

NORTH DAKOTA

WATER USERS ASSOCIATION | WATER COALITION | WATER RESOURCE DISTRICTS ASSOCIATION | IRRIGATION ASSOCIATION

Legislative Report

Conference Committees Will Start Work on Bills

With the final revenue forecast of the session recently set, agency budgets and spending bills are quickly moving through appropriations committees and to their respective chambers for consideration. When passed, a bill goes to the second body for its consideration. If passed by the second body in the same form, the bill is enrolled, signed by presiding officers, and sent to the Governor. If the second body amends and then passes the bill, it is sent back to the first body for concurrence. If the first body does not concur, the presiding officers of both legislative bodies appoint a conference committee.

As we draw closer to adjournment, a bill's path to final adoption can get more complicated. Many of the major budget bills are the last bills finalized during the session, as common ground on funding or policy differences is sought between the chambers in conference committees. This will be especially true this session as members need to make cuts to appropriations bills in order to balance the budget.

A conference committee consists of six members, typically two majority members and one minority member chosen from each of the committees that heard the bill in the House and Senate. The conference committee makes recommendations on a uniform version of a bill to both houses, which must both approve the bill in the same form in order for it to be adopted and become law.

Water Funding

SB 2020 DWR/SWC Funding

Support

SB 2020 is the appropriations bill for the Department of Water Resources and State Water Commission. The bill appropriates funding into the buckets as follows:

Bucket	Amount
Salaries and operations	\$83.3M
Capital Assets (Resources Trust Fund \$\$)*	\$118M
--NAWS	--\$36M
--SWPP	--\$80M
--Devils Lake Outlet	--\$2M
Flood Control	\$114.6M

--Valley City	--\$13.2M
--Mouse River	--\$76.1M
--Lower Heart	--\$12.3M
--Other Flood Control	--\$5M
--Conveyance	--\$8M
Water Supply	\$283M
--Red River Valley Water Supply	--\$175M
--Western Area Water Supply	--\$40M
--Bismarck	--\$30M
--Municipal	--\$38M
Rural Water	\$40M
General Water	\$12M
Discretionary	\$1M
Red River Joint Board Pilot Project	\$1M
TOTAL	\$652.9M

The bill also includes:

- \$30M from the water stabilization fund for WAWS debt service (per SB 2196, likely to be removed as it was removed from SB 2196 by the House this week)
- A line of credit for NAWS and SWPP's water treatment plant project (total of \$100M)
- Legislative intent to provide 75% funding for the Red River Water Supply Project (approx. \$953M)
- Legislative intent for the Mouse River Flood Control Project (approx. \$380.5M)
- Language allowing the State Water Commission to use the remaining funds in the 21-23 discretionary bucket, as well as the 23-25 discretionary bucket, for a wide variety of expenses, including potentially non-project expenses
- Language allowing line transfers between the operating line and the capital assets line up to \$5M
- Funding for staff training and tools for the DWR's appropriations division
- Funding for the DWR's IT unification initiative
- Approval of three additional FTEs for the DWR

*The bill itself includes \$300.3M in the capitol assets line item. This includes the line of credit and authority to use federal funds for the NAWS project.

There was some discussion this week of potential available this week. The House has removed the \$30 M in loan forgiveness for WAWS that was in SB 2196. Additionally, there was an error in the capital assets and operating line items when it came over from the Senate that results in an additional \$24.6 M. Adding that additional revenue and subtracting the reduction in \$10.2 M

due to revised revenue forecasts results in the potential for an additional \$44.4 M in revenue that could be allocated into buckets. Additional information provided to the division is available [here](#).

The Division anticipates finalizing this bill next Monday or Tuesday.

Heard, House Appropriations Education and Environment Division, March 14

SB 2017 Game and Fish Department

Support

SB 2017 is the appropriations bill for the Game and Fish Department, including funding for aquatic nuisance species prevention. The Senate Appropriations Committee received a report from the Game and Fish Department on the Governor's budget proposal for the department. The Governor's proposed budget recommends funding for the Game and Fish's aquatic nuisance species (ANS) line item totaling almost \$3 million. This includes funding for 1 FTE as well as seasonal workers. The almost \$1.5 million increase from current funding will come from federal funds from the US Army Corps of Engineers and additional funding from the Game and Fish Department. This funding will be for more inspection facilities and activities. The Governor's proposal also includes \$850,000 for an aquatic nuisance species lab and storage facility in Jamestown. The Water Users testified regarding the importance of funding ANS prevention activities. The bill as passed by the Senate includes full funding for the ANS requests. The bill was heard in front of the House Appropriations Government Operations Division on Wednesday, March 8. The division worked on the bill several times and seems supportive of keeping the ANS funding intact.

