# NEBRASKA NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

## Water Sustainability Fund

Application for Funding

Section A.

## ADMINISTRATIVE

**PROJECT NAME:** Middle Niobrara Natural Resources District Educational Complex

**SPONSOR'S** PRIMARY *CONTACT INFORMATION* **(Not Consultant's)**

Sponsor Business Name: Middle Niobrara Natural Resources District (MNNRD)

Sponsor Contact's Name: Chandler Schmidt

Sponsor Contact's Address: 303 E. HWY20, Valentine, NE 69201

Sponsor Contact's Phone: 402-376-3241

Sponsor Contact's Email: cschmidt@mnnrd.org

1. **Funding** amount requested from the Water Sustainability Fund:

   **Grant** amount requested. $ 4,425,630.48

   - If requesting less than 60% cost share, what %? N/A

   **If a loan is requested** amount requested. $ 0

   - How many years repayment period? N/A
   - Supply a complete year-by-year repayment schedule. N/A

2. **Neb. Rev. Stat.§ 2-1507 (2)**

   Are you applying for a **combined sewer overflow 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☒
- Attach a copy to your application.
- What is the population served by your project?
- Provide a demonstration of need.
- **Do not complete the remainder of the application.**

3. **Permits Required/Obtained** Attach a copy of each that has been obtained. For those needed, but not yet obtained (box **"NO"** checked), 1.) State when you will apply for the permit, 2.) When you anticipate receiving the permit, and 3.) Your estimated cost to obtain the permit.

(N/A = Not applicable/not asking for cost share to obtain)
(Yes = See attached)
(No = Might need, don't have& are asking for 60% cost share to obtain)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| G&P - T&E consultation (required) | N/A☒ | Obtained: YES☐ | NO☐ |
| DNR Surface Water Right | N/A☒ | Obtained: YES☐ | NO☐ |
| USACE (e.g., 404/other Permit) | N/A☒ | Obtained: YES☐ | NO☐ |
| FEMA (CLOMR) | N/A☒ | Obtained: YES☐ | NO☐ |
| Local Zoning/Construction | N/A☐ | Obtained: YES☐ | NO☒ |

- The MNNRD will need a zoning/building permit to construct the new MNNRD office, which SINREC will be inside the new office. The MNNRD will apply for the permit once a contractor has been selected and approved by the MNNRD Board of Directors. The MNNRD anticipates receiving those permits sometime in the spring/summer of 2025. There will be a $30 fee for the building permit.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cultural Resources Evaluation | N/A☒ | Obtained: YES☐ | NO☐ |
| Other (provide explanation below) | N/A☒ | Obtained: YES☐ | NO☐ |

4. **Partnerships**

List each Partner / Co-sponsor, attach documentation of agreement:

The MNNRD supports this project along with many other partners which include UNL Conservation and Survey Division, Lewis and Clark NRD, Central Platte NRD, Lower Niobrara NRD, Niobrara Council, Upper Niobrara White NRD, UNL Extension, Lower Big Blue NRD, Little Blue NRD, Lower Elkhorn NRD, Lower Loup NRD, Lower Platte North NRD, Lower Platte South NRD, Lower Republican NRD, Midde Republican NRD, Nemaha NRD, North Platte NRD, Papio Missouri River NRD, South Platte NRD, Tri Basin NRD, Twin Platte NRD, Upper Big Blue NRD, Upper Elkhorn NRD, Upper Loup NRD, Upper Republican NRD, NE NRCS State Office, Water Leaders Academy, NE Well Drillers Association, NE State Irrigation Association, and NE Forest Service. Letters of support are attached in the supplemental information attachment.

Identify the roles and responsibilities of each Partner / Co-sponsor involved in the proposed project regardless of whether each is an additional funding source.

Each entity partnering with the MNNRD on SINREC will provide on-going technical assistance, information, documents, and assist with hands on training held at SINREC.

5. **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.

Total project cost of the project: **$7,376,050.80**

The MNNRD has been putting money aside for 10 years and has funds secured through building capital outlay in the MNNRD annual budget to cover the cost of 40% ($2,950,420.32) match towards the project with a request from WSF for 60% ($4,425,630.48). The MNNRD has tried prior to this application for other outside funding assistance for this project.

| Building & Educational Complex Estimated Costs | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Item** | **Construction** | **Total** |
| Water Conservation & Site Development | $1,612,872.00 | $1,612,872.00 |
| Building & Educational Complex | $5,763,178.80 | $5,763,178.80 |
| **Totals:** | **$7,376,050.80** | **$7,376,050.80** |

6. **Overview**

In 1,000 words *or less*, provide a brief description of your project including the nature/purpose of the project and its objectives. Do not exceed one page!

The Middle Niobrara Natural Resources District (MNNRD) is creating the Sandhills Interactive Natural Resources Educational Complex (SINREC) to bring a visual and hands on learning environment for the general public through engagement with the Natural Resource Districts (NRDs) and partners. This state-of-the-art complex will provide a combination of digital and hands-on training opportunities for all who visit the facility. SINREC will offer both indoor and outdoor education experiences that allow individuals to actively participate in and observe resource conservation management. The facility will focus on surface and groundwater management encompassing: water, soil, habitat, forestry, range management, and agriculture as the focus for all public participants. The classroom features interactive displays, interpretative signs, graphic wall murals, posters, and digital technology to create a highly engaging environment. Exhibits cover topics such as water conservation, soil resources and health, habitat conservation, forestry, range management, and agricultural practices. Digital displays will have interactive videos, history lessons, and access to valuable resources. The water exhibit focuses on sustainable use of the Ogallala Aquifer, interaction between surface and groundwater, and methods for protecting and improving water quality and quantity. A large sand table will demonstrate the effects of soil erosion and best practices for soil health. Fish and wildlife habitat section provides information on native species identification, habitat requirements, invasive species impacts, and fish and wildlife interactions. The forestry section includes a variety of tree slabs, for a tactile experience while examining annual growth rings, and learning tree identification using bark, leaves, and other characteristics. Forest management emphasizes the importance of tree planting and proper forest health. The range management display highlights the benefit of native grasses, various prairie ecosystems, and sustainable agriculture through livestock grazing. As visitors move from one exhibit to the next, they will see how conservation in one area positively impacts others, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all areas of natural resource management. Visitors will also have the opportunity to learn about local and statewide conservation programs and incentives. The education components located inside the facility are designed to connect with outside exhibits and working examples of conservation equipment, enabling participants to first understand concepts in the indoor classroom and then apply and observe them in the outdoor classroom. The indoor and outdoor classroom settings at SINREC will complement and enhance the hands-on experience, broadening the scope and quality of educational opportunities. The indoor classroom is designed to cater to different learning styles: auditory, kinesthetic, and visual, ensuring that participants can engage effectively. This approach allows SINREC to offer top-tier, comprehensive training for attendees. Research shows that learners retain 5% of material from lectures, 30% from demonstration, and up to 75% from hands-on participation. By emphasizing hands-on training, SINREC keeps learners actively engaged, reduces risks of failure by allowing practice in a controlled environment, and enhances problem-solving skills by exposing participants to real-world challenges.

