



NEBRASKA ASSOCIATION OF RESOURCES DISTRICTS

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TO: NARD Board, NRD Managers and Conservation Partners
FROM: Dean E. Edson, NARD Executive Director
RE: March 18 NARD UPDATE

NARD Washington DC Trip – Representatives from 10 NRDs were in Washington DC this week to visit with the Nebraska Representatives and Senators. In addition, the group met with several agencies and other Congressional members and staff to discuss natural resource management issues. Highlights of the trip are:

Brian Kennedy, House Resources Committee, Director of Communications – Mr. Kennedy provided an update on ESA Reform. Since the act was adopted 30 years ago, over 1,300 species have been listed and only 10 have been recovered. This is less than 1% success rate. The committee is working on a reform package that makes the federal government a better partner and neighbor to the private landowners, including tax incentives. Peer review of the science used to list the species and habitat designation will be included. Several groups are working with the House and Senate leaders and President Bush to put together a reform bill, which should be introduced in late April.

Mr. Kennedy also provided an update on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) and the proposal to allow oil drilling. When oil drilling was allowed in the Northern Slope of Alaska over 30 years ago, the Caribou population was 3,000 head. Today the herd is estimated at 34,000 head, which disputes the claim by environmental groups that oil drilling destroys habitat. By allowing drilling in ANWR, US production capacity could be increased by 50 percent (an additional 1.2-1.4 million gallons per day) equal to the imports from Saudi Arabia.

In a related matter, the Senate defeated of an amendment that would strip out a provision in the Fiscal Year 2006 Budget Resolution to open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for energy exploration. The Senate struck down the amendment by a vote of 51-49 on Wednesday while several NRDs members were on the Hill watching debate. The full Budget Resolution will be voted on by the Senate at the end of the week.

Kris Polly, National Water Resources Association – Kris Polly, a Nebraska native, provided an update of issues of concern for the NWRA. These included the leadership changes after the election, TMDLs and private/public ventures on providing habitat for endangered species. Several NWRA members in the western states have been working with the USFWS and other partners to propagate and release endangered fish and other species. NWRA is also part of the coalition to reform the endangered species act.

USDA - FSA – Beverly Preston and Chad Chadwell, USDA-FSA, provided an update on CRP and CREP programs. The new Nebraska CREP Program was summarized. In a related note, the CREP program will be formally approved on Saturday, March 19th, in Holdrege. Representative Osborne has led the charge to get this program in place to help producers address water shortages.

Missouri River Basin Association – Dave Cookson, Nebraska Attorney General's Office, provided an update in the Missouri River Basin Association (MRBA) activities. There has been 7 lawsuits filed over the management of the Missouri River. Through MRBA, the state of Nebraska will be working with Transportation and Infrastructure Sub-committee to try to resolve the issues. Congressman Tom Osborne is a member of the sub-committee.

American Farm Bureau – Troy Bredenkamp, another Nebraska native, and lobbyist for AFBF, provided an update on key issues for the agriculture organization. These include working on full funding for the Farm Bill, tax reform, trade agreements and increasing energy supplies.

USDA- NRCS - The group meet with Steve Chick, Gary Margheim, Craig Derickson and Carol Jett, all with NRCS, provided summaries on funding and operations for conservation programs. Dave Gagner, Assistant to the Chief for

NRCS, also addressed the group and provided insight on the politics of Washington. Dave has worked for several organizations in DC over the years including Ducks Unlimited, NACD and NRCS.

NACD – Krysta Harden, Executive Director for the National Association of Conservation Districts, provided a summary of priorities for NACD, including restoring the funding cuts proposed for conservation programs. A summary of budget issues is on page 3 of this update.

CORP of Engineers - Larry Prather, Assistant Director of Civil Works for the US Army CORP of Engineers provided an update of activities, programs and funding for CORP projects. Bob Weaver, independent lobbyist, provided an update of funding and budget issues related to Nebraska projects.

Nebraska Delegation - Following the meetings on Monday and Tuesday, the NRD delegates joined the Nebraska Senators and Representatives at the Nebraska Breakfast on the Hill. Following the breakfast, the NRD delegates had private meetings with Representatives Tom Osborne, Lee Terry, Jeff Fortenberry and Senators Chuck Hagel and Ben Nelson to discuss issues of concern.

