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To: NARD & NARD Risk Pool Board of Directors  
 CC: NRD Managers  
 From: Dean E. Edson, Executive Director  
 Re: June Board Action  
 Date: June 22, 2023

The following is a report on the actions at the June 12<sup>th</sup> NARD Risk Pool and NARD Board Meetings and the Basin Tour that followed.

### **NRD Basin Tour**

Approximately 65 directors and staff from Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) along with conservation partners convened in Kearney for the annual NRD Basin Tour hosted by the Central Platte NRD June 12-13, 2023.

The NRD Basin Tour explores a different water basin each year. The hosting NRD showcases conservation projects, partnerships and the local communities in which they live and work. The Platte River's economic and cultural significance in Nebraska extends from its role in supporting agriculture, tourism, and recreation to its deep connections to Native American heritage, pioneer history, and environmental conservation.

Central Platte NRD General Manager Lyndon Vogt discussed how the Platte Basin is vital for drinking water, irrigation, municipal and industrial uses, wildlife, and recreation in Nebraska as well as water uses in Wyoming and Colorado.

“We appreciate the opportunity to share more about the proactive approach Central Platte NRD has taken to develop projects that conserve our resources and protect water users throughout the Basin,” Vogt said.

The Central Platte NRD boundaries reach from the Lincoln-Dawson County line near Gothenburg to Hwy 81 near Columbus. Major Nebraska river basins form the boundaries of the 23 NRDs, enabling districts to respond to local conservation and resource management needs with local solutions. While all NRDs share 12 main responsibilities, each district sets its own priorities and develops its own programs to best serve local needs. Serving central Nebraska, Central Platte NRD shares many of the same management challenges that other NRDs face across the state.

Vogt along with Assistant Manager Jesse Mintken and Information/Education Specialist Marcia Lee led the two-day tour showcasing several projects that protect lives, property and the future in central Nebraska including groundwater recharge, flood reduction infrastructure and habitat restoration.

“Basin tours give NRD directors a unique look at the conservation challenges that are being faced around the state,” said Dr. Orval Gigstad, Nebraska Association of Resources Districts president

and Nemaha NRD director. “It is interesting to see the diversity of natural resource issues and how local NRD boards develop solutions to benefit their communities and the state.”

The tour included several stops featuring conservation projects that protect both urban and rural natural resources. Some of the 2023 tour highlights included:

- Upper Prairie-Silver-Moores Flood Reduction Project (Grand Island)
- State Fairgrounds Outdoor Learning Area (Grand Island)
- Wood River Flood Control - Hall County Park (Grand Island)
- Platte Valley Industrial Park (Grand Island)
- Alda & Plautz Crane Viewing Decks (Alda and Gibbon)
- Elm and Turkey Creeks Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (Elm Creek)
- B1 Reservoir and Wildlife Management Area (Lexington)
- Cozad Ditch Company Headgates (Gothenburg)
- Bayer Crop Science Water Utilization Learning Center (Gothenburg)

### **NARD Board**

**NRD Hall of Fame --** The Executive Committee approved a slate of candidates for the 2023 NRD Hall of Fame Award as follows:

- A. NRD Board Member
  - 1. Darwin Anderson, LLNRD
  
- B. NRD Employee
  - 1. Duane Woodward, CPNRD
  - 2. Tom Mountford, LPNNRD
  - 3. Larry Schultz, LLNRD
  - 4. Kent Miller, TPNRD
  
- C. NRD Supporter
  - 1. Jim Cannia, LPSNRD
  - 2. Lori Potter, LLNRD

Ballots were mailed to NARD Board members and NRD Managers. The NRD Hall of Fame winner in each category will be announced during Husker Harvest Days at the show media center. The inductees will be formally presented the award at the NARD Annual Meeting in Kearney on September 25, 2023.