7. **Project Tasks and Timeline**

Identify what activities will be conducted to complete the project, and the anticipated completion date.
**For multiyear projects** please list (using the following example):

| Tasks | Year 1$ | Year 2$ | Year 3$ | Remaining | Total $ Amt. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Permits | $18,000 | | | | $18,000 |
| Engineering | | $96,000 | | | $96,000 |
| Construction | | $87,000 | $96,000 | | $183,000 |
| Close-out | | | | $8,000 | $8,000 |
| | | | | TOTAL | $305,000 |

- What activities (Tasks) are to be completed.
- An estimate of each Tasks expenditures/cost per year.
- Activities in years 4 through project completion under a single column.

The MNNRD to date, has spent $1,083,081.65 on the initial educational complex components (Outdoor portion) with assistance from Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET), U.S. Forest Service(USFS), and NE Forest Service(NEFS).

A description of the tasks to be completed for this project are as follows: Construction/Implementation of a proposed new MNNRD Office building and parking lot/green infrastructure projects. Finalizing layout and components of SINREC with Heartland Scenic Studio. Construction of the educational facility, installation of the interactive displays, interpretative signs, graphics, wall murals, posters, and digital technology. An estimated timeframe of each task is included in the supplemental information attachment. Design and permitting has been completed. Construction will take place, and all funds consumed over a 2 year period. MNNRD's 40% ($2,950,420.32) match is secured through the MNNRD's annual budget. A preliminary project planning timeline is attached in the supplemental information attachment.

| Building & Educational Complex Estimated Costs | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Item** | **Construction** | **Total** |
| Water Conservation & Site Development | $1,612,872.00 | $1,612,872.00 |
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The MNNRD has also been working on other projects involving litter waste reduction and green infrastructure. The MNNRD parking lot had spalling concrete and raveling asphalt along with three different foundations. The MNNRD and Buer Bulldozing removed and repurposed 2,442 tons of pavement. The repurposed material was ground, milled, and utilized at the MNNRD HQ in preventing erosion, reducing blowing sand and deposit around the MNNRD HQ, and creating better surfacing versus soft sand. The

MNNRD and Buer Bulldozing completed this project in December 2024. To coincide with the litter waste reduction project, the MNNRD is working with E&A Consulting on design and installation of green infrastructure projects in the MNNRD parking lot. Examples of green infrastructure projects would be: Bioswales, wetlands, rain gardens, rain barrel implementation, and possibly porous pavement. These green infrastructure projects will aid in collecting and reducing stormwater runoff, improving water quality by reducing the amount of stormwater reaching waterways, filtering pollutants from the stormwater that does run off through plants, habitat, vegetation and soil which capture and remove contaminants like sediment, metals, or bacteria by way of absorption, filtration, and plant uptake. The MNNRD has an 8-acre lot and approximately 42,000 sq ft of roof top.

8. **IMP**

Do you have an **Integrated Management Plan** in place, or have you initiated one? YES☒ NO☐ Sponsor is not an NRD☐

## Section B.

## DNR DIRECTOR'S FINDINGS

### **Prove Engineering & Technical Feasibility**

(Applicant must demonstrate compliance with Title 261, CH 2 - 004)

1. Does your project include physical construction (defined as moving dirt, directing water, physically constructing something, or installing equipment)?
YES☒ NO☐

If you answered "YES" you must answer all questions in section 1.A.
If you answer "NO" you must answer all questions in section 1.B.

If "YES", it is considered mostly structural, so answer the following:

1.A.1 Insert a feasibility report to comply with Title 261, Chapter 2, including engineering and technical data;

This project includes many components with a full site grading plan, topographic survey, developing elevations, parking lot configuration, development and design of rain gardens, storm water runoff from rain garden into existing storm sewer system, sodding and planting schedule, architectural design for the building configuration and layout, spatial analysis, structural engineering, soil bearing capacities, environmental impact analysis, and educational complex configuration and layout.

Engineering and technical data included in the supplemental information attachment.

1.A.2 Describe the plan of development (004.01 A);

The MNNRD, E&A Consulting, Miller Architects, and Heartland Scenic Studio developed a site plan, soils tests, elevations/grading, etc. for the parking lot tear out project, GPR projects, and proposed new MNNRD office with SINREC.

1.A.3 Include a description of all field investigations made to substantiate the feasibility report (004.01 B);

The MNNRD in working with E&A Consulting, Miller Architects, and Heartland Scenic Studio has had land surveys, bore samples, soil tests, and elevations/grading. The MNNRD has provided layouts in the supplemental information attachment.

1.A.4 Provide maps, drawings, charts, tables, etc., used as a basis for the feasibility report (004.01 C);

The MNNRD has provided layouts from Heartland Scenic Studio, E&A Consulting, Miller Architects, and Parking Lot/Green Infrastructure Projects, in the supplemental information attachment.

