

**LOWER BIG BLUE NATURAL RESOURCES
DISTRICT BOARD MEETING
June 11, 2026
7:00 PM**

Notice of the meeting was published in accordance with Section 84-1411, Nebraska Statutes, in the Beatrice Daily Sun and the Wilber Republican. Notice was also sent to Radio Station KWBE, Crete News, and Fairbury Journal-News. In accordance with the Nebraska Open Meetings Act, the Open Meetings Act is posted on the north wall of the meeting room for public viewing. The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Chad Weichel at 7:00 p.m.

Directors Present: Larry Barta, Ryan Birkett, Steve Kelley, Bob Lorenz, Duane Parde, Dean Roehr, Jason Sand, Rodney Skleba, Doug Stokebrand, Chad Weichel, Bruce Weise.

Staff Present: Scott Sobotka, Manager; Scott Theis, Operations Supervisor;, Adam Kimmerling, Office Administrator; Brandy Scholl, NRD Clerk, Tyler Weishahn, Assistant Manager, Zack Zimmerman, Source Water Protection Coordinator.

Directors Absent: Brent Katz, Jason Pohlmann

CONSIDERATION OF EXCUSED ABSENCES

Chad reported that Jason Pohlmann has asked to be excused from the June 11, 2026, board meeting.

MOTION #1 was made by Larry Barta, seconded by Bruce Weise, to excuse Jason Pohlmann from the June 11, 2026, board meeting. Motion carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise.
NAY: None **ABSTAIN:** None. Motion Carried.

Scott reported that Brent Katz will not be at the June 11, 2026, board meeting.

MOTION #2 was made by Doug Stokebrand, seconded by Jason Sand, to excuse Brent Katz from the June 11, 2026, board meeting. Motion carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, **NAY:** None
ABSTAIN: Roehr, Weise. Motion Carried.

APPROVAL OF JUNE 11, 2026 CONSENT AGENDA

MOTION #3 was made by Steve Kelley, seconded by Duane Parde, to adopt the Consent Agenda for the June 11, 2026, board meeting which includes: adoption of the agenda as submitted, approval of the May 14, 2026, meeting minutes, financial status report dated May 31, 2026, May 2026 bills payable, May 2026 revenues, monthly bank account summary and Beatrice West and Wymore Rural Water Financials. Motion carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Katz, Kelley, Lorenz, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** Roehr.

OPEN PUBLIC COMMENTS

None

INFORMATION & EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT – DOUG STOKEBRAND

Doug reported on the committee meeting held May 28th, 2026. He noted the changes in the proposed FY 2027 budget.

An increase of \$8,400 in educational activities for the Producer Connect subscription. The fishing contest line item has been reduced.

The FY 2027 Information and Education Budget is \$42,025 which represents a \$7,400 increase over FY 2026.

MOTION #3 was made by Dean Roehr, seconded by Larry Barta, to approve the proposed Information and Education budget of \$42,05.00 for FY 2027. Motion carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

PROGRAMS & PROJECTS COMMITTEE REPORT –RYAN BIRKETT

WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY TASK FORCE REPORT

Scott noted there are several unknowns with the budget at this time (WFPO, Clatonia 319, flow meter cost-share), but that the intent is to keep the tax asking the same as last year. The Committee reviewed the Executive Summary of the Governor’s Water Quality and Quantity Task Force, the impending ONE RED program, and the LBBNRD’s role in utilizing the funding. Much of what the NRDs have been doing to manage groundwater quality and quantity either directly carries out the 21 tasks outlined in the report or dovetails well with what others are already doing to achieve the task force goals. The Producer Connect app will aid in carrying out several of the tasks. Besides the direct benefits to the LBBNRD, Eastern Nebraska Water Resources Assessment (ENWRA) membership would address over half of the tasks.

REVIEW OF NSWCP POLICY

Scott reviewed the current NSWCP policy. The NRD places priority for funding to those applications that have the highest amount of soil loss/ac/yr and are above planned or constructed flood control dams. Summer work is a priority over fall or spring work. The NRCS also prioritizes applications. The NRD also provides cost-share on flow meters through NSWCP funds. The District expects to receive around \$81,000.00 in state funds. The current cost docket allows for the program to be used for irrigation management practices including flow meters. The Committee discussed other possible program improvements with these funds (i.e. stacking with ONE RED programs, Sentinel Fertigation, other irrigation scheduling equipment).

