



# North Dakota Irrigation Association

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Dedicated to strengthening and expanding irrigation to build and diversify our economy

**House Appropriations – Education and Environment Division  
Hearing for HB 1020  
January 30, 2025  
Testimony of Steve Hansen, Chairman, ND Irrigation Association**

Chairman Nathe and Members of the Committee, my name is Steve Hansen, and I serve as Chairman of the North Dakota Irrigation Association (NDIA) in addition to being a farmer and irrigator from Ludden, ND, in Dickey County. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of House Bill 1020 and state funding for irrigation projects.

As you know, North Dakota producers often face devastating drought. Irrigation can be a valuable resource for producers because it has the potential to produce high value crops even in dry or drought periods. Irrigation also allows our farmers to maximize their soil's potential, increasing the productivity and profitability of the land.

In 2024, the NDIA, in partnership with the ND Department of Water Resources, Garrison Diversion Conservancy District, and North Dakota State University, undertook a study to identify areas for potential irrigation development. Attached to this testimony is a handout summarizing this study. The study showed that while less than one percent of cropland in North Dakota was irrigated in 2022, there are two million acres ripe for development, meaning that they have amenable soil types and land use in addition to access to water. In fact, 37 counties have more than 10,000 acres of cropland potential for future irrigation development.

To realize this development will likely require state support. Today, the state supports irrigation development in two ways. First, irrigation districts can apply for cost share through the State Water Commission for planning and construction of shared works, such as intakes, main transmission lines, and power lines, that benefit multiple irrigators in a district. While there are a limited number of districts in the state, and many of these are not very active, there is renewed interest in setting up and revitalizing districts. We would ask that adequate funding be included in the General Water bucket to support this effort. A recent request before the State Water Commission for one project was \$150,000. There could be a few requests in the next biennium, so \$300,00-\$500,000 would support a handful of projects.

The Irrigation Association also supports the request of the Garrison Diversion Conservancy District (GDCD) for \$5 million for irrigation development. The GDCD works closely with irrigators and potential irrigators in its district to further develop irrigation along the McClusky Canal.

The state, in a shared program with the State Water Commission and the Bank of North Dakota, also provides interest rate buydown for individual irrigators establishing new irrigation systems. The State Water Commission recently increased their contribution to this program and the Bank is looking to do the same in the near future. Together, this increased funding would increase the maximum buydown for an irrigator to 4% or \$90,000. Historically, this program has been undersubscribed. With this increase, we're hopeful there will be greater interest in using it. The State Water Commission has dedicated approximately \$300,000 to the Ag Pace program for the current biennium. We would ask that the same amount (\$300,000) be contemplated for inclusion in the General Water bucket for the next biennium.

Just as important as funding for irrigation development is ensuring the Department of Water Resources (DWR) has the staff and resources needed to process water permit applications. Every irrigator must receive a water permit from the DWR. It is the DWR's responsibility to ensure that new permit applications do not adversely affect those who are already using the water, known as prior appropriators. In order for the DWR to make timely and responsible decisions on these important permits, it needs staff with the skills and tools needed to analyze the data and process permits. The agency had a request for an additional FTE for a data analyzer, who we believe could be of use to existing staff in the appropriations division. The DWR currently collects a lot of data regarding water use, aquifer levels, and more. Without the right personnel to analyze such data, the data can't be used to make timely and responsible decisions on permits. While this FTE request wasn't included in the Governor's budget, we believe this position is worth consideration.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony, Mr. Chairman. I'd be happy to stand for any questions you may have.