1.A.5 Describe any necessary water and/or land rights including pertinent water supply and water quality information (004.01 D);

The MNNRD owns the property the MNNRD HQ is located. There will be no land or water rights. The MNNRD HQ sits on an 8-acre lot with approximately 42,000 sq ft of roof top and stormwater runoff that drains in the city storm sewer. The implementation of the proposed new office building and GPR projects will improve overall water quality by reducing stormwater runoff reaching the city storm sewer.

1.A.6 Discuss each component of the final plan (004.01 E);

The final plan for the MNNRD will be construction of the proposed new office building, parking lot, indoor/outdoor hands on educational facility (SINREC), and implementation of GPR projects in the parking lot.

A design/layout of the MNNRD Building along with the green infrastructure projects is attached in the supplemental information attachment.

1.A.7 When applicable include the geologic investigation required for the project (004.01 E 1);

There was no physical geologic investigation completed. The MNNRD HQ was surveyed including elevations with grading plan/map along with soil sample bores that were collected and tested for composition, moisture levels, and load bearing capacity.

1.A.8 When applicable include the hydrologic data investigation required for the project (004.01 E 2);

There was no hydrologic data investigation completed. Survey was completed to determine elevations thus incorporating square footage of the MNNRD HQ to develop green infrastructure projects for stormwater runoff and hydrology of water movement at the MNNRD HQ. This will help to tie in with the City of Valentines storm water sewer system.

1.A.9 When applicable include the criteria for final design including, but not limited to, soil mechanics, hydraulic, hydrologic, structural, embankments and foundation criteria (004.01 E 3).

Final design criteria included a full site grading plan, developing elevations, parking lot configuration, development and design of rain gardens, storm water runoff from rain garden into existing storm sewer system, sodding and planting schedule, architectural design for the building configuration and layout, spatial analysis, structural engineering, soil bearing capacities, environmental impact analysis, and educational complex configuration and layout.

If “NO”, it is considered mostly non-structural, so answer the following:

1.B.1 Insert data necessary to establish technical feasibility (004.02);

1.B.2 Discuss the plan of development (004.02 A);

1.B.3 Describe field or research investigations utilized to substantiate the project conception (004.02 B);

1.B.4 Describe any necessary water and/or land rights (004.02 C);

1.B.5 Discuss 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).

## Prove Economic Feasibility

(Applicant must demonstrate compliance with Title 261, CH 2 - 005)

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 MNNRD has been working on an educational facility complex since 2019. The outdoor educational component of SINREC was implemented utilizing NET funding in 2020. In January 2022, a Woody Biomass Boiler system that heats the MNNRD HQ was installed in partnership with USFS and NEFS. With a limited tax base, the MNNRD is trying to utilize grant funding for the education complex. This project also utilizes local contractors and a Nebraska design company, Heartland Scenic Studio - Omaha, NE, to keep the money as local as possible without utilizing other design companies located throughout the United States. Without utilizing outside funding, the MNNRD would not be able to accomplish this endeavor and provide state of the art education and information on area and Nebraska’s natural resources.

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 is the project life.(Title 261, CH 2 - 005).

Heartland Scenic Studio developed estimated design and implementation costs based on relative education projects. Benefits for this project are mostly intangible, meaning that these benefits cannot be expressed in monetary terms because of the difficulty in annualizing benefits due to the nature of benefits. The intangible benefits of SINREC aim at educating youth and adults about conservation and natural resource management.

This WSF application focuses on those intangible benefits and includes costs associated with design and implementation of the project.

This project has the opportunity to provide a vast and diverse experience to the public. Valentine, NE is a tourism hot spot and a hub for major traffic. North central NE is home to the National Park unit, the Niobrara National Scenic River, and one of the most biologically significant areas in the state of Nebraska. There are six ecosystems that co-mingle this area creating a diverse range in plants and wildlife. A socioeconomic study released in 2022 by the National Park Service saw an increase in visitation to nearly 80,000. The annual visitation to the Niobrara River in 2024 was more than 74,000 visitors. The increase in visitation and interest in the natural wonders of Nebraska leads to a need for more nature-based education centers. This number does not account for all the traffic that will stop on their way through Valentine, NE. Many visitors pass through town heading to the Black Hills, Colorado, Wyoming, etc. that are actively looking for natural resource features to recreate. The MNNRD office sits on Highway 20 and near Highway 83. The location will encourage visitors to stop and visit the educational facility.

3.A 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).

| Building & Educational Complex Estimated Costs | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Item** | **Construction** | **Total** |
| Water Conservation & Site Development | $1,612,872.00 | $1,612,872.00 |
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Construction costs will be directed towards the building, educational facility, parking lot, stormwater runoff projects, installation of interactive displays, interpretative signs, graphics, wall murals, posters, and digital technology. A minimum of 60% of the project will be associated with the educational components. Construction will take place over a 1 to 2 year period. Annual operation and maintenance costs are built into the MNNRDs annual budget. The MNNRD has been putting money aside for 10 years and has funds secured through building capital outlay in the MNNRD annual budget to cover the cost of 40% ($2,950,420.32) match towards the project. An estimated timeframe of each task is included in the supplemental information attachment.

3.B 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 intangible or secondary benefits (if any) 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, in a way that justifies economic feasibility of the project such that the finding can be approved by the Director and the Commission (005.02).

This project will increase water sustainability through the implementation of GPR projects collecting rainwater, reducing stormwater runoff, practicing responsible irrigation water management in the District and with the educational irrigation pivot, working with landowners utilizing various flowmeters to show the available options of tracking water usage, utilizing different sprinkler nozzle packages, utilizing soil moisture equipment, and educating individuals on water conservation. The MNNRD will also utilize woody biomass, cover crop varieties, farming practices such as no-till, and showcase the importance of soil organic health. Along with the above benefits, the MNNRD will also showcase pumping plant efficiency and nitrate application/reduction practices that potentially could not only contaminate groundwater but also surface water runoff that could lead to drinking water issues, both domestic and municipal wells, along with our valuable streams that provide habitat, recreation, and drinking water for the cities. Trainings for NRD Technicians will also provide hands-on training and keep them informed on innovative technology that landowners can be communicated about.

