

Governor's Water Quality and Quantity Task Force

DRAFT Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, September 24, 2025

Younes Conference Center North

707 W. Talmadge St. Kearney, NE 68845

Members Present: Joe Anderjaska, Brittany Bartak, Don Batie, Jesse Bradley, Brian Bruckner, Devin Brundage, Russ Callan, Tom Downey, Jessica Groskopf, Brandon Hunnicutt, Brian Kissinger, Scott Knobbe, Matt Manning, Tim Mundorf, Scott Schaneman, John Shadle, Marty Stange, Annette Sudbeck

Members Absent: Steve Kyes & Dean Settje

Staff and Audience Present: Isabella Peterson, Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment; Cicely Wardyn, Governor's Policy Research Office; Wade Ellwanger, Lower Niobrara NRD; Tylr Naprstek, Lower Loup NRD; John Thorburn Tri-Basin NRD; Jeff Shafer, NPPD; Jennifer Swanson, NARD; Lyndon Vogt, Central Platte NRD; Dustin Wilcox, NARD; Courtney Widup, Central Platte NRD.

The meeting was called to order at 1:00p.m. by Jesse Bradley. Bradley stated that the meeting was being conducted in accordance with the Nebraska Open Meetings Act and a copy of the current Open Meetings Act was posted and available for inspection and review near the back of the room. Bradley stated that a public meeting notice was published in the Omaha World Herald newspaper and the Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment's website on September 17, 2025 in accordance with state law.

Approval of Meeting Minutes from 6/2/2025

Brundage moved and Hunnicutt seconded the motion to approve the Task Force meeting minutes from June 2, 2025. There was no opposition. Motion carried.

Presentations

Jennifer Swanson, NARD, gave a presentation on the Producer Connect platform. Courtney Widup, Central Platte NRD, gave a presentation on the Nitrogen Use Efficiency Dashboard. The presentations can be found on the Task Force webpage at:

<https://dnr.nebraska.gov/water-quality-and-quantity-task-force>.

Members took a break from 2:08 to 2:20pm.

Bradley gave an overview of Task Force goals looking forward, noting that the group should work toward having their goals translated into short-, mid-, and long-term goals with action items between now and December. The tentative goal is to finalize and

publicize the report at a final meeting in March. The Task Force has meetings scheduled out until June of 2026, but want to be respectful of everyone's time.

Subcommittee Updates

Each subcommittee provided updates to the group.

A. Financing & Incentives

Hunnicutt gave the report for the Financing and Incentives Subcommittee. The goals are as follows:

1. Establish a centralized clearinghouse to inventory, manage, and prioritize water quality and quantity projects across Nebraska
2. Identify and implement sustainable, diversified funding models to support the development, implementation, and maintenance of priority water projects in Nebraska

B. Nitrate Legacy & Drinking Water Access

Stange gave the report for the Nitrate Legacy & Drinking Water Access Subcommittee. The goals are as follows:

1. Develop and consistent education, marketing, and outreach program across the state
 - i. Statewide, but look at local issues
 - ii. Aimed at the general population and those who can make a difference including producers, agronomists, well drillers, etc.
2. Develop data and planning to support community water system protections
 - i. Wellhead protection areas
 - ii. Water use and quality information to NRDs, DWEE, communities
 - iii. Smaller communities
3. Expand rural water systems and regionalization of water systems
 - i. Get the data in the hands of the decisionmakers
 - ii. Work to promote nutrient management and bring in the experts

C. Water Conservation & Quantity

Schaneman gave the report for the Water Conservation & Quantity Subcommittee. The goals are as follows:

1. Expand metering and measurement across the state

- i. This would be long-term, bigger goal that could include legislative changes
 - ii. Public perception is important and must address that allocations and taxes are not coming next, but the goal is to measure what you are using; need standard messaging
 - iii. Many NRDs have already done this and we can look to them as case studies and see lessons learned
 - iv. Data privacy must be addressed; data individual level at the NRD, but aggregate when passed along to the State
 - v. Consider NRD administrative costs and resources
 - vi. Must consider surface water users and small districts with limited funds
 - vii. Education component
 - viii. Nebraska is a leader in water management, and this goal aligns with that
- 2. Develop strategies to support large water users and continued economic growth
 - i. Law that applies to Upper Platte could be a template for other areas of the state
 - ii. Don't want to hinder economic growth, but must offset new large water users coming in
 - iii. Establish increased communication with economic development folks
- 3. Expand water storage opportunities and management of water consumption
 - i. Address efficiency in practices that may hinder return flows
 - ii. Incentives and education components

D. Methods & Resources

Batie gave the report for the Methods & Resources Subcommittee. The goals are as follows:

- 1. Create standards that ensure proper nitrogen recommendations being provided to farmers
 - i. Professional certification to sign off on N recommendations
 - ii. Integrate with UNL to do online certifications
 - iii. Use well drillers as a case study
- 2. Increase the percentage of nitrogen that is applied during the growing season

- i. Incentivize and promote fertigation, side dress, water amount
 - ii. Must address what types of fertilizer
 - iii. Education
3. Support movement toward sensor- and model-based nitrogen recommendations
 - i. Sentinel, Adapt N, etc.
4. All producers in all phase areas of all NRDs utilize tools like Producer Connect in order to increase benchmarking and aggregate data

Members discussed how to frame goals with timeframes and whether some goals were more regulatory than incentive or education based. Wardyn offered the example of the E-15 bill structure in which incentives are offered on the front end and if certain targets are not met by a certain date, regulatory components are triggered. Members noted that there are many goals that can utilize incentives to target behavioral changes, including using ONE RED money on the front end, and then structure the goals to pivot to a plan B if metrics are not met and widespread behavioral changes are not made.

Scheduling & Logistics

Members confirmed availability for upcoming subcommittee meetings for October and November. The next full Task Force meeting will be held December 16, 2025 in Kearney.

Public Comment

John Thorburn, Tri-Basin NRD stated that some of the recommendations related to crop consultants may not be feasible and that if the type of fertilizer recommendations are changed and the nitrogen still goes into the aquifer, then there is no gain.

The meeting adjourned at 3:39p.m.