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## **WATER TOPICS OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

Wednesday, June 10, 2026  
Roughrider Room, State Capitol  
Bismarck, North Dakota

Representative Steve Swiontek, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

**Members present:** Representatives Steve Swiontek, Mike Beltz, Mike Berg, Jay Fisher, Karla Rose Hanson, Jon O. Nelson, Todd Porter, Dan Ruby, Daniel R. Vollmer; Senators Randy A. Burckhard, Michael Dwyer, Justin Gerhardt, Larry Luick, Ronald Sorvaag,\* Paul J. Thomas, Mark F. Weber

**Member absent:** Representative Matthew Ruby

**Others present:** Senator Brad Bekkedahl, Williston, member of the Legislative Management Mike Keily, Tappen; Brian Reilly, Walsh County Rural Water District; Sindhuja S.Pillai-Grinolds, Department of Water Resources; Geoff Slick, Advanced Engineering and Environmental Services, LLC; Gene Veeder, State Water Commission; Eric Volk, North Dakota Rural Water Systems Association

See [Appendix A](#) for additional persons present.

\*Attended remotely

### **ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

**It was moved by Senator Burckhard, seconded by Representative Nelson, and carried on a voice vote that the minutes of the March 26, 2026, meeting be approved as distributed.**

Chairman Swiontek held a moment of silence to honor the memory of the late Representative Liz Conmy, a former member of the committee.

### **WATERSHED MANAGEMENT STUDY**

Mr. Dustin Richard, Counsel, Legislative Council, presented a memorandum entitled [Watershed Management Study - Interim Status Update](#).

### **STORM WATER AND WASTEWATER STUDIES**

Mr. Levi Kinnischtzke, Senior Fiscal Analyst, Legislative Council, presented a memorandum entitled [Storm Water Projects Study and Wastewater Projects Fund Study - Interim Status Update](#).

In response to a question from a committee member, Mr. Kinnischtzke noted political subdivisions have identified the need to undertake storm water and wastewater projects, but additional funding sources for these projects have not been identified.

### **REQUIRED REPORTS AND UPDATES**

Mr. Reice Haase, Director, and Ms. Sindhuja S.Pillai-Grinolds, Director, Water Development Division, Department of Water Resources, provided information ([Appendix B](#)) regarding the Department of Water Resources' (DWR) studies relating to the state's cost-share policies and governance and finance of regional water systems; the State Water Commission's (SWC) project prioritization methodology; the projects SWC has designated as a project receiving carryover funding, the total amount obligated to a project receiving carryover funding, and the total amount of funds not yet obligated to a project receiving carryover funding; DWR's recent activities; and the committee's statutory duties. They noted:

- The projected funding needed to finish the Northwest Area Water Supply (NAWS) Project is approximately \$96 million, which will be appropriated from several sources including the state and federal government.
- The design and specifications of the biota water treatment plant and Snake Creek pumping station for NAWS are being constructed based on needs from the early years of the previous decade; however, increased capacity to account for growth in the area was included in the original design and specifications. The design and specifications for future project components may need to be modified to accommodate for increased water supply demands from the system.
- A project sponsor that begins work on a project before being approved by SWC is not eligible for cost-share funding.
- SWC and DWR are cognizant of the large amount of funds carried over from one biennium to another and have implemented a two-tiered funding system to provide funding for preconstruction and construction costs separately.
- Deloitte Consulting released a report outlining the findings and recommendations of a study regarding the future governance and financing options of the Southwest Pipeline Project (SWPP), NAWS, and the Red River Valley water supply project (RRVWSP). According to interested stakeholders, the preferred governance and financing option for the SWPP is to keep the governance structure the same, but leverage capital repayment. According to interested stakeholders, the preferred governance financing option for the NAWS Project is to keep the current model, but make small improvements. According to interested stakeholders, the preferred governance and financing option for the RRVWSP is to transfer ownership, operation, and maintenance duties to SWC.
- DWR and SWC are discussing potential changes to the state's cost-share policy at each basin-hosted meeting this summer. The conversations have been and will be largely focused on affordability for stakeholders undertaking a project.