3.C Present all cost and benefit data in a table to indicate the annual cash flow for the life of the project (005.03).

| Cost and Benefit Data Table | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Item** | **Number** | **Value** | **Life Expectancy** | **Total** |
| Estimated Number of Visitors Per Year & Value of Each Visit | 5,000 | $40.00 | 50 years | $10,000,000.00 |
| Trainings, Workshops, and Certifications | 25 | $5,000.00 | 50 years | $6,250,000.00 |
| Total Benefits | | | | $16,250,000.00 |

The economical cost benefit ratio over the life expectancy of the project $16,250,000 divided by $4,425,630.48 (WSF request) equals a 3.67 to 1 ratio. The benefits outweigh the costs exponentially not only monetarily but most importantly through information, education, and hands-on learning opportunities this project will provide on stormwater runoff, green infrastructure, agricultural practices, irrigation management, ground and surface water management, woody biomass utilization, forestry management, the NRD and NDNR system, water resources, conservation, and Nebraska's natural resources.

3.D 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, demonstrate the economic feasibility of such proposal by such method as the Director and the Commission deem appropriate (005.04). (For example, show costs of and describe the next best alternative.)

The economic feasibility of SINREC will be seen through the hundreds and thousands of visitors the MNNRD will see annually. In 2023, $38,900,000 was spent in Cherry County, NE, on purchases by travelers including lodging taxes and other applicable local and state taxes. The MNNRD anticipates a high percentage of those travelers to also stop at the MNNRD and visit SINREC, showcasing the NRD system, what NRDs do, what NRDs are responsible for, and be able to provide hands on training and learning. Those individuals will have the opportunity to gain valuable knowledge of stormwater runoff, green infrastructure, agricultural practices, irrigation management, ground and surface water management, woody biomass utilization, forestry management, the NRD and NDNR system, water resources, conservation, and Nebraska's natural resources.

The MNNRD is working with the Dept of Environment and Energy on hosting annual Natural Resources Groundwater Technician Certification training and testing at the educational facility. Currently, the training and exam are in a room setting, where you are sitting for half a day going through PowerPoint slides covering topics including chemigation, water quality monitoring, static water level measurements and geology, flowmeters, and well licensing and certificate requirements. Individuals then have an exam in the afternoon. With the educational facility, there will be opportunity to provide hands on learning for individuals to see firsthand all the topics and items that are covered on the exam.
SINREC is a cost effective alternative to education in natural resources simply because there isn't anything like it in the state of Nebraska.

## Prove Financial Feasibility

(Applicant must demonstrate compliance with Title 261, CH 2 - 006)

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

The MNNRD has been putting money aside for 10 years and has planned and budgeted the cost of design and implementation of the building/parking lot project in their annual budget to cover the cost.

A copy of the 24-25' MNNRD Budget is included in the supplemental information attachment.

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

The MNNRD has been putting money aside for 10 years and has planned and budgeted the cost of design and implementation of the building/parking lot project in their annual budget to cover the cost. The MNNRD also includes operation and maintenance costs into annual budgets prepared each year.

A copy of the 24-25' MNNRD Budget is included in the supplemental information attachment.

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. A loan is not involved with this project.

7. Describe how the plan of development minimizes impacts on the natural environment (i.e. timing vs nesting/migration, etc.).

The plan of development minimizes impacts on the natural environment through information and education of Nebraska's natural resources, ground and surface water utilization, stormwater runoff, green infrastructure projects, irrigation management, water sustainability, flood control, wildlife and fisheries habitat, water conservation, woody biomass utilization, forestry management, and conservation. All project implementation will be located at the MNNRD HQ so there will be no impacts to timing/nesting/migration.

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

The MNNRD is a local government agency that focuses on conserving, sustaining, and improving natural resources and the environment. This project aligns with the types of projects and the 12 MNNRD statutory responsibilities:

1) Development, management, use and conservation of groundwater and surface water.
2) Soil conservation
3) Erosion and sediment control
4) Flood prevention and control
5) Pollution control
6) Water supply for any beneficial uses
7) Prevention of damage from flood water and sediment
8) Development and management of recreational and park facilities
9) Forestry and range management
10) Development and management of fish and wildlife habitat
11) Drainage improvement
12) Solid waste disposal

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

In the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (NDNR) Annual Report and Plan of Work for the Nebraska State Water Planning and Review Process (hereafter referred to as the Annual Report) (NDNR, 2020), the Statewide activities describe Water Sustainability Fund goals. Contribute to multiple water supply management goals including flood control, reducing threats to property damage, agricultural uses, municipal and industrial uses, recreational benefits, wildlife habitat, conservation, and preservation of water resources (NDNR 2020).

The MNNRD will provide benefits of water sustainability through showcasing the importance of stormwater runoff collection and reduction and reducing stormwater to the city's sewer system through the aid of the GPR projects. The MNNRD will provide responsible irrigation ground water management through the utilization of the SINREC center pivot irrigation system. The MNNRD will be able to show, teach, and explain to constituents/landowners/everyone the value of water utilization, flowmeters, sprinkler nozzles, soil moisture probes, woody biomass, soil organic health, cover crops, farming practices/no-till, groundwater monitoring wells, pumping plant efficiency, and nitrate application/reduction practices that could potentially lead to drinking water issues and our valuable streams that provide habitat, recreation, and drinking water to our cities. The MNNRD will showcase water sustainability with interactive displays, interpretative signs, graphic wall murals, posters, and updateable digital technology.
The MNNRD General Manager is on the Niobrara Council Board of Directors and works with Niobrara Council through the Cherry County Zoning Niobrara River Corridor Agricultural District Comprehensive Development Plan maintaining the pastoral landscape and scenic beauty through preservation of agricultural uses as the predominant land use and maintaining visual qualities of the river corridor and local economic activity the Niobrara River generates. The MNNRD assists the Niobrara Council with permitted uses, conditional uses, temporary uses and accessory uses. All building, structures, and uses which require a zoning permit shall be forwarded to the Niobrara Council for review and comment with regard to compliance of the proposed development. Applications for any use listed as a conditional use is referred to the Niobrara Council for review and comment. Any application for a variance from the requirements is referred to the Niobrara Council for review and comment.

