

**HB 1020
Testimony of Harold Gaugler, WRDA President
Senate Appropriation's Education and Environment Division
March 11, 2025**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Education and Environment Division:

My name is Harold Gaugler and I serve on as the President of the ND Water Resource Districts Association and on the Grant County Water Resource District.

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 state funding provided by the State Water Commission. Without this funding, many important flood control, water supply, erosion protection, water management, and beneficial use projects would not have been completed.

Water resource districts often serve as the local sponsor for projects that utilize funding from the "General Water" bucket and from the "Flood Control" bucket. Water resource districts in the eastern and north central parts of the state serve as the local project sponsor for conveyance projects. HB 1020 as currently drafted has \$15 million slated for conveyance projects. For the first time, conveyance is specifically called out in HB 1020. While \$15 million would not cover all projects identified for the next biennium, it will go a long way to supporting these vital infrastructure projects.

Water resource districts also serve as project sponsors for large and small flood control projects. We are appreciative of the work done on the House side to fund the Mouse River Flood Control project at \$125 million and other flood control projects at \$7.5 million.

Lastly, 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 of the critical path to maintaining project schedules and 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 the same. We support additional FTE specifically for positions that can streamline the permit review and approval processes, 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.