

NEBRASKA NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES – February 25, 2026

CALL TO ORDER

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE; NEW MEMBER INTRODUCTION & ROLL CALL

Chairman Wilke called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. in the Holiday Inn Convention Center, Kearney, Nebraska. Following the Pledge of Allegiance, Commissioners observed a moment of silence for former Commissioner Randy Fox. Doug Iske was then welcomed to the Commission to fill the unexpired term for the Nemaha Basin Representative. The roll was called.

Roll Call:

Commissioners		Absent	Present	Commissioners		Absent	Present
Rollie	Amsberry	X		Larry	Mohrman		X
Don	Batie		X	Tom	Mountford		X
Lawrence	Bradley		X	Doug	Reeves		X
Devin	Brundage	X		Keith	Rexroth	X	
Mark	Czaplewski		X	Lyle	Schroer		X
Lane	Darnall		X	John	Shadle		X
Scott	Dicke		X	Matt	Smallcomb		X
Christopher	Dierks		X	Jeff	Steffen		X
Brad	Dunbar	X		Dennis	Strauch		X
Doug	Iske		X	Greg	Wilke		X
Nate	Jenkins		X	Vacant			
Steve	Kelly		X	Vacant			
Rick	Kubat		X	Vacant			
Kennon	Meyer		X				

DWEE staff in attendance:

Kent Zimmerman

Others in attendance were:

Megan Grimes, NARD; Rich Walters, TNC.

ANOUNCEMENTS

- Commissioner Iske was elected during a Special Caucus last November, to fill the unexpired term for the Nemaha Basin Representative.
- Commissioner Smathers recently resigned. Smathers was recognized for the leadership he provided beginning with the Water Funding Task Force and continuing through current operations of the Water Sustainability Fund; and for Chairing the Commission and various committees.
- Seven elected representative positions' terms end next January. Procedures will begin November to Caucus next January to fill those terms.

NOTICE OF THE MEETING AND PUBLIC MEETING LAWS

Notice of the meeting was published on the State Public Meetings Calendar and on the Natural Resources Commission (Commission) web site at <https://nrc.nebraska.gov>. A copy of Nebraska's open meeting statutes was available in the room.

MINUTES

Dierks moved and Steffen seconded the motion to approve the minutes of the September 30th, 2025, Commission meeting.

Motion Passed.

Commissioner	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent	Commissioner	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Amsberry				X	Mohrman	X			
Batie	X				Mountford	X			
Bradley	X				Reeves	X			
Brundage				X	Rexroth				X
Czaplewski			X		Schroer	X			
Darnall	X				Shadle	X			
Dicke	X				Smallcomb	X			
Dierks	X				Steffen	X			
Dunbar				X	Strauch	X			
Iske	X				Wilke	X			
Jenkins	X				Vacant				
Kelly	X				Vacant				
Kubat	X				Vacant				
Meyer	X				TOTALS	19	0	1	4

DWEE UPDATE & PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments were offered. Chief Water Officer Manning and Director Bradley were unable to attend the meeting; however, Director Bradley passed along a comment that the Legislature's Appropriations Committee has released a preliminary budget report which did not include the spending authority for Water Sustainability Funding although it was in the Governor's recommended budget. Bradley urged Commissioners to discuss the issue with their representatives. Staff will continue to monitor this budget item as it goes through floor debate.

Commissioner Czaplewski requested an update on the Perkins County Canal, to which Commissioner Meyer responded regarding the pending litigation and permitting. Commissioner Meyer noted that the State of Nebraska (Nebraska) filed a case in the United States Supreme Court (Court) in July. How original actions work when one state sues another in the Court, you must first petition the Court to hear the case. Nebraska has asked the Court to take our case against the State of Colorado (Colorado). Colorado has responded and the Court is now giving

the United States Solicitor General (Solicitor) an opportunity to brief the issue and address any other Federal interests that may be involved. Once the Solicitor's Brief is submitted, hopefully by June we will know if the Court will take the case. If the Court decides to take the case, a Special Master will be appointed. Nebraska and Colorado would meet with the Special Master and set a trial schedule. Discovery and the trial would be before the Special Master, then the Special Master's opinion would be submitted to the Supreme Court Justices for their consideration. Regarding permitting, the 404-permit application was submitted last week and is available on the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) website. The USACE has scheduled public open house hearings for March 9 – 11, 2026, in Denver, Julesburg, Kearney plus a virtual option. There will also be an informational open house next week in Ogallala for the public.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Chairman Wilke passed around a listing of the 2025 Committee Members and asked Commissioners to update the list if they would like to be added or removed from a committee.

