MINUTES

Nebraska Environmental Trust Board
2nd Quarter Meeting
Thursday, May 7, 2026
1:30 p.m.

1. **Call to Order**

Chair Mark 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.

Advance notice of the meeting was published in the Lincoln Journal Star on April 24, 2026. 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 (9):
District I: James Hellbusch, Columbus; Ted Vasko, Papillion
District II: Garfield Coleman, Omaha; Chair Mark Quandahl, Omaha
District III: Josh Andersen, Edgar
State Agency Representatives: Jesse Bradley, Director, Nebraska Department of Water, Energy and Environment; Matt Manning, Chief Water Officer, Nebraska Department of Water, Energy and Environment; Tim McCoy, Director, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission; Sherry Vinton, Director, Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Members Absent (4):
District II: Roger Helgoth, Omaha
District III: Eric Hansen, North Platte; Rod Christen, Steinauer
State Agency Representatives: Ashley Newmyer, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

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

2. **Consent Agenda**

<u>Background on Consent Agenda Items</u>

The consent agenda included February 5, 2026, Board meeting minutes, financial reports, approval to set financials aside for audit, and the Grant Disbursement Report.

> **Motion by** Vasko, seconded by Andersen, "I move to approve the Consent Agenda."
>
> **Voting Aye:** Bradley, Coleman, Hellbusch, Manning, McCoy, Vasko, Vinton, Andersen, Quandahl
> **Absent:** Christen, Hansen, Helgoth, Newmyer
> **9 Voted Aye. Motion carried.**

Roger Helgoth Arrived at 1:33 p.m.

3. Public Comment

Shelly Kelly, Executive Director of the Sandhills Task Force, thanked the Board for its continued support and highlighted current youth initiatives. She explained the Task Force supported LR298CA to help maintain funding through a competitive grant process and protect long-term conservation efforts. Kelly also raised concerns about the new 2026 NET grant contract language, allowing for termination of a project if there is a lack of sufficient funding available. This could put long-term conservation projects at risk. She asked the Board to clarify when funds are officially secure and how NET will protect awarded money.

4. Director's Report

Executive Director Holly Adams briefed the Board on ongoing matters, noting that Jeff Kanger (District 1) resigned after seven years of service and that she will follow up with the Governor's Office regarding his replacement. She reported that legislative bill LB1072 was approved transferring $13.5 million from NET, while the proposed constitutional amendment LB298CA did not pass this legislative session. Legislative bill LB60 was approved, authorizing the sale of Nebraska lottery tickets through vending machines. The next NET grant cycle will open in mid-July and close on September 8, 2026. Executive Director Adams reminded Board members to return the NET Conflict of Interest forms included in their folders.

Discussion: It was stated that Jeff Kanger moved out of District 1, therefore he can no longer represent this district on the NET Board.

5. Ranking and Scoring Criteria Ad Hoc Committee Report

The Ranking and Scoring Ad Hoc Committee was established at the February 5, 2026, NET Board meeting. The Committee met on March 17, 2026, to review scoring results and criteria. The Committee recommended retaining the existing scoring criteria and questions for the upcoming 2027 grant cycle.

6. Real Property Improvement Ad Hoc Committee Report

The Real Property Ad Hoc Committee was established at the February 5, 2026 NET Board Meeting. The committee met on March 25, 2026, and reviewed real property improvement policies and procedures. The Ad Hoc committee recommended no changes to the current NET contract or policy.

7. Grant Application Cycle 2026/2027

a. Point Allocation for Geographic Distribution

The Board reviewed the Distribution of Awards by County Map for 2019 – 2025. The 2025 funding map shows that grants have been spread fairly across counties with no major gaps. Based on this information, additional points for specific geographical areas are not recommended for the 2027 Grant cycle.

Discussion: Board members commented that distribution of grants has been fairly awarded throughout the entire state. A concern was raised about the lower number of individual projects in the upper Northeast counties, and it was clarified by Executive Director Adams there are an additional 72 'state-wide' projects that were not reflected on this map.

b. Annual Priorities within Funding Categories

The Board reviewed the current five-year Nebraska Environmental Trust funding categories, which include Habitat, Surface and Ground Water, Waste Management, Air Quality, and Soil Management. No priorities to the current categories were recommended.

Discussion: None.

8. Annual Grants Portal Management Service Agreement

Background on Annual Grants Portal Management Service Agreement

Executive Director Adams summarized the annual service agreement for managing the NET grants portal, which supports grantee applications, reporting, and Board scoring. NET policy requires contracts over $25,000 to be reviewed by the NET Board. Gregoire Consulting, whom is a sole-source provider has collaborated with NET since 2011, providing support and software maintenance. The software is used by both grantees and Board members and is an important asset to NET.

