

NEBRASKA NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

Water Sustainability Fund

Application for Funding

Section A.

ADMINISTRATIVE

PROJECT NAME: Upper Republican NRD Moisture Probe Program

PRIMARY CONTACT INFORMATION

Entity Name: Upper Republican Natural Resources District

Contact Name: Nate Jenkins

Address: PO Box 1140, Imperial, NE 69033

Phone: 308-883-1535

Email: natejenkins@urnrd.org

Partners / Co-sponsors, if any: N/A

1. Dollar amounts requested: (Grant, Loan, or Combination)

Grant amount requested. \$ \$216,000

Loan amount requested. \$ N/A

If Loan, how many years repayment period? N/A

If Loan, supply a complete year-by-year repayment schedule.
N/A

2. Permits Needed - Attach copy for each obtained (N/A = not applicable)

Nebraska Game & Parks Commission
(G&P) consultation on Threatened and
Endangered Species and their Habitat

N/A Obtained: YES NO

Surface Water Right

N/A Obtained: YES NO

USACE (e.g., 404 Permit) N/A Obtained: YES NO

Cultural Resources Evaluation N/A Obtained: YES NO

Other (provide explanation below) N/A Obtained: YES NO
[Click here to enter text.](#)

3. Are you applying for funding for a combined sewer over-flow project?

YES NO

If yes, do you have a Long Term Control Plan that is currently approved by the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality?

YES NO

If yes attach a copy to your application. N/A

If yes what is the population served by your project? N/A

If yes provide a demonstration of need. N/A

If yes and you were approved for funding in the most recent funding cycle, then resubmit the above information updated annually but you need not complete the remainder of the application.

4. If you are or are representing an NRD, do you have an Integrated Management Plan in place, or have you initiated one?

N/A YES NO

5. Has this application previously been submitted for funding assistance from the Water Sustainability Fund and not been funded?

YES NO

If yes, have any changes been made to the application in comparison to the previously submitted application? N/A

If yes, describe the changes that have been made since the last application.
N/A

No, I certify the application is a true and exact copy of the previously submitted and scored application. (Signature required) N/A

6. Complete the following if your project has or will commence prior to next July 1st.

As of the date of submittal of this application, what is the Total Net Local Share of Expenses incurred for which you are asking cost share assistance from this fund? \$ N/A

Attach all substantiating documentation such as invoices, cancelled checks etc. along with an itemized statement for these expenses. N/A

Estimate the Total Net Local Share of Expenses and a description of each you will incur between the date of submittal of this application and next July 1st for which you are asking cost share assistance from this fund.
\$ N/A

Section B.

DNR DIRECTOR'S FINDINGS

Does your project include physical construction (defined as moving dirt, directing water, physically constructing something, or installing equipment)?

YES NO

1(a). If yes (structural), submit a feasibility report (to comply with Title 261, CH 2) including engineering and technical data and the following information:

A discussion of the plan of development (004.01 A);

For the past four years, the Upper Republican NRD (URNRD) has incentivized the use of soil moisture probes that promote irrigation scheduling guided by actual soil moisture content. Since 2013, the district's program has led to the purchase or lease of 348 probes on approximately 45,200 acres within the district. All of the units that have been installed with the exception of less than five use telemetry to relay data accessible by computer, smart phone or tablets informing of irrigators of soil moisture content normally at every 4 inches at depths up to normally 4 feet. Software programs offered by most vendors of the probes then compare actual moisture content to suggested moisture content levels to offer recommendations on whether or not water needs to be applied to the crop.

The program has increased in popularity over the past four years and has been dependent on a variety of grant funds, including from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Recently, the three NRDs within the Republican Basin – URNRD, Middle Republican NRD and Lower Republican NRD – applied for and received approval to partner with the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in the NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program. The program in essence will make more money available within the Republican Basin for some existing federal programs under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). In order for additional federal funds to be available in the Republican Basin for programs under the EQIP program meant to reduce water use, the NRDs in the basin must also pay for water-conservation efforts. Under the approved RCPP program as it applies to the URNRD, our district must spend dollars on soil moisture probes in order for the district to be eligible for more EQIP dollars. The intent of this proposed grant is to help encourage the use of soil-moisture probes that we believe reduce water use; WSF and local dollars spent on probes, in turn, will attract more EQIP funds to the district. Please note that the EQIP funds do not go to the URNRD and will not be used to help pay for probes that would be purchased/leased under this proposed WSF grant. Rather, WSF funds and URNRD dollars spent on the probe program would trigger the availability of an equal amount EQIP funds for separate, EQIP programs enrolled in by individuals within the district.

Under the proposed program, approximately 80-100 probes per year in 2017 and 2018, or a total of 160-200 probes total, would be installed with aid from the WSF and URNRD. Irrigators would purchase or lease soil-moisture probes of their choice and reimbursement from the WSF would be sought for 60 percent of the cost of the probes. The remaining 40 percent would be paid for by the URNRD/landowners.

The URNRD would have access to all of the individual accounts of participating farmers so we could see the soil moisture information, related watering recommendations, and determine whether the recommendations were being followed.

A description of all field investigations made to substantiate the feasibility report (004.01 B);

The probe program that has existed in the URNRD and funded by a variety of previous grants was initiated by our belief that irrigation scheduling within the district could be improved by irrigator access to better data and data-based watering recommendations. A variety of studies have concluded that use of soil moisture sensors can improve irrigation scheduling that is necessary under limited water-supply conditions (e.g., Aguilar, J; Rogers, D; Kisekka, I, 2015), suggesting reduced water use can be achieved. Our experience has been that this is true. The soil-moisture content data made available to farmers via probes with telemetry units can drastically increase their understanding of and interest in soil moisture in relation to crop root depth.

Useful research on exactly how much less water is used because of attentive use of soil moisture probes is difficult because it is difficult to establish an experiment control. While we can observe the behavior of an individual farmer when he uses a probe for irrigation decisions, we can't definitively know what the same farmer's behavior would have been had he not used a probe. Year-to-year comparisons (same field with a probe used one year, not used the next) are difficult because precipitation patterns are never the same year to year.

This said, we have gotten abundant input from farmers who use soil moisture probes. The predominant response from farmers who use the information to make irrigation decisions is that they believe they apply 1 inches to 3 inches less water over the course of an irrigation season.

Maps, drawings, charts, tables, etc., used as a basis for the feasibility report (004.01 C); N/A

A description of any necessary water and land rights and pertinent water supply and water quality information, if appropriate (004.01 D);

No water rights issues will need to be addressed as part of the project because probes will be installed by farmers who willingly participate in the program. The water supply that will be better managed due to the project is the water supply contained in the High Plains Aquifer underlying fields where farmers use soil moisture probes.

