

MINUTES

LOWER LOUP NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

December 18, 2025

Ord, Nebraska

The December 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 December 18, 2025. Chairman Thoene called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER

Directors in attendance:

Rollie D. Amsberry, Treasurer
Robert L. Bauer
James Eschliman
Randy Kauk
Thomas L. Knutson
Larry Mohrman, Secretary
Alan Petersen
John Shadle
Henry J. Thoene, Chairman

Timothy E. Bartak
Colton R. DeBower
Jeremy Eschliman
Justin W. King
Gary A. Kruse
Todd Nitsch
Chad J. Podolak
Gerald Smith
Rick Vlach, Vice Chairman

Director absent:

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
Ann Freeman, Water Programs Secretary
Ken Sheets, Field Data Liaison
LeeAnn Smith, Water Admin. Assistant
Neal Fulton, Agronomist

Tyler Naprstek, Assistant General Manager
Kim A. Lyons, Financial Secretary
Brant Bechtold, I & E Specialist
Makenzi Woollen, Financial Assistant
Jason Moudry, Water Programs Specialist
Aron Lewis, District Conservation Forester
Derek Vogt, Agronomist
Brian Kolar, Projects Technician

Guests in attendance:

Bryce Bauer, NRCS, Ord

Julie Nitsch, Boelus

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, 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 no Directors had asked to be excused. Roll call vote was taken.

Directors present: Amsberry, Bartak, Bauer, DeBower, James Eschliman, Jeremy Eschliman, Kauk, King, Knutson, Kruse, Mohrman, Nitsch, Petersen, Podolak, Shadle, Smith, Thoene, Rick Vlach. Director absent: Alex Vlach.

It was later discovered that Alex Vlach had emailed the office that he would not be present for tonight's meeting.

MINUTES

Thoene asked for corrections and/or additions to the November 20, 2025, Board meeting minutes. With no corrections being heard, Thoene announced that the minutes will stand approved.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Russell Callan, General Manager, highlighted expenditures of \$2,500.00 to UNL for soil judging scholarships; \$22,429.20 to AMS, Inc. for vadose sampling equipment; and \$145,115.00 to Cornerstone Mapping for infrared aerial imaging. Callan highlighted additional expenditures of \$10,000.00 to NARD Research for Lower Platte Basin Coalition dues.

James Eschliman motioned, seconded by Knutson, to approve the December 18, 2025, Treasurer's Report. Motion carried by electronic vote. Directors voting yes: Amsberry, Bartak, Bauer, DeBower, James Eschliman, Jeremy Eschliman, Kauk, King, Knutson, Kruse, Mohrman, Nitsch, Petersen, Podolak, Shadle, Smith. Directors abstaining: Thoene, Rick Vlach. Director absent: Alex 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.

FORESTER'S REPORT

Aron Lewis, District Conservation Forester, reported that 8,064 trees and 2,400 coco mats were sold as of earlier in the day, adding that he has received many calls on the mailer that went out. He stated that he expects sales to pick up after Christmas.

Lewis added that he has been taking a Fire Effects class through the University of Idaho, adding that it is required for doing burns. He stated that he has done some fuel reduction site visits in Valley and Nance Counties and there will be a Prescribed Burn Workshop in Central City that he will be presenting at. He added that he will be on Holiday Break from December 23-January 5th and will be attending the Colorado Wildfire Academy January 13-16.

NRCS REPORT

Bryce Bauer, DC East, NRCS, reported that the EQIP deadline was pushed back to January 15th, adding that staff should have rankings completed by the end of the month and funding by mid-February to early March. He added that staff has been working on 2026 burn plans and applications adding that they are shooting for October to clean up the fire lines and trees. Bauer added that staff is working on getting soil tests for nutrient management plans and that CSP payments are being made.

INFORMATION & EDUCATION REPORT

NARD Legislative Conference

Alan Bartels, I&E Coordinator, reported that the Legislative Conference will be held January 27-28 in Lincoln.

Washington, D.C. Conference

Bartels reported that the Washington, D.C. Conference will be March 30- April 1, adding that he will have more information later.

Incumbent Candidate Filing Deadline

Bartels reported that the incumbent filing deadline is February 17th.

ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

Field Work – Domestic Well Sampling

Tylr Naprstek, Assistant General Manager, reported that domestic well water samples are being taken across the District. He added that the NRD is always looking for new sites, but they must have a registered well and we would need to know the depth. The techs are currently at 921 wells that have been tested. He stated that results will be checked for discrepancies between current and historical readings and results will then be sent to the State. Following this process, result letters will be sent out with the last 5 sample readings.

Flow Meter Maintenance

Naprstek reported that the agreement with Seim Ag from Chapman was signed again and that 138 flow meters are due for maintenance this year in Area 28. He said that Areas 18, 19 and 20 will go under the same maintenance program as the other management areas.

Drought Monitoring

Naprstek reported that there was no difference from last month to this month's outlook. He highlighted an area in Platte, Nance and Merrick Counties that need to be monitored. He added that static water levels will be taken in March and April.

