

DRAFT MINUTES

Nebraska Environmental Trust Board
Special Meeting
Thursday, January 8, 2026
1:30 p.m.

1. Chair Quandahl called the meeting of the Nebraska Environmental Trust Board (NET) to order at 1:30 p.m. in Suite 310, 2077 N St, Lincoln, Nebraska.
Advanced notice of the meeting and public hearing was published in the Lincoln Journal Star on December 27, 2025. The agenda and documents to be considered at the meeting were provided. The Open Meetings Act was posted near the meeting room entrance and on the Nebraska Environmental Trust website.

Roll call was conducted, and a quorum was present.

Members Present (11):

District I: James Hellbusch, Columbus; Ted Vasko, Papillion

District II: Garfield Coleman, Omaha; Roger Helgoth, Omaha; Chair Mark Quandahl, Omaha

District III: Josh Andersen, Edgar; Rodney Christen, Steinauer

State Agency Representatives: Matt Manning, Chief Water Officer, Nebraska Department of Water, Energy and Environment; Tim McCoy, Director, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission; Ashley Newmyer, Director, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health; Sherry Vinton, Director, Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Members Absent (3):

District I: Jeff Kanger, Lincoln

District III: Eric Hansen, North Platte

State Agency Representatives: Jesse Bradley, Director, Nebraska Department of Water, Energy and Environment

Staff Present: Holly Adams, Executive Director; Lana Merani, Grants Administrator; Madison Moe, Grants Assistant; Karen Plautz-Castro, Administrative Specialist

2. Consent Agenda

Background on Consent Agenda Items

The consent agenda included November 6, 2025, Board meeting minutes.

Motion by Vasko, seconded by Anderson, "I move to approve the consent agenda."

Voting Aye: Christen, Coleman, Helgoth, Hellbusch, Manning, McCoy, Newmyer, Vasko, Vinton, Andersen, Quandahl

Absent: Bradley, Hansen, Kanger

11 Voted Aye. Motion carried.

3. Public Comment

Alex McKiernan, SE Nebraska, Farmer/Rancher, Commended NET for their fair grant processes which have minimized arbitrary actions. He encouraged consistent grant scoring year to year and feels that NET should consider funding all grants which scored above 27.7.

Shelly Kelly, Broken Bow, Sandhills Task Force Director, commented that over the past several years the NET grant application process has become more manageable, and NET has encouraged applications. She supported the consistent use of scoring criteria from year to year.

4. Public Hearing on Proposed Eligibility Recommendations for the 2026 Grant Cycle

As presiding officer, Chair Quandahl opened the public hearing at 1:40 p.m. to accept testimony on the proposed funding list for the 2026 Grant Cycle under consideration by the Nebraska Environmental Trust Board, pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 81-15,167 through 81-15,176.

55 written records were received from the public and distributed to the Board prior to the meeting. 5 individuals appeared in-person before the Board to testify during the public hearing.

Testimony During Hearing

Kimberly Carroll Steward, Lincoln – Nebraska Recycling Council (NRC)

Kimberly Steward spoke in support of the Recycling Equipment Grant (REG), NET application 26-146. This grant leverages local investment, builds infrastructure and extends essential services to communities that would otherwise be left out and urges the Board to fund their project.

Grace Baron, Lincoln, Nebraska Recycling Council (NRC) Program Director

The Recycling Equipment Grant (REG) provides funds to acquire recycling equipment which can be limiting factor in rural communities. REG provides recycling equipment for non-profits and businesses to help conserve resources, lower greenhouse emissions and decrease landfill/waste pollution.

Matt Bailey, Schuyler, Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Group (SCWIG) Member

SCWIG is a group of landowners, producers and other stakeholders from Boone, Madison, Platte and Colfax counties in Nebraska. Their primary focus is to reduce flooding and improve water quality. SCWIG understands that NET's grant application is a competitive process and intends to seek feedback and guidance from NET and plans to reapply for this grant in the future.

Sam Nieman, Gretna, Hillside Solutions, Community Partnership Sustainability Strategist

Spoke for funding of the Recycling Equipment Grant (REG) NET application 26-146. The REG grant program provided by the Nebraska Recycling Council funds recycling equipment utilized by Hillside Solutions. The work they do with grant-funded equipment directly aligns with the mission of NET.

