

Testimony of Steve Hansen
Neutral Testimony for House Bill 1353
March 18, 2021

Chairman Kruen and members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee:

My name is Steve Hansen, and I farm in the south Oakes area in Dickey and Sargent Counties. I serve as the Chairman of the Dickey County Water Resource District, and I serve as the Vice Chairman of the North Dakota Irrigation Association. I am here testifying on my own, and I will ask the Irrigation Association to support my request at our next meeting.

I'm here representing myself and numerous other farmers in my area that are in my same situation. Roughly half of the acres that I farm are irrigated. I am here today to tell you about an issue that is facing my farming neighbors and me. In the area that I farm, there are approximately 49 irrigation water permit applications that are held in abeyance or deferred, and many of these permit applications have been outstanding for over 20 years. I myself have 6 permit applications that are held in abeyance. No permits have been granted in my area for over 20 years.

The Office of the State Engineer (OSE) has utilized ND tax dollars to utilize electromagnetic sonar (AEM) data to prove that sufficient, rechargeable groundwater resources exist to support additional irrigation development. In addition, the OSE has developed a real-time groundwater monitoring system (PRESENS) to monitor the aquifer levels. The groundwork and studies have been completed, which have shown that adequate water resources exist.

In 2020, for example, which was a heavy irrigation year due to drier conditions, at the end of August when irrigators shut down, the PRESENS system showed that the aquifer was fully recharged within 7 days. Still no permits have been granted.

With the budget issues North Dakota faces, one North Dakota State University study provides that for every \$1 spent on irrigation development, \$7 is returned to the State, which represents an average that would fluctuate year to year based on commodity prices and market conditions.

In our area, we have high dollar commodities including potatoes and onions, and producers who raise these crops wish to expand, but these producers are restricted due to rotation requirements and lack of irrigation. By not granting additional irrigation permits when the water resources are available, it is holding the economic development of North Dakota back.

North Dakota has fallen way behind in irrigation development in comparison to our surrounding states. Let's be a leader and start moving forward progressively.

I am not an expert on state agency organization, and therefore I am not testifying for or against the merits of 1353 as it's written. However, the Office of the State Engineer has been extremely conservative in their approach to irrigation development. I am here to request that the ND Legislature authorize a study for our irrigation development and how we appropriate water in ND, so that the Legislature can address this issue in 2023 if it finds that changes are necessary.

Thank you.