MrMr injection valves, as well as low pressure drains and drain hoses, stating that this offers the producer an option to fix the issue immediately so the tech won't have to come back to recheck after repairs.

Water Quality Sampling

Naprstek reported that 860 water samples have been taken. He added that in some areas everything is sampled, stating we have summer help assisting Mike Lorenz, and that we are looking at irrigation and domestic samples. Naprstek stated that in January we will send a result letter containing the last 5 years of sampling data.

Kauk asked if recent storm damage has affected Davis Creek again. Naprstek stated that it was discovered that the Wi-Fi is not working properly, so Brant Bechtold, Information Specialist, is working on replacing equipment.

WATER RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Nitsch reported that the meeting was held in the shop at Davis Creek and that the road work looks good.

City of Dannebrog, Fullerton, and Genoa Municipal Well Work

Nitsch reported that an update was given on testing the municipal wells for Dannebrog. He added that they are taking samples and working with a few sites for possible well replacement.

Nitsch reported that Naprstek gave an update on Fullerton, adding that the test holes are showing selenium and that seven have been completed so far. He added that their well decommissioning is on hold until the fall.

Nitsch also reported that Jason Moudry, Water Programs Specialist, gave the Committee an update on the planned testing by the City of Genoa to spot a new municipal well to supplement the two wells they are currently running.

Naprstek added that \$620,000 of water infrastructure funding was going towards the construction of a new well and transmission line in Genoa. This is part of \$18 million in funding for critical Nebraska water infrastructure projects, as advanced by U.S. Senator Fischer, through the Senate Appropriations Committee. This also includes \$2.3 million to construct a retention lagoon, lift station, and sanitary sewer extensions in Greeley, and \$696,000 to replace an aging well and renovate the sanitary water storage tank in Farwell.

Nitrate Vulnerability Model Numbers

It was reported that Naprstek gave an update to the Committee and that staff is putting together data for this season's triggers.

Groundwater Management Plan

It was reported that there will be a stakeholder meeting on August 28th, by invitation only.

Large Water User Discussion

Nitsch reported that an update was given on the model that is being developed, using transmissivity, etc. He added that it will give an idea of which water users will need to complete a hydrologic study.

Smith asked if there had been any concern about the water usage for the proposed nuclear plant near Hastings, Nebraska. Callan explained that the nuclear reactor sits in the aquifer. It uses a lot of water to cool, but the water never leaves the aquifer, so it is not a consumption. For our purposes, the water is not physically leaving the aquifer..

Bauer asked if there are any models already developed. Callan stated there is not anything specific to what we are trying to do and added that we are also looking at location to see what is considered a large user.

Drought Management Status

Nitsch reported that an update was given that compared drought status from a month ago, a few months ago, and a year ago. Drought conditions have improved with the recent rains, but can change very quickly. Naprstek added that a lot of the NRD was in “Severe” ranking and now, with the current water levels from April’s testing, there is “Moderate” drought in Area 18. He said Areas 18, 19, and 20 are very susceptible but are in better condition than they were six months ago. Updates from last month, compared to current statistics, were shown, as well as the precipitation outlook. It was added that western Nebraska and the Republican Valley area still have quite a bit of concern.

Naprstek showed the U.S. seasonal drought outlook and the difference from this month to last month, as well as the surface water status, adding that it looks good right now. He added that this is the first time since last year that there have not been drought conditions in our District.

Vadose Sampling Update

Nitsch reported that Moudry gave an update on the new soil moisture sensors, adding that they give good insight on the layers of soil, etc.

PROGRAMS/PROJECTS COMMITTEE

Pibel Dam Erosion & Grant Update

Kruse reported that Kevin Gustafson, District Engineer, is looking at various products and said that Flexamat would be the best product to use at Pibel Lake along the shore. He added that it will cost an estimated \$24,000 for materials. Kruse added that it will not be done until the Fall of '25 or Spring of '26.

Kruse added that the NRD is working with JEO for the walking trail.

Mud Creek WFPO - Ansley

Kruse reported that there is nothing new to report.

Mira Creek WFPO – North Loup

Kruse reported that the Mira Creek Watershed Plan had been forwarded to the NRCS Chief for authorization.

Sargent Flood Project

Kruse reported that JEO is working on the pivot crossing and working things out with the landowner.

Tour of the Davis Road Project and Lagoon

Kruse reported that the Committee took a tour of Davis Creek and the lagoon area.

Other

Kruse reported that there is a drainage issue concern north of Monroe. He stated that Platte County and Loup Power District are putting together a plan on how to reconfigure the area and will come to the NRD for assistance.

Kruse also reported that the damage to Mud Creek by Broken Bow has been repaired.

Kauk asked about Flexamat and if it is recommended that a contractor do the work. Callan stated that staff did it last time. Gustafson stated that we are planning to do it ourselves but are working on transportation. The last time we used one roll, but 10 rolls will need to be used this time, so we may need to have a semi-truck carry them to location.

ENGINEER'S REPORT

Flooding – Howard County

Gustafson reported that there is an erosion problem at the Middle Loup railroad bridge at St. Paul in Howard County. He added that the emergency manager wants to get people together to get options for that part of the river to be redone.

R. Vlach added that that part was not fixed in 2019, stating that that section was further up and that the bridge used to be further north than it is now.