A discussion of each component of the final plan including, when applicable (004.01 E);

Required geologic investigation (004.01 E 1); N/A

Required hydrologic data (004.01 E 2); N/A

Design criteria for final design including, but not limited to, soil mechanics, hydraulic, hydrologic, structural, embankments and foundation criteria (004.01 E 3). N/A

- 1(b). If no (non-structural), submit data necessary to establish technical feasibility including, but not limited to the following (004.02):

A discussion of the plan of development (004.02 A);
N/A

A description of field or research investigations utilized to substantiate the project conception (004.02 B); N/A

A description of the necessary water and/or land rights, if applicable (004.02 C); N/A

A discussion of the anticipated effects, if any, of the project upon the development and/or operation of existing or envisioned structural measures including a brief description of any such measure (004.02 D).
N/A

2. Provide evidence that there are no known means of accomplishing the same purpose or purposes more economically, by describing the next best alternative.

The intent of the program is to increase awareness and understanding of the relationship between soil moisture content, crop root depths and irrigation needs. Since a main intent is understanding soil moisture content, there is no alternative to measuring it.

3. Document all sources and report all costs and benefit data using current data, (commodity prices, recreation benefit prices, and wildlife prices as prescribed by the Director) using both dollar values and other units of measurement when appropriate (environmental, social, cultural, data improvement, etc.). The period of analysis for economic feasibility studies shall be fifty (50) years or with prior approval of the Director, up to one hundred (100) years [T261 CH 2 (005)].

- Describe any relevant cost information including, but not limited to the engineering and inspection costs, capital construction costs, annual operation and maintenance costs, and replacement costs. Cost information shall also include the estimated construction period as well as the estimated project life (005.01).

The costs of the soil moisture probes and installation varies significantly depending on type and brand, but the URNRD has determined the average cost to be \$2,250 based on prices from all known vendors of the products in the area. There are no O&M costs associated with the probes during the initial purchase of a probe. The purchase price covers all data transmission and software in the first year. In subsequent years, there is a service fee. However, under this proposed program, no WSF funds or URNRD funds would be used for service fees. Grant and URNRD funds will only be used for the initial purchase and installation of probes.

The project life will be dependent on how long participants use probes after the initial purchase.

- Only primary tangible benefits may be counted in providing the monetary benefit information and shall be displayed by year for the project life. In a multi-purpose project, estimate benefits for each purpose, by year, for the life of the project. Describe any intangible or secondary benefits separately. In a case where there is no generally accepted method for calculation of primary tangible benefits describe how the project will increase water sustainability, such that the economic feasibility of the project can be approved by the Director and the Commission (005.02).

The project will help increase water sustainability by reducing water use within the URNRD. Input from irrigators who use moisture probes within the District already suggests annual water savings of 1 inch-3 inches per year, per acre. It is expected that 160-200 probes will be installed under the project over a two-year period. Should the number of probes installed be at the midpoint of this range – 180 – they will be distributed on approximately 23,500 acres. Should the average

reduction in water use be 2 inches per acre, total reduced water use over the two-year period would be 47,000 acre inches, or 3,917 acre feet.

This estimate is very conservative because it assumes the probes purchased under the proposed program would only be used the year in which they were purchased. Our experience with previous probe programs suggests that approximately 75 percent of irrigators who purchase probes continue to use them. Those that don't continue to use them choose not to for a variety of reasons, but the most common reason appears to be lack of computer skills and use that prevent them from regularly checking the data provided by the probes.

Should 75 percent (135) of the probes continue to be used over a five-year period subsequent to buying them and when cost-share was no longer available, total acres inches of saved water assuming 2 inches of reduced water use per year would be 175,500 acre inches, or 14,625 acre feet.

- All benefit and cost data shall be presented in a table form to indicate the annual cash flow for the life of the proposal, not to exceed 100 years (005.03).

Activity	Cost Year 1	Cost Year 2	Total
Probe Purchases 80 per Year	\$180,000	\$180,000	\$360,000
Total By Year and Fund 60% WSF 40% URNRD	WSF: \$108,000 URNRD: \$72,000	WSF: \$108,000 URNRD: \$72,000	\$360,000 (WSF \$216,000 URNRD \$144,000)

- In the case of projects for which there is no generally accepted method for calculation of primary tangible benefits and if the project will increase water sustainability, the economic feasibility of such proposal shall be demonstrated by such method as the Director and the Commission deem appropriate (005.04).

A conservative approach to estimating the value of water potentially saved under the project is to value water based on its ability to increase crop yields. Within the URNRD, the average yield difference between dryland and irrigated cropland is approximately 100 bushels per acre. The average water use in the district is approximately 12 inches per acre. Commodity prices the Natural Resources Commission

provides in grant application materials suggest a \$5.11 per bushel value for corn be used. Using that figure, the per acre value of irrigated corn is \$511 more than dryland corn, making the value of each inch of irrigation water applied approximately \$42.58 assuming 12 inches of water applied.

As mentioned earlier, if 2 inches less water was applied on 23,500 acre equipped with 180 probes over the two-year project period total water savings over that period would be 47,000 acre inches. Assuming value of \$42.58 per acre inch of water, the total value of the saved water would be approximately \$2 million dollars. The value of 175,500 acre inches saved should the probes continue to be used four years after cost share expires, for a total of five years, would be approximately \$7.5 million.

4. Provide evidence that sufficient funds are available to complete the proposal.

The URNRD has a cash balance of \$8 million, property tax revenues of \$2,035,000 and occupation tax revenues of approximately \$4.4 million. The URNRD has sufficient budget authority to fund the project and will budget to fund the project.

5. Provide evidence that sufficient annual revenue is available to repay the reimbursable costs and to cover OM&R (operate, maintain, and replace).

There are no O&M costs associated with the project.

6. If a loan is involved, provide sufficient documentation to prove that the loan can be repaid during the repayment life of the proposal.
N/A

7. Describe how the plan of development minimizes impacts on the natural environment.

The installation of the probes only requires a hole of a few inches in diameter and approximately 4 feet long be created in crop fields where the probes are installed, so there is essentially no impact on the natural environment.

8. Explain how you are qualified, responsible and legally capable of carrying out the project for which you are seeking funds.

The URNRD is qualified to carry out the project because it has operated a similar project for the previous four years. We have a solid understanding of how moisture probes work and how to administer a cost share program for them that is cost effective. We are responsible for such a project because it pertains to water use and the district is charged with managing groundwater. We are legally qualified pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. 46-702 to manage groundwater.

9. Explain how your project considers plans and programs of the state and resources development plans of the political subdivisions of the state.

The project is consistent with the URNRD's Groundwater Management Plan, Integrated Management Plan jointly developed with and approved by the State and duties associated with the Republican River Compact of which the State is party.

