



NEBRASKA ASSOCIATION OF RESOURCES DISTRICTS

601 S. 12th St. Suite 201
Lincoln, NE 68508

nard@nrdnet.org
(402) 471-7670

March 23, 2007

TO: NARD Board, NRD Managers and Conservation Partners
FROM: Dean E. Edson, NARD Executive Director
RE: March 23 NARD UPDATE

Republican River Basin Financing -- The Republican River NRDs have been meeting with state agencies and Irrigation Districts in the basin to discuss surface water leasing and potential long-term purchase of surface water to assist with compact compliance. Leasing or purchasing surface water would fill short-term needs of the basin and also act as a “shock-absorber” in future water-short years for compact compliance.

One of the problems related to this solution is financing. Thus, NARD has been working with bond counsel to come up with some statutory language to allow the local NRDs in the basin to assist with financing through bonds and/or revenue notes. This would allow for repayment of the bonds over time rather than coming up with all of the tax funds needed in the first year. In the next week, a draft will be offered to senators for consideration as part of the solution on the water issues. In summary, this is how the program could work.

- The provisions and authorities would only apply to the a natural resources district with jurisdiction that includes a river subject to an interstate compact among three or more states and that also includes one or more irrigation districts within the compact river basin.
- Allows the local NRDs, irrigation districts and other local entities to be involved in negotiation and development of a solution to the issues at hand.
- Qualified projects that could be financed would include any one or any combination of the following:
 - (1) The acquisition, ownership and management of water rights, including storage rights, with respect to a river or any of its tributaries.
 - (2) The acquisition by purchase or lease, or the administration and management, pursuant to mutual agreement, of canals and other works, including reservoirs, constructed for irrigation from a river or any of its tributaries.
 - (3) Vegetation management, including, but not limited to the removal of invasive species in or near a river or any of its tributaries.
 - (4) Augmentation of river flows with ground water.
 - (5) Such other measures to enhance river flow as are determined appropriate by the board of directors of a qualified natural resources district.
- Allows a qualified natural resources district to issue bonds and refunding bonds of the district, with terms determined appropriate by the board of directors, payable from one or more permitted payment sources:
 - (1) Funds granted to a qualified natural resources district by the state or federal government for one or more qualified projects.

- (2) An occupation tax of up to \$10 per irrigated acre.
- (3) Additional property tax levy authority of up to 10-cents.

- Allows for qualified districts to form joint entities or agencies for the qualified projects and project financing. The qualified natural resources district may issue the bonds or refunding bonds directly, or such bonds may be issued to any interlocal joint entity or to any joint public agency in connection with any joint project which is to be owned, operated, or financed by the joint entity or joint public agency for the benefit of the qualified natural resources district. For the payment of such bonds or refunding bonds, the qualified natural resources district may pledge one or more permitted payment sources.

Vegetation Management Bill Advances – The Natural Resources Committee advanced LB 458, with amendments, to assist local NRDs with vegetation management in rivers and tributaries. The committee amendment is supported by NARD, as it eliminates the unfunded mandate portion of the original bill. The committee amendment creates a 13-member Riparian Vegetation Task Force consisting of the Governor, state agencies, NRDs and a riparian landowner from each of the state's congressional districts. The task force would sunset on June 30, 2009.

The task force is to consult with appropriate federal agencies and develop and prioritize vegetation management goals and plans to accomplish them. The primary focus of the task force shall be in river basins that are fully appropriated or overappropriated. Intent language is included to appropriate \$2 million dollars annually to the Noxious Weed and Invasive Plant Species Assistance Fund for the management of vegetation within the banks of a natural stream or within one hundred feet of the banks of the channel of any natural stream. These funds are to be used only for activities and equipment as part of a vegetation program to improve streamflow.

Extension for ranch operations advanced -- Senators advanced LB 677 last week which would give certain ranch operations an extension to request an inspection of their animal feeding operation. As amended by the Natural Resources Committee amendment, LB 677 would reauthorize the exemption for previously exempt livestock operations. Those operations would have until Jan. 1, 2009, to request an inspection without incurring late fees. Late fees would apply for operations that fail to request an inspection by the deadline.

State Envirothon Competition Set -- The Nebraska State Envirothon is set for May 5th in Fort Robinson, Nebraska. The regional results are in and the State invitations have been sent out. The following schools have confirmed participation in the state competition: Sidney Team 1, Sidney Team 2, Creek Valley, Wauneta-Palisade Team 1, Hayes Center, Superior Team 1, Neligh Team 2, Bellevue East Team A, Pender, Concordia Team B, David City and St. Paul. Superior Team 2 is in the process of determining whether or not their students will be able to compete.

Traditionally, there are 14 schools that compete in the State's Envirothon competition. There are 7 tests that the students will take; aquatics, forestry, policy, special topics, range, soils, and wildlife. The special topics test is weighted heavier than the other tests. It requires an oral presentation designed to solve a problem that Nebraska is currently dealing with. This year's Envirothon theme focuses on the analysis of renewable energy. This year's winner will participate in Canon's National Envirothon competition in Geneva, New York at the Hobart and William Smith Colleges. Congratulations and good luck to all teams participating.

The Nebraska Envirothon competition is always in need of volunteers to help with activities as well as sponsors to help offset the cost of running the event. If you are interesting in assisting with this year's competition, please contact Kody Schrader at (402) 471-7672.