Chair Wilke stated that the Executive Committee scheduled the following dates for the next four Commission meetings:

- April 29th
- July 29th
- Sept 29th (Tuesday after NRD conference)
- February 17th, 2027

PROGRAM COMMITTEE

No Committee updates were given. Chairman Wilke asked staff to lead discussion on agenda topics pertaining to program activities. No unusual activity was reported.

Resources Development Fund

The status report showed business as usual. Commissioners briefly discussed each project's progress.

Small Watersheds Flood Control Fund

This is currently an unfunded program.

Soil & Water Conservation Program Fund

The status report showed business as usual.

Staff reported meeting last week with NRCS and NARD staff, to review changes to NRCS's 2026 Payment Rate calculations. Two significant changes include use of a per practice base rate with an implementation payment; and a change to the "unit of measurement" for some practices,

such as going from "feet" to "pounds" for pipe costs. Staff discussed issues this creates, and Commissioners may anticipate an action item for this at the April meeting.

Staff also reported the NRD Manager’s Partnership Committee is requesting modification of a practice requirement within NC – 16 regarding plan review and approval for Windbreak Renovation. Specifically, the group would like to add the option for either NRCS or NRD staff to review and approve the windbreak renovation plans provided they are trained to do so. Currently only a Forester of the Nebraska Forest Service may review and approve plans.

Batie moved and Czaplewski seconded the motion to modify the NSWCP procedure in practice NC - 16 to allow NRCS and NRD planning staff, trained in farmstead or field windbreak renovation, to review and approve plans.

Chairman Wilke asked if there was additional discussion, there was none offered.

Motion Passed.

Commissioner	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent	Commissioner	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Amsberry				X	Mohrman	X			
Batie	X				Mountford	X			
Bradley	X				Reeves	X			
Brundage				X	Rexroth				X
Czaplewski	X				Schroer	X			
Darnall	X				Shadle	X			
Dicke	X				Smallcomb	X			
Dierks	X				Steffen	X			
Dunbar				X	Strauch	X			
Iske	X				Wilke	X			
Jenkins	X				Vacant				
Kelly	X				Vacant				
Kubat			X		Vacant				
Meyer	X				TOTALS	19	0	1	4

Natural Resources Water Quality Fund

The status report showed business as usual. An \$800,000 payment is about to be distributed.

Water Well Decommissioning Fund

The status report showed business as usual.

Water Sustainability Fund

The WSF Financial Status report showed business as usual. Commissioners discussed project status for each of the active projects. Commissioners were reminded to visit the NRC’s website at: www.nrc.nebraska.gov to review project status reports which will be posted as they are received. All reports are due by April 1st. Also, the next round of applications will be received between March 16 – 31, 2026. The Commission will review the outcome of the legislative request for spending authority and determine whether to proceed with application reviews during the April 29th, 2026, NRC meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS & REQUESTS FOR AGENDA ITEMS

- Seven appointed position terms expire May 31, 2026. Commissioners interested in reapplying are encouraged to go to the Governor’s website and do so.
- Commissioner Steffen, and his wife Jolene, were recognized for receiving the 2025 Hugh Hammond Bennett “Producer of the Year” award from the National Conservation Planning Partnership which was presented to them on stage at NACD’s Annual Conference in San Antonio, Texas last week.
- Commissioners I – 9 Forms need to be completed and turned in if they have not already done so.
- Next meeting is April 29th, 2026, here in Kearney.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 2:16 p.m.



Greg Wilke, Chair

Matt Manning, P.E., J.D., Chief Water Officer, DWEE