10. Are land rights necessary to complete your project? YES☐ NO☒

No land rights are necessary to complete the project. The MNNRD owns the entire property this project will be developed on.

**If yes:**

10.A Provide a complete listing of all lands involved in the project.

The MNNRD owns the entire property this project will be developed on.

10.B Attach proof of ownership for each easements, rights-of-way and fee title currently held.

The MNNRD owns the entire property this project will be developed on.

Information is included in the supplemental informational attachment.

10.C Provide assurance that you can hold or can acquire title to all lands not currently held.

The MNNRD owns the entire property this project will be developed on.

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

The MNNRD owns the entire property this project will be developed on. The MNNRD possess all necessary authority to provide education due to the following 12 statutory requirements:

1) Development, management, use and conservation of groundwater and surface water.
2) Soil conservation
3) Erosion and sediment control
4) Flood prevention and control
5) Pollution control
6) Water supply for any beneficial uses
7) Prevention of damage from flood water and sediment
8) Development and management of recreational and park facilities
9) Forestry and range management
10) Development and management of fish and wildlife habitat
11) Drainage improvement
12) Solid waste disposal

All necessary City and State permits will be obtained for this project. Current match funding is available, and future funding will be addressed through the Districts annual budget and partnering opportunities.

12. Identify the probable consequences (environmental and ecological) that may result if the project is or is not completed.

If the entire project is not completed at one time, the opportunity to further develop the education component would not happen for years, if ever. At a minimum, it would add another 10-15 years of budgeting to possibly have funding available to complete the project at today's cost estimates. The environmental component of natural resource management cannot be taken for granted. Economics outweigh ecological management and associated resource challenges. This project will be able to tell the story of importance of clean drinking water, air quality, soil health, and where one's food comes from. Without this project, environmental protection will not expand or be adopted as fast as it will be by educating more people. The overall project makes everything more efficient. Indoor and outdoor portions of the project will be beneficial due to the fact of physically showing individuals resource and conservation management. With the development of the building and parking lot incorporated with the green infrastructure projects, it will assist in reducing the City of Valentine's stormwater challenges. The MNNRD will be able to show, teach, and explain the environmental value of water utilization, flowmeters, sprinkler nozzles, soil moisture probes, woody biomass, forestry management soil organic health, cover crops, farming practices/no-till, groundwater monitoring wells, pumping plant efficiency, nitrate application/reduction practices, and stormwater collection/reduction.

## 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 to 6 for items (1)-(9); and 0 to 3 for items (10)-(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 72 possible points, plus two bonus points. The potential number of points awarded for each criteria are noted above. 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 MNNRD, through stormwater runoff green infrastructure projects, efficient irrigation water management, conservation windbreaks, cover crops, soil health, woody biomass, and minimal tilling practices, will remediate and mitigate threats to Valentine, NE's drinking water by reducing the amount of contaminants that reaches the City of Valentine's sewer system and potentially our valuable streams. Approximately 2,700 people rely on the City of Valentine's water. Remediating or mitigating threats to drinking water will reduce the increased risk of chronic diseases, developmental issues in children, reproductive problems, cardiovascular diseases, and damage to organs.

The City of Valentine has issues with nitrates in wells, stormwater, runoff, and sewers in downtown Valentine, NE, which includes two state highways (HWY83/HWY20). The runoff and flooding adds up quickly, with little amounts of precipitation. In 2018, design concepts and ideas started flowing in an effort to reimagine Valentine's main street corridor. The summer of 2022, construction started in the rebuilding process including new storm sewers and water lines. This project was finished in June 2023. The City of Valentine has a stormwater holding pond located at the corner of E Street and Green Street that fills, then drains into the Niobrara River. Additional city sewer projects are in the works.

In 1995, the District finished developing its Groundwater Management Plan that laid out issues and action items for addressing groundwater quality and quantity concerns. The District samples around 460 wells annually for nitrate contamination and works with NDEE to sample surface and groundwater for other contaminates like herbicides and pesticides. The MNNRD administers the Chemigation Act by working closely with landowners that apply chemicals through their irrigation system making sure they have a current applicators license, safety and operational systems are in working order, and chemicals are being properly applied to prevent water contamination. The MNNRD assists in protecting community drinking water supplies under various programs such as NDEE's non-point source management program and source water protection program. The MNNRD utilizes information and education efforts to incorporate water quality data as it is collected to seek solutions and prevent water contamination. The District helps to identify and encourage best management practices for irrigation and nutrient management, administer well decommissioning program, and maintains a network of dedicated wells to closely monitor changes in groundwater quality and quantity.

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 District is guided by a Groundwater Management Plan that was started in 1985 and approved in 1995 as well as a jointly adopted Voluntary Integrated Management Plan (VIMP) with NeDNR that was finalized in 2020. The District spent years identifying current and future threats to its groundwater quality and quantity by utilizing data collected through District staff and Stakeholders as well as other natural resource agency partners. Both plans revolve around the long-term sustainability of its resources and the continued beneficial use for all of the Districts' constituents. Action items in both plans include monitoring of increasing/decreasing static water levels, yearly sampling for nitrate contamination and mitigation of any current contamination, education and implementation of best management practices for Ag producers, promoting water conservation, reducing soil erosion and improving soil nutrients, reducing the degradation of streams and wetlands and taking advantage of any state and federal programs that assist the District or its residents in maintaining or improving its natural resources. As stated in both plans, it shall be the goal of the MNNRD to forever maintain or improve upon the present groundwater quality and quantity resources within the district and take any action necessary to meet that goal. The MNNRD is prepared to protect its most precious natural resources.

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.

   The MNNRD monitors groundwater quantity closely by collecting static water levels across the entire District on irrigation wells, domestic wells, and monitoring wells every spring and fall, documenting changes in the aquifer. The MNNRD works with farmers and ranchers in the District on proper irrigation water management, flowmeters, sprinkler packages, and best management practices to assist with aquifer depletion, runoff, and erosion.