**Sponsorship Requests.** The board approved co-sponsoring the following events.

- A. General Fund Operation
  - 1. NET Big Red Wrap- up - \$6,000
  - 2. NARD Annual Meeting Auction & Raffle - \$6,000
  - 3. Nebraska Corn Growers Open -- \$500
  
- B. NARD Foundation Program
  - 1. \$1,000 for Nebraska Farm Bureau Foundation for Ag Awareness - Ag in the Classroom

**Longitude 103 Producer App** – The Board approved using the NARD Research Account for the joint effort between the Nebraska Corn Board and 17 NRDs to develop the Longitude 103 nitrogen dashboard project. It was discussed at the manager’s meeting and 17 districts are going to participate. The managers recommended that the NARD Research Account be used for this project. Longitude 103 is a leading provider of agricultural technology solutions. Producer Connect, a web and mobile application suite, allows producers to access their crop reporting data and includes a fertilizer recommendation based on yield goals. This collaborative effort aims to empower agriculture producers to optimize inputs, which will enhance agricultural profitability, water quality and irrigation efficiency.

The partnership between the Nebraska Corn Board and the Natural Resources Districts exemplifies the commitment of key stakeholders to foster a thriving agricultural industry while protecting our water quality and quantity. The Nebraska Corn Board has generously contributed funds to assist with the development of Producer Connect, recognizing the potential it holds in transforming the landscape of modern farming.

Producer Connect will be free to producers and offer a wide range of features designed to simplify nitrogen and water management. Ag producers will have a password-protected log in and only be able to see their own data. A few of the potential features include:

- **Producer-specific data:** Ag producers will have access to their reported data, which includes previous crops grown, actual yield, fertilizer applied, water usage, crops to be grown, expected yield, soil and water test results, and legume or manure credits.
- **Protected data:** All data will be held by the local NRD, and individual producer data will not be shared. Aggregate data may be used by the NRD for educational activities, certified applicator training and producer meetings.
- **Customizable recommendations:** The dashboard will provide a personalized nitrogen recommendation based on yield goals. The nitrogen efficiency of bushels per pound of applied fertilizer will be displayed and compared to the average of producers within the area. An economic analysis could show cost savings using the calculated nitrogen application versus a typical fertilizer application.
- **Irrigation efficiency:** The dashboard will also include the ability to track water-use data.
- **Historical data analysis:** By analyzing past nitrogen usage and crop performance, the dashboard will enable producers to identify trends in water use, fertilizer application and crop yield.
- **Environmental impact assessment:** The platform will assist farmers in quantifying the impact of their nitrogen usage, aiding in compliance with regulations and demonstrating commitment to sustainable practices.
- **Information exchange:** The dashboard will allow for communication between the producer and the local NRD. Producers will also be able to view current research results to improve profitability.

Producer Connect is currently in its initial stages of development and is expected to launch in January 2024. The initial roll out will be in Phase 2 and Phase 3 Groundwater Quality Management Areas and areas that have irrigation allocations. The NARD Foundation is also contributing \$5,000.00 toward the project.

**Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund** – The board approved participation in negotiated rule making for the NETF, if such is approved by NETF. There has been a request filed by a group, Friends of the Trust, to have the NETF use negotiated rulemaking to develop new rules for funding requests and grants. If the NETF approves the request, NARD could be a party to the negotiated rulemaking. It was recommended by the NRD Managers that Don Blankenau be the NARD Representative to the group if it comes about. Blankenau estimated it would cost around \$4,000.00 to be involved. It was recommended by the NRD managers to share that cost equally.

**NARD General Operation Budget FY 2023-2024 and 24-25** – The NARD Board approved the proposed FY 23-24 & FY 24-25 budgets for the Foundation and General Operating accounts. This budget was tentatively approved in March and has been at the district offices for consideration for final action at the June meeting.

The two-year budget adopted last year asked for a 4% increase in dues each of the next two fiscal years. This is maintained. The other major changes included: 1) New line-item amount for NRD Dam Assessments (\$540,000 Income, \$500,000 Expense); 2) Increased income and expenses for the annual and legislative conferences in both fiscal years; 3) Decreased income for NDEE Liaison grant; and 4) Increased interest income.

There were no changes proposed with the tree program or the reimbursements from the NARD Risk Pool.

**NARD Foundation Budget FY 2023-2024 and 24-25** - The NARD Board approved the proposed FY 23-24 & FY 24-25 budgets for the Foundation. This was tentatively approved in March and has been at the district offices for consideration for final action at the June meeting.