Irrigated Acres Violations

Naprstek reported that staff is close to half done with reviewing infrareds, looking to differentiate between irrigated ground and non-irrigated. Naprstek added that not everything outside of the lines is always a violation. There can be acre rotations that are in place and transfers not drawn or accounted for.

WATER RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Producer Connect / Nitrogen Dashboard

Callan stated that there has been a lot of discussion with Governor Patten on how to get ONE RED money back to everyone, adding that there has been talk about "Producer Connect" for sharing data and reporting on cost-share items and ways to get money out to producers.

Naprstek stated that the other portion of this conversation is our own producer dashboard, which was launched for people to input annual reports. He showed the website where producers go, adding that there are videos on YouTube showing how to do various actions to complete their reporting.

Wheeler County Nitrates

Derek Vogt, Agronomist, gave an update on the nitrate levels in Wheeler County. He showed the median and count for all the sites in Wheeler County from 2011 to present, adding that domestic well data has been added in.

Options were shown how sites could be combined into a management area as well as what effects it would have on the areas involved in each management area. An option was shown with all five townships in the same management area. Callan stated that the domestic samples have brought the median down a little, adding that it needs to be decided if the Board wants to trigger all in Wheeler County or in smaller areas.

Further discussion was held on the different options for setting up the management areas. Callan added that after the vote tonight, there will be a hearing and public information meetings set up.

Smith motioned, seconded by Jeremy Eschliman, to go with Option 2, combining townships into one, for the Wheeler County Water Quality Management Area. Motion carried by electronic vote. Directors voting yes: Amsberry, Bartak, Bauer, DeBower, James Eschliman, Jeremy Eschliman, Kauk, King, Knutson, Kruse, Nitsch, Petersen, Podolak, Shadle, Smith, Thoene, Rick Vlach. Director voting No: Mohrman. Director absent: Alex Vlach.

Instream Flow Results 2025

Naprstek reported that instream flow numbers have been put together, adding that the minimum requirement for our instream flow was compared to what flows were. He stated that information on the days triggered is important, as a letter will be sent from DWEE stating to junior water right users who are using LLNRD instream rights, that, essentially, they are to “back off” on water usage.

A summary of the last 3 years was shown to get a better look as to when we are more likely to be in a higher chance of not meeting the flow criteria, with March through May consistently meeting that criteria as far as the higher percent ratio goes. In the fall, numbers are significantly better. This information will go into the Lower Platte River Basin Coalition report.

Flow Meter Readings 2025

Naprstek presented a map showing flow meter readings, with totals listed. He added that most readings were down significantly, in part, due to the rainfall that we've received, stating that there were over 1,500 meters read and the overall average was 5.65 inches, so total pumping is down a lot. In 2022, the average was around 9 inches. Naprstek added that producers will get a letter with the county average information, the map, and their meter readings.

He showed another map based on crop type. He added that, looking at the water quality management areas (WQMA), nobody pumped over 5 inches in Area 30. He talked about the large red dots around Duncan, indicating some high water usage for potato crops, concluding that the smaller fields averaging 5 to 17 acres are dumping on significant amounts of water.

Nutrient Management Plans

Naprstek reported that most nutrient management plans are coming in, adding that he is watching for annual reports to come in to see how they countered the previously approved plans. He said that there is a lot of good discussion. He stated that the Nitrogen Reduction Act funds were used for some projects.

Large Water User Discussion

It was reported that the Large Water User Discussion was presented to the Governor's Task Force and that the NRD will be setting up meetings with large water users in the District for input.

Vadose Sampling Update

Naprstek reported that Custer County sampling has been completed and Wheeler County has three more sites to go.

PROGRAMS/PROJECTS COMMITTEE

Kruse stated that there was a correction to the Committee meeting minutes, stating that Rick Vlach was present for the meeting.

Fullerton Dam Removal

Kruse reported that the Requests for Proposal were sent out and should be ready to review in January, adding that there has been quite a bit of interest.

NRD Habitat Area DRAFT Rules

Kruse reported that staff is working on drafting new recreation area rules & regulations.

Monroe Area Recharge Project

No update. Callan will be setting up meetings soon.

Pibel Dam Erosion & Grant

Kruse reported that the lake is coming back up and is currently full after the erosion project completion, adding that there is no additional information on the design for the grant application.

Sargent Flood Project

Kruse reported that the final design was received from JEO. Callan added that after the first of the year, talks with landowners will begin to negotiate easements. Callan, Thoene, Gustafson, and Petersen will be part of that negotiating committee.

ENGINEER'S REPORT

Fullerton Dam

Kevin Gustafson, District Engineer, reported that RFPs were sent using Beacon Bid, and 6 of 8 firms have downloaded the specifications. He added that there has been interest from out-of-state companies and thinks there may be a combination of them working together with local firms. Proposals are planned to be opened on January 20, 2026. He added that the estimates should be ready for review by next Board meeting.