2026-2027 NSWCP APPLICATIONS

Scott reviewed the 2026-2027 NSWCP applications. A total of 9 applications were received this year for conservation work. The District will receive approximately \$81,000.00 from the Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Program. The \$30,000 typically budgeted for flow meters under water quality cost-share was moved to the NRD Land Treatment and Water Management line item making \$130,000.00 available for NRD flow meter cost-share in 2026-27. The Committee also discussed other potential NSWCP practices to consider in the future. After receiving notification, the LBBNRD’s WaterSMART grant application was not approved, the Committee recommended focusing on flow meter cost-share for the now. There are approximately 630 registered wells that would be required to have a flow meter installed within the next two years. If 80% of those wells aren’t currently metered, it would take about \$450,000 to provide cost-share. The Committee also discussed allowing producers in Phase 2 Groundwater Quantity Management Sub-Areas (GWQMAs) to receive cost-share on more than two flow meters per landowner, as well as allowing more than the \$8,000 maximum for producers in those sub-areas.

Scott reviewed NSWCP Land Treatment amounts of State funding to the four counties in the NRD. State NSWCP Fund Allocation for FY 2027 is \$80,811. Remaining funds would be used for flow meter cost-share.

2026-2027 NSWCP Recommendations

County	Applications	Approved	Amount
Gage	3	-	\$ 21,963.00
Saline	6	-	\$ 47,647.00
Jefferson	0	-	\$ 0.00
Pawnee	0	-	\$ 0.00
	9		\$ 69,610.00

NRWQF POLICY – WATER QUALITY COST-SHARE

The Committee reviewed current water quality cost-share programs. The 2026-2027 budget proposal is reduced to \$30,000.00 from \$60,000 with the shift to include flow meter cost-share funding with NSWCP funds reflecting \$30,000.00. A total of approximately \$130,000.00 is available for flow meter cost-share. The NRD will also continue to seek flow meter cost-share funding through other sources (i.e. Water Resources Cash Fund, etc.). The NRD receives around \$35,000.00 in state funds toward this budget item. The Committee also discussed the irrigation scheduling equipment program and whether cost-share should be increased. Other equipment is eligible for cost-share, but participation in the program has been low. As staff work to assist producers in the Groundwater Quality Phase II Area with meeting reporting requirements, this funding could be considered for use toward a soil sampling program administered by the NRD.

REVIEW WATER QUALITY RULES AND REGULATIONS

The NRD is planning to assemble a stakeholder group to focus on the Groundwater Quality Phase II Area, review existing rules and regulations, and recommend any improvements to help reduce groundwater nitrate concentration in the area. The group, in conjunction with the NRD Source Water Protection (SWP) Coordinator, will also help ensure current requirements are met. The Committee suggested direct mailings to landowners and operators within the area, maintaining the current soil sampling cost-share program, and personal contact/assistance from the SWP Coordinator to work with operators to use the Producer Connect app for required reporting.

NITROGEN MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS POLICY

The Committee reviewed the Nitrogen Reduction Incentives Act (NiRIA) and Nitrogen Use Efficiency (NUE) programs. The agreement with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is coming to a close, but the NRD continues to work in cooperation with TNC, the Nebraska Corn Board, and Precision Conservation Management (PCM) to implement these programs and more. Thirty applications have been submitted for the NiRIA program seeking \$44,314 in cost-share. No applications were received in Priority A (\$15/ac - Phase II or WHPA) Areas, 19 were received in Priority B (\$12/ac - certified irrigated) Areas, and 11 were received in Priority C (\$10/ac - dryland) Areas. This program requires producers to reduce applied nitrogen by 40 lbs. or 15% to receive cost-share. Twenty-seven applications have been received seeking \$49,878 in cost-share for the NUE program. The Committee reviewed the program rules and inputs taken into account. This program pays \$15/ac when an NUE of 1.0 or under is achieved. The Corn Board and PCM have also hired a position to work in the district, so there will be even more opportunities for cost-share on conservation and groundwater quality/quantity management.