Committee work, House Appropriations Government Operations Division, March 31

HB 1286 Oil Tax Trigger

Monitor

HB 1286 would remove the trigger which increases the tax rate paid when oil prices get above \$90 per barrel for three consecutive months. The trigger was reached this summer and resulted in greater than expected revenue in the Resources Trust Fund, among other state government funds. This bill was amended to clarify the portion of the tax paid to the Three Affiliated Tribes. The Senate committee passed the bill to the floor with no committee recommendation, an unusual motion. The committee was evenly split on the bill thus the no committee recommendation was the only motion that could get a majority of the committee.

Passed, Senate, 36-10, March 22

HB 1385 Tribal Eligibility for SWC Funds

Support

HB 1385 would include tribes in the list of entities eligible for cost share from the State Water Commission. The ND Water Users Association testified in favor of this bill. The Senate passed the bill unanimously. There was a ceremonial signing ceremony on March 30 that the ND Water Users participated in. Pictures are attached to this report.

Signed by the Governor, March 27

SB 2196 WAWS Oversight and Loans and NAWS Line of Credit

Support

SB 2196 would move oversight of WAWS from the Industrial Commission to the State Water Commission. It also provides for forgiveness of some WAWS loans and stipulates that interest on WAWS loans should be the same as what other North Dakota governmental entities receive. The bill also renews the line of credit available for NAWS. The North Dakota Water Users

submitted testimony in favor of SB 2196. The Department of Water Resources asked the bill to be amended to remove the reference to the NAWS line of credit as that is now included in SB 2020. The committee amended the bill to remove the loan forgiveness authorized in the bill and gave the bill a do pass recommendation as amended.

Passed (with amendment), House, 81-10, March 27

Water Resource Districts

HB 1073 Operations Plans for Dams

Monitor

HB 1073 removes an existing requirement that operators of dams submit an operating plan to the Department of Water Resources.

Signed by the Governor, March 15

HB 1076 Permit Thresholds for Dams and Dikes

Support

HB 1076 creates a tiered regulatory framework for dikes based on what the dike is protecting and not a specified volume. It does this by eliminating the requirement for a professional engineer for the construction of agricultural dikes and farmstead ring dikes, increasing the threshold for requiring a construction permit for an agricultural dike from 50 acre-feet volume protected to 80 acres or more protected area, and requiring construction permits for construction of municipal dikes if they are protecting residences or occupied structures. HB 1076 was heard by the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee and was given a 'do pass' recommendation. The Water Resource Districts Association submitted testimony in favor of the bill.

Passed, Senate, 45-0, March 21

HB 1239 Subsurface Drainage Notification

Support

HB 1239 would renew legislation passed during the 2021 session that requires landowners to notify water resource districts when they are conducting a subsurface drain project that is under 80 acres. The notification requirement that was passed in 2021 will sunset if this legislation does not pass. The ND Water Resource Districts Association and several agriculture groups testified in favor of this bill. The committee amended this bill to add an emergency clause and gave the bill a 'do pass' recommendation. The Senate committee heard this bill. There were questions raised about exempting farmyards from the notification requirement. The committee was interested in looking at that issue further. The Senate Ag Committee added an amendment to the bill that exempts projects under 15 acres from notification. After amending the bill, the committee gave the bill a 'do pass recommendation'.

Do pass as amended recommendation, Senate Agriculture Committee, 4-2, March 30

HB 1391 Assessment Authorities

Support

HB 1391 would require water resource districts publish and distribute meeting minutes within 72 hours after a meeting. It would also alter the trigger for when projects that are cleaning or repairing a drain have to go to a public vote. Currently, these projects only go to a vote when the cost of the project, minus dollars received for sources other than annual levies, exceeds the amount the board receives over six years in annual levies. This proposal would require projects that cost more than that six-year max, regardless of other funds, to go to a vote. The ND Water

Resource Districts Association and ND Water Users Association, along with several water managers testified in opposition to this bill. The committee amended this bill to remove the section dealing with assessment votes. It also changed the meeting minutes section to stipulate that the board will publish in a newspaper or put on a website draft meeting minutes 10 days after a meeting. The bill passed as amended unanimously. This bill was heard on the Senate side on March 10. Minimal amendments were made to the bill to clarify that the minutes could be draft or unofficial minutes and that the appeal period begins after minutes are published. The bill was given a 'do pass as amended' recommendation.

