

**North Platte Natural Resources District  
Board of Directors Meeting**

**April 8, 2021**

The regular meeting of the North Platte Natural Resources District (NRD) Board of Directors was called to order in person at 3:00 p.m. MST, April 8, 2021, by Roger Eirich, at the North Platte NRD Offices (Agenda item #1). A zoom or phone conference call option was available to the public. Notice of the meeting was given to the public by publishing a legal notice in the April 1, 2021, Scottsbluff *Star-Herald*. Eirich informed meeting attendees that this meeting would be conducted in accordance with the Open Meetings Act, a copy of which is posted on the NPNRD website for public inspection (Agenda item #2).

Board members present: Kent Andreas, Gary Darnall, Dave Deines (by zoom) Roger Eirich, Chuck Henkel, Pete Lapaseotes, Ryan Reuter, and Mark Westphal. Board member absent: Dan Weinreis.

Chairman Eirich called for a motion to excuse Weinreis from the meeting. Motion made by Andreas, seconded by Reuter, to excuse board member Weinreis from the meeting. Motion passed.

Ayes: Andreas, Darnall, Deines, Eirich, Henkel, Lapaseotes, Reuter, Westphal

Nay: none

Abstain: none

Absent: Weinreis

Others present in person: John Berge, Barb Hoehn, Danielle Schafer, Scott Schaneman, Lydia Hendrickson, Travis Preston, Kyle Ann Hopkins of NPNRD staff; Lex Larson, Nic Lease, Lindsay Schroeder, J.G. Elliot co.; Megan Dockery and Steve Smith, Simmons Olson Law Firm; Thad Kuntz, Adaptive Resources, Inc.; Sarah Gray, NRCS District Conservationist. Others present by zoom: Dean Edson, Executive Director, NARD; Larry Reynolds, NARD Board of

Directors from Tri Basin NRD @ Holdrege, Jim Eschliman, President, NARD Board of Directors; Kate Gibson, Research Project Manager, and Ankit Chandra, Program Coordinator with Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute.

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

1. Zoom Meeting Instructions
2. Final Agenda
3. Minutes, North Platte Natural Resources District, March 11, 2021
4. Final Treasurers Report
5. Manager's Report
6. Legislative Update
7. Legal Opinion on Redistricting Requirements
9. Master Planning Scope of Work
10. Nutrient Management Stakeholder Mapping Project
11. Health Insurance Talking Points
12. Water Resources Committee Minutes, April 1, 2021
13. Seametrics Proposal
14. Sitzman Pilot Proposal

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

The same items as listed above were provided to board members in person.

### **3. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The Board reviewed the minutes of the March 11, 2021 regular Board meeting.

Motion made by Henkel, seconded by Reuter, to approve the minutes of the March 11, 2021 regular Board meeting. Motion passed.

Ayes: Andreas, Darnall, Deines, Eirich, Henkel, Lapaseotes, Reuter, Westphal

Nay: none

Abstain: none

Absent: Weinreis

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

Ryan Reuter reviewed the Treasurer's report with the Board. Motion made by Darnall, seconded by Westphal, to accept the Treasurer's report and pay the bills as listed. Motion passed.

Ayes: Andreas, Darnall, Deines, Eirich, Henkel, Lapaseotes, Reuter, Westphal

Nay: none

Abstain: none

Absent: Weinreis

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

Sarah Gray, NRCS District Conservationist asked to speak and thanked the group for their help with the Local Working Group meeting. She also went over some of NRCS's accomplishments over the last year.

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

General Manager John Berge indicated that the written report was sent to the board and was available on the NPNRD website. He highlighted the following items:

Administrative:

- Barb Hoehn Retirement – Barb will be retiring as of April 30, and I will name an interim replacement for her in the coming days. Since this announcement, Scott Schaneman has been named interim Assistant Manager and Craig Uhrig will be the interim Water Department Manager.

- Office Reopening – We announced on April 5 that our office would be reopening to the public, without appointment. As you know, our offices have been closed since March 20, 2020. Our staff will be rearranging their schedules to ensure full staffing on that date as well. The press release is attached as 6a.
- Budget Meetings – Department Heads and I met on April 7 to discuss the budget outline. We are working now on our first draft of the budget for FY 2022 and will have a draft to the Budget and Personnel Committee by April 30. Staff had a meeting this week.

#### Projects and Programs:

- Spring Levels Presentation – Normally, we would provide a spring levels presentation to you at the April Board Meeting, but that has necessarily been delayed. We are now hoping to provide that presentation to you at the May Board Meeting.