The Board reviewed the software's maintenance, noting it was developed by UNL and supported by a Nebraska-based provider. Executive Director Adams will investigate changing the terms to a two-year contract to match the biannual budget, and has begun discussions with Gregoire Consulting about long-term succession planning to keep the portal supported.

Motion by Helgoth, seconded Andersen "I move to approve the Grants Management System service agreement with Gregoire Consulting, Inc. and authorize the Executive Director to sign the contract in the amount of $31,500."

Discussion: None.

Voting Aye: Coleman, Helgoth, Hellbusch, Manning, McCoy, Vasko, Vinton, Andersen, Bradley, Quandahl
Absent: Christen, Hansen, Newmyer
10 Voted Aye. Motion carried.

9. Grant Closeout Report

Background on Grant Closeout Report

When a project contract reaches its end date, the grantee must submit a final report. NET staff reviews reports, disbursement requests, and balances of projects when the contract date ends. If a grant project is in breach of the contract, the executive director sends a written 15-day notice. Failure by the grantee to comply may result in a revocation of the grant. The staff creates a summary report for the Board to review the final status of each grant project before closing them in the Grants Portal.

Executive Director explained that the Grants Closeout Report lists project that finished early or contracts have ended. A list of these projects can be found in the meeting packet, tab 9, page 1.

Motion by Andersen, seconded Coleman "I move to approve the report provided and presented by NET Staff, for the closeout of the projects presented in the report."

Discussion: None.
Voting Aye: Helgoth, Hellbusch, Manning, McCoy, Vasko, Vinton, Andersen, Bradley, Coleman, Quandahl
Absent: Christen, Hansen, Newmyer
10 Voted Aye. Motion carried.

10. Grant Modification Requests

a. 23-153-3: Lincoln-Lancaster Co. Health Dept - Requesting six-month extension.
b. 24-132-2: Nebraska Recycling Council – Requesting six-month extension.
c. 25-147: Little Blue Natural Resources District – Requesting one-year extension.
d. 25-112: I. Nicholson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary – Requesting one-year extension.

Motion by Andersen, seconded by Hellbusch, "I move to deny the request to extend projects 23-153-3, 24-132-2, 25-147, and 25-112"

Discussion: Several Board members noted that certain grantees complete projects on schedule, they later request extensions primarily to use remaining funds. Others, acting as good stewards of taxpayer dollars, simply return the unspent money. The Board emphasized that grantees are expected to meet contract deadlines. However, they acknowledged that delays outside a grantee's control, such as the situation in project #25-112, where Bald Eagles established a nest in the project area, can reasonably justify an extension

Andersen requested to withdraw his motion. Chair Quandahl asked for unanimous consent to withdraw the motion from consideration. There being no objections, and the motion was withdrawn.

Motion by Andersen, seconded by Hellbusch, "I move to deny the request to extend projects 23-153-3, 24-132-2, and 25-147"

Discussion: Several Board members noted that some conservation projects face nature related challenges that grantees cannot control, so some flexibility may be needed. Some members were concerned that certain projects may be requesting extensions simply to utilize leftover money. The Board agreed that it is still responsible for making sure NET funds are used properly while also supporting environmental goals.

Voting Aye: Hellbusch, Vasko, Vinton, Andersen, Coleman, Helgoth, Quandahl
Voting Nay: Manning, McCoy, Bradley
Absent: Christen, Hansen, Newmyer
7 Voted Aye. Motion carried.

Motion by Helgoth, seconded by Vasko, "I move to approve Rowe Sanctuary's request to extend project 25-112 for one year."

Discussion: Comments from members revolved around the recent burn bans across the state and how U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service monitors Bald Eagle nesting sites. These two issues impacted the grantee's project.

Voting Aye: Vasko, Vinton, Andersen, Bradley, Coleman, Helgoth, Hellbusch, Manning, McCoy, Quandahl
Absent: Christen, Hansen, Newmyer
10 Voted Aye. Motion carried.

11. Habitat for Humanity of Omaha Request for Utilization of Property Funds

Chairman Quandahl outlined how Agenda item #11 will be addressed by the Board for expired NET Grant #13-155.

- First, two individuals representing Habitat for Humanity of Omaha will address the Board.

- Next the Board will have the opportunity to ask questions with the representatives from Habitat for Humanity of Omaha and have open discussion.
- Lastly, the individuals would be excused and if needed, the Board may have additional time for discussion before voting.

Background on Habitat for Humanity of Omaha:
Executive Director Adams summarized the Board meeting actions from February 5, 2026, in which Habitat for Humanity of Omaha requested, and NET Board granted, the sale of their ReStore II store with the condition that Habitat for Humanity of Omaha repay the original grant funding amount of $475,000. The sale was completed and the funds are currently in escrow.

