

# MINUTES

## LOWER LOUP NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

January 22, 2026

Ord, Nebraska

The January 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 January 22, 2026. Chairman Thoene called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

### CALL TO ORDER

#### Directors in attendance:

Rollie D. Amsberry, Treasurer  
Colton R. DeBower  
Justin W. King  
Gary A. Kruse  
Todd Nitsch  
Chad J. Podolak  
Gerald Smith  
Rick Vlach, Vice Chairman

Timothy E. Bartak  
Jeremy Eschliman  
Thomas L. Knutson  
Larry Mohrman, Secretary  
Alan Petersen  
John Shadle  
Henry J. Thoene, Chairman

#### Director absent:

Robert L. Bauer  
Randy Kauk

James Eschliman  
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  
Dan Ruterbories, Rangeland Resources Tech

Tylr Naprstek, Assistant General Manager  
Kim A. Lyions, 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  
Harold Benton, Water Resources Technician

#### Guests in attendance:

Miles Anderson, NRCS, Albion

Chris Hobza, 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, 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 Bauer, James Eschliman, Kauk, and A. Vlach had asked to be excused.

**Smith motioned, seconded by Kruse, to excuse absent Directors Bauer, James Eschliman, Kauk and A. Vlach. Directors voting yes: Amsberry, DeBower, Jeremy Eschliman, Knutson, Kruse, Mohrman, Nitsch, Petersen, Podolak, Shadle, Smith, Thoene, R. Vlach. Directors not present for vote: Bartak, King. Directors absent: Bauer, James Eschliman, Kauk, A. Vlach.**

King arrived at 4:02 p.m.

## MINUTES

Thoene asked for corrections and/or additions to the December 18, 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 \$1,632.00 to Kaleo on the River for usage of the camp for ACE Camp; \$8,152.88 to HDR Engineering, Inc for the Nance County Model; and \$2,998.90 to JEO Consulting Group, Inc. for the Sargent Project, adding that discussion on land rights will take place next month.

Bartak arrived at 4:05 p.m.

Callan highlighted additional expenditures of \$26,200.00 to Yanda's Music & Pro Audio for a new projector for the Board Room; \$40,000.00 to Olsson for the GET Model; and \$5,993.67 to the City of Genoa for their well location project with LRE.

**Shadle motioned, seconded by Jeremy Eschliman, to approve the January 22, 2026, Treasurer's Report. Motion carried by electronic vote. Directors voting yes: Amsberry, Bartak, DeBower, Jeremy Eschliman, King, Knutson, Kruse, Mohrman, Nitsch, Petersen, Podolak, Shadle, Smith, Thoene, R. Vlach. Directors absent: Bauer, James Eschliman, Kauk, 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.

## FORESTER'S REPORT

Aron Lewis, District Conservation Forester, reported that as of earlier in the day there were 17,467 trees and 2,633 coconut mats sold. He added that he has been going on site visits and working on plans for machine plantings and Hazard Fuel Reduction Project (WUI) plans. Lewis added that he is also writing forest management plans for EQIP applications, stating that he writes them for all NRCS offices in the District.

Lewis also reported that he helped with a prescribed burn class that was held in Central City and attended the Colorado Wildfire Academy for a leadership class.

Lewis stated that next week he will be in Lincoln for a Forest Service All-Staff meeting from Tuesday through Friday.

Lewis added that the exploding trees seen in the news actually does happen, but rarely, and encouraged everyone to check their trees for splits after extreme low temperatures. Mohrman asked if the trees that crack would die. Lewis responded that they probably would, as the frost cracks disrupting their water systems flow. Dell Harris, Water Resources Specialist, asked if there are trees that are more susceptible than others. Lewis stated it can happen to any of them, adding that the water inside the tree freezes and expands, causing the trunk to split.

## NRCS REPORT

Miles Anderson, DC East, NRCS, reported that staff has been taking advantage of the nice weather and have been making up for time lost in the Fall. He stated that there have been quite a few changes to various programs for FY26 and that several EQIP applications have been received, estimating close to 80 in the East and adding that he was unsure of numbers in the West. However, he thinks it will be more than can be funded.

Anderson added that allocation numbers came in today for the State and the individual NRDs, adding that the State will get \$44 million total that will be split into various State pools with about \$18 million locally that is split up. He stated that Lower Loup will get \$1.7 million with about \$575,000 in the East and the remainder for the West. He said that they will have the opportunity to request additional funding after the initial funds are obligated.

