

MINUTES

LOWER LOUP NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

July 23, 2026

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 23, 2026. 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
Alexander L. Vlach

Timothy E. Bartak
James Eschliman
Randy Kauk
Thomas L. Knutson
Larry Mohrman, Secretary
Alan Petersen
John Shadle
Clifford Sterner
Rick Vlach, Vice Chairman

Directors absent:

Robert L. Bauer

Henry J. Thoene, Chairman

Staff in attendance:

Russell G. Callan, General Manager
Joanne Wells, Financial Secretary
Brant Bechtold, I & E Specialist
Kevin Gustafson, District Engineer
Abigail Lyons, Agronomist

Kim A. Lyons, Administrative Assistant
Alan Bartels, I & E Coordinator
Dell Harris, Water Resources Specialist
Aron Lewis, Conservation Forester

Guests in attendance:

Jess Milby, NRCS Specialist, Albion

VERIFICATION OF MEETING NOTICE AND ADOPTION OF AGENDA

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 Bauer and Thoene had asked to be excused.

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

MINUTES

R. Vlach asked for corrections and/or additions to the June 25, 2026, Board meeting minutes. None being heard, R. Vlach announced that the minutes will stand approved as presented.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Russell Callan, General Manager, highlighted expenditures of \$2,550.00 to KOLN-TV for sponsorship of the drought report; \$37,030.00 to VandWater Inc., for telemetry for the vadose sites; and \$32,214.93 to Ward Laboratories, Inc. for soil and water samples.

DeBower, James Eschliman, Mohrman, Podolak, Shadle, and Smith arrived at 5:03 p.m.

Callan highlighted additional expenditures of \$357.00 to Firefly Reservations for the Davis Creek reservation portal; \$10,000.00 to Bartlett for assistance for their splash pad project; and \$7,914.00 to DWEE for the chemigation program. Callan stated that our techs and staff work on the chemigation program all summer. DWEE has no "hands-on" involvement with the chemigation process. NRD managers are working on a draft resolution to get the whole program moved to the NRDs, eliminating the fees sent to DWEE every year.

Kauk asked if people make reservations through Firefly now for Davis Creek. Callan replied that they do, as of January 1, 2026.

Smith asked if the flow meter cost-share listed on the Supplemental Agenda was an over-allotted amount. Callan stated that some producers have cost-share and/or telemetry on multiple meters.

James Eschliman motioned, seconded by Jeremy Eschliman to approve the July Treasurer's Report. Motion carried by electronic vote. Directors voting yes: Amsberry, Bartak, DeBower, James Eschliman, Jeremy Eschliman, Kauk, King, Knutson, Kruse, Mohrman, Nitsch, Petersen, Podolak, Shadle, Smith, Sterner, A. Vlach. Director present but not voting: R. Vlach. Directors absent: Bauer, Thoene.

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

R. Vlach asked for public comments, none were heard.

FORESTER'S REPORT

Aron Lewis, Conservation Forester, reported that he was in Crawford helping with the Log Road fire during the weekend of July 4th, adding that it burned 1,500 acres and was started by dry lightning and dry conditions. He stated that he has been working on fuel reduction projects in Rock County and sick tree calls, adding that he has seen a lot of fungal infections; however, they should go away as things dry out from the last 2 wet months.

Lewis stated that Katie Arn is the forestry intern in the office and she will continue to work one day a week while attending school in Kearney. He added that she will be helping map projects in Rock County.

Lewis stated that the annual NRD tree meeting will be August 5-6 at the Lower Elkhorn NRD, adding that technicians will go to the meeting. He said that he would not be attending, though, as he has a baby due next month and he will be leaving for paternity leave until October.

Kauk asked if he had heard about the ash borer in Lincoln. Lewis stated he thought they already had it there and added that he has a general plan and the City has a plan as well.

Jeremy Eschliman asked about fall planting and why Lower Loup NRD doesn't do plantings in the Fall as well as Spring. While Lewis agreed that Fall is a great time to do tree planting, he stated that staff is doing chemigation inspections and sampling, and with school starting soon, there would be no help for getting them planted.

NRCS REPORT

Jess Milby, NRCS, Albion, reported that they have wrapped up the 2026 EQIP contract period and have been working on implementation and payments, adding that they have been meeting with the producers to be sure the projects are meeting their goals. With the 2026 projects funded, they are starting to focus on FY 2027. Milby added that NRCS staff has been attending trainings in technical skills so they can better help producers and have been working on writing

accepted CRP contracts. She added that the grassland CRP sign-up closed May 29th and have recently learned that 5 applications in Boone County and 2 applications in Howard County have been accepted.

Milby also reported that FSA approved the second round of Continuous CRP batching with Lower Loup East, receiving 14 approved applications. If acres remain available, FSA will consider offers for subsequent batching periods. General CRP enrollments closed April 17th, with 4 applications being approved.

INFORMATION & EDUCATION REPORT

Drought Report Sponsorships

Alan Bartels, I&E Coordinator, reported that the NRD has started sponsoring the Drought Report on KOLN 10/11 News which covers the entire LLNRD area reaching over 240,000 homes. The report begins with a 10-second weather billboard featuring our logo and website address, plus our logo is on the screen during the segment. This will air every Thursday at 5:00 a.m., 6:00 a.m., noon, and 10:00 p.m. Our logo will also appear on their streaming channel and Facebook page when the drought report is given, which gets it in front of another 260,000 followers.

We are also sponsoring the report on NTV, covering more than 90% of the District. This will air Thursdays at 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., and features our logo and website. They run several promos throughout the week encouraging viewers to tune into the LLNRD Drought Report. It will also appear on their FOX affiliates on Thursdays at 9:00 p.m. NTV and FOX reaches more than 290,000 households.