Habitat for Humanity of Omaha requested permission to retain the $475,000 from the sale of the NET funded property and instead use the funds to establish a home repair program in Omaha and surrounding communities that would be focused on energy efficiency improvements for low-to moderate income households.

Amanda Brewer CEO, Habitat for Humanity of Omaha and thanked the Nebraska Environmental Trust for its long-term support of the ReStore II project and approval of the property's sale. In lieu of repaying the original grant, she is requesting to redirect the funds towards purchasing residential high-efficiency HVAC systems, install insulation, improve ventilation and educate residents on energy use and system maintenance. All these areas align with NET's clean air and emissions reduction principles. Amanda Brewer stated that in 2013 the original purchase of the building was $2.5 million, of which $440,000 of NET funds were used for purchase of building and the remaining $35,000 was used for building improvements. Earlier this year the building was sold for $2.2 million.

Javier Fernandez, former Board Chairman for Habitat for Humanity of Omaha spoke to the NET Board requesting that Habitat for Humanity of Omaha reinvest the grant funds for replacing outdated HVAC systems with modern efficiency systems in residential homes.

Board members focused on whether Habitat for Humanity of Omaha would reapply in 2026 if the current funding request is denied. Javier Fernandez and Amanda Brewer further explained they have people interested in this program with a donor match. They conveyed there is some urgency, as the private donor's match may be affected. Clarification was requested on why the donor match depended on immediate action, along with details about the property's 2013 purchase price, improvements, current appraisal value, and sale.

Motion by Hellbusch, seconded Helgoth "I move that the Board deny the Habitat for Humanity of Omaha's request to utilize the $475,000 repayment of NET Grant funds."

Discussion: Members reiterated they voted to approve the sale on February 5, 2026, requiring Habitat for Humanity of Omaha to repay the $475,000 and did not support letting them keep the funds for a different purpose. They said Habitat for Humanity of Omaha could apply for a new NET grant. Additionally, concerns were raised that the funds would not be under NET contract or oversight, which doesn't align with the Board's objective to responsibly manage state resources.

Voting Aye: Vasko, Vinton, Andersen, Bradley, Coleman, Helgoth, Hellbusch, Manning, McCoy, Quandahl
Absent: Christen, Hansen, Newmyer
10 Voted Aye. Motion carried.

12. Consider Update to NET Policy Section IX: Trust Staff, C. Procedures for Annual Evaluation of Executive Director

The Board reviewed a proposal to move the Executive Director's evaluation from the August Board Meeting to the May Meeting. This change would allow salary adjustments to begin on July 1st and avoid retroactive payments. Better aligning with the State fiscal year.

Motion by McCoy, seconded Vasko "I move to adopt the new policy change for Section IX: Trust Staff, C. Procedures for Annual Evaluation of Executive Director, as presented."

Discussion: None.

Voting Aye: Vinton, Andersen, Bradley, Coleman, Helgoth, Hellbusch, Manning, McCoy, Vasko, Quandahl
Absent: Christen, Hansen, Newmyer
10 Voted Aye. Motion carried.

13. Report and Recommendation of the Executive Committee with Recommendations for the Executive Director

Chairman Quandahl stated that the Executive Committee met April 28, 2026, to review and discuss the Executive Director's performance. He recommended conducting a closed session where he would circulate the results of the evaluation among Board members.

Motion by Andersen, seconded Bradley, "I move to enter closed session as this is clearly necessary to prevent needless injury to the reputation of the Executive Director to discuss salary and performance evaluation."

Discussion: None.

Voting Aye: Andersen, Bradley, Coleman, Helgoth, Hellbusch, Manning, McCoy, Vasko, Vinton, Quandahl
Absent: Christen, Hansen, Newmyer
10 Voted Aye. Motion carried.

Chairman Quandahl repeated the limitations of the subject matter for the closed session.

Except for Executive Director Adams, all members of the public and NET staff exited the meeting room and the closed session commenced at 2:33 p.m.

Closed session concluded and Chairman Quandahl announced "The closed session ended at 2:56 p.m. The meeting is now reconvened."

Motion by Andersen, seconded Coleman, "I move that the Executive Director be granted an increase of 2.25% plus a 1.0% performance-based increase in salary effective on July 1, 2026."

Discussion: None.

Voting Aye: Bradley, Coleman, Helgoth, Hellbusch, Manning, McCoy, Vasko, Vinton, Andersen, Quandahl
Absent: Christen, Hansen, Newmyer
10 Voted Aye. Motion carried.

14. Next Meeting

Thursday, August 6, 2026, Telegraph Lofts West, 2077 N St, Suite 310, Lincoln, NE 68510, 1:30 p.m

15. Adjourn

Chair Quandahl adjourned the meeting at 2:59 p.m.

Holly Adams
Holly Adams
Executive Director