WATER QUALITY RULES AND REGULATIONS

Beyond what had already been discussed, the Committee reviewed the scope of work provided by Olsson last year that would review Groundwater Quantity Rules and Regulations and the NRD monitoring network, future scenario modeling, surrounding NRD rules research and graphics support. This and any other studies would fit under the Groundwater Management Studies line item currently budgeted at \$55,000. It was also noted that Producer Connect fees have been moved to the Information and Education budget. Water Sustainability Fund applications (AEM and rural water upgrades) were also reviewed.

DWEE ONE RED PROGRAM

Part of the Department of Water, Energy, and Environment's (DWEE) ONE RED program includes providing \$75,000 to each NRD for staffing to carry out the program. This funding is also stackable with NRCS funding being provided toward shared positions.

URBAN CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Scott reviewed the Urban Conservation Assistance applications for 2026-2027 from four area communities. This program will assist with 50% of the cost of these projects up to a maximum of \$25,000.00. Applicants are requesting cost-share for culvert repairs, drainage improvements, and Odell submitted two applications, one being for the development of long-term camping sites. Total NRD funds requested came to \$47,931.82. The committee recommended approval of drainage improvement applications from Virigina Plymouth Diller, and Odell for a total of \$31,897.91 Three of last year's projects are currently complete and one community canceled their application.

REVIEW FY 2026 EXPENDITURES/FY 2027 CAPITAL EXPENDITURES

The Committee asked about specific line items from the Capital Expenditures budget, and staff provided answers as well as highlighting other line items. The Clatonia Creek 3A 319 project would have \$800,000 available between a potential sinking fund including last year's budgeted amount (\$200,000), this year's addition of \$100,000, and 319 funds. Staff are meeting next week to discuss future Blue Basin Model needs. The Small Dam Program is budgeted at \$100,000 as staff will work to promote new dam construction and possibly rehab. Hazard Mitigation is at \$100,000, and Planning and Zoning is at \$6,000 as the NRD continues to work in cooperation with counties in the district. The Lower Turkey Creek Project DeWitt Re-mapping/Site 3 Construction line item is budgeted at \$176,000 as Natural Resources Development Funding (NDRF) needs to be spent or returned to the State. Fillmore County would like to reopen a road that was closed for the construction of Turkey

Creek Site 3, and the NRD needs to complete the modeling of DeWitt before the project can be closed out, so most of this funding would go toward those items. Scott also discussed the recreation and dam maintenance line items, Swan 31 Mitigation Project, Rural Water Project and Land and Building line items.

NORTHERN NATURAL GAS PROJECT REVIEW

There is a project by Northern Natural Gas to install additional pipeline across northern Gage County that crosses NRD easements for the operation and maintenance of flood control structures. The NRD was notified of a 30-day review on May 13th and will work with Northern Natural Gas on crossing consent agreements they will need. The tailwaters of Little Indian 6-D were specifically discussed.

MOTION #5 was made by Ryan Birkett, seconded by Jason Sand, to authorize the transfer of \$20,000 in FY 2026 operational funding from Wymore Rural Water to the Lower Big Blue NRD. Motion carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

MOTION #6 was made by Ryan Birkett, seconded by Duane Parde, to authorize the transfer of \$13,600 in FY 2026 operational funding and administrative funding from Beatrice West Rural Water to the Lower Big Blue NRD. Motion carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

MOTION #7 was made by Ryan Birkett, seconded by Doug Stokebrand, to transfer any unused budgeted FY 2026 Operations Land and Building Project Funds into the designated Land and Building Capital Improvements sinking account at the end of the fiscal year. Motion Carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

MOTION #8 was made by Ryan Birkett, seconded by Doug Stokebrand, to transfer \$200,000 in FY 2026 Clatonia Creek budget item into a designated Public Use Project Improvement Fund at the end of the fiscal year.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

MOTION #9 was made by Ryan Birkett, seconded by Bob Lorenz, to approve the Capital Expenditures budget of \$3,842,079.91 for FY 2027. Motion carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

PERSONNEL AND EQUIPMENT COMMITTEE REPORT – JASON SAND

Per Diem Policy FY 2027

The Committee reviewed the existing per diem policy and noted expected increases to the mileage rate. Logistics of travel to Washington, D.C. and upcoming NACD and GMDA meetings were also discussed. Due to the potential variability in costs depending on the location of the NACD, removing the \$1,500 not-to-exceed portion of item #7 was recommended.

