MINUTES

Nebraska Environmental Trust Board
3rd Quarter Meeting
Thursday, Aug 6, 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 1:35 p.m. in Suite 310, 2077 N St, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Advance notice of the meeting was published in the Lincoln Journal Star on July 21, 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;
District II: Roger Helgoth, Omaha; Chair Mark Quandahl, Omaha
District III: Josh Andersen, Edgar; Rod Christen, Steinauer; Eric Hansen, North Platte
State Agency Representatives: Tim McCoy, Director, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission; Ashley Newmyer, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services; Sherry Vinton, Director, Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Members Absent (4):
District II: Ted Vasko, Papillion
District III: Garfield Coleman, Omaha;
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;

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 the May 7, 2026, Board Meeting minutes, financial reports, approval to set aside the financials for audit, and the Grant Distribution Report.

Motion by Hellbusch, seconded by Andersen, "I move to approve the Consent Agenda."

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

Ted Vasko Arrived at 1:40 p.m.

3. Public Comment

Marco Stoltzfus, Director of Rowe Sanctuary representing Audubon Great Plains expressed strong support for the Nebraska Environmental Trust proposed grant contract revisions, noting they enhance transparency, reduce burdens, and improve accessibility for conservation grantees. Stoltzfus asked the Board to reconsider the ineligible status of retirement and life insurance contributions or determine whether these costs could be allowed as match contributions.

Mike McDonald, Nebraska Soil Health Coalition, he explained that with the assistance of the NET grant, The Nebraska Soil Health Coalition (NSHC) launched its second regional Hub in southwest Nebraska, which recently experienced drought, wildfires, and hailstorms this year. NSHC is building this hub via a three-pronged approach (Stakeholder Visioning Group, Producer Learning Community, Demonstration and Education Sites) to help producers strengthen local soil health, improve farm profitability, and build community-based learning and demonstration sites.

4. Set NET Board Meeting Calendar and Grant Application Deadline for 2027

Motion by Andersen seconded by McCoy, "I move to approve the 2027 NET Grant application and meeting calendar as follows:
Thursday, January 7, 2027, Public Hearing and Grant Awards for 2027
Thursday, February 11, 2027, 1st Quarter Board meeting
Thursday, May 6, 2027, 2nd Quarter Board meeting
Thursday, August 5, 2027, 3rd Quarter Board meeting
Thursday, November 4, 2027, 4th Quarter Board meeting
and Grant Application deadline September 7, 2027."

Discussion: Comments on the 2027 calendar noted upcoming holidays, and it was explained that the January 7 meeting is scheduled early in the year to allow for the awarding of grants.

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

5. Grant Application Cycle 2026-2027 – Authorization for Technical Advisory Committee.

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) serves as a resource for NET staff and the Grants Committee when expertise is needed to determine the technical feasibility of a project. The TAC would allow Executive Director Adams and NET Staff permission to seek advice from professionals regarding grant applications. Advice would be requested from other state agencies, but not without permission of the agency director.

- If needed reviews are requested prior to the Grant Committee evaluating applications, and would be available to the committee, Board members and NET staff.
- Any Board member, can request a technical review

Motion by Andersen, seconded by Vasko, "I move to establish a Technical Advisory Committee to assist NET staff with evaluation of grant proposals and authorize NET staff to seek reviews as appropriate for the 2027 grant applications."

Discussion: If technical reviewers are necessary, Executive Director Adams would work with NET staff to put together a list of reviewers and would provide the list to the Board Chairman.

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

6. Election of Officers

Background on Election of Officers
Neb. Rev. Stat. § 81-15-172 requires the Board to elect a chairperson from among its citizen members annually. NET Bylaws, Article II, states the vice-chairperson will be selected from the agency directors and sets forth procedures for the election of officers. The office of chairperson rotates yearly by Congressional district.

Ted Vasko was nominated for the position of NET Chairman. Since there were no other nominees, by unanimous decision, Ted Vasko was elected Chairman of The Nebraska Environment Trust.

Sherry Vinton was nominated for the position of NET Vice-Chairman, since there were no other nominees, by unanimous decision, Sherry Vinton was elected Vice-Chairman of The Nebraska Environment Trust.

As per NET Bylaws, Article II, Section 3 Ted Vasko and Sherry Vinton began their terms in office at the close of the meeting.

7. Grant Modification Requests

Discussion: The Executive Director, Adams, noted that there were no modification requests, so the agenda item was skipped. A board member added a positive remark about the NET staff, stating that the lack of grant modification requests suggests the system is operating effectively.

8. Grant Contract Updates

Background on Grant Contract Updates

Chairman Quandahl summarized the history of the NET grant contract, noting that it was last revised five years ago, at which time the Board committed to reviewing the contract annually as part of a continuous improvement process benefiting grantees, NET, and the State of Nebraska. Executive Director Holly Adams confirmed that the updated contract language had been reviewed by the Attorney General's Office. She noted the revisions reflected grantee feedback, aligned the contract with other state and federal funding agreements, and streamlined NET's review process for project reimbursements.

Questions were raised by Board members regarding the proposed administrative expense revision. Concerns were expressed that administrative costs should not be covered by NET funds. It was stated, to be good stewards of taxpayers' dollars, NET has an expectation that awarded funds are used primarily towards project expenses rather than personnel costs.

> **Motion by** Andersen, seconded Hellbusch "I move to create an Ad-Hoc Committee to review the NET Grant Contract for the following grant cycle. The committee's term will extend through August 6, 2027.

Discussion: The Ad-Hoc Committee can address the issues and propose changes to the NET grant contract for next year's grant applications. The NET Board will review proposed changes and can approve/deny or request further revisions.

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

9. Grants Audit Report

NET implemented a new audit and site-visit process in fiscal year 2025–26 to improve grant monitoring and ensure compliance with Title 137 requirements. Madison Moe, Grants Assistant completed 27 audits across the state, including both desk reviews and in-person site visits, covering projects that benefitted at least 91 of Nebraska's 93 counties. These audits confirmed grantees were making positive progress. Overall, 86% of projects showed favorable results, and NET will continue refining the audit process to support grantee success.

Discussion: Board members asked questions about attendance, audit concerns, and the audit checklist. Grants Assistant Moe explained that site audits focus on contract compliance and that she uses a tailored audit checklist. She noted she has not experienced any pushback during audits and grantees have been cooperative and are eager to share project updates through tours, displays, and conversations. She also invited Board members to join her on future site visits.

10. Director's Report

Executive Director Adams provided an update on NET activities and deadlines. The 2026 grant application cycle is now open, with applications due in the NET portal by September 8, 2026. A ZOOM question and answer meeting for prospective grantees will be held in August 2026.
Executive Director Adams noted that NET was not included in the recent lawsuit regarding legislative approved transfer of NET funds to other State Agencies and recently a district judge paused any further transfers.

11. Next Meeting

Thursday, Nov. 5, 2026, Telegraph Lofts West, 2077 N St, Suite 310, Lincoln, NE 68510, 1:30 p.m

12. Adjourn

Chair Quandahl adjourned the meeting at 2:47 p.m.

Holly Adams

Holly Adams
Executive Director