

Senate Agriculture Committee

Testimony in favor of HB 1280

Steve Hansen, Farmer, Oakes, ND

March 6, 2025

Good afternoon, Sen. Luick and members of the Senate Agriculture Committee. My name is Steve Hansen and I am a farmer and irrigator in the Oakes area. I am here today to ask for your support for HB 1280.

Water management is key to my farming operation. We utilize both irrigation and drainage to manage water and maximize our yields. Our farm greatly benefits from access to conveyance systems owned and managed by the county through our local water resource district. This infrastructure allows for the movement of excess water with minimal damage to roads and public and private property.

HB 1280 is a commonsense update to the process by which these conveyance systems are built and maintained. Like many types of public infrastructure, these ditch systems are maintained through a special assessment paid by users of the infrastructure. In many cases, projects to either build or maintain these ditches have to be approved by the system users (i.e. local taxpayers).

It makes sense to me that you would lose your right to participate in future assessment votes if you are delinquent on past assessment payments. We have seen this happen when folks at the top of the hill don't feel like they use the conveyance infrastructure because the water was going to drain off their land without or without that infrastructure. Because they feel they don't benefit, they refuse to pay their assessment.

It doesn't seem fair that those who refuse to pay their assessments on existing projects, projects that have been approved and from which they are benefiting, would be able to potentially stymie or block future projects. Passage of HB 1280 would correct that unfairness.

For these reasons, I would ask for your favorable consideration of HB 1280 and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.