MOTION #10 was made by Bruce Weise, seconded by Rodney Skleba to approve the per diem policy for FY 2027 as presented. Motion carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

NRD FY 2027 Operations Budget

The budget is due by September 30, 2026, and Dana F. Cole will again be contracted to assist with and submit the forms. The Committee reviewed the current FY 2026 operations budget and the proposed FY 2027 operation budget line by line. Scott noted an increase of 2% in NARD dues while NACD dues will remain the same. The Committee also discussed equipment needs and plans to upgrade desktop computers for staff. The proposed purchase of an additional, smaller skid steer and sweeper is included in the budget. This year's budget has several larger unknown items due to uncertainty about when funding will become available for WFPO, WaterSMART and HAZ-MIT projects, and whether the NRD will be awarded WSF funding. The Committee also discussed potential budget considerations for cleaning and maintenance needs at the new office building, as well as any additional paving or construction needs.

MOTION #11 was made by Jason Sand, seconded by Duane Parde to approve the Operations Budget totaling \$394,074.53. Motion Carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

MOTION #12 was made by Jason Sand, seconded by Steve Kelley, to go into closed session only to discuss personnel matters and to prevent needless injury to the reputation of a person or persons". Motion Carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

Chairman Weichel stated: "The Board will be going into closed session only to discuss personnel matters and to prevent needless injury to the reputation of a person or persons"

The Board entered closed session at 7:40 P.M.

The Board exited closed session at 8:07 P.M.

MOTION #13 was made by Jason Sand, seconded by Steve Kelley, to come out of closed session at 8:07 P.M. Motion Carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

NRD FY 2027 Personnel Budget

The Committee reviewed the current FY 2026 personnel budget and the proposed FY 2027 personnel budget line by line, as well as the FY 2025-2026 NRD Salary Survey. The NRD has hired a shared Water Quality Protection Coordinator with NRCS reimbursing 50% of the personnel services but has not yet hired a part-time NRCS clerk who will work in the Gage County Field Office. In addition, DWEE is obligating \$75,000 toward staff funding for the promotion and workload associated with ONE RED programs. Overall, the Committee expressed appreciation for and the need to retain current staff. Committee members acknowledged the value of the staff currently in place, and the need to maintain salaries and increases after working to bring levels up to NRD median levels. It was noted that this NRD's current staff consistently exhibit a willingness to cooperate, thereby maintaining a smaller workforce that is more productive. The Committee is recommending a 4% cost-of-living increase with a \$12,000.00 allocation in merit pay to be allocated by management after the January performance reviews. The Committee noted that the merit pay has allowed the NRD to maintain a competitive staffing salary. Discussion was held on comparable management salaries and plans to meet to discuss potential increases as well as a multi-year commitment.

The Committee also noted the value of returning summer help/interns. The NRD has retained two part-time employees/interns and recently brought on another one.

MOTION #14 was made by Jason Sand, seconded by Duane Parde, to raise the Manager's salary for FY 2027 to \$129,864.56. and approve the FY 2027 personnel services budget as amended for \$1,186,055.50. Motion Carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

MOTION #15 was made by Jason Sand, seconded by Bruce Weise, that the Board is committed to raising the Managers salary to the median level among NRD's within the next two fiscal years.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

Personnel & NRD Policy

On the recommendation of the NRD attorneys, the Committee discussed the need for a staff cell phone policy. The Committee also discussed emergency contact forms (especially for summer help), and the Healthy Family Workplace Act. Staff have historically used personal cell phones for work purposes and prefer to do so. The attorneys recommended implementing a policy where staff acknowledge use of personal cell phones for work purposes, and that the NRD provide compensation. The Committee agreed that such a policy is needed. The NRD will work with the attorneys to draft a policy that satisfies the Committee's recommendations and, if possible, is not considered taxable income. An emergency contact form has been developed to ensure NRD personnel can be contacted and/or their listed contacts can be contacted in the event of an emergency. Prior to being informed that the LBBNRD is exempt from the Healthy Family Workplace Act, one hour of sick leave for

every thirty (30) hours worked was being accrued by two part-time employees. The Committee recommended paying out the balance accrued through June 2026 and discontinuing the accrual in the future.