Meanwhile, back in Nebraska, the following action occurred:

Advanced to Final Reading:

- **LB 546 (Brown, Bourne, Burling, et al.) Adopt the Nebraska Opportunity Zone Act and create the Nebraska Innovation Zone Commission** - The proposal creates the Nebraska Innovation Zone Commission to develop high technology business between the Omaha and Lincoln business communities, the university system of the State of Nebraska, including the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and the University of Nebraska Medical Center, and Sarpy County, including Offutt Air Force Base. The bill establishes a commission that consists of the following: 1) representatives of Douglas, Sarpy, Lancaster, Saunders and Cass counties, 2) University officials and community colleges, 3) Lincoln and Omaha City Councils, and 4) representatives of Papio-Missouri and Lower Platte South NRDs.

The Natural Resources Committee advanced the following bills to General File:

- **LB 120, Class A Streams** – The committee amendments to the bill prohibits expansion of livestock operations if its livestock waste control facility is located within one mile of a designated cold water Class A stream segment. An exemption is granted to facilities owned by the University of Nebraska if the department determines based on scientific information provided in the application or other available information that the proposed expansion does not pose a potential threat to the stream.
- **LB 140, NRD GW Technician** – The bill adds a tenth member to the Water Well Standards and Contractors Licensing Board by including a natural resources ground water technician, which is one of the classifications for licenses under the board. The current board includes representatives of other license classifications.

Negotiated Rule Making Committee – The Negotiated Rule Making Committee for LB 962 finished their work on March 18th without reaching a consensus on the rule to use. There are several parts of the rule that most agree on, but the major stumbling block remains of what line to use. In the past discussions on the Platte River Cooperative Agreement group, and for establishing the boundaries for the moratorium and management area of the Central and Twin Platte NRDs in 2003, it was generally agreed that a 28/40 line (water pumped for 40 years would have a 28% impact) would be appropriate. However, the Central Nebraska Public Power District is now pushing for a 1/50 line (water pumped for 50 years would have a 1% impact), which would bring in more area to regulation. A 1/50 line could end up regulating groundwater users in the Republican River drainage area to manage flows in the Loup Basin as the lag effect could show a impact. As a compromise, DNR Department suggested a 10/50 line on Friday, but there was not a consensus. For the Central Platte NRD, a 10/50 line extends outside the district's boundary to cover about ¼ of the Upper Big Blue, ¾ of the Tri-Basin and 1/6 of the Little Blue NRDs. The 10/50 line in the Loup Basin extends to the upper 1/3 of Central Platte and the lower 1/3 of the Upper Elkhorn. The Department has decided to review the information and release a draft rule and report for comment in two weeks. No additional meetings of the committee would be called unless DNR determines it necessary. A final rule would come out of the draft rule for public comment at a later date.

COMPARISON OF ADMINISTRATION'S PROPOSED BUDGET FOR FY06 TO CURRENT FY05 BUDGET FOR USDA CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

Conservation Program	FY05	Proposed FY06	Difference	% Change
Discretionary Programs				
Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)	\$697 M	\$620M	-77 M	-11%
Watershed Planning	\$7M	\$5.1	-1.9M	-27%
Watershed Operations (PL566)	\$65M	\$0	-\$65	-100%
Watershed Rehabilitation	\$27M	\$15M	-\$12M	-44%
Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D)	\$51M	\$25M	-\$26M	51%

(Note: RC&D areas 20 years or older will no longer be funded, which includes the Panhandle RC&D and North Central RC&D in Nebraska).

Mandatory Farm Bill Programs _____

Environmental Quality

Incentives Program (EQIP) \$1,076B \$1.068B -\$8M -.70%
(Note: EQIP authorized at \$1.2 billion).

Grassland Reserve Program \$128M \$0M -\$128M -100%
(Note: GRP reached its authorized cap level)

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program
[WHIP] \$47M \$60M +\$13M +28%
(Note: Takes program to authorized level)

Wetland Reserve Program \$275M \$321M +\$46M +17%
(Note: Restores program to 200,000 acres enrollment in FY06. Program is authorized at 250,000 acres annually)

Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)
[Note: FRPP authorized at \$100M] \$112M \$83.5M -\$28.5M -25%

Conservation Security Program (CSP) \$202M \$274 +\$72M +36%
(Note: CSP authorized as an entitlement program?)

Total Projected Impact Of FY06 Proposed Budget On NRCS Staffing = -1,939 FTE.