For the Foundation, the changes for this year include: 1) Increased interest income due to interest rates; 2) Adding an expense item for NRD recreation sites promotion (This used to be funds for the NGPC Great Parks Pursuit); 3) Adding a expense item for Nitrate Education to be determined by the NARD Board in consultation with the NRD Managers; and 4) Adding an income and expense for the NRD Fun Run.

**Deadline for Resolutions** – The Legislative Committee set August 15, 2023, as the deadline for resolutions for consideration at the annual meeting. The NARD Annual Meeting is September 24-26, 2023, in Kearney, and the deadline needs to be at least 30 days in advance, so all districts have a chance to review the resolutions prior to the meeting. Resolutions received after August 15th will need 2/3rds vote of the delegates for consideration.

### **NARD Awards**

**The NARD Board elected the following award winners at the June 12, 2023, Board Meeting:**

- **NRD Director of the Year - Marcel Kramer, LCNRD.**

Marcel Kramer's affiliation with Lewis & Clark NRD and his service as a director began on his election in 1996 and continues 26 years later. Marcel served as board chair from 2001 to 2002 and secretary/treasurer from 2007 to 2010. Presently Kramer is LCNRD's delegate to the NARD board of directors and prior to that he served as the alternate starting in 2003. He represents LCNRD by attending and participating in the NARD meetings, the annual legislative conference and the congressional trips when held. The LCNRD nominated Kramer for the award.

- **Educator of the Year for K-6** – No nominations submitted in 2023.
- **Educator of the Year for 7-12 - Zeta Greene of Sandhills Public Schools.**

The Upper Loup NRD nominated Zeta Greene of Sandhills Public School for this award. Zeta Greene is an extraordinary teacher with conservation of natural resources at the root of her values. She is passionate about forage quality, planting trees, and edible wildlife feeding areas and incorporates these themes into her curriculum. Zeta has been with Sandhills Public School for five years where she teaches 7th -12th grade Sciences at their high school and coaches Junior High Volleyball, Junior High and High School Track, and she is also involved with the school's Student Council program. In addition to her curricular activities, Zeta helps with 4-H council, works at the county fair in Blaine County and is also involved with the Master Gardening program. Natural resources are an important component when it comes to Zeta.

- **Outstanding Soil Stewardship Award – Daryl Obermeyer, Brownville, NE.**

Daryl Obermeyer and his wife Jackie have operated a cow/calf and rotational cropping system that includes cover crops for several decades. Daryl is a devout no-tiller and has been since the early 80's. His system of crop rotation has always included some wheat on the more highly erodible land to maintain higher residue amounts following harvest. He used cover crops in his operation before most people had even heard about them. Having cattle, Daryl could not only see the advantage of having green on his fields but realized the added benefits from having supplemental grazing for his cattle. Daryl was nominated by the Nemaha NRD.

- **Tree Planter of the Year – Brian Moes family of Osmond, NE.**

Brian, his wife Jolene, their sons Tyler, and Jordan, along with their families have more than demonstrated this commitment. This journey for the Moes family started in 2006 with the purchase of 100 Blue Spruce. They have planted almost every year since and have planted over 7,000 trees in various locations on their farm. Brian and his sons operate a grain and livestock operation northeast of Osmond. They have seen the benefit of trees on their cow herd and have no problem giving up a little farm ground for trees as they know it will pay much more than that few rows of corn or beans they will lose. The Moes family was nominated by the Lower Elkhorn NRD.

- **Outstanding Grassland Conservation Award – Mark Alberts, Gothenburg, NE.**

Thanks to the efforts of Mark Alberts, farmers and ranchers in the Loess hills of Dawson County, Nebraska, have had great success using fire to improve and maintain their pastures.

As coordinator, burn boss and volunteer of the Central Platte Rangeland Alliance (CPRA), he facilitates prescribed burns that, coupled with other control methods, have proven to be up to 100% effective in killing cedars and promoting native warm season grasses. Alberts was nominated by the Central Platte NRD.