Do pass as amended recommendation, Senate Agriculture Committee, 6-0, March 31

HB 1462 Appeals from a Local Governing Body

Oppose

HB 1462 would require a local board to serve a decision of the board on every entity impacted by a decision. Additionally, it would clarify the ability for the court to award attorney's fees if a board loses an appeal at the district court level. The ND Water Resource Districts Association and League of Cities testified in opposition to this bill. The committee adopted an amendment to require only water boards to serve notice via three publications, once per week over three weeks, in the county newspaper where the decision is made and mail a copy of the decision to any "aggrieved person". The amendment also removes the attorney's fees section. The House floor passed the bill as amended, sending it over to the Senate side. The bill received a 'do not pass' recommendation from the committee.

Failed, Senate, 46-0, March 30

SB 2036 Drainage Statute Clean Up

Support

SB 2036 is the clean-up bill put together by the interim drainage committee. This bill combines the current two chapters of code that deal with assessment projects into one chapter and makes some updates to the assessment process. The committee made a slight amendment to the bill to update a reference to the Department of Water Resources and fix a drafting error. The Senate passed the bill unanimously. The bill was heard on March 2 with both the DWR and the Water Resource Districts Association offering amendments to the bill. Amendments are still being prepared on the bill. The committee added amendments and gave the bill a 'do pass recommendation'.

Do pass as amended recommendation, House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, 13-0, March 30

SB 2326 Economic Analysis Threshold for SWC Cost Share

Support

SB 2326 would clarify that the State Water Commission could only require an economic analysis on flood control and water conveyance projects above \$1 million. This would remove the SWC's ability to lower that threshold via policy as is current practice. The committee add an amendment to reduce the threshold to \$500,000 and gave the bill a 'do pass recommendation'.

Do pass as amended recommendation, House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, 13-0, March 30

SB 2372 Watershed Districts

Monitor

SB 2372 would require the Department of Water Resources to establish boundaries for watershed districts and then require counties to appoint managers to the watershed districts.

The current drainage chapter of code, 61-16.1, would apply to watershed districts. The ND Water Resource Districts Association provided opposition testimony to SB 2372 and offered to work with interested parties on a possible amendment to encourage watershed-based management within the current water resource district model. The bill was amended to require participation in joint boards. The House committee took testimony on this bill with some opposition testimony. Amendments are being considered on this bill.

Heard, House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, March 16

Irrigation

HB 1020 2023-2025 SBARE Funding Priorities

Support

HB 1020 includes appropriations for NDSU Agriculture Research and Extension, including the 2023-2025 priorities for the State Board of Agricultural Research and Education (SBARE) priorities. SBARE priorities include infrastructure for the Nesson Valley Irrigation Research and Demonstration Project. The Irrigation Association submitted testimony in support of HB 1020. The House Appropriation's Government Operations Division gave this bill a 'do pass' recommendation, sending it to the full Appropriations Committee. The bill includes \$1.2 million for Nesson Valley. The full Senate Appropriations Committee received an overview of this bill. The Government Operations continued to work on the bill this week.

Heard, Senate Appropriations Government Operations Division, March 9

HB 1074 Informational Hearings related to Water Permit Applications

Support

HB 1074 clarifies that informational hearings related to water permit applications are more appropriately referred to as public hearings for the public to provide input to the Department of Water Resources. The Irrigation Association testified in support of this bill.

Signed by the Governor, March 15

HB 1075 Public Hearing on Water Permit Cancellations

Support

HB 1075 removes the requirement that the Department of Water Resources hold a public hearing on a water permit cancellation. Instead, the bill would institute a public notice and comment period to allow feedback on a cancellation. The DWR believes this change will speed up the cancellation process. The Irrigation Association testified in support of this bill. The bill passed the Senate unanimously.

Signed by the Governor, March 27

HB 1247 Property Tax Exemption for Elevators and Potato Warehouses

Monitor

HB 1247 would treat property that is zoned commercial property, but is now privately owned and houses a grain elevator or potato warehouse, as agricultural property for tax purposes. The committee could not get information on what impact this would have statewide and so asked for the issue to be studied. The bill was amended to ask for a study.