All of URNRD is a Groundwater Management Area where controls designed to reduce water consumption and extend aquifer life are in place. The project's intent and design to reduce water use are consistent with the State's interest in "management, protection and conservation of groundwater...that's essential to economic prosperity and future wellbeing of the State...and the public interest demands procedures for the implementation of management practices to conserve and protect groundwater supplies," (*Neb. Rev. Stat. 46-702*).

The project will help the District meet Integrated Management Plan goals and objectives designed to sustain a balance between water uses and water supplies and maintain compliance with the Republican River Compact. Among the specific objectives in the IMP the project will help achieve is reducing District-wide groundwater use under average precipitation conditions.

10. Are land rights necessary to complete your project?

YES NO

If yes, provide a complete listing of all lands involved in the project.

N/A

If yes, attach proof of ownership for each easements, rights-of-way and fee title currently held.

[Click here to enter text.](#)

If yes, provide assurance that you can hold or can acquire title to all lands not currently held.

N/A

11. Identify how you possess all necessary authority to undertake or participate in the project.

The authority needed to undertake the project since it is a cost-share project in nature is primarily that which is needed to collect and spend tax dollars for authorized purposes. As a political subdivision of the State, the URNRD can collect and spend tax dollars and managing groundwater is one of our authorized purposes.

12. Identify the probable environmental and ecological consequences that may result as the result of the project.

We expect and hope that the environmental consequences arising from the project will be preservation of water that can extend, hopefully indefinitely, the life of the aquifer underlying the district.

Section C.

NRC SCORING

In the NRC's scoring process, points will be given to each project in ranking the projects, with the total number of points determining the final project ranking list.

The following 15 criteria constitute the items for which points will be assigned. Point assignments will be 0, 2, 4, or 6 for items 1 through 8; and 0, 1, 2, or 3 for items 9 through 15. Two additional points will be awarded to projects which address issues determined by the NRC to be the result of a federal mandate.

Notes:

- The responses to one criterion *will not* be considered in the scoring of other criteria. Repeat references as needed to support documentation in each criterion as appropriate. The 15 categories are specified by statute and will be used to create scoring matrixes which will ultimately determine which projects receive funding.
- There is a total of 69 possible points, plus two bonus points. The potential number of points awarded for each criteria are noted in parenthesis. Once points are assigned, they will be added to determine a final score. The scores will determine ranking.
- The Commission recommends providing the requested information and the requests are not intended to limit the information an applicant may provide. An applicant should include additional information that is believed will assist the Commission in understanding a proposal so that it can be awarded the points to which it is entitled.

Complete any of the following (15) criteria which apply to your project. Your response will be reviewed and scored by the NRC. Place an N/A (not applicable) in any that do not apply, an N/A will automatically be placed in any response fields left blank.

1. Remediates or mitigates threats to drinking water;
 - Describe the specific threats to drinking water the project will address.
 - Identify whose drinking water, how many people are affected, how will project remediate or mitigate.
 - Provide a history of issues and tried solutions.
 - Provide detail regarding long range impacts if issues are not resolved.

The project will address rising nitrate levels that have been observed in the URNRD by helping reduce irrigation usage that can promote leaching of nitrates into the groundwater. The average nitrate level within the URNRD has more than

doubled to 3.91 parts per million since 1974. The URNRD is currently in the process of determining what areas of the district warrant additional testing and whether additional action beyond testing is needed.

Rising arsenic levels have been detected in municipal water supplies recently, including in Imperial and Wauneta. Extensive testing is currently being done in Wauneta to determine the movement of arsenic in the groundwater supply so that remediation methods can be assessed. In Benkelman, new municipal wells had to be located and installed because of unacceptable levels of uranium and arsenic in the former groundwater supply. It has not yet been determined whether there is a relationship between nitrates and development of high arsenic levels, but nitrates can trigger elevated levels of uranium.

It is reasonable to say that because of the predominance of irrigated cropland in the District and its close proximity to municipal and residential wells – there are approximately 430,000 irrigated acres in the district - all 9,000 of the residents within the URNRD could benefit from improved water quality potentially caused by less irrigation the project could create. If efforts to reduce the leaching of nitrates into groundwater are not addressed, the current rate of increase in nitrate levels will continue to increase. This potentially could lead to contamination issues forcing the location of new municipal wells, reverse osmosis systems and/or restrictions imposed by the URNRD on fertilizer applications.

2. Meets the goals and objectives of an approved integrated management plan or ground water management plan;
 - Identify the specific plan that is being referenced including date, who issued it and whether it is an IMP or GW management plan.
 - Provide the history of work completed to achieve the goals of this plan.
 - List which goals and objectives of the management plan the project provides benefits for and how the project provides those benefits.

The Integrated Management Plan jointly developed and approved by the URNRD and Nebraska Department of Natural Resources has been formally approved four times. The initial plan became effective June 2, 2005; it was revised and approved and then became effective on April 3, 2008; it was revised and approved and became effective on Nov. 1, 2010; and was revised and approved recently, becoming effective on Jan. 15, 2016. The district also has a groundwater management plan for its groundwater management area, which is the entire URNRD.

The District has taken a series of actions to achieve the IMP goals including: 1) Implementing the Rock Creek and NCORPE augmentation projects that have achieved, and will continue to ensure, compliance with the Republican River Compact as adopted in 1943 and as implemented in accordance with

the Settlement Agreement approved by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2003. The augmentation projects kept Nebraska in compliance with the compact in 2013, 2014, 2015 and will be relied upon to do so in 2016. These actions have helped achieve the IMP goal of maintaining compliance with the compact. 2) Reached agreements with the other NRDs in the Republican Basin and the State that apportion Compact compliance responsibilities to the NRDs based on depletions to stream flow that occur within their respective Districts. This has helped achieve the second IMP goal of ensuring that water users within the District assume their share, but only their share of the responsibility to maintain compliance with the Compact; 3) Implemented a uniform groundwater allocation system whereby all water users within the District have the same allocation. By implementing the augmentation projects, the District has prevented water users in close proximity to the Republican and River and its tributaries from being subject to lower water allocations. This has helped achieve the third IMP goal of the District apportioning its share of Compact compliance responsibility equitably so as to minimize adverse economic, social, and environmental consequences arising from Compact compliance activities. 4) Continued to prohibit expansion of new irrigated acres and permanently retired approximately 1,500 acres from irrigation using District and federal funds. This has helped achieve the fourth IMP goal of protecting groundwater users whose water wells depend on recharge from the river or stream and the surface water appropriators on such rivers or streams from stream flow depletions caused by water uses begun after the time in which the Republican Basin was designated fully appropriated.

The proposed project helps achieve the following IMP goals and objectives in the following ways:

1) Maintain compliance with the Republican River Compact:

Use of soil moisture probes will help reduce water consumption, aiding State efforts to not exceed its allocation under the Compact and/or limit the amount of excessive use that must be offset by increasing stream flow via stream flow augmentation projects developed in the Republican River Basin. Compliance with the Compact aided by reduced water use prevents statewide liability for noncompliance that include significant penalties. For instance, the State of Kansas recently sought but did not successfully receive a court judgement of approximately \$70 million for Nebraska's noncompliance with the Compact in 2005-2006.

