

**NORTH PLATTE NATURAL RESOURCES  
DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
MEETING**

**April 14, 2016**

The regular meeting of the North Platte Natural Resources District Board of Directors was called to order at 3:00 p.m. MDT, April 14, 2016, by Kent Andreas at the North Platte NRD conference room, 100547 Airport Road, Scottsbluff, Nebraska. Notice of the meeting was given to the public by publishing a legal notice in the April 7, 2016, Scottsbluff *Star-Herald*. Andreas informed meeting attendees that this meeting would be conducted in accordance with the Open Meetings Act, a copy of which is posted in the meeting room for public inspection.

Board members present: Kent Andreas, Gary Darnall, Dave Deines, Gerald Dillman, Roger Eirich, Chuck Henkel, Dave Ostdiek, and Pete Lapaseotes. Absent: Dan Weinreis. Others present: John Berge, Barb Cross, Scott Schaneman, Dave Wolf, Carolyn Hudson, Lynn Okicki, and Dave Christian, NPNRD staff; Curtis Cloud, Natural Resources Conservation Service; Melody Dobson, American Doorstop Project; and Thad Kuntz, Adaptive Resources, Inc.

The following items of informational material were made available to the Directors electronically prior to the Board Meeting:

1. Meeting Notice
2. Agenda
3. Minutes, North Platte Natural Resources District, Board of Directors Meeting, March 10, 2016.

4. Treasurer's Report (Preliminary)

The following items were provided to the Directors at the Board Meeting:

1. Agenda
2. Treasurer's Report
3. Manager's Report
4. North Platte Natural Resources District Proposal for Sponsorship, submitted as a New Project in the Program Focus Area: Public Relations, Agriculture Education & Preservation. Presented by American Doorstop Project, Melody Dobson & Jody L Lamp, National Co-Coordinator.
5. Minutes, North Platte Natural Resources District, Budget & Personnel Subcommittee, March 24, 2016.
6. Minutes, North Platte Natural Resources District, Water Resources Subcommittee, March 21, 2016.
7. Table of Lease Rates for 2016 Permanent Retirements Only.
8. Table of Lease Rates for 2016 Temporary Leases.
9. Minutes, North Platte Natural Resources District, District Operations Subcommittee Meeting, March 24, 2016.
10. Letter to Mr. Alan Gehring, State Conservation Engineer, of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, from the North Platte Natural Resources District, dated April 14, 2016, regarding the completion report for the Gering Valley Watershed Project.

**3. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meetings**

The Board reviewed the minutes of the March 10, 2016, regular Board meeting.

Moved by Ostdiek, seconded by Eirich, to approve the minutes of the March 10, 2016, regular Board meeting. Motion passed.

Ayes: Andreas, Darnall, Eirich, Henkel, Lapaseotes, Ostdiek,

Nay: None

Abstain: Deines, Dillman

Absent: Weinreis

#### **4. Treasurer's Report and Accounts Payable**

Dave Ostdiek reviewed the Treasurer's report with the Board. Moved by Dillman, seconded by Henkel, to accept the Treasurer's report and pay the bills as listed. Motion passed.

Ayes: Andreas, Darnall, Deines, Dillman, Eirich, Henkel, Lapaseotes, Ostdiek,

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Weinreis

#### **5. Comments from the Public**

There were no comments from the public.

#### **6. Manager's Report**

Berge reported the addition of Steve Smith to work as a Resource Technician. Steve comes to us from Lincoln where he most recently worked for US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. He has a bachelor's degree in Finance and is pursuing a second degree in Fisheries and Wildlife.

Travis Preston and others are working on several different projects related to

web-based GIS applications, including an improved version of the agricultural mapping app that Jeff presented to you over a year ago. This app's availability is dependent on our ability to utilize our ESRI licensing for this purpose and some technical issues are still being worked on with potential vendors. In addition to that, we will be hosting telemetry data on our website for review and management by landowners.

We have had two conferences with Idea Bank, the firm that we are working with on re-development of our website. We have seen a mock-up of the site and are working with the firm on content, including a portal to dashboards related to telemetry data, water use and potentially the agricultural mapping app.

We are in preliminary talks with ARI to prove up irrigation efficiency numbers in our model, which could really make a difference when it comes to calculating consumptive use. This would potentially be a collaborative project between the NRD, USDA ARS and NRCS utilizing telemetry, soil moisture probes, precipitation monitoring and data loggers. As this proposal gets more fleshed out, we will apprise the board. We are also in discussions with Enterprise Irrigation District on some potential leasing projects on their ditch.