Ms. Miranda Kleven, Senior Consultant, Advanced Engineering and Environmental Services, LLC, and Mr. Eric Volk, Executive Director, North Dakota Rural Water Systems Association, provided information ([Appendix C](#)) regarding municipal and water usage and user rates across the state. They noted:

- Residents receiving water from a rural water supply system either receive water through a bulk user, such as a city, or directly from the rural system through individually metered infrastructure.
- Calculating the appropriate depreciation schedule for water supply infrastructure depends on the complexity of the system and whether the infrastructure is a vertical or horizontal asset.
- According to a study conducted by the American Water Works Association, although \$35 billion was invested in water development and infrastructure last year in the United States, a total annual investment of approximately \$90 billion over the next 25 years is necessary to ensure water infrastructure is maintained and operational. Increased investment could make water user rates less affordable for households across the country.

Ms. Shannon Fisher, Program Manager, Division of Municipal Facilities, Department of Environmental Quality, and Ms. DeAnn Ament, Executive Director, Public Finance Authority, provided information ([Appendix D](#)) regarding the federal affordability index applied to water supply systems.

Mr. Gene Veeder, Commissioner, Upper Missouri River Basin, State Water Commission, provided information regarding the recent activities of SWC and the feasibility and desirability of regionalizing water infrastructure across the state. He noted:

- Regionalizing water supply infrastructure across the state has delivered high-quality water to some of the state's most rural communities.
- The Western Area Water Supply Project, NAWS, the SWPP, and the RRVWSP are the four main regional water supply systems in the state and each are designed to extract Missouri River water for use in all parts of the state.

- Because of the increased demand for Missouri River water from downstream states, the state needs to take a more aggressive approach to preserve and maintain water rights along the Missouri River.

Mr. Brian Reilly, Manager, Walsh County Rural Water District, and Mr. Geoff Slick, Rural Water Practice Leader, Advanced Engineering and Environmental Services, LLC, provided information ([Appendix E](#)) regarding an anticipated request for which the state cost-share is estimated to be \$10 million or more for the district's water supply project. They noted:

- Walsh County Rural Water District is the primary supplier of water to Walsh County residents.
- The district owns and maintains between 700 and 800 miles of water supply infrastructure within the county.

Mr. Michael Gunsch, Senior Civil Engineer, Houston Engineering, Inc., provided information ([Appendix F](#)) regarding an anticipated request for which the state cost-share is estimated to be \$10 million or more for watershed planning and management near Crystal Springs. He noted:

- Project sponsors plan to seek funding for the Crystal Springs watershed management project from the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), SWC, or both. Other public and private stakeholders plan to contribute 25 percent of the funding for the project.
- Project sponsors are in contact with Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge managers to determine the feasibility of pumping water from the Crystal Springs area to the refuge. The refuge managers want assurances the quality of the pumped water would not be lower than the quality of the water currently in the refuge.
- Pumping water into Long Lake is the most cost-effective option to remove the excess water in and around Crystal Springs. Project sponsors studied the feasibility of pumping the excess water north of Jamestown; however, cost estimates were three times higher than under the proposed plan.
- Each year, approximately \$292 billion of interstate commerce is conducted using the state's railway system. Removing excess water in the Crystal Springs area would ensure interstate commerce is not disrupted.

Mr. Bill Robinson, Chairman, Lower Heart River Water Resource District, provided information ([Appendix G](#)) regarding an anticipated request for which the state cost-share is estimated to be \$10 million or more for a flood risk reduction project in Mandan. He noted:

- While improvements to a community's levee system must be approved by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, FEMA ultimately will determine whether the levee system complies with federal 100-year flood requirements.
- FEMA deemed Mandan's levee system inadequate because the system would not meet federal standards if an ice jam event occurred in the Heart River.
- All future awards from SWC for the levee system improvement project will be used for final construction costs.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Mike Keily, Tappen, provided testimony regarding an anticipated request for which the state cost-share is estimated to be \$10 million or more for watershed planning and management near Crystal Springs. He noted the proposed project to remove excess water in the Crystal Springs area would divert additional water to Kidder County, which would negatively affect his property and livelihood.

No further business appearing, Chairman Swiontek adjourned the meeting at 2:59 p.m.

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Dustin A. Richard  
Counsel

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Levi Kinnischtzke  
Senior Fiscal Analyst

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