Both sponsorships will run for one year. Bartels also noted that he had seen it on Twitter (X) which wasn't included in the contract.

LLNRD Fall Directors Tour

Bartels announced that the tour will be held on September 14-15, 2026, and take the place of the September Committee meetings.

NRD Annual Conference

Bartels reported that the NARD Annual Conference will be held September 28-29 in Kearney.

ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

Callan stated that Naprstek was not present to give his report; however, Callan briefly reviewed the agenda topics.

Water Quality Sampling and Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) Documentation

Callan stated that we are always re-analyzing how we collect, store, and transport water quality samples, as to how it relates to the accuracy of nitrate results.

Chemigation Inspections

Callan stated that 550 inspections have been completed thus far and added that there will be about 1,200 total done before the end of the season.

LPRBC Depletion and Consumption Analysis

Callan stated that the tech group of the Integrated Management Plan has been reviewing the plan and looking at some of the recharge projects, canal retiming, etc., trying to figure how to account for water and how to calculate it through the system, taking into consideration the reporting requirements.

ENGINEER'S REPORT

Powerhouse (Fullerton) Dam

Kevin Gustafson, District Engineer, reported that there was a meeting with EA Engineering on Monday and they were looking at options which they will get to us by the end of the month. He added that they have come up with what he had in mind and will have more of an update later.

Columbus Regional Flood Assessment

Gustafson reported that JEO has been selected for the Columbus Regional Flood Assessment project and the initial study has been completed for the Columbus area. He added that they are looking at expanding their studies to include the Loup River from Columbus to the St. Paul area. They will have a stakeholders group formed of emergency management, the City of Columbus, LLNRD, and Platte County personnel.

St. Edward Flood Mitigation

Gustafson reported that a request for assistance was received and that he and Callan have a meeting scheduled for next week to get caught up on the project. He added that JEO is working with St. Edward on the project.

Mud Creek WFPO

Gustafson stated that surveying started on July 15th with the geotechnical investigations and will start in pasture areas on August 10th, moving to crop ground areas after harvest. He added that he has been in contact with the City and landowners and everything is going smoothly so far.

Kauk asked if this is the project by Ansley. Gustafson stated it is.

Gustafson added that JEO has also started consulting with NRCS on the required environmental reporting.

Pibel Lake Recreational Trail

Gustafson reported that JEO is finalizing the design and permits have been obtained. He added that he is hoping to have the project ready to go out for bids by the end of next month so that the project can get started this fall.

Sargent Flood Project

Gustafson reported that the design is done for the project and we have submitted a BRIC grant application per NEMA's recommendation. He added that he found out that the hazard mitigation funding is no longer available. He said we hope to hear back on the BRIC grant some time in September.

James Eschliman asked the total cost of the project. Gustafson stated it is about \$6.4 million.

MANAGER'S REPORT

Budget Hearing Date/Time

Callan stated that a motion was needed to set the budget hearing date and time.

Kruse motioned, seconded by Knutson, to set the budget hearing for September 3rd at 5:10 p.m. Motion carried by electronic vote, all present voting yes.

Callan stated that the budget spreadsheet will be uploaded to tablets soon.

Water Strategies

Callan stated that a Water Strategies update was placed at each Director's spot.

Litigation

No update.

New Hires

Callan introduced Joanne Wells and announced that she had begun her new position as Financial Secretary.

Non-action Reports

Callan stated that NSWCP funds, which is our cost-share project that comes from the State, were part of the money that was transferred from the Nebraska Environmental Trust in 2025 and that those funds are now under litigation and the judge has ordered that all payment from the State be stopped. Callan added that we have contacted producers that have a current contract and informed them that payments will not be made from NSWCP State funds at this time. He also stated that the \$100,000 from NRD funds will still go out for planned grazing systems which we will pay out. There are a few people that have approved contracts and have started their project but currently will not be paid. He also added that they are predicting 12-18 months before the lawsuit is settled.

Callan stated that the Water Sustainability Fund grant for the vadose project with CPNRD and UBBNRD is part of the litigation, so that funding for that project has been put on hold as well. He stated that we have funded the project so far but will not get any reimbursements until the litigation has been figured out. He added that he has been talking with Jesse Bradley at DWEE to see if we will be able to get reimbursed if we pay producers. He stated that there is verbiage that states that DWEE's money must go directly to the landowner, so it is unknown at this time if we would be able to get reimbursed if we were to pay them.

Smith asked if work is continued, if we will get reimbursed. Callan stated that it depends on the judge's ruling.

Bartak asked if we knew who brought the lawsuit. Callan replied that he didn't.

Callan added that the planned grazing systems will still get paid from NRD funds.

Callan also reported that bids were received on the trailer and mower that were advertised and that the high bids were \$3,110 and \$2,165, respectively.

Eschliman asked how many junior water rights were shut down due to drought status. Callan stated that there were about a dozen and they were mostly for storage rights, so there hasn't been much effect.

NARD REPORT

James Eschliman stated he didn't have anything to report.

NRC REPORT

Amsberry reported that a meeting will be held on Wednesday in Kearney but doesn't know what funding will look like. Shadle added that the scoring committee will go forward with scoring and will see how the lawsuit goes.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/FUTURE MEETING TOPICS

It was announced that the Fall Directors Tour will be in September and will take the place of Committee meetings.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business before the Board, Chairman R. Vlach declared the meeting adjourned at 5:36 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 in the Grand Island Independent. The next Board of Directors meeting will be held September 3, 2026, at 5:00 p.m., at the Headquarters Office in Ord, Nebraska.

Larry Mohrman
Secretary