Mike Murphy, Valentine, Middle Niobrara Natural Resource District, NET application 26-121.

Spoke on behalf of the grant for the MNNRD educational complex located in north central Nebraska. While the MNNRD is aware that the Governor is discussing potential budget cuts, Murphy noted the Governor also wants to leverage federal dollars and funds more effectively. Murphy encouraged the Board to utilize funds currently available for environmental purposes instead of losing that opportunity since unused funding may be repurposed elsewhere into the state budget.

The public hearing concluded at 1:58 p.m.

5. Grants Committee Report and Recommendations: Award of 2026 Grants

At the NET Board Meeting held on November 6, 2025, the Board approved the Grants Committee eligibility recommendations. The six members of the Grants Committee independently scored the eligible applications (71). The Grants Committee then met on December 11, 2025, and recommended funding for applications with a minimum average score of 30 points or higher. The projects are listed in rank order score on pages 5-1 to 5-3, and include the recommendations for funding amounts.

Further discussion among the Board on how the Grants Committee used quantitative measures to define the data. It was noted there will be variability of the average application score from year to year. Also, NET uses a competitive grant process, and this year the bell curve method was utilized as a visual tool to demonstrate the overall distribution of scores and to highlight disparities/gaps between applications.

Motion by Coleman, seconded by Andersen, "As Chairman representing the Grants Committee, I move that the Nebraska Environmental Trust Board accepts and approves the following grant applications, as recommended by the Grants Committee, and authorize the Chairperson and Executive Director to sign the award letters and contracts: 26-120, 26-145, 26-172, 26-126, and 26-108."

Discussion: None.

Voting Aye: Christen, Coleman, Helgoth, Hellbusch, Manning, Newmyer, Vasko, Vinton, Andersen Quandahl

Abstaining: McCoy

Absent: Bradley, Hansen, Kanger

10 Voted Aye. 1 Abstained. Motion carried.

Motion by Coleman, seconded by Andersen, "As Chairman representing the Grants Committee, I move that the Nebraska Environmental Trust Board accepts and approves the following grant applications, as recommended by the Grants Committee, and authorize the Chairperson and Executive Director to sign the award letter and contract: 26-141."

Discussion: None.

Voting Aye: Coleman, Helgoth, Hellbusch, McCoy, Newmyer, Vasko, Vinton Andersen, Christen, Quandahl

Abstaining: Manning

Absent: Bradley, Hansen, Kanger

10 Voted Aye. 1 Abstained. Motion carried.

Motion by Coleman, seconded by McCoy, "As Chairman representing the Grants Committee, I move that the Nebraska Environmental Trust Board accepts and approves the following grant applications, as recommended by the Grants Committee, and authorize the Chairperson and Executive Director to sign the award letters and contracts: 26-109, 26-166, 26-134, 26-107, 26-113, 26-168, 26-157, 26-140, 26-160, 26-112, 26-106, 26-122, 26-114, 26-131, 26-137, 26-115, 26-117, 26-151, 26-161, 26-116, 26-149, 26-148, 26-102, 26-170, 26-150, 26-164, 26-169, 26-143, 26-165, 26-138, 26-163, 26-139, 26-162, 26-123, 26-136, 26-147, 26-154, 26-130, 26-173, 26-133, 26-124, 26-125, 26-128, 26-110, 26-105, 26-171 and 26-167."

Discussion: None.

Voting Aye: Helgoth, Hellbusch, Manning, McCoy, Newmyer, Vasko, Vinton, Andersen, Christen, Coleman, Quandahl

Absent: Bradley, Hansen, Kanger

11 Voted Aye. Motion carried.

The Board took a break from 2:11 p.m to 2:14 p.m.