#### Outreach:

- Surface Water Meeting – Scott and I are working with a select group of surface water Districts to schedule a meeting with DNR and the NPNRD at the end of April or beginning of May to discuss infrastructure needs.
- Water Tour/Water Conference – The Chamber Water Tour will be held on August 17-18 and will follow the Nebraska Water Conference held on August 16 in Scottsbluff.

## **7. Legislative Update**

Berge reported on upcoming hearings and current bills in the legislature. The board packet included a table that shows bills. Some are related to Natural Resources and some to Political Subdivisions. Berge indicated that members could review the printed report.

## **8. Discussion of Redistricting Requirements**

Berge asked NPNRD Attorney Steve Smith to discuss this issue. Smith indicated that his letter of March 22, 2021 is self-explanatory. When the North Platte NRD was created, the decision was made to split into subdistricts. All registered voters in the district vote for all candidates on the ballot. NPNRD has been solicited by former State Senator Tyson Larson, who is now with G-Gov, to help us with redistricting requirements. According to Tim Erickson, of the Legislative Councils Office, under U.S. and Nebraska law, the state is required to redistrict based on the census. There is no requirement for NRD's to follow that. This NRD is not required to change anything. There will be a report compiled for NRD's based on the census. NPNRD staff could compile numbers based on that to review each district's and consider any changes they may or may not wish to make.

## **9. Discussion of Master Planning**

Berge informed the board that there will be a staff retreat on May 3, 2021 with our facilitator to begin the process of updating the Master Plan. There is a document that shows the schedule of meetings. A board retreat is on that agenda. Board input is very important to completing the process.

## **10. Discussion of Stakeholder Mapping for Nutrient Management**

Kate Gibson, Research Project Manager, and Ankit Chandra, Program Coordinator with Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute have been helping to develop a strategy for an outreach plan. This affects municipalities and others. Recent conversations with Gibson and Nic Brozovic (Director of Policy, Water for Food Daugherty Global Institute) have assisted the NPNRD in forming a plan for implementation of our Nutrient Management Plan. The board was shown the wheel that Chandra developed to bring everyone involved in Nutrient Management into focus. The wheel is a tool for indicating

who we should be interacting with and is a conversation starter designed to make sure everyone who needs to be involved in the process is included (i.e., Funders, Regulators, Educators, Suppliers, and those impacted by contamination).

#### **11. Health Insurance Discussion with NARD Representatives**

Eirich started the conversation, discussing the fact that this NRD is required to carry health insurance on employees who do not wish to be on our insurance.

Dean Edson replied sighting the background on the program. "Up until 2006, there was an agent who ran the insurance program. It was discovered that it was being run illegally. The program was upside down by 1.3 million in claims. A decision was made to move forward with forming an insurance company and running it ourselves (23 NRD's through NARD). They ended up going back and paying claims that had not been paid. They worked for a year to get the new insurance set up. To have an adequate pool, every full-time employee who is eligible for insurance needed to participate. All 23 districts agreed. Local districts could decide to add spouses or families. The program average premium increases have been approximately 4 ½ percent a year. They have tried to maintain the cost of the program. When Obama care was passed, we could not go backwards on benefits. We were grandfathered in so we did not have to add certain programs. All caps went away. The maximum amount a person could receive. It's this way with all insurance now." "It will be a dangerous thing if the district goes off on its own." Edson went over the profit sheets and stated that "If we went out on our own, a huge bill would make us have to raise our insurance rates. In the pool, costs get spread out to 23 districts. This year we are exceeding by \$984,000.00. Close to a million dollars. Every year, the premium level is set at a break even point." There are 375 employees on insurance covering 800 people. Trying to cut costs is difficult. Berge gave an example of several employees in this office who have other

insurance. This NRD is spending an additional \$50,000.00 per year on employees who do not need the insurance. Edson stated that the districts agreed that all employees would be covered. In 2007 the roster of employees was smaller. The roster of employees has changed. With Obama Care, with no caps, the individuals with policies on our insurance have \$700,000.00 in claims. We start cutting people out, without caps on health care coverage, it would be a problem. Other policies may not provide the same coverage. Obama care says we cannot drop coverages. They stay the same or increase. Full-time employees must stay in the pool. We can shop on our own deal. Berge discussed how Ryan Reuters health insurance works, and it is less than 50% of our rates. Why are we spending 40% more for coverages that we could get somewhere else? This NRD's premiums have increased from \$257,000.00 to \$365,000.00 a year. It is hard to explain to our constituents. If we go to the open markets, we could buy whatever coverages we want and could drop certain coverages. Berge asked Edson if NARD shops for other coverages. Edson stated that NARD looks every year. "We could find something else, but it wouldn't be the same. The worry is what happens next year." Berge asked if NARD had considered joining other pools. Edson indicated that "yes, but they worry about representation on the board. There is not another political subdivision pool we can join. We have not added others from political subdivisions. Every year, the NARD Stop Loss committee looks at renewals. They have an actuary and they bid out the insurance-based on what levels were paid out last year in premiums. The insurance company will most likely pay us back this year. Lapaseotes asked "what happens to the extra money, the \$984,000.00?" Edson stated that there is a two-month lag to get the money back. Berge asked what the reserve amount is required to be? Edson stated that a minimum reserve is required. No dollar amount was given. There were no other questions

and Berge stated that we will follow up with them. The risk pool will meet at the new NARD office and they will have zoom capabilities.

