

Testimony to the North Dakota Senate
North Dakota State University
Williston Research Extension Center, Williston, ND
January 2025

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Government Operations Division of the Senate Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address this group on behalf of the Williston Research Extension Center, a branch station of the North Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station with staff also addressing NDSU Extension duties. For the record, I am Sam Funk, director of the NDSU Williston Research Extension Center located in Williston, North Dakota.

The Williston REC provides research and outreach on diverse agricultural cropping systems and crops, soils, and includes dryland and irrigated research within the Center activities and properties. We also address land reclamation given our geographic relationship to the expansive oil and gas economic climate in the Bakken region and Williston Basin.

Funding during the 2023-25 biennium included encouraging items to support REC staff such as a compensation package. Also included were appropriations for new construction at the WREC. However, the Williston Basin or Bakken “Premium” is a part of the reality for the region which includes a higher cost of living and more expensive material and labor costs around Williston due to competition for scarce resources and labor with competition in the oil fields, supporting industries and enterprises. The North Dakota Legislature was generous in providing \$1.7 million in funding for a structure at the WREC Irrigated Research Site, commonly referred to as the WREC Nesson Valley location. The hope was for construction which included a meeting center, heated shop space, and offices.

At multiple times when estimates of costs to build the new facility at Nesson were provided – including at the bid opening – the construction, even for an unfinished building with minimal internal structure, was quoted to be well in excess of the \$1.7 million or the even lower available funds to build when fees for required architect services were subtracted.

This brings us to the request from SBARE to build a structure for the WREC Irrigated Research site that focuses on the immediate and most pressing needs of a heated shop, restrooms, and an employee break room to facilitate important irrigated and high-value agricultural research and outreach at this site. This change in scope for the structure, special fund authority to raise an additional \$1.3 million, and no new request for state dollars for this building beyond carryover of the \$1.7 million in general funds appropriated by the 68th Legislative Assembly are intended to account for additional

costs that may occur in building a structure with expected reinvigorated investment in the oil and gas sector in the Williston Basin.

The North Dakota Legislature also generously provided for \$475,000 for the construction of multiple storage sheds around the AES REC network in the state. When the WREC requested an estimate for a shed similar to our fellow REC in Minot, we found an estimate that was significantly higher per square foot than what was underway to be built at a location just hours to the east of Williston. In order to accommodate for the Williston Basin or Bakken "Premium" a request with SBARE is to carryover the \$475,000 in funding from the 2023-25 biennium with no new state dollars, but with special fund authority to spend an additional \$325,000 as needed to complete the shed, and a continued exemption from the requirement to have an architect participate in this building project to protect high value farm and research equipment under roof.

The challenges we face are ones which we can meet and successfully accomplish our intermediate and longer-term goals. Thank you for your support and consideration.

Samuel Funk, Director

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