Anderson also mentioned the new EQIP regenerative pilot program, adding that they are still learning about it; however, it is based on looking at the producer's whole farm. He stated

that the deadline to have contracts ranked is February 20<sup>th</sup> and out the door by the middle of March.

Callan asked if they would be adding staff or a technical service provider (TSP) to help with regenerative ag. Anderson stated that it would be under the same contract to fund TSP work with producers, stating that labs are adding specific soil tests, etc. that need to be incorporated, and that soil health regenerative ag soil tests must be run at the beginning and end for a minimum of 5 years.

## USGS VADOSE ZONE STUDY - 2025 REPORT – CHRIS HOBZA, USGS

Chris Hobza, USGS, showed a slideshow presentation on the background and timeline of Year 2 of the Vadose Zone Study. They are looking at the effects of different fertilizer application practices on nitrogen movement through the vadose zone and groundwater quality. The project came about after the proposed rule change from 2022 to ban fall fertilizer application across the District. The year 2024 was Year 1 of the pilot project. Ten different fields were selected, representing 3 different fertilizer practices – fall fertilizer application, fall manure, and side-dress. Hobza explained some of the soil types and their infiltration rate, adding that Nora, Crofton, and Moody soils are prevalent in most of the District.

Hobza also showed visuals and discussed the nitrogen cycle in landscapes and nitrogen use in corn. A lot of nitrogen use starts around mid-June through mid-July, so fall application fertilizer is in the soil for 6½ months before being utilized. Hobza explained how the study was done and showed pictures of the soil collection process at different crop growth stages, adding that samples are taken at depths between 8-30 feet. He explained that they are broken down in 1-foot increments for the first 8 feet then 2-foot increments, tracking changes in nitrate form and concentration over time.

Hobza discussed another component of this study – soil moisture monitoring – providing a continuous record of soil moisture data, capturing extreme precipitation events or irrigation events, tracking how precipitation affects the soil moisture profile. Valuable information from this part of the study was to track the development and estimate the depth of the active root zone, which has been showing a maximum depth of 20-24”.

Another component is the use of a bromide tracer on the fields included in the study. Bromide is a negatively charged ion that dissolves and won't bind to any soil particles, and won't be lost by plant uptake, but moves with the leaching water. It mimics nitrogen movement through the soil. Results being tracked is the time lapse between application and soil cores being taken, and the total of any precipitation during that time, including rainwater and irrigation. Bromide movement is expected any time there is an intense storm or precipitation.

Results and discussion was held and questions were answered about the study's findings thus far. In 2024, bromide moved faster through the soil than had been anticipated, moving at about 1” per day. In 2025, the bromide was moving at about 1.2” per day, during wetter conditions.

Data was studied at two soil zones – the active root zone from ground level to 24”, and then below the root zone from 2-8’. Any nitrogen that gets below the 2-foot zone will not be used by the plant but will work its way down to the groundwater. Nitrogen lost to groundwater was calculated in lbs/acre by using the soil and precipitation test results. Average results to date show that more nitrogen is lost when growing corn than when growing beans. Due to increased precipitation, more nitrogen was lost in 2025 than in 2024

The project, through a 3-year Water Sustainability Fund grant, is being expanded to include Wheeler and Custer Counties, along with Central Platte NRD and Upper Big Blue NRD, which will encompass about one-third of the state’s irrigated acres.

Hobza added that there is one year left of the 3-year project, so more findings will be presented later.

Callan added that, based on discussions with Arindam Malakar at UNL, there is just as much, if not more, ammonia present. He said that it will eventually convert to nitrate, but it was unexpected to find in such levels.

## INFORMATION & EDUCATION REPORT

### Washington, D.C. Meeting

Alan Bartels, I&E Coordinator, reported that the Washington, DC trip will be held March 30-April 1<sup>st</sup> with flights going out on March 29<sup>th</sup> and returning on April 2<sup>nd</sup>. The flight, lodging, and conference schedule has been emailed.

### Central Region Envirothon

Bartels reported that earlier in the day, he and Brant Bechtold, I&E Specialist, in cooperation with Central Platte NRD, helped host the Central Regional Envirothon, held at CCC in Columbus, which featured a special topic on non-point source pollution. He added that St. Paul and Ord had two teams, Newman Grove and Aurora each had one team and Loup City had four teams. He reported that one of St. Paul’s teams placed 1<sup>st</sup>, Aurora placed 2<sup>nd</sup>, and one of St. Paul’s teams placed 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Bartels also reported that Jason Moudry, Water Programs Specialist, and Dan Ruterbories, Rangeland Management Specialist, helped with a career development day event in Palmer.