We currently have obligated funds for about a quarter of the required meters in the fully appropriated area of the district. We are working on outreach, including phone calls directly to each landowner who has not yet applied for cost-share. We will likely have plenty of grant dollars to complete this important project. We attended a presentation by Jacob Fritts of the Nature Conservancy and Trenton Franz of the University of Nebraska in reference to their Western Nebraska Irrigation Project which

is using data collection devices, specifically moisture sensors in a stretch of the South Platte River as a way for landowners to better manage their water usage. TNC and the University expressed interest in doing a similar project in our District.

At the March Board Meeting, Berge was instructed to open a CD at Valley Bank with the proceeds from an expiring CD at First State Bank. That task is complete.

We have experienced a few delays in the shipment of the components of the telemetry project. Those delays are related to shipping problems that AMCI is experiencing from one of their vendor sources in China. We have informed the Department of Natural Resources of these delays and are working with AMCI to receive the shipment as soon as possible. The North Platte NRD was awarded a \$750,000 grant with a \$250,000 cash match from the Nebraska Environmental Trust for telemetry expansion. This grant, in conjunction with the DNR DAMP money that we've already received, will expand our budget to nearly \$1.3 million and expand our reach with these devices to 861 meters by the end of 2019.

Jerry Dillman, Kent Andreas, and Dave Deines from the board and Dave W., Barb and I met with members of the North Platte Valley Water Association (NPVWA) for a regularly scheduled meeting. One of the items on the agenda of that meeting was the future of the organization. Following a very robust discussion with those members, it was decided that NPVWA would continue to exist and function, but the Association would not be soliciting money this year, and would be very mindful of expenses. That organization will meet immediately after the NRD Board meeting

every other month starting in June.

The Scottsbluff-Gering United Chamber of Commerce Agribusiness Committee is again hosting the annual water tour of the North Platte Project. I am co-chairman of the Water Tour, and will be speaking during the two-day tour. The tour takes place on July 19-20, and reservations will be accepted beginning on May 1. I spoke to the Nebraska LEAD class about our management activities in the North Platte NRD on April 4. Kyle Ann Hopkins is a participant in this year's Water Leaders Academy. It is my hope that each year we can have an employee go through this important program. Scott Schaneman participated last year. I will be speaking at the Global Water for Food Conference in Lincoln on April 22. Barb, Tracy, Carolyn and Lynn will be attending and participating in the National Groundwater Summit in Denver next week.

## **7. Legislative Preview**

Berge reported the North Platte Valley Water Association met and discussed two things: the fully appropriated study by the Department of Natural Resources and the future of the organization. It was decided that the organization will continue, but they would have regular meetings every two months and more meetings during the legislative session. LB 1038, which would deal with the purposed purchase of Spencer Dam water rights by Nebraska Game and Parks and the Niobrara NRDs and other bills incorporated into it, passed 48-0-1 on final reading. Berge also mentioned that a property tax bill was passed, with most of the relief going to agriculture. The Natural Resource commission will meet on April 19-20 to discuss the Water Sustainability Fund grants, and the board will approve

shortly afterwards.

## **8. American Doorstop Project Presentation**

Melody Dobson presented information on a project she is developing that details the history of agriculture. She is beginning to do research and collect information in Nebraska, then will tour through Montana and North Dakota to continue her research. Her financing is in part through the Montana Historical Society and she is looking for financial support to keep the project going. Melody was instrumental in developing a wheat harvest documentary that won an Emmy award.

## **9. Report from the Budget and Personnel Subcommittee**

Ostdiek reported for the Budget and Personnel subcommittee the upcoming budget meeting schedule and timeline. He reminded the board about upcoming events. The first increment of the Integrated Management Plan (IMP) ends in 2018. The Governor and legislature have placed property tax relief in a very high priority. Land valuations are eventually going to go down, and the District will still have the need for funds to meeting IMP obligations and goals. Berge and Zayac also reminded the committee of an additional tax that can only be used to administer and implement ground water management activities and integrated management activities. The tax is only available through fiscal year 2017-2018 and generates around \$240,000 per year for the District.