2) Reduce existing groundwater use within the URNRD by 20 percent from the 1998 to 2002 baseline pumping volumes under average precipitation conditions so that, when combined with stream flow augmentation and incentive programs, the URNRD's groundwater depletions are maintained within their portion of Nebraska's allowable groundwater depletions as computed through the use of the Republican River Compact Administration

Model. Additionally, voluntary reductions in baseline pumping volumes will continue to be pursued by the URNRD with the incentive of limiting the level of long-term management actions that are necessary during compact call years: The project will help achieve this goal by reducing pumping on approximately 23,500 acres. Anecdotal evidence from irrigators who use probes currently suggests water usage can be reduced by approximately 8 percent to 25 percent through their use. The proposed cost-share program is part of a long-term effort to encourage use of probes on as many acres as possible in the district. Those who install probes as part of the proposed program and have success using them can reasonably be expected to explain their benefits to fellow farmers, creating additional use of probes beyond those cost-shared as part of the proposed project.

4) Cause the reductions in water use required for compact compliance to be achieved through a combination of regulatory, incentive, and augmentation programs designed to reduce consumptive use. To the extent funds are available, incentive programs will be made available through targeted incentive programs: Augmentation projects designed to offset depletions to stream flow have been developed by the URNRD to help accomplish this objective. The proposed project represents an attempt to reduce depletions via reductions in groundwater pumping.

One of the URNRD's primary objectives related to groundwater quantity, contained in the district's groundwater management plan, is "to reduce the amount of groundwater being withdrawn." The proposed project will help achieve this objective.

3. Contributes to water sustainability goals by increasing aquifer recharge, reducing aquifer depletion, or increasing streamflow;

List the following information that is applicable:

- The location, area and amount of recharge;
- The location, area and amount that aquifer depletion will be reduced;
- The reach, amount and timing of increased streamflow. Describe how the project will meet these objectives and what the source of the water is;
- Provide a detailed listing of cross basin benefits, if any.

Approximately 23,500 acres can reasonably be expected to receive improved irrigation scheduling and reduced water use via the project by making farmers aware of actual soil-moisture content. The vast majority of probes purchased also provide recommendations via a software program on when to irrigate to prevent irrigation when soil moisture is adequate.

Input from irrigators who use moisture probes within the District suggests annual water savings of 1 inch-3 inches per year, per acre from using probes. It is expected that 160-200 probes will be installed under the project over a two-year period. Should the number of probes installed be at the midpoint of this range – 180 – they will be distributed on approximately 23,500 acres. Should the average reduction in water use be 2 inches per acre, total reduced water use over the two-year period would be 47,000 acre inches, or 3,917 acre feet.

This estimate is very conservative because it assumes the probes purchased under the proposed program would only be used the year in which they were purchased. Our experience with previous probe programs suggests that approximately 75 percent of irrigators who purchase probes continue to use them. Those that don't continue to use them choose not to for a variety of reasons, but the most common reason appears to be lack of computer skills and use that prevent them from regularly checking the data provided by the probes.

Should 75 percent (135) of the probes continue to be used over a five-year period subsequent to buying them and when cost-share was no longer available, total acre inches of saved water assuming 2 inches of reduced water use per year would be 175,500 acre inches, or 14,625 acre feet.

The area where the reduced aquifer depletion will occur as a result of the project is impossible to predict because all irrigators in the district will be eligible to apply for cost share under the program.

The impact such a reduction in pumping would have on stream flow would depend on proximity of fields where probes were used to streams. However, we know from the Republican River Compact Model that the average impact a pumping irrigation well within the URNRD has on stream flow is approximately 35 percent over a 50-year period, i.e. 35 percent of water pumped from the well would have resulted in stream flow within 50 years had it not been pumped. If the acres installed with probes under the program have a similar average of 35 percent impact on stream flow and an average of 2 inches less pumping occurs over time because of their use, benefits to stream flow within 50 years would be approximately 980 acre feet.

4. Contributes to multiple water supply goals, including, but not limited to, flood control, agricultural use, municipal and industrial uses, recreational benefits, wildlife habitat, conservation of water resources, and preservation of water resources;

- List the goals the project provides benefits.
- Describe how the project will provide these benefits
- Provide a long range forecast of the expected benefits this project could have versus continuing on current path.

Using actual soil moisture content relative to crops' water needs to guide irrigation decisions can reduce unnecessary irrigation applications. In this way it makes water use more efficient and aids agricultural use, both reducing energy costs associated with pumping and preserving water for future use that wouldn't have been available otherwise. It also aids agriculture within the context of the district's limitations on groundwater use. Reduced water usage caused by the project will help prevent farmers from exceeding their allocation (13 inches per year) and facing penalties – namely the loss of some allocation. Allocation also has an effect on land values within the URNRD. Unused allocation from previous years can be “banked” for use in future years. Land that has significant banked allocation tends to have a higher market value.

Municipal and domestic uses may also benefit from the project to the extent that reduced water usage prevents impacts on municipal well fields and domestic wells. It is fair to say that all municipal wellfields within the District have the potential to be impacted by water used for irrigation. Additionally, about 45 percent of the district's residents live outside cities and villages and have domestic wells potentially impacted by irrigation withdrawals.

There is a recreational and wildlife benefit from the project to the extent that reduced pumping it causes results in more stream flow. In particular, Enders Reservoir and Champion Lake in Chase County have experienced less inflows over time due to groundwater pumping for irrigation.

In general, the project seeks to conserve and preserve groundwater in an area where there have been significant groundwater declines over time. On average, groundwater levels are approximately 25 feet lower in the district compared to the period before irrigation development. Modeling needs to be conducted to help us better understand aquifer life under current pumping rates in different parts of the district, but some areas of the district could see insufficient supplies to fully irrigate crops within approximately 40 years under current usage rates.

5. Maximizes the beneficial use of Nebraska's water resources for the benefit of the state's residents;

- Describe how the project will maximize the increased beneficial use of Nebraska's water resources.
- Describe the beneficial uses that will be reduced, if any.
- Describe how the project provides a beneficial impact to the state's residents.

It is our hope and intent that the project does not reduce beneficial uses, but rather eliminates unnecessary uses of water or reduces uses that have minimal crop yields not justified by pumping expenses. The combination of soil sensors and software that interprets the data to provide recommendations on whether soil is dry enough to warrant irrigation helps farmers distinguish between beneficial and non-beneficial applications of water.