### 2026 Directors Retreat

The 2026 Directors Retreat will take place March 10<sup>th</sup> at LLNRD Headquarters beginning at 9 a.m. Lunch and supper will be provided. More details will be provided as the schedule comes together. Directors should plan to attend.

## ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

### Davis Creek 2025 Numbers

Tylr Naprstek, Assistant General Manager, reported that Davis Creek reservations totaled 1,662 nights last year. He reported that ReserveAmerica has been switched over to a different operating system, FireFly, effective January 1, 2026, to reserve camp sites. It appears that everything is working as it should, adding that reservations are slowly starting to come in. He added that numbers were slightly down last year; however, it was a rainy season, so he is hoping things pick up this year.

### Flow Meter Maintenance & Report

Naprstek reported that flow meter maintenance in Area 28 has been completed by Seim Ag. Naprstek also reported that an informational letter was mailed to producers last week summarizing water usage.

### GWMP Annual Report

Naprstek reported that 48 paper Annual Reports were mailed and the rest of the producers are using the dashboard online to enter in their data. An example was shown of what the dashboard looks like including graphing of data. He added that January 31<sup>st</sup> is the deadline to have reports and soil samples completed.

Naprstek also reported that the Wheeler County nitrates and pending future groundwater quality expansion meeting was held in Bartlett last week. He added that there was good attendance. Attendees were provided a Wheeler County map showing nitrate readings and trends. He stated that there will be more information at the Committee meetings which will be held in Bartlett on February 17<sup>th</sup>. Callan added that it will be a formal public hearing at noon on the 17<sup>th</sup> with transcription.

### Drought Monitoring

Naprstek reported that the drought monitor map showed "Moderate" drought growing across a majority of the Lower Loup NRD area. He estimates that by next week it could be considered "Severe" drought.

### Irrigated Acres Violations

Naprstek reported that staff reviewed potential violations and have narrowed them down to 20-25 straight violations. He added that certified letters will be sent out next week to address these violations.

## ENGINEER'S REPORT

### Fullerton Dam Removal Design Proposals

Kevin Gustafson, District Engineer, reported on the proposals received for the Fullerton Dam removal design. He briefly went over the ranking process and scores of each of the six proposals that were received, as well as the proposed outcome. He stated that some proposals were for removal and some were for reconstruction. Naprstek added that HDR's proposal was too extensive and included more analysis than necessary.

Podolak asked who the final decision maker is. Callan replied that he would like to see the NRD and Fullerton share the decision and be 50/50 partners on the project. He added that staff is looking for a grant that would fit the project.

Recommendation was given to accept the EA Engineering proposal for the design portion of the project, pending Fullerton approval.

**Amsberry motioned, seconded by Knutson, to accept the EA Engineering design and construction oversight fees proposal of \$311,000, pending approval by Fullerton. Motion carried by electronic vote. Directors voting yes: Amsberry, Bartak, DeBower, Jeremy Eschliman, King, Knutson, Kruse, Mohrman, Nitsch, Petersen, Podolak, Shadle, Smith, Thoene, R. Vlach. Directors absent: Bauer, James Eschliman, Kauk, A. Vlach.**

## VARIANCE COMMITTEE

Smith reported that there is a variance request to move acres 19 miles out of Upper Elkhorn NRD, who has no restrictions, and put them on land that is not ideal. He added that this was the first hearing, so more information will be available next month.

## MANAGER'S REPORT

### Water Strategies

No update.

### Litigation

No update.

### New Hires

No update.

### Non-action Reports

Callan reported that he was asked to go to Phoenix and present on Davis Creek, adding that the water districts there are looking for a way to have public input and income at the same time, adding that the public benefits are high.

Callan also reminded everyone that the Board retreat will be held March 10<sup>th</sup>.

### Chairman Appointment of Committee Members

Last year's Committee assignments were handed out and Thoene announced that if anyone wanted to change to talk to him.

### NARD REPORT

Callan reported that he and James Eschliman were able to Zoom into the NARD meeting, adding that the meeting focused on Producer Connect and what is going on with that.

### NRC REPORT

Amsberry reported that the next meeting will be held the first week of February.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS/FUTURE MEETING TOPICS

None.

### ADJOURNMENT

With no further business before the Board, Chairman Thoene declared the meeting adjourned at 6:03 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 February 26, 2026, at 4:00 p.m., at the Headquarters Office in Ord, Nebraska.

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Larry Mohrman  
Secretary