

Testimony, SB2020

March 9, 2023

Prairie Room, State Capitol, Bismarck, ND

Dennis Reep, Burleigh County WRD, ND Water Users Association, ND Water Resource Districts Association

Chairman Nathe and Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

My name is Dennis Reep and I serve on the Board of Directors for the ND Water Resource Districts Association as President, the ND Water Users Association, and the Burleigh County Water Resource District.

North Dakota water interests are dependent on the state's healthy economy and revenue outlook and can only be supported by a strong budget for Department of Water Resources' operations and critical water project funding and grants. Water resource districts have a long history of providing valuable services in North Dakota to the local constituents in their respective counties and regions. Enabling legislation for the establishment of water resource districts was first passed in 1935. The responsibility of water resource districts includes water management from a local and regional perspective for beneficial uses of water, as well as for protection against flooding, erosion, and other detrimental effects of too much water.

The beneficial uses of water and protection against damage caused by flooding is critical to the agricultural and other local economies, as well as the social well-being of our citizens. Rural flood control provides crucial drainage relief not only for North Dakota farms and ranches, it also reduces flood damage to township, county, and state infrastructure.

An important piece of providing these vital services has been NDDWR funding. Without this funding, many important flood control, water supply, erosion protection, water management, and beneficial use projects would not have been completed. According to the North Dakota Water Development Plan, there exists approximately \$1.05B in current needs for water projects, \$605M is classified as high priority. There exists approximately \$48M in current needs for general water management projects, and approximately \$109M in current needs for water conveyance and local flood control projects. Water resource districts sponsor many of these types of projects. Our water resource districts request additional funding authorization for water resource districts' projects for this upcoming biennium.

A critical part of any water project is applying for and securing appropriate federal, state, and local permits. Permit reviews and approvals are often the bottle neck or critical path to maintaining project schedules and correspondingly, efficient use of state and local tax dollars. As the need for projects and funding for projects has increased, the capacity to process and approve those permits at the state level has remained stagnant due a ceiling on the FTE number at the NDDWR. We support the funding of additional FTEs at the NDDWR to streamline the permit review and approval process, which in turn will assist our constituents in maintaining project momentum and facilitate the efficient use of state and local tax dollars.

Thank you for your service to the State of North Dakota and the hard work that goes with it. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have regarding this testimony.

Thank you.