Eliminating non-beneficial uses of water as proposed under the project preserves water for the future that can be beneficially used. All residents of Nebraska benefit from this environment of additional irrigation supplies because it helps ensure that all the benefits derived from irrigated agriculture – food, fuel, tax revenues, jobs and economic output – continue longer or indefinitely.

6. Is cost-effective;

- List the estimated construction costs, O/M costs, land and water acquisition costs, alternative options, value of benefits gained.
- Compare these costs to other methods of achieving the same benefits.
- List the costs of the project.
- Describe how it is a cost effective project or alternative.

The costs associated with the project are limited to the purchase and installation of soil moisture probes by farmers, who will then be reimbursed for a portion of their expenses. The basis of the grant request is the average probe cost of \$2,250. Based on our experience with similar programs in previous years that have been funded by various grants, we can expect applications for cost share on approximately 80-100 probes.

For the purposes of this grant, we are assuming cost share will be provided on 80 probes that have an average cost of \$2,250 apiece. Total project cost, then, would be \$360,000 over two years. Requested grant funds of \$216,000 would cover 60 percent of the cost of the probes. That is the only expense associated with the project.

Because in most cases now probes are purchased, not leased, it can be expected that many of the probes bought under the program will be used in future years after cost-share has expired. Most probe vendors charge an annual service fee of approximately \$200-\$400 in years after probes are purchased, but this expense will not be covered by the proposed grant.

There are a few ways to analyze the cost-effectiveness of the project but maybe the best is to consider demand and continued use of the products that we propose to cost share. The URNRD has offered similar cost-share programs for probes for four years utilizing various grants. Please note that we currently have no grant funds for the project, thus this application. During those four years, demand for probes has grown and 348 of them have been installed on more than 45,000 acres in the district and we estimate that 75 percent of people who bought them with cost share continued to use them after receiving cost share. It appears as if those who are using probes, primarily as a means of reducing water use and becoming more efficient, believe they are cost effective.

7. Helps the state meet its obligations under interstate compacts, decrees, or other state contracts or agreements or federal law;

- Identify the interstate compact, decree, state contract or agreement or federal law.
- Describe how the project will help the state meet its obligations under compacts, decrees, state contracts or agreements or federal law.
- Describe current deficiencies and document how the project will reduce deficiencies.

The compact the project will help meet is the Republican River Compact between Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado as adopted in 1943 and as implemented in accordance with the Settlement Agreement approved by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2003.

Water consumption reduced under the project within will help ensure Nebraska's Compact allocation will not be exceeded. It will also reduce the amount of water use in excess of the allocation that must be offset by increasing stream flow via stream flow augmentation projects developed in the Republican River Basin. The project will help prevent and/or reduce statewide liability for noncompliance that include significant penalties. As an example, the State of Kansas recently sought but did not successfully receive a court judgement of approximately \$70 million for Nebraska's noncompliance with the Compact in 2005-2006.

Recently developed augmentation projects in the Basin, the Rock Creek Augmentation Project in Dundy County and the NCORPE Augmentation Project in Lincoln County have successfully kept the state in compliance with the Compact. But should their capacity at some be point be insufficient to ensure compliance, the only other available option to the NRDs in the Republican Basin including URNRD would be to impose stricter allocations, or prohibit irrigation altogether, on acres close to the Republican River and its tributaries (approximately 40,000 acres in URNRD) in dry years when compliance action was needed. By reducing water use and therefore the

impacts on stream flow caused by groundwater pumping that are considered usage of Nebraska's compact allocation, the project could help prevent or at least mitigate special regulations on water users close to the Republican and its tributaries.

8. Reduces threats to property damage or protects critical infrastructure that consists of the physical assets, systems, and networks vital to the state or the United States such that their incapacitation would have a debilitating effect on public security or public health and safety;

- Identify the property that the project is intended to reduce threats to.
- Describe and quantify reductions in threats to critical infrastructure provided by the project and how the infrastructure is vital to Nebraska or the United States.
- Identify the potential value of cost savings resulting from completion of the project.
- Describe the benefits for public security, public health and safety.

Continued aquifer depletion that the proposed project seeks to address could impact both critical infrastructure and the economy at the local, regional and national levels, according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Cyber and Infrastructure Analysis. Decreases in critical infrastructure caused by dwindling water supplies could be experienced in the food and agriculture, energy, and chemical sectors according to the analysis.

Specifically, food and fuel (ethanol) prices could rise due to less crop production and water and wastewater systems could be negatively impacted by growing populations and declining groundwater levels. Transportation systems infrastructure could be affected by potentially less demand for transportation services as a result of less agriculture and ethanol production. Interestingly, for purposes of projecting future crop yields that might impact those infrastructure areas, DHS used Dundy County in our District as the lone example.

DHS modeling showed that in the future, dryland crop yields might actually decline slightly and reliance on groundwater irrigation could be more tenuous. "Whereas farmers have used irrigation to offset impacts of climate variability on crop yields in the past, the depletion of the High Plains Aquifer could hinder their ability to do so in the future," according to the report. "As groundwater availability decreases over time, it is possible that more agricultural land will be converted from irrigated to dryland farming."

Counties of highest concern overlying the aquifer are those the modeling described in the report showed as having 25 or fewer years of groundwater

use available. No such counties in Nebraska were shown to be facing that imminent of a problem, but of the seven counties in Nebraska where the life of the aquifer usable for irrigation was shown to be 50-100 years, two are in the District (Dundy and Chase). One of the four counties in the Nebraska with a usable aquifer life of 100-200 years was in the District (Perkins).

9. Improves water quality;

- Describe what quality issue(s) is/are to be improved.
- Describe and quantify how the project improves water quality, what is the target area, what is the population or acreage receiving benefits, what is the usage of the water: residential, industrial, agriculture or recreational.
- Describe other possible solutions to remedy this issue.
- Describe the history of the water quality issue including previous attempts to remedy the problem and the results obtained.

Average nitrate levels within the URNRD have risen 111 percent since water quality testing began in 1974 and now stand at 3.91 ppm. This is still well below the maximum acceptable level of 10 ppm but it is prudent to take action now to slow or eliminate the rate of increase.

Less crop irrigation caused by the project could reduce leaching of nitrates into the groundwater supply. The URNRD is also currently in the process of identifying areas of the district where nitrate levels are high relative to the district average and at risk of reaching 10 ppm in the short and mid-term.

The URNRD has annually taken water samples from both domestic and irrigation wells for more than 40 years to test for contaminants. Rules and regulations have been established that require more testing in areas where high nitrate levels are detected. Additionally, limitations on groundwater use (allocations) were established in 1979. Allocations were set for groundwater quantity purposes but were expected to help slow the rate of nitrate infusion into the groundwater supply.

Other possible solutions to rising nitrates are limitations on fertilizer use. We hope not to have to impose such restrictions with help from projects such as the one proposed in this grant application.