   The area around Ainsworth, NE, is primarily surface water irrigated by way of water brought through a canal system from Merritt Reservoir and over to the Ainsworth Irrigation District (AID). There is approximately 35,000 acres that are surface water irrigated. Due to surface water irrigation, this has led to increased streamflow in Plum Creek, Sand Draw Creek, Bone Creek, Willow Creek, and Long Pine Creek. Conservation work is done to improve water quality and quantity with best management practices working with willing landowners to reduce streambed erosion, bank erosion, and improving properties. This lessens impacts both to the District and downstream.

   The MNNRD, through SINREC, also has three groundwater monitoring wells on the east, south, and west sides of the educational center pivot. These allow visual learning through physically being able to collect samples with various sampling equipment, see how groundwater infiltrates into a well by seeing the screening, firsthand with a downhole camera in the clear casing. The educational center pivot has various types of sprinkler packages along with various types of flowmeters demonstrating effective irrigation water management and water usage. A chemigation trailer has been developed to teach how groundwater contamination could occur. Information and education has been developed on aquifer recharge, reducing aquifer depletion, streamflow's, and water monitoring through SINREC. Pictures are attached in the supplemental information handout.

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.

   The MNNRD, statutorily is responsible for maintaining the water supply for all beneficial uses and will contribute to multiple water supply goals through stormwater runoff collection, reduction, and reducing stormwater to the city's sewer system through the aid of the GPR projects. The MNNRD teaches responsible irrigation water management throughout the District as well as the utilization of the educational center pivot irrigation system. The MNNRD will be able to show, teach, and explain to constituents/public the value of water utilization, flowmeters, sprinkler nozzles, soil moisture probes, woody biomass, forestry management, soil organic health, cover crops, farming practices/no-till, groundwater monitoring wells, pumping plant efficiency, and nitrate application/reduction practices that could potentially lead to drinking water issues and our valuable streams that provide habitat, recreation, and drinking water to our cities.

   Information and education on water supply goals will be provided through SINREC. The different components of SINREC will allow the MNNRD to better relay the information through interactive displays, videos, and posters.

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.

   The MNNRD maximizes the beneficial use of Nebraska water resources through stormwater runoff, green infrastructure, reducing pollutants and bacteria, improving water quality, proper irrigation water management, proper tillage practices, utilizing no-till drills, soil health, woody biomass utilization, fish and wildlife habitat, and conservation windbreaks. This project will provide a beneficial impact to not only the local constituents but also the entire state of Nebraska, and nationally through education, research, monitoring, show and tell, and hands on learning.

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.

   SINREC is a cost effective project that will provide a lasting imprint on everyone that visits. Education centers are a must to keep not only the youth, but adults informed on natural resources, water management, and conservation. This project could me mimicked throughout the state of Nebraska for the different river basins, similar to NGPC learning centers.

   There will be no land and water acquisition costs. Alternative options would be to not see SINREC through fruition and know all the benefits, learning, and knowledge to hundreds of thousands of people would not be seen. SINREC is a cost effective alternative to education in natural resources because there isn't anything like it in the state of Nebraska. Most people don't understand what an NRD is, what we do, or why they spend money on taxes to the NRD of which District they reside.

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.

   There is no interstate compact, decree, State contract/agreement, or Federal laws that pertain to project. The project would help to tell the story about local water management and the unique partnership the Niobrara Basin NRD's have with NGPC and NDNR in management of the Niobrara River at the local, state, and nationally as it pertains to the Congressionally designated Wild and Scenic River.

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.

This project will protect critical highway and city infrastructure through stormwater collection and reduction, runoff reduction, removal of the old concrete building foundation, and replacing with new green infrastructure will reduce stormwater and runoff to the city's sewer system. Potential failures due to excessive amounts of runoff from the building could cause a threat to the system leading to bigger issues within the city sewer system. The GPR project would help reduce impacts but also show the story about using native vegetation in conjunction with the rain gardens to also provide wind reduction, sand erosion filter, and the possibility to be included in a City trail project. By using native trees and shrubs it should help reduce heating and cooling costs associated with the building. With the number of people that walk along the highway in front of the office, public safety and health is also a priority. By reducing stormwater runoff, we will reduce the impact it could potentially have on somebody walking by during an event of excess runoff. The entire project will bring a clean, green, and professional appeal to the community and those that travel through it.

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.

This project will improve water quality through stormwater runoff collection, reduction, and reducing stormwater to the city's sewer system through the aid of the GPR projects. The MNNRD collects around 460 water samples throughout the MNNRD every summer for nitrate testing. Samples are tested at Ward Laboratories along with testing in-house at the MNNRD office where we can test for nitrates, bacteria, and E. coli. The MNNRD provides technical assistance to landowners in the Long Pine Creek Watershed and across the District on various best management practices to improve water quality through grant funding or the NRCS EQIP program. The MNNRD works hand in hand with landowners to improve stream stability, water quality, erosion and sediment control, and fish and wildlife habitat. Projects that have been implemented consist of three in-stream restoration projects, stream fencing, wells/tanks, structures for water control, irrigation management, cover crops, conservation windbreaks, and dam rehab/repair. The MNNRD will provide responsible irrigation water management through the utilization of the educational center pivot irrigation system. The MNNRD will be able to show, teach, and explain to constituents and landowners the value of water utilization, flowmeters, sprinkler nozzles, soil moisture probes, woody biomass, forestry management, soil organic health, cover crops, farming practices/no-till, groundwater monitoring wells, pumping plant efficiency, and nitrate application/reduction practices that could potentially lead to drinking water issues and our valuable streams that provide fish and wildlife habitat, recreation, and drinking water to our cities.

The MNNRD covers portions of Cherry, Brown, Keya Paha, and Rock Counties and covers 4,662 square miles. Population of the District is approximately 7,879. Water usage in the MNNRD consists of residential, agricultural, municipal, and recreational.