HQ Garage

Gustafson reported that the concrete floor of the new garage was finished yesterday.

Sargent Flood Project

Staff met with EPAC for an update on the project and the process. Staff met with JEO and they will send everything in to FEMA for the final review for benefit cost ratios, adding that we are basically done with the design portion of the project.

VARIANCE COMMITTEE

Smith reported that there was one variance request this month and the Committee voted to deny the request based on our rules and past precedence. He added that the requester had history on the land, but it was not in the allowable time frame.

Smith motioned, seconded by Kruse, to deny the variance request to expand irrigation acres for Andy Jordan; however, allow him to collaborate with staff to use the acre expansion with allocation program. Motion carried by electronic vote, all present voting yes.

MANAGER'S REPORT

Water Strategies

No update.

Litigation

No update.

New Hires

No update.

Non-action Reports

Callan reported that there will not be Committee meetings in January. He added that there will be an informational meeting in Bartlett on January 13th.

NARD REPORT

No report given. James Eschliman stated they will meet at the Legislative Conference in January.

NRC REPORT

No report given. Amsberry stated the next meeting will be held in February.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS, NARD REPRESENTATIVE/ALTERNATE, NARD ANNUAL CONFERENCE VOTING DELEGATE/ALTERNATE, AND LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE VOTING DELEGATE/ALTERNATE

Thoene asked for nominations for Chairman.

Kruse nominated Thoene.

With no other nominations heard, vote was held to appoint Thoene as Chairman. Motion carried by electronic vote. Directors voting yes: Amsberry, Bartak, Bauer, DeBower, James Eschliman, Jeremy Eschliman, Kauk, King, Knutson, Kruse, Mohrman, Nitsch, Petersen, Podolak, Shadle, Smith, Rick Vlach. Directors abstaining: Thoene. Director absent: Alex Vlach.

James Eschliman motioned, seconded by Smith, to keep the rest of the officers the same. Motion carried by roll call vote, all present voting yes.

Kruse motioned, seconded by Knutson, to keep the NARD Representative and Alternate, NARD Annual Conference Voting Delegate and Alternate, and Legislative Conference Voting Delegate and Alternate the same. Motion carried by roll call vote, all present voting yes.

2026 Board Officers: Chairperson – Henry Thoene
Vice Chairperson – Rick Vlach
Secretary – Larry Mohrman
Treasurer - Rollie Amsberry

NARD Representative – James Eschliman
Alternate – Hank Thoene

NARD Annual Conference Voting Delegate – Henry Thoene
Alternate – James Eschliman

Legislative Conference Voting Delegate – Henry Thoene
Alternate – Jerry Smith

APPROVAL OF 2026 BOARD MEETING CALENDAR, DESIGNATION OF OFFICIAL NEWSPAPERS & BANKS, SET MAXIMUM COST LIMIT PER PLATE FOR AWARDS DINNER AND MAXIMUM FOR 2026 AWARDS

The 2026 Draft Board Meeting Calendar was presented, and the list of newspapers, banks, and awards was reviewed as follows:

Newspapers - The Grand Island Independent is the only District-wide daily publication that covers the NRD. In the past we have designated it as our District-wide paper but have also utilized The Albion News, The Burwell Tribune, The Custer County Chief, The Columbus Telegram, Cedar Valley News, The Nance County Journal, The Ord Quiz, The Phonograph-

Herald, The Ravenna News, and The Sherman County Times for meeting announcements and legal notices.

Banks – First Interstate Bank in Ord has been the main repository for the Lower Loup NRD's funds, and First National Bank in Ord serves as the secondary repository. The following banks are additional repositories for Lower Loup NRD funds – Cornerstone Bank, North Loup, NE; Pathway Bank, Ord, NE; BankFirst, Ord, NE; Farmers & Merchants Bank, Ericson, NE; Citizens Bank & Trust Company, Loup City, NE; State Bank of Scotia, Scotia, NE; Citizens State Bank, Spalding, NE; and Heartland Bank, Ord, NE; and Nebraska Public Agency Investment Trust (NPAIT), Lincoln, NE.

Awards – The current maximum Awards Dinner per-plate cost limit is \$70, and the awards maximum limit is \$125.

Jim Eschliman asked if a limit increase was needed for the awards maximum. Callan stated it is going well with the current rate.

Rich Vlach motioned, seconded by Shadle, to approve the 2026 Board Meeting Calendar, Designate Official Newspapers & Banks and to keep the Maximum Cost Limit Per Plate for Awards Dinner and Maximum for 2026 Awards the same. Motion carried by roll call vote, all present voting yes.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/FUTURE MEETING TOPICS

Kauk asked what the NRD excess pickups went for. Callan stated one was \$11,500 and the other was just over \$3,500.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business before the Board, Chairman Thoene declared the meeting adjourned at 5:23 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 January 22, 2026, at 4:00 p.m., at the Headquarters Office in Ord, Nebraska.

Larry Mohrman
Secretary