10. Has utilized all available funding resources of the local jurisdiction to support the program, project, or activity;

- Identify the local jurisdiction that supports the project.
- List current property tax levy, valuations, or other sources of revenue for the sponsoring entity.
- List other funding sources for the project.

The jurisdiction that supports the project is the URNRD. We believe our regulating and managing all ag water use in the area since the 1970's makes it uniquely qualified to pursue the proposed project.

The District's 2015-2016 tax levy is \$.055216 per \$100 of valuation and will generate \$2,035,000 of revenue. The District's other source of revenue is the \$10-per-irrigated-acre occupation tax that generates \$4.4 million annually.

11. Has a local jurisdiction with plans in place that support sustainable water use;

- List the local jurisdiction and identify specific plans being referenced that are in place to support sustainable water use.
- Provide the history of work completed to achieve the goals of these plans.
- List which goals and objectives this project will provide benefits for and how this project supports or contributes to those plans.
- Describe and quantify how the project supports sustainable water use, what is the target area, what is the population or acreage receiving benefits, what is the usage of the water: residential, industrial, agriculture or recreational.
- List all stakeholders involved in project.
- Identify who benefits from this project.

The URNRD's Long Term Plan, Master Plan, Integrated management Plan and Groundwater Management Plan all seek to preserve water within the URNRD. Slowing and eventually stopping groundwater declines, in one form or another, is included as a primary goal in the long range, master and groundwater management plans. The URNRD's 2010-2020 master plan, for instance, has the stated goal of "developing, promulgating and enforcing rules and regulations that provide for appropriate protection of the aquifer so as to slow and eventually stop water table declines in order that beneficially usable quantities of water remain in the aquifer; incentives to use water efficiently; conservation of groundwater; and maintaining or enhancing groundwater quality."

The URNRD's Integrated Management Plan, first approved in 2005, revised and approved in 2008 and 2010, and revised and approved again in January 2016, has goals and objectives with a purpose of "sustaining a balance between water uses and water supplies so that the economic viability, social and environmental health, safety and welfare of the river basin... can be achieved and maintained for both the near and long term."

The District has pursued sustainable water use since the 1970's when it became, in 1979, the first entity in Nebraska and possibly the country to limit agricultural water use by establishing an allocation on the use of groundwater. Since that time, allocations have been reduced by approximately 40%. The

regulations have slowed groundwater declines compared to what was predicted to occur absent regulations. Average groundwater declines are approximately 60% less than what USGS predicted they would be if regulations weren't established (Lappala, 1978) and the most significant groundwater declines are approximately half what USGS estimated would occur without regulations.

In addition to allocations, regulations limiting proximity of irrigation wells to one another were approved in 1979 and again in 1992. In 1997, the District approved and implemented the first well-drilling moratorium in Nebraska. Larger declines in areas that abut the District in Kansas and Colorado which do not have regulations or whose regulations are less stringent also illustrate the beneficial impact of these actions within the District. Average annual declines in areas of Kansas with a similar climate have been more than double what has occurred in the District,

Most recently, in 2013, the District made some of its most significant rules changes in its history when it restricted the use of unused allocation, or "carry-forward", and created new penalties for water users who use more than their water allotments. All agricultural water use has been metered since the late 1970's and approximately 400 wells are measured in the spring and fall. Metering, well measurements and allocations have created an extensive database from which the District can base decisions to further its long term goal of slowing groundwater declines in the District. The proposed project represents the next step in water management for the District.

The primary goal which the project will help achieve, mentioned in the response to the first part of this question, is to slow and eventually stop groundwater declines. The project will help achieve this goal by helping farmers reduce or eliminate unnecessary use of groundwater. By knowing for certain how much water is available for crop consumption in the soil profile, and receiving recommendations via software that interprets soil moisture relative to crop needs, they can limit irrigations to what is needed.

The project will also help achieve the following objectives contained in the District's Long Range Implementation Plan:

- Conduct monitoring and other data collection activities and research necessary for interpretation of changes in groundwater levels and actual and potential pollution of the aquifer: The URNRD will have access to data provided to farmers from soil moisture probes. This information will be a form of data collection that can aid our understanding of how pumping relative to crop water needs as suggested by probes relates to groundwater level changes.
- Reduce the potential for non-point contamination of ground and surface water through education, research, management practices, incentives and

rules that protect the water but also minimize adverse effects on the economy of the area: Less water use and subsequently less leaching of nitrates into the groundwater supply via the project will help achieve this objective.

One of the URNRD's primary objectives related to groundwater quantity, contained in the district's Groundwater Management Plan, is "to reduce the amount of groundwater being withdrawn." The proposed project will help achieve this objective.

The target area of the project is the 1.7 million-acre land area of the District. The approximately 430,000 irrigated acres in the area are located throughout the District. The population of the area directly benefitting from the project is the 9,000 residents of the District and all residents of the Republican Basin and Nebraska generally that benefit from the agricultural output and stream flow generated in the District.

The District considers all residents of the District stakeholders in and beneficiaries of the project.

12. Addresses a statewide problem or issue;

- List the issues or problems addressed by the project and why they should be considered statewide.
- Describe how the project will address each issue and/or problem.
- Describe the total number of people and/or total number of acres that would receive benefits.
- Identify the benefit, to the state, this project would provide.

One of the main challenges it seems Nebraska will face in coming decades is sustaining its water supply so it can sustain irrigated agriculture that is a vital piece of the state economy. The project attempts to address this challenge by limiting water use to what is needed to produce reasonable crop yields.

To protect and preserve water supplies, it is expected that regulating water use through an allocation system such as what is done in the URNRD will become more common across Nebraska. As regulations become more commonplace, it will be important that farmers be familiar with tools such as soil moisture probes so they do not exceed allocations. We view the proposed project as an entryway for farmers to become familiar with technologically advanced moisture probes so they can continue to use them. It is worth noting that almost all of the probes purchased under previous and similar URNRD cost-share programs have been those with telemetry that relay information to phones and computers and offer irrigation scheduling recommendations.

As stated before, most all Nebraskans benefit from the efficient and wise use of water because of the revenue, jobs and recreation it provides. Should supplies within the URNRD dwindle to the point in some areas that crops can't be fully irrigated, land values will likely decrease. This could increase the need, for example, for local school districts that currently don't rely, or rely very little, on state aid to be eligible and in need for more, impacting other school districts across the state. Tax revenue in the form of sales and income taxes generated by irrigated agriculture in the district would also decrease, impacting residents across the state. This project, and no project, is a "silver bullet" that can alone produce more sustainable uses of water to prevent such consequences but is part of a broader effort including other actions such as regulations. The project appeals to the URNRD as a means of reducing water use because similar programs in the past have demonstrated the ability, according to farmers who use probes, to reduce water use.