The MNNRD has had a Groundwater Management Plan (GMP) that was established in 1995. Through the GMP, the MNNRD monitors and manages groundwater quality and quantity. The MNNRD has 4 different management zones. Each management zone is monitored and managed differently with various requirements. The MNNRD collects around 460 water samples each year with an average of 6.5 ppm nitrate in the MNNRD. The MNNRD will continue following the GMP by monitoring water quality and quantity every year to better serve the constituents of the District.

The MNNRD administers the Chemigation Act by working closely with landowners in the District applying chemicals through an irrigation system making sure they have a current chemigation permit, inspect any new, special, or emergency chemigation permits prior to use, and carry out routine inspections with a goal of each system being inspected biannually. The MNNRD assists and coordinates for protecting community drinking water supplies under various

programs such as NDEE's non-point source management program and source water protection program. The MNNRD utilizes information and education efforts to incorporate water quality data as it is collected to seek solutions to contamination problems, identify and encourage best management practices for irrigation and nutrient management, administer a well decommissioning program, and continue installing additional monitoring wells with dedicated equipment as needed to improve data collection in areas where there are water quality concerns.

The three monitoring wells on the property will be utilized to collect and show water quality and quantity and the interconnectivity of both the educational pivot and municipal wells impact to the aquifer. At SINREC, we will be able to provide real-time information on residential, industrial, recreational and agricultural water usage as well as a history of water quality and quantity data collected throughout the MNNRD.

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 MNNRD supports this project along with many other partners which include UNL Conservation and Survey Division, Lewis and Clark NRD, Central Platte NRD, Lower Niobrara NRD, Niobrara Council, Upper Niobrara White NRD, UNL Extension, Lower Big Blue NRD, Little Blue NRD, Lower Elkhorn NRD, Lower Loup NRD, Lower Platte North NRD, Lower Platte South NRD, Lower Republican NRD, Midde Republican NRD, Nemaha NRD, North Platte NRD, Papio Missouri River NRD, South Platte NRD, Tri Basin NRD, Twin Platte NRD, Upper Big Blue NRD, Upper Elkhorn NRD, Upper Loup NRD, Upper Republican NRD, NE NRCS State Office, Water Leaders Academy, NE Well Drillers Association, NE State Irrigation Association, and NE Forest Service. Letters of support are attached in the supplemental information attachment

The MNNRD is the lowest valuated NRD in Nebraska. The MNNRD's property tax levy is .039129 per $100 of assessed value of $2,952,696,592.00. The MNNRD's most recent tax request is $1,155,360.64. Other sources of revenue for the MNNRD come by way of grants for various projects in the District. Continuing management and maintenance of the SINREC project will be provided by MNNRD staff and the District's annual budget. A copy of the Levy Limit form is provided in the supplemental information.

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 local jurisdiction that manages, promotes, and enforces water sustainability is the MNNRD. The 1995 Groundwater Management Plan and 2020 Voluntary Integrated Management Plan are plans that have been approved and followed to support sustainable water use across the Districts 3 million acres. The usage of water in the MNNRD comprises of residential, agricultural, municipal, and recreational.

In collaboration with NDNR, the goal of the 2020 Voluntary Integrated Management Plan is to protect the water supplies to sustain its benefits into the future and develop systemic approaches for the development and sustainability of water resources, while protecting existing uses and supplies, allowing for growth and changes in use within the MNNRD, and promoting coordination between surface water and groundwater users to protect all water uses in the MNNRD. By continuing requiring flowmeters on all new irrigated acres, that will allow the MNNRD to monitor water usage and work with the landowners on best management practices and water management. Cropland in the MNNRD is greatly limited by the topography and soil types. The biggest area of cropland is located near Ainsworth, NE with most of that being surface water irrigated from water delivered from Merritt Reservoir and canaled to the Ainsworth Irrigation District in northern Brown County.

This project supports sustainable water use by promoting healthy watersheds, water resources management, and stakeholder input. This project will provide benefits to the entire District, to Nebraska, and further.

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.

There are many growing concerns associated with information and education through the quality and accessibility of education due to factors like misinformation online, declining teacher quality, and access to quality learning materials, leading to misinformed individuals and information. SINREC will provide a state of the art learning facility with top notch information and education about Nebraska's water resources, natural resources, and conservation. SINREC is designed to cater to different learning styles including auditory, kinesthetic, and visual, ensuring that participants can engage effectively. This approach allows SINREC to offer top-tier, comprehensive training for attendees. Research shows that learners retain 5% of material from lectures, 30% from demonstration, and up to 75% from hands-on participation. By emphasizing hands-on training, SINREC keeps learners actively engaged, reduces risks of failure by allowing practice in a controlled environment, and enhances problem-solving skills by exposing participants to real-world challenges. SINREC will reach youth, adults, farmers, ranchers, teachers, other agency personnel, other NRDs across the State, and travelers passing through. The benefits SINREC will provide the State of Nebraska are endless. Educational facilities geared towards preserving, conserving, and mitigating impacts to Nebraska's water and natural resources is an evolving concept.

This project has the opportunity to provide a vast and diverse experience to the public. Valentine, NE is a tourism hot spot and a hub for major traffic. North Central NE is home to the National Park unit, the Niobrara National Scenic River, and one of the most biologically significant areas in the state of NE. There are six ecosystems that co-mingle in this area creating a diverse range of plants and wildlife. A socioeconomic study released in 2022 by the National Park Service saw an increase in visitation to nearly 80,000. The annual visitation to the Niobrara River in 2023 was 75,219. The increase in visitation and interest in the natural wonders of NE leads to a need for more conservation-based education centers. This number does not account for all the through traffic that will stop on their way through Valentine, NE. Many visitors pass through town heading to the Black Hills, Colorado, Wyoming, etc. that are actively looking for natural resource features to recreate. The MNNRD office sits on Highway 20 near a major intersection. The location will encourage visitors to stop and visit the educational facility. People do not know how and by who natural resources are being managed for future generations to enjoy and utilize. Through show and tell, and hands-on activities, individuals will be able to learn the importance of water and natural resource conservation.

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.

