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## **AGRICULTURE AND WATER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Wednesday, June 17, 2026  
Memorial Union, Ballroom B, North Dakota State University  
Fargo, North Dakota

Representative Dori Hauck, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 9:07 a.m.

**Members present:** Representatives Dori Hauck, Karen A. Anderson, Mike Beltz, Mike Brandenburg, Kathy Frelich, Jeff Hoverson, Keith Kempenich, Dwight Kiefert, David Monson, Dennis Nehring, Kathy Skroch; Senators Cole Conley, Robert Erbele, Randy D. Lemm, Larry Luick, Michelle Powers, Terry M. Wanzek, Mark F. Weber

**Members absent:** Representative Lisa Finley-DeVille; Senator Michael Dwyer

**Others present:** Tom Bodine, Department of Agriculture; Paul Christenson, Churchs Ferry; Josh Gelinske, NDeavor; Kade Grafel\* and David Miller,\* Decision Innovation Solutions, LLC; Xinhua Jia, Alan Kallmeyer, Greg Lardy, and Marshall Stewart, North Dakota State University; Hollie Mackey, ND AgTech; Duane Pool, Department of Water Resources

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

*\*Attended remotely*

**It was moved by Representative Nehring, seconded by Senator Wanzek, and carried on a voice vote that the minutes of the March 31, 2026, meeting be approved as distributed.**

Dr. Marshall Stewart, President, North Dakota State University, presented information ([Appendix B](#)) regarding the university's role in the agriculture industry of the state.

Mr. Tom Bodine, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Agriculture, and Mr. Kade Grafel, Research Analyst, and Mr. David Miller, Chief Economist, Decision Innovation Solutions, LLC, provided a report ([Appendix C](#)) regarding the findings and recommendations of a study that reviewed the potential benefits of expanding irrigation throughout the state. They noted:

- Only 17 dairy operations exist in the state, with the largest operation comprising 2,000 dairy cows. Companies are seeking to build two dairy operations in eastern North Dakota, which would add approximately 37,500 dairy cows to the state's dairy industry.
- Proper on-farm drainage and irrigation practices often lead to higher seed rates for farmers and more productive soils.
- Increased productivity requires farmers to purchase additional materials and products, which provides an economic boost to the state's agricultural economy.
- Surface water, not groundwater, would be the primary source of water used to expand irrigation in the state.
- Expanding irrigation capacity likely would assist in recharging certain aquifers across the state.

Dr. Greg Lardy, Board Member, State Board of Agricultural Research and Education, provided a report ([Appendix D](#)) regarding the board's annual evaluation of research activities and expenditures. He noted:

- Due to various appropriations from the Legislative Assembly over the past several biennia, storage facilities have been constructed at several research extension centers across the state.
- If asked, the State Board of Agricultural Research and Education and research extension centers provide scientific, engineering, and technical guidance to private agricultural companies, including Grand Farm, for purposes of growing companies within the state's agricultural industry.

Dr. Xinhua Jia, Professor, Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering, and Dr. Alan Kallmeyer, Dean, College of Engineering, North Dakota State University, presented information ([Appendix E](#)) regarding the mission and recent activities of the North Dakota Water Resources Research Institute, water use for data centers, and crop irrigation management. They noted:

- Following the enactment of the Water Resources Research Act of 1964, 54 research institutes were established at each land grant university across the country, including the North Dakota Water Resources Research Institute.
- The institute collaborates with various stakeholders, including the United States Geological Survey, state agencies, and private water resources consultants, to research and analyze state-specific issues related to water quality and scarcity, socioeconomic planning, agricultural drainage, and infrastructure innovation.
- Participation rates in North Dakota State University's new water resources certificate have exceeded initial projections and expectations.
- The Agricultural Products Utilization Commission funded a feasibility study to determine whether greenhouses could use the heat generated from a data center to grow crops adjacent to a data center.

Ms. Hollie Mackey, Chief Executive Officer, ND AgTech, and Mr. Josh Gelinske, Chief Technology Officer, NDeavor, presented information ([Appendix F](#)) regarding the mission and recent activities of the National Science Foundation Agricultural Technology Engine in North Dakota. They noted ND AgTech acts as a clearinghouse, bringing industry players together to develop solutions in the agricultural technology industry.

### **ECONOMIC ANALYSIS STUDY**

Dr. Duane Pool, Director, Planning and Education Division, Department of Water Resources, presented information ([Appendix G](#)) regarding the formula for conducting an economic analysis for assessment drain projects and the projected cost threshold for conducting economic analyses. He noted the changes to the economic analysis formula agreed upon by various stakeholders can be changed internally within the Department of Water Resources, and legislation is not required to enact the changes.

Ms. Dani Quissell, Executive Vice President, North Dakota Water Users Association, presented information ([Appendix H](#)) regarding the formula for conducting an economic analysis for assessment drain projects, the projected cost threshold for conducting economic analyses, and potential legislative changes regarding assessment drains.

Committee members expressed support for the changes to the economic analysis tool proposed by the stakeholders involved in water drainage.

### **WETLANDS AND INUNDATED LANDS STUDY**

Mr. Aaron Birst, Executive Director, North Dakota Association of Counties, provided information ([Appendix I](#)) regarding the committee's study of water and wetlands regulations and the taxation of inundated lands in the state. He noted:

- When inundated agricultural land is removed from the county tax rolls, the property tax burden is transferred to other property taxpayers in the county.

- Legislation enacted by the Legislative Assembly attempting to govern the rules of the United States Fish and Wildlife Easement Program likely would not pass muster under the United States Constitution.

Representative Frelich presented information ([Appendix J](#)) regarding the committee's study of water and wetlands regulations, specifically applied to Devils Lake.

Mr. Paul Christenson, Churchs Ferry, presented information regarding the committee's study of water and wetlands regulations, specifically applied to Devils Lake. He noted:

- Water resource districts are conducting drainage operations to protect roads and infrastructure and are snagging and clearing debris in water channels.
- Certain water management practices have increased the amount of water flowing to downstream residents.

### ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Representative Frelich presented a bill draft [[27.0174.02000](#)] relating to sovereign lands management. She noted the bill draft would exempt from the definition of sovereign lands certain lands acquired through a patent issued by the United States before statehood.

Representative Frelich presented a bill draft [[27.0183.01000](#)] to provide for a study relating to pollutants in Devils Lake. She noted:

- The bill draft would require the Department of Water Resources and the Department of Environmental Quality to determine the feasibility and desirability of constructing a treatment plant to treat water leaving Devils Lake for the purpose of lowering lake levels.
- At the conclusion of the study, each department would be required to present to the Legislative Management the findings of the study and any recommendations to implement the findings.

Chairman Hauck invited committee members and members of the public to attend a tour of the North Dakota State University Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory at 2:00 p.m.

No further business appearing, Chairman Hauck adjourned the meeting at 3:45 p.m.

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Dustin A. Richard  
Counsel

ATTACH:10