The program is expected to reduce water use on approximately 20,800-26,000 acres within the district depending on how many probes are purchased under the program. Because the aquifer within the district is unconfined and water use from one irrigation well can effect the supply of another, it is reasonable to assume all 430,000 irrigated acres within the district will benefit. The economy of the district is driven by irrigated agriculture, so all 9,000 residents of the district have the potential to benefit from reduced water use the project will cause.

13. Contributes to the state's ability to leverage state dollars with local or federal government partners or other partners to maximize the use of its resources;
- List other funding sources or other partners, and the amount each will contribute, in a funding matrix.
 - Describe how each source of funding is made available if the project is funded.
 - Provide a copy or evidence of each commitment, for each separate source, of match dollars and funding partners.
 - Describe how you will proceed if other funding sources do not come through.

Recently, the three NRDs within the Republican Basin – URNRD, Middle Republican NRD and Lower Republican NRD – applied for and received approval to partner with the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in the NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). The program in essence will make more money available within the Republican Basin for some existing federal programs under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). In order for additional federal funds to be available in the Republican Basin for programs under the EQIP program meant to reduce water use, the NRDs in the basin must also pay for water-conservation efforts. Under the approved RCPP program as it applies to the URNRD, our district must spend

dollars on soil moisture probes in order for the district to be eligible for more EQIP dollars. The proposed grant is to help encourage the use of soil-moisture probes that we believe reduce water use; WSF and local dollars spent on probes, in turn, will attract more EQIP funds to the district.

See Attachment 1 indicating preliminary approval for the URNRD's participation in the program. A memorandum of understanding is currently being developed with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

Please note that the EQIP funds made available under the RCPP program will not go to the URNRD, and will not be used to help pay for probes that would be purchased/leased under this proposed WSF grant. Rather, WSF funds and URNRD dollars spent on the probe program would trigger the availability of an equal amount EQIP funds for separate, EQIP programs enrolled in by individuals within the district.

Our intent is that through the proposed grant and expenditures made for probes and equal amount of federal dollars will be made available under separate NRCS EQIP programs.

Because we do not currently have a grant from other sources to fund cost-share on soil moisture probes, if this grant proposal is not approved we will seek other grant funds.

14. Contributes to watershed health and function;

- Describe how the project will contribute to watershed health and function in detail and list all of the watersheds affected.

There are seven watersheds defined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that are entirely or partially contained within the District: Arikaree; Red Willow; Stinking Water; North Fork of the Republican; South Fork of the Republican; Upper Republican; and Frenchman. All are considered impaired waters for the following reasons:

Arikaree – E. Coli

Red Willow – E. Coli, Biointegrity; Chlorophyll; Dissolved Oxygen; Phosphorus

Stinking Water – E. Coli

North Fork of the Republican – E. Coli

South Fork of the Republican – E. Coli

Upper Republican – E. Coli; Chlorophyll; Dissolved Oxygen; Nitrogen; Phosphorus; Selenium

Frenchman – E. Coli; Chlorophyll; Selenium

To the extent that reduced groundwater pumping under the proposed project can mitigate decreases in stream flow, the project could reduce impairment of the Red Willow, Upper Republican and Frenchman watersheds by increasing dissolved oxygen and dilution of phosphorus, nitrogen and selenium. Less leaching of nitrogen and phosphorus due to reduced irrigation may decrease their presence in groundwater and therefore natural discharges to streams (base flow), improving watershed health.

15. Uses objectives described in the annual report and plan of work for the state water planning and review process issued by the department.

- Identify the date of the Annual Report utilized.
- List any and all objectives of the Annual Report intended to be met by the project
- Explain how the project meets each objective.

The project meets the following objective cited in the NeDNR September 2015 Annual Report and Plan of Work for the Nebraska State Planning and Review Process:

Republican River Basin IMPs (p. 24): The annual report states that NDNR and the NRDs in the Republican Basin including URNRD will continue to meet annually to “review the IMPs and progress made towards achieving the goals of each plan. These reviews focus on the assessment of two key compliance standards: limitations on groundwater depletions and limitations on groundwater pumping.” The proposed project will help achieve IMP goals of reduced pumping – specifically, reducing pumping over the long term and during periods of average precipitation by 20 percent compared to 1998-2002 baseline pumping volumes.

16. Federal Mandate Bonus. If you believe that your project is designed to meet the requirements of a federal mandate which furthers the goals of the WSF, then:

- Describe the federal mandate.
- Provide documentary evidence of the federal mandate.
- Describe how the project meets the requirements of the federal mandate.
- Describe the relationship between the federal mandate and how the project furthers the goals of water sustainability.

Congressional approval was required for the Republican River Compact to be entered into by Nebraska, Colorado and Kansas and Congressional approval would be required to dissolve it. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider the compact a federal mandate.

It was entered into with Congressional approval in 1943 and allocates the annual, average supply of the Republican River among the three states thusly: 49 percent to Nebraska; 40 percent to Kansas; and 11 percent to Colorado. The amount of water subject to those percentages varies annually depending upon stream flows.

Before a 2002 settlement agreement between the compact states, the accounting that determined each state's consumptive use under the compact included surface water and alluvial groundwater for irrigation, municipal and industrial uses, and evaporation from U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Reservoirs. Subsequent to the 2002 agreement approved by the U.S. Supreme Court, depletions to stream flow caused by all groundwater use including from upland wells is included in the calculations. A groundwater model was developed to compute depletions to stream flow caused by groundwater pumping.

Annually, the State of Nebraska, using estimates of surface water supplies and depletions, forecasts whether action will need to be taken the following year to ensure compliance with the compact. A primary intent of the IMPs developed by the NRDs in the Republican Basin and NEDNR is to ensure compact compliance. One way it seeks to do this is by mitigating impacts on stream flow caused by establishing goals to reduce groundwater pumping. Reducing groundwater pumping is the main intent of the proposed project and, if achieved as projected, will therefore aid the federal mandate of compact compliance.

The compact by constraining uses to allocations between the states is naturally a limiting force on groundwater pumping and this has been demonstrated in many ways over the past approximately 20 years. All wells in the Lower and Middle Republican NRDs were metered because of the compact (wells in URNRD were metered because of water quantity concerns that predated compact issues); moratoriums on new irrigation development were established because of efforts to comply with the compact; and water use restrictions, or allocations, were implemented in the Lower and Middle Republican NRDs because of the compact (water quantity concerns predating compact concerns caused allocations in the URNRD). In this way, there is a direct connection between the federal mandate of compact compliance and water sustainability goals.

Section D.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Overview

In 1,000 characters or less, provide a brief description of your project including the nature and purpose of the project and objectives of the project.

The Upper Republican NRD Moisture Probe Program is a proposed cost-share program whereby WSF funds would be used to defray farmers' costs of purchasing probes, therefore encouraging their use and reducing water use in the URNRD.