The local entities supporting the project include UNL Conservation and Survey Division, Lewis and Clark NRD, Central Platte NRD, Lower Niobrara NRD, Niobrara Council, Upper Niobrara White NRD, UNL Extension, Lower Big Blue NRD, Little Blue NRD, Lower Elkhorn NRD, Lower Loup NRD, Lower Platte North NRD, Lower Platte South NRD, Lower Republican NRD, Midde Republican NRD, Nemaha NRD, North Platte NRD, Papio Missouri River NRD, South Platte NRD, Tri Basin NRD, Twin Platte NRD, Upper Big Blue NRD, Upper Elkhorn NRD, Upper Loup NRD, Upper Republican NRD, NE NRCS State Office, Water Leaders Academy, NE Well Drillers Association, NE State Irrigation Association, and NE Forest Service. Letters of support are attached in the supplemental information attachment

MNNRD was awarded NET funding in 2020 for the outdoor portion of SINREC. The MNNRD was also donated several pieces of equipment for the outdoor portion of SINREC including a 121' fully operational center pivot irrigation system from Lindsay Corporation and several various kinds of flowmeters from McCrometer. The MNNRD has also been working with other grant funding through NDEE's Litter Waste Reduction (LWR) and Green Project Reserve (GPR) green infrastructure as well as National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD).

The MNNRD has sought other funding sources through NET two times as well as Congressionally Direct Spending and was not successful. If the MNNRD does not get approved through WSF, there is no other funding source options.

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 2 main river corridor systems within the MNNRD. The 76 mile Niobrara National Scenic River and Snake River with many streams, creeks, and tributaries that feed them. One of the key watersheds in the MNNRD includes the Long Pine Creek Watershed (LPCW) located in Brown and Rock County, Nebraska, which encompasses 332,000 acres. The LPCW WFPO Planning effort was officially signed and approved in August 2024. The MNNRD and NE NRCS State Office are waiting on final design funding from the NRCS national level to begin the final design and permitting phase of the LPCW WFPO Plan-EA Tier 1 projects. The MNNRD is also working on three other WFPO projects in Cherry County. Two of those watersheds are located south of Merriman, NE, and the other south of Valentine, NE, south of the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge. These areas took a big hit during the 2019 flooding and the MNNRD realized that we need to do something to be proactive in protecting, conserving, and managing water in our District. E&A Consulting is working on the Plan-EAs and are approximately at 30% alternative design. The MNNRD and E&A Consulting continue working with the NE NRCS State Office on comments and revisions. The final draft Plan-EAs will be submitted to the National Water Management Center (NWMC) in Little Rock, AR, soon for review at the National level.

The MNNRD has continuously been working to assist landowners on stream restoration projects, irrigation efficiency, and projects with the Ainsworth Irrigation District to reduce erosion, sediment, scouring, head cuts, channelization, thus providing stability, vegetation, and integrity to the stream channel, and improving water quality. Over time, the MNNRD is hopeful we can treat several areas and get creek systems back to grade by reducing impacts to not only the creeks but also infrastructure, county roads, and properties.

SINREC will provide information and education on watershed health, watershed function, and watershed longevity. Information provided will direct individuals visiting SINREC with the knowledge to better understand how watersheds work, hydrologic functions, and water resources.

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 2020 Annual Report (NDNR 2020), lists the objects related to the Water Sustainability Fund;

> *Water Sustainability Fund*
> The Legislature created the Water Sustainability Fund in LB 906 (2014) and defined governance and appropriation in LB 1098 and LB 1098A. From July 2014 through June 2018, a net $46,170,000 has been transferred to the fund. Funds committed to projects through June 2018, are $41,702,715. Per LB 944, the appropriation for FY 2019 was reduced by $429,557 to $10,309,520. The transfer for FY 2019 is $6,000,000 per LB 945. According to *Neb. Rev. Stat.* § 2-1506, the goals of the Water Sustainability Fund are to:
>
> - Provide financial assistance to programs, projects, or activities that increase aquifer recharge, reduce aquifer depletion, and increase streamflow;
> - Remediate or mitigate threats to drinking water;
> - Promote the goals and objectives of approved integrated management plans or groundwater management plans;
> - Contribute to multiple water supply management goals including flood control, reducing threats to property damage, agricultural uses, municipal and industrial uses, recreational benefits, wildlife habitat, conservation, and preservation of water resources;
> - Assist municipalities with the cost of constructing, upgrading, developing, and replacing sewer infrastructure facilities as part of a combined sewer overflow project;
> - Provide increased water productivity and enhance water quality;
> - Use the most cost-effective solutions available; and
> - Comply with interstate compacts, decrees, other state contracts and agreements and federal law.

This project meets all of these objectives minus the last objective as we do not have interstate compacts or decrees. Through education and information, these objectives will be accomplished on a watershed and statewide basis.

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.

NRDs were created to solve flood control, soil erosion, irrigation runoff, and groundwater quality and quantity issues. Nebraska NRDs are involved in a wide variety of projects and programs to conserve and protect Nebraska's natural resources. This project does not meet requirements of a Federal mandate but the NRDs are charged under state law with 12 cv areas of responsibility including.

1) Development, management, use and conservation of groundwater and surface water.
2) Soil conservation
3) Erosion and sediment control
4) Flood prevention and control
5) Pollution control
6) Water supply for any beneficial uses
7) Prevention of damage from flood water and sediment
8) Development and management of recreational and park facilities
9) Forestry and range management
10) Development and management of fish and wildlife habitat
11) Drainage improvement
12) Solid waste disposal

Per Section Title 16 U.S. Code 1273, Chapter 28, Section 2, the Niobrara National Scenic River was dedicated in 1991 by Congress with the majority of the 76 mile stretch falling in the MNNRD and rest in the Lower Niobrara Natural Resources District (LNNRD). The State of Nebraska along with Rock, Cherry, Brown, and Keya Paha Counties, NGPC, LNNRD, and MNNRD have been working with Niobrara Council and NPS to manage the 76 mile stretch of the Wild and Scenic River on the Niobrara River to avoid future Federal mandates.