



1401 32nd Street SW • Fargo, ND 58103 • Phone: 701-239-4151 • Fax: 701-239-4276

email: information@rrvsga.com

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Chairman Patten and members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee,

My name is Brent Baldwin and I am a farmer and President of the Red River Valley Sugarbeet Growers Association. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support Engrossed House Bill 1218.

Water resource districts are the local sponsors of many water conveyance and flood control projects of a variety of sizes. We believe these projects, large and small, provide real benefit farmers. While we recognize the importance of ensuring appropriate use of public funds, we believe that the economic analysis required for water conveyance and flood control projects by the State Water Commission should be limited to large projects.

The economic analysis tool does not take into account non-monetized benefits in considering overall benefits a project may generate. As farmers, we've seen where and when the water is located, and sometimes we work on a project that will benefit in the near future, even though there may not appear to be economic benefits at the time the economic analysis is conducted.

Our water resource districts are committed to managing water resources responsibly, and state funding is critical to making some of these projects happen, regardless of size. Most often it is the farming community who petitions to have projects developed in the first place.

Of particular example is regarding bank stabilization projects. The current State Water Commission's cost-share policy stipulates that cost-share assistance will only be approved for bank stabilization projects that protect public infrastructure. In our rural areas, this often means that protecting rural roads are the only benefits that can be captured under the economic analysis required by the policy. As an example, the current economic analysis does not take into account the substantial financial and time impact that even a brief detour can have on farmers. When we have to go even just a couple miles around to get to a field because the shoulder is no longer strong enough, it may mean the difference of getting a quarter planted or not before a rain comes.

The original HB 1218 would have increased the EA threshold to \$5million. However, this number was lowered to \$750,000 in the Engrossed Bill. We would support an amendment to increase the threshold to above \$2 million. This increase would result in more cost-share dollars for Water Resource District projects, fewer delays and save money in the long run. We ask for your support on HB 1218 in increasing the \$750,000 to \$2 million and providing a DO PASS recommendation

Brent Baldwin
St. Thomas, ND
President – Red River Valley Sugarbeet Growers