Previous programs within the URNRD have demonstrated that most of the demand for probes is for those that electronically relay soil-moisture information to depths of up to normally 4 feet to a software program and digital interface accessible by computer, smart phone and tablets. The programs interpret the data to offer recommendations on whether soil moisture is such that irrigation applications are, or are not, needed. Multiple studies have concluded that such probes are significant aids in irrigation scheduling, namely in areas with limited water supplies, suggesting that they can reduce water use. Since 2012 and using various grants that have since expired, the URNRD has provided cost share on probes that have been used on more than 45,000 acres. We have regularly communicated with many of the irrigators who have used the probes and they indicate that regular use of them and the irrigation recommendations they offer can reduce annual water applications by 1"-3" per acre annually. We believe the use of probes is a cost effective way to reduce water use. While 45,000 acres is significant, it represents only 10 percent of the irrigated acres within the URNRD. There remains much more opportunity to expose irrigators to the use of probes with cost-share incentives such as those in the proposed program.

Under the proposed program, irrigators would choose and purchase soil moisture probes of their choice and the URNRD would have access to all data that they provided. Funds from the WSF would pay for 60 percent of the cost of the probes and the URNRD/irrigators would pay the remaining cost. The cost of probes currently used in the district varies significantly but average approximately \$2,250 apiece. Previous programs have shown previous demand for approximately 80 probes per year. Using this experience, we are requesting \$216,000 from the WSF for a two-year program where approximately 160-200 probes would be purchased and installed at a total cost of approximately \$360,000. The 40 percent of the cost not covered by WSF funds would be paid for by the URNRD/irrigators. Cost-share would be provided on a reimbursement basis.

Should the number of probes installed under the project be 180 they would be installed on approximately 23,500 acres. If use of the probes caused 2 inches per acre less water use, total reduced water use over the two-year period of the grant would be 47,000 acre inches, or 3,917 acre feet. The amount of savings would increase significantly should irrigators who got probes under the program continue to use them after cost share expired. It has been our experience that approximately 75 percent of those who bought probes under URNRD cost-share programs continued to use them after they no longer received cost share. Typically, once a probe is bought the annual service fee for telemetry and other services is approximately \$200-\$400 annually.

As can be noted from other WSF applications submitted by the URNRD this year, we are aggressively pursuing projects that are designed to reduce water use. The district is at a key juncture where actions taken now can help stabilize groundwater levels before reduced water supplies jeopardize the ability to fully irrigate crops in some areas of the district in coming decades. Use of soil moisture probes in our district has demonstrated the ability to reduce water use and help meet our objective of slowing groundwater declines. The district has required meters on all wells and imposed allocations since 1979, which has prevented groundwater declines from being more significant than they otherwise would have been. Still, groundwater declines persist and on average, groundwater levels within the district are approximately 25 feet lower now than before widespread irrigation development began.

Development of new technology now on the market, including advanced moisture probes that offer irrigation scheduling recommendations and would be offered under this program, offer the district new opportunities to preserve groundwater.

2. Project Tasks and Timeline

Identify what activities will be conducted by the project. For multiyear projects please list what activities are to be completed each year.

2017-2018: In both years the District will undertake the same process of advertising the availability of cost share for soil moisture probes. The program will limit to three or four the number of probes that each participant can receive cost-share for. There will also be limits on how much cost-share is available for each probe, dependent on the \$2,250 average price of probes. Because WSF cost share covers 60 percent of project costs, the amount of cost share from

WSF provided for each probe will be \$1,350 This will help increase the number of people exposed to the use of soil moisture probes under the program. Probes purchased will only be able to be used within the URNRD. Once accepted into the program, participants will be able to purchase probes of their choosing. Once proof of purchase is demonstrated to the URNRD, the URNRD will reimburse participants and then seek reimbursement from the WSF.

3. Partnerships

Identify the roles and responsibilities of agencies and groups involved in the proposed project regardless of whether each is an additional funding source. List any other sources of funding that have been approached for project support and that have officially turned you down. Attach the rejection letter.

N/A

4. Other Sources of Funding

Identify the costs of the entire project, what costs each other source of funding will be applied to, and whether each of these other sources of funding is confirmed. If not, please identify those entities and list the date when confirmation is expected. Explain how you will implement the project if these sources are not obtained.

The total cost of the project is \$360,000, of which the WSF would fund 60 percent, or \$216,000, over the two-year duration of the project. All funds under the project would be used for purchase and installation of probes. No other sources of funding are being sought.

5. Support/Opposition

Discuss both support and opposition to the project, including the group or interest each represents.

There is no opposition to the project and the participation of landowners within the District under previous programs indicates a high level of support.

Nate Jenkins

Attachment 1

From: Pat Underwood <underwoodpat@ymail.com>
Sent: Friday, February 12, 2016 10:42 AM
To: Nate Jenkins; Jack Russell; Bob Merrigan; Keep Andrew - NRCS Imperial NE; Kennedy Jason - NRCS McCook NE; Scott Dicke; Jerald Kovarik
Cc: Mike Clements
Subject: Fw: RCPP 2016 Program Announcement

Official notification below. Mike will have received a copy also. Thanks everyone, for all your good thoughts, work and input on this, and thanks to Mike for the great idea in the first place.

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: RA. NRCS. DCWA2. RCPP <RCPP@wdc.usda.gov>
To: RA. NRCS. DCWA2. RCPP <RCPP@wdc.usda.gov>
Sent: Friday, February 12, 2016 10:50 AM
Subject: RCPP 2016 Program Announcement

Good Morning RCPP Applicant:

Thank you for submitting a full-proposal to the Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). I am pleased to inform you that your full-proposal for was selected for FY 2016 program funding.

This was a highly competitive process, with 167 full-proposals submitted by a diverse group of applicants from across the nation. Full-proposals underwent rigorous technical review, were scored based on the criteria outlined in the Announcement of Program Funding, and ranked against other projects in the funding pool.

In the coming weeks, you will be contacted by the State Conservationist of the Lead state to begin project negotiations and development of Partnership Agreements. These agreements will need to be completed no later than March 30, 2016 with NRCS. When you meet with the State Conservationist, please be aware that at a minimum you will need to discuss the following items:

1. Dollars Requested by Program and by State
 - a. Includes Program FA dollars, NRCS TA, and Partner TA (if requested)
2. Deliverables of Project
3. Roles and Responsibilities
4. Reporting timeline

Please note that any Adjustment of Terms or Alternative Funding Arrangements have not been approved. These will need to be discussed with the Lead State Conservationist during the negotiation process to determine eligibility and/or feasibility. Final approval will be issued after the negotiation process with the State Conservationist.

Again, congratulations and thank you for your interest in this partnership effort to deliver conservation on the ground. If you need more information, please email me at rcpp@wdc.usda.gov.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Rose, Director
Financial Assistance Programs Division

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