## **12. Water Resources Committee Report**

### **a. Consideration of Seametrics AGH 3000 to a Two-Year Pilot Study**

Berge went over the offer from Seametrics. The current meters were installed to specifications at the time of install. The new meters will need to be re-piped at a considerable cost to the producers. The value to producers is much cheaper with a Seametrics meter.

Motion made by Darnall that Seametrics AG 2000 meters may be replaced by Seametrics AG 3000 meters with a maximum cost share of \$542.50 (75% of replacement cost) per meter, under a two-year pilot program. Replacements done with the Seametrics AG 3000 meter cannot exceed 50 meters within the district. Meters must be installed per manufactures instructions and must adhere to NPNRD rules and regulations. This cost share will be added to the previously approved option to replace Seametrics AG 2000 meters with a meter on the current approved flow meter list to include McCrometer, Mastermeter, Netafim Octave, and Field Net, up to a maximum cost share not to exceed \$1,050.00 (75% of replacement cost) per meter, seconded by Westphal. Motion passed.

Ayes: Andreas, Darnall, Deines, Eirich, Henkel, Lapaseotes, Reuter, Westphal

Nay: none

Abstain: none

Absent: Weinreis

### **b. Consideration of Sitzman Nutrient Management Pilot Study**

Scott Schaneman went over the provisions of the study involving Craig Stizman's farm. He stated that basically, there are ways to manage nutrients without breaking the bank.



There are already cost-share dollars out there for nutrient management. A Scotts Bluff County producer is using alternate cropping and other methods to work on this and is working with an agronomist on the project. It is a two-year study and it would work well with the things that this NRD is already cost sharing on. This will help with both soil and water contamination. Stizman is going to try and have Panhandle Coop help with the costs. NPNRD has some water quality funds that can also help with the project.

Motion made by Lapaseotes, seconded by Darnall, to proceed with the study. Motion passed.

Ayes: Andreas, Darnall, Deines, Eirich, Henkel, Lapaseotes, Reuter, Westphal

Nay: none

Abstain: none

Absent: Weinreis

### **13. Consideration of Resolution Honoring Barb Hoehn**

Berge indicated that there would be a pie social for Barb Hoehn's retirement on April 30<sup>th</sup>. He read the following resolution:

**Whereas**, Barb has served with distinction as a member of the District staff for over five years and has earned the trust and gratitude of her fellow staff and Board members of the North Platte Natural Resources District;

**Whereas**, Barb has been a strong advocate for the conservation of natural resources, an effective steward of public funds, and the epitome of a public servant;

**Whereas**, Barb spearheaded the design and construction of the Greener Gardens Greenhouse, a Project of the North Platte Natural Resources District, and because of her hard work and dedication to this project, it has become an influential part of the District's outreach

and education to the public in not just our District and but across the State of Nebraska and beyond;

**Whereas**, her sense of humor, kindness, energy, and graciousness has enriched those fortunate enough to know and work with her;

**And Whereas**, the North Platte Natural Resources District Board of Directors, on behalf of the entire District, staff and public, wishes to extend its gratitude and sincere best wishes for every happiness in the future.

**Now Therefore Be It Resolved**, that the North Platte Natural Resources District, on behalf of its Board of Directors and staff recognizes and appreciates Barbara Hoehn's service, achievements and contributions. Furthermore, this Resolution shall be duly recorded and spread across the minutes of the North Platte Natural Resources District on this 8<sup>th</sup> day of April 2021.

Motion made by Henkel, seconded by Reuter, to adopt the resolution. Motion passed.

Ayes: Andreas, Darnall, Deines, Eirich, Henkel, Lapaseotes, Reuter, Westphal

Nay: none

Abstain: none

Absent: Weinreis

#### **14. Adjourn**

There being no further business, the Chairman called for a motion to adjourn. Motion made by Andreas, seconded by Reuter, to adjourn at 4:19 p.m., MST. Motion passed.

Ayes: Andreas, Darnall, Deines, Eirich, Henkel, Lapaseotes, Reuter, Westphal

Nay: none

Abstain: none

Absent: Weinreis