## **10. Report and Recommendations from the Water Resources Subcommittee**

### **a. Proposed Rule Change Subject and Timeline**

The Water Resources Subcommittee met March 21<sup>st</sup> and had a very preliminary discussion regarding proposed rule changes. Some of the topics discussed at the

meeting were: variances, flow meters, certifications options, transfers, compliances/penalties, fee structures for various programs, back-up wells, and others. The committee discussed the topics briefly and informed staff which ones they were interested in discussing at future committee meetings.

**b. Lease and Retirement Rates for Fiscal Year 2017**

The subcommittee discussed the staff proposal for standardized water retirement agreement rates. The purpose of the standardized rates is to establish a policy for the District that will base a payment for water on the location within the unit response function (URF) zones and on verifiable irrigation history. The flat rates would allow for shorter time in lease negotiations with landowners. The rates can be reexamined and approved by the full board each year. Payments will be based upon 15 year payouts and apply to both permanent retirements and temporary leases. For example, for a permanent retirement with an excellent irrigation history (at least ten years), the standard rate would be \$250.00 per acre, per year. The rate for a permanent retirement of lands with poor irrigation history, located in a 100% URF zone would be set as \$195.00 per acre, per year. Rate tables were provided to the Board. The subcommittee unanimously recommended the motion to the board. Moved by Darnall, seconded by Lapasotes to approve the standardize water lease rates including permanent ground water only retirements and temporary surface water, ground water, and comingled leases. The three temporary lease rate tables will start at \$195.00, and the rates will be reduced based upon URF zones and irrigation history. The top rate for the permanent retirements remained at \$250 and

to limit the temporary leases on a single tract of land to two, five year contracts, totaling ten years on ground water only acres. Motion passed.

Ayes: Andreas, Darnall, Deines, Dillman, Eirich, Henkel, Lapaseotes,

Ostdiek

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Weinreis

## **11. Report and Recommendations from District Operations Subcommittee**

### **a. Report on Proposed Cost-Share Changes**

Berge wanted to discuss some possible changes to the NSWCP cost-share program. Some of the practices the District cost-shares on do not help us meet our Integrated Management Plan (IMP) goals and obligations. The applications were down this year, and the District spent about \$40,000 that did not help us meet our IMP obligations.

After doing some research, staff found that other NRDs fund a limited number of practices and the payment limitations range from \$3000 to \$10,000. Producers still have the opportunity to cost-share on practices not on the NRD list through federal programs. The committee asked staff to have a schedule of practices they would like to see, determine the amount of cost-share they would like to assign, and bring the proposal back to the committee.

### **b. Proposed Rate changes for Harrisburg Water System for Fiscal Year 2017**

Berge gave an update on the Harrisburg Water System. The District has

setup a contingency fund to help with future maintenance costs. The system is over 20 years old and will eventually incur large repair costs. The contingency fund will not be able to cover the costs alone, so one alternative to help with the fund is to raise water rates. The last time the rates were raised was in 2008, and the increase would help contribute to the contingency fund. The subcommittee unanimously recommended the motion to the board. Moved by Dillman, seconded by Henkel, to approve a three percent increase of the base fee for residential and commercial customers and increase the special fee to \$15.00 per 1000 gallons for special circumstances effective July 1, 2016. Motion passed.

Ayes: Andreas, Darnall, Deines, Dillman, Eirich, Henkel, Lapaseotes,

Ostdiek

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Weinreis

## **12. Consideration of Gering Watershed Project**

Berge reported the board needs to verify that the Gering Valley Project is completed and all the funds have been spent. Moved by Eirich, seconded by Ostdiek to approve the final Gering Watershed Report. Motion passed.

Ayes: Andreas, Darnall, Deines, Dillman, Eirich, Henkel, Lapaseotes, Ostdiek

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Weinreis

### **13. Staff Spotlight: Lynn Okicki**

Lynn Okicki started working for the District on February 1<sup>st</sup> and really is enjoying it. She currently is working in the water quality department. She has helped Carolyn with the spring levels. She moved to the area from Denver a year ago and loves camping and fishing.

### **14. Adjourn**

Moved by Dillman, seconded by Darnall, to adjourn at 4:12 p.m., MDT. Motion passed.

Ayes: Andreas, Darnall, Deines, Dillman, Eirich, Henkel, Lapaseotes, Ostdiek

Nay: None

Abstain: None

Absent: Weinreis