6. UNL Public Policy Center Report on 5-Year Funding Category Review

Executive Director Adams briefly described the five-year requirement for reviewing NET's funding categories. Kurt Mantonya and Grant Van Robays from the UNL Public Policy Center organized and facilitated the review process, secured venues and published meeting notices in early November 2025. During the following weeks, in-person meetings were held in Districts 1, 2, and 3 (November 18–20, 2025) which were followed by a virtual session held on December 2, 2025. Mantonya summarized these meetings into a report and presented their findings to the Board. Chair Quandahl thanked both Mantonya and Robays for completing the report in a timely and efficient matter which was the overall opinion of the Board. It was suggested that future meetings could be held further north and west within Districts 2 and 3, but it was acknowledged that the two-week timeline between setting and holding the meetings led to certain accommodations being made without circumventing state statutes. Alternative meeting locations will be taken into consideration for the next five-year review. Additional discussion regarding the distribution of lottery funds designated for education, climate change, lottery sales and a historical five-year funding snapshot was brought forward for consideration. Executive Director Adams plan to resend the 2025 UNL Public Policy Report, along with a copy of the January 8, 2026, presentation and the archived 2020 five-year category review report to NET Board members for additional review. An agenda item will be added to the next NET Board meeting for the purpose of reviewing the proposed revisions to the category descriptions as identified in the UNL Public Policy report. An invitation will be extended to Brian Rockey, Nebraska Lottery Director to speak at the next NET Board meeting to address lottery related inquiries.

7. Basic Grant Contract updates

In 2022, the NET Trust Committee and the Center for Operational Excellence worked to streamline NET processes. One of the improvements was to update the contractual grant requirements and complete an annual review of the contract. A copy of the current contract with proposed updates was included in the January 8, 2025 Board packet, (pages 7-1 to 7-13). The proposed contract revisions are meant to fix grammar errors, add clarification, remove redundancies and to better align contractual language with current NET policies.

Motion by Vasko, seconded by Coleman "I move that the NET Board approves the standard conditions grant contract for grant awards and that the Executive Director shall have discretion to negotiate specific conditions as allowed in Title 137, Chapter 8."

Discussion: The grant contract from 2002 was updated approximately 4 years ago to better reflect the policies and procedures of the Board. Since then, annual reviews of this contract have been conducted to drive continuous improvement, making it easier for grantees to understand and for NET staff to administer. Executive Director Adams confirmed that language for multi-year projects is included in the contract to ensure applicants stay on schedule. Chair Quandahl added that it is possible to make amendments or addendums which to ad hoc contract changes which occur outside of the typical grant review process.

Amended motion by Manning, agreement by Vasko, and seconded by Hellbusch, "to change the word 'reasonable' to 'responsible' in the second paragraph on page 7-9."

Voting Aye: Helgoth, Hellbusch, Manning, McCoy, Newmyer, Vasko, Vinton, Andersen, Christen, Coleman, Quandahl

Absent: Bradley, Hansen, Kanger

11 Voted Aye. Motion carried

Discussion: Board members inquired if NET’s contractual services policies are similar to DAS (Division of Administrative Services) rules for bidding and dollar limitations. Executive Director Adams stated that the NET bidding policy requires three bids for contractual services costing \$20,000 or more, and the proposed contract will apply to the current awardees. It was agreed the NET strives to be good stewards of the Trust Fund, and a historical perspective is needed before making further policy changes. The Board choose to vote on the proposed revisions to the NET grant contract as is, but agreed to have further discussion regarding NET’s bidding policies at the next NET Board meeting scheduled on February 5, 2026.

Original Motion as amended by Vasko, seconded by Coleman “I move that the NET Board approves the standard conditions grant contract and changes the word ‘reasonable’ to ‘responsible’ in the second paragraph on page 7-9, for grant awards and that the Executive Director shall have discretion to negotiate specific conditions as allowed in Title 137, Chapter 8.”

Voting Aye: Hellbusch, Manning, McCoy, Newmyer, Vasko, Vinton, Andersen, Christen, Coleman, Helgoth, Quandahl

Absent: Bradley, Hansen, Kanger

11 Voted Aye. Motion carried.

8. Directors Report

It was requested that Board members are not utilizing the index tabs from their Board packet, to please pull the tabbed index sheets out and return them to NET staff for reuse.

9. Next Meeting

Thursday, February 5, 2026, at Nebraska Environmental Trust, 2077 N St, Suite 310, Lincoln, NE 68510, 1:30 p.m

10. Adjourn

Chair Quandahl adjourned the meeting at 2:49 p.m.



Holly Adams
Executive Director