- **Community Conservation Award – Bob Hansen, Coleridge, NE**

The Lewis & Clark NRD nominated Bob Hansen for the NARD Outstanding Community Conservation Award. Bob contributes to conservation activities on his own property and volunteers with his neighbors and local agencies to protect soil, water, plants and animals. Bob Hansen has been involved in many conservation activities in the LCNRD and the surrounding area, helping the area thrive for future generations. Bob rarely mentions his volunteer efforts, but he has been a reliable volunteer for the following entities: Northeast Nebraska Prescribed Burn Association, North American Bat Monitoring Project, Missouri River Outdoor Expo, Bow Creek Watershed Project, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Education events, and Nebraska Master Naturalist Training Program.

- **Water Conservation Award – Dave Condon, Creighton, NE.**

The Lewis & Clark NRD nominated Dave Condon for the NARD Outstanding Water Conservation Award. Dave is a 4th Generation farmer who operates his family farm south of Creighton, which has been in the family since the early 1900s. The farm was operated as a feeder cattle, cow/calf, and row crop operation through 2005, at which time Dave took over the row crop operation, consisting of corn, beans, small grains, and some hay. Dave uses variable rate irrigation (VRI) pivot technology installed on one of the UNL Research sites located within the BGMA. VRI technology provides Dave with the ability to apply irrigation water and fertilizer or chemicals through chemigation to exactly where it is needed at the right rate and time.

The awards will be presented at the NARD Annual Meeting in Kearney on September 24-26, 2023. The NARD will notify and invite the award recipients to the award recognition luncheon.

### **NARD Risk Pool Board**

**FY 2023-24 Health & Dental Plan Changes:** The NARD Risk Pool Board approved no changes to the health insurance and dental rates for FY 2023-24. The rates and coverage will stay the same as they were for FY 2022-23.

We had just about everything go in a positive direction this year, with reduced claims, reduced claims for lasers, reduced renewal rates for reinsurance, and no lasers in reinsurance for 2023-24. Table 1 on the next page shows the rates for the prior and upcoming fiscal year.

**TABLE 1 -- NARD Intergovernmental Risk Management Pool Association  
Proposed monthly premium changes for Fiscal Year 2023-24**

<b>Coverage</b>	<b>Employee</b>	<b>+Spouse</b>	<b>+Children</b>	<b>+Family</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>Medical - FY 2022-23</b>	\$1,074.48	\$2,230.75	\$1,905.02	\$3,152.47	\$1,686.80
<b>Medical – No change proposed FY 2023-24</b>	<b>\$1,074.48</b>	<b>\$2,230.75</b>	<b>\$1,905.02</b>	<b>\$3,152.47</b>	<b>\$1,686.80</b>
<b>Dental - FY 2022-23</b>	\$44.52	\$89.03	\$81.03	\$133.55	\$86.91
<b>Dental – No change proposed FY 23-24</b>	<b>\$44.52</b>	<b>\$89.03</b>	<b>\$81.02</b>	<b>\$133.55</b>	<b>\$86.91</b>

**FY 2023-24 Claims Experience**

The NARD Intergovernmental Risk Management Pool Association has experienced six claims over \$100,000. This is down from ten experienced at the end of April 2022. We did not experience any maximums on lasers this year. Other than the laser individual, we did not have any other individual go over our \$175,000 maximum.

Last year, we had two laser cases that hit over \$340,000 out of a maximum \$455,000 in liability. Last year, we had over \$170,000 of the maximum \$225,000 aggregating specific. In FY 2022-23, the premiums included coverage for 85% of the laser and 100% of the aggregating specific.

For FY 2023-24, we do not have a lasered individual, so we do not need to calculate that into premiums this year.

The goal for the 2023-24 Fiscal Year is to show a small profit, balanced with keeping rates affordable for the employees of the natural resources districts.

**Upcoming Meetings**

- July 31, 2023 – NRD Benefits Meetings – Twin Platte NRD, North Platte
- August 28-30, 2023 - NRD Managers Retreat – LLNRD Host
- August 25 – September 4, 2023 - Nebraska State Fair, Grand Island
- September 12- 14, 2023 – Husker Harvest Days, Grand Island
- September 24-26, 2023 – NARD Annual Meeting, Kearney
- October (3rd Week) NRD Benefits Meetings – TBA
- November 1, 2023 – NRD Mangers Meeting – TBA
- November 5-6, 2023 – NARD Board Meeting - TBA