Streambank Work

Gustafson stated that a jetty will be installed at the Loup City Airport where erosion is taking place. He added that the Village of Ericson has a spot on the Cedar River that is encroaching on the lagoons, adding that they were pumped over the edge of the bank. He also added that there is some erosion downstream of Loup City on the Middle Loup River.

Kruse asked if Ericson Lake homes go into a lagoon. Gustafson stated they do not, but they pump systems and dump into the lagoons there.

Gustafson reported that he met with Monroe officials, and they have an issue with water adjacent to the canal at Monroe to the north. He added that water comes down but cannot get

through, so sediment is left when coming over the bridge. He stated that he met with the County Road Superintendent, and they have been working with Loup Power to come up with plans.

Gustafson added that there is an agreement for the power company to take the lip out of the box culvert and install a concrete apron so a Bobcat can be used to clean it out. He added that they are collaborating with the landowner across the road and are trying to create a plan for more flow there.

Gustafson added that there was a drowning at the low head dam in Fullerton on the Cedar River. He added that the City contacted the NRD for assistance in making it safer. Gustafson said that he is looking into alternatives and that he reached out to the Silver Jackets to see if they can help.

King asked if the dam is owned by the City. Gustafson stated that it used to be power generating but is no longer used for that purpose. He added that these structures are safe at low flow; however, high flow is enough that you cannot get out.

Callan showed the location of the dam and stated that in recent years there have been three drownings there. He stated that they approached the NRD for assistance to develop a kayak ramp a few years back but backed out. Callan added that the sidewalls are about 20 feet and that they have developed camper pads nearby. Gustafson added that it could be rocked or graded differently to slow down the flow. Callan stated they will come to the Committee when they have a plan.

R. Vlach asked if there was anything new with Sargent. Gustafson stated no. Callan added that we should have the 90% design and after that is complete, funding can be applied for.

MANAGER'S REPORT

Budget Hearing Date/Time

Callan stated with the way deadlines fall, it would be better to move the August Board Meeting to September 4th.

Jeremy Eschliman motioned, seconded by Kruse, to move the August Board of Directors Meeting to September 4th and set the Budget Hearing for 5:10 p.m. that day, with the Special Hearing to Set the Final Tax Request immediately following. Motion carried by electronic vote. Directors voting yes: Amsberry, Bauer, DeBower, James Eschliman, Jeremy Eschliman, Kauk, King, Kruse, Mohrman, Nitsch, Petersen, Podolak, Shadle, Smith, R. Vlach. Director not present for vote: Knutson. Directors absent: Bartak, Thoene, A. Vlach.

Water Strategies Update

Callan stated he is working with Water Strategies on a letter for the RCPP Contract Revocation.

Litigation Update

Callan stated there is no update.

New Hires

No new hires to report.

Non-action Reports

Callan stated that advertisement will begin for Lukasiewicz's position, and Adams's open position will be readvertised. It was stated that they are in Subdistricts 5 and 1, respectively.

Callan also stated that neither he nor Naprstek would be around to attend the August Committee meetings, so it was suggested that Committee meetings not be held in August.

NARD REPORT

Thoene was not present to give a report.

NRC REPORT

Amsberry reported that a meeting was held yesterday in Kearney and that there were four requests approved for funding -- two large and two small, adding that the NRD received a large request for nitrate testing. He stated that there was \$1.5 million to appropriate and that the funds were being transferred from the Environmental Trust Fund. He added that a total of 22 applications were received.

Mohrman added that the rankings were close and that the top two used most of the money.

It was reported that the NRD vadose zone expansion grant was funded for \$631,000 and that CPNRD and UBBNRD will be partnering on the project, and we will be adding on the Wheeler County and Merna Valley areas.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/FUTURE MEETING TOPICS

No announcements were made.

Shadle motioned, seconded by Knutson, to enter Executive Session at 6:06 p.m. to discuss property acquisition. Motion carried by electronic vote, all present voting yes.

Jim Eschliman motioned, seconded by Smith, to exit Executive Session at 6:39 p.m. Motion carried by electronic vote, all present voting yes.

Shadle motioned, seconded by Petersen, to pursue the project with the proposed counter-offer. Motion failed. Directors voting yes: Amsberry, Knutson, Petersen, Smith, Shadle. Directors voting no: Bauer, DeBower, James Eschliman, Jeremy Eschliman, Kauk, Kruse, Mohrman, Nitsch, Podolak, R. Vlach. Director abstaining: King. Directors absent: Bartak, Thoene, A. Vlach.

Kruse motioned, seconded by Petersen, to go back to original offer with a 20-day expiration period.

Jeremy Eschliman stated it is not a need and there may be more risk than we want. Mohrman added that if people want flow meters, we will have to say we spent the money on something else.

Vote was held. Motion failed. Directors voting yes: Amsberry, Kruse, Petersen, Smith, Shadle. Directors voting no: Bauer, DeBower, James Eschliman, Jeremy Eschliman, Kauk, Knutson, Mohrman, Nitsch, Podolak, R. Vlach. Director abstaining: King. Directors Absent: Bartak, Thoene, A. Vlach.

Petersen stated we do not want to burn any bridges, in case it comes up again in the future.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business before the Board, Vice Chairman R. Vlach declared the meeting adjourned at 6:47 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 September 4, 2025, at 5:00 p.m., at the Headquarters Office in Ord, Nebraska.

Larry Mohrman
Secretary