MOTION #16 was made by Jason Sand, seconded by Rodney Skleba, that the District develop a cell phone policy which would compensate employees for the use of personal phones for District business. Motion Carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

MOTION TO INCREASE RESTRICTED TAX AUTHORITY 1%

Scott explained to the directors that the restricted tax authority of the NRD may be increased an additional 1% by board action.

MOTION #17 was made by Duane Parde, seconded by Larry Barta, that the Board increase the District's restricted fund taxing authority by 1% in FY 2027. Motion carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

BUILDING COMMITTEE REPORT – DEAN ROEHR

Dean Roehr reported on the status of the building project. Dean reviewed several issues with construction that the committee and staff are working to address with the contractor and architect.

PROCUREMENT OF RECREATIONAL EQUIPMENT & MATERIALS

Scott Theis reported that two bids were received from MD Aquatics, LLC and EZ Dock Great Plains for docks with kayak launches to be placed at NRD areas.

MOTION #18 was made by Dean Roehr, seconded by Bob Lorenz, to purchase two docks and kayak launches from MD Aquatics for a total price of \$20,223.20 for placement at two recreation areas. Motion carried.

YEA: Barta, Birkett, Kelley, Lorenz, Roehr, Skleba, Parde, Sand, Stokebrand, Weichel, Weise. **NAY:** None **ABSTAIN:** None.

NRD ACTIVITIES

Scott reported on the June 3rd managers meeting in Holdrege and the Basin Tour held last week.

Scott talked about the Beatrice well head protection area resizing.

Swan 31 has been reduced to a significant hazard following work by the NRD to reduce the low opening of the home downstream.

Staff plan to have Infinity Precision Ag spray some hard to reach areas of some dams using a drone.

Scott highlighted the functionality of several structures during the recent heavy rains. Staff plans to work with NRCS to calculate the dollar the amount of flood mitigation provided by the projects.

Scott shared that a newsletter has been finished and the recreation brochure has been updated.

AGENCY REPORTS

NRCS

Kelli shared that 27 EQIP contracts have been obligated for approximately \$1.1 million. Staff are currently assessing nine CSP applications and have completed 33 status reviews for Gage and Saline counties.

EXTENSION

No Report

NRC

Steve reported that the next meeting will be July 29, 2026.

NARD

Steve reported on the NARD financials and reviewed award recipients for this year. Awards will be presented at the Fall Conference in Kearney. NARD dues will be increasing by 2%.

Announcements, Upcoming Meetings & Activities

July 4 th	Holiday – Independence Day
July 9 th	NRD Board Meeting
July 21 st – 23 rd	GMDA Conference – Lubbock

Being no further business, Chairperson Chad Weichel adjourned the meeting at 9:16 p.m.

Secretary, Jason Sand

I, the undersigned, Secretary of the Lower Big Blue Natural Resources District, hereby certify that these are true and correct minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors of the District held June 11, 2026, that all of the subjects discussed at the meeting were contained in the agenda for the meeting, kept continually current and readily available for public inspection at the principal office of the District during normal business hours, and except for items of an emergency nature, the agenda was not altered later than twenty-four (24) hours before the scheduled commencement of the meeting; that at least one copy of all reproducible material discussed at the meeting was available at the meeting for examination and copying by members of the public; that the minutes were in written form and available for public inspection within ten working days and prior to the next convened meeting for said body; and that all news media requesting notification of the meeting of said body were provided advance notification of the time and place of said meeting and the subjects to be discussed at said meeting.

:amk