Signed by the Governor, March 20

Atmospheric Resources

HB 1166 Weather Modification

Oppose

HB 1166 would prohibit state cost share for weather modification unless counties adjoining the county conducting the activity agrees. The ND Weather Modification Association testified in opposition. The committee considered significant amendments to this bill. The bill as amended now completely removes the cost share for weather modification activities and restricts where weather modification activities can occur. The amendment also alters the process for reauthorizing weather modification in counties where it occurs. The bill passed the floor, 69-22. The Senate committee heard the bill with several amendments discussed. No action was taken on the bill. The Senate Agriculture committee amended the bill to remove the prohibition of cost share and clarify that reauthorization needs to occur via a public vote every four years. After amending the bill, the committee sent the bill to the floor with no committee recommendation.

Amended, sent to the floor with no committee recommendation, Senate Agriculture Committee, 6-0, March 30

Other Bills of Interest

HB 1038 Statute Technical Corrections

Monitor

HB 1038 updates one outdated reference to the Office of the State Engineer.

Signed by the Governor, March 23

HB 1072 Technical Corrections

Monitor

HB 1072 updates some references to the State Water Commission in the Atmospheric Resource Board's statutes.

Signed by the Governor, March 15

HB 1077 Water Storage Contracts

Support

HB 1077 adds a requirement that a federal agency completing a water storage contract with an entity within North Dakota must provide the Department of Water Resources a copy of the contract. The ND Water Users Association testified in support of this bill. The bill was amended to require entities to notify the DWR within 60 days of beginning discussions and keep in contact with the DWR throughout the negotiations.

Signed by the Governor, March 15

HB 1098 Floodplain Management Ordinances

Monitor

HB 1098 clarifies when communities that fail to adopt or enforce floodplain management ordinances are prohibited from receiving funds.

Signed by the Governor, March 15

HB 1118 Income Tax Credit

Monitor

HB 1118, as amended by the committee, would provide a \$800 tax credit for single filers and a \$1,600 tax credit for joint filers. It also establishes a flat tax rate of 1.9%.

Do not pass recommendation, Senate Finance and Tax Committee, 6-0, March 21

HB 1158 Income Tax Rate

Monitor

HB 1158 would lower the income tax rate to a flat 1.5%. The Senate Finance and Tax Committee significantly amended the bill to make a more comprehensive tax bill, passed the bill unanimously, and rereferred the bill to the Appropriations Committee. In its current form the bill combines initiatives to provide both income tax and property tax relief. Income tax relief is preferred by the House; property tax relief is preferred by the Senate. The bill received a 'do pass' recommendation from the Appropriations Committee.

Passed, Senate, 43-3, March 30

[HB 1218](#) NAWS Authority

Monitor

HB 1218 would make the current Northwest Area Water Supply (NAWS) advisory committee an authority. It would also change the makeup of the Authority. The North Dakota Water Users submitted testimony in favor of HB 1218. The committee lowered the representation from Minot and gave the bill a do pass recommendation unanimously. The bill passed the House 91-0 on February 14. The Senate committee made a minor amendment and gave it a do pass recommendation.

Passed (with amendment), Senate, 46-1, March 7

[HB 1379](#) Legacy Fund Earnings

Monitor

HB 1379 would change the current 'streams' that Legacy Fund earnings go into. Last session, the legislature established certain priorities that would be funded with Legacy Fund earnings. This would make a few changes to that, expanding priorities to include value-added agriculture, county and township bridges, and workforce development.

Heard, Senate Appropriations Committee, March 22

[SB 2029](#) Caps for Emergency Commission and Budget Section Approvals

Monitor

SB 2029 changes the caps on approvals from the Emergency Commission and Budget Section. Last session, the legislature placed dollar amount caps on these approvals. This bill seeks to change that to a percent of the budget approved by the legislature. This bill was amended in committee to add an emergency clause. An emergency clause would allow the bill to come into effect sooner. The bill was given a do not pass recommendation from the House committee. The bill was sent back to committee by the House floor.

Rereferred to House Government and Veterans Affairs Committee, March 24

[SB 2097](#) Wild and Scenic River Designations

Support

SB 2097 would require anyone seeking a wild, scenic or recreational river designation notify the department of water resources, the local water resource district and other interested state and local entities prior to seeking the designation. The North Dakota Water Users testified in support of this bill. The Senate committee amended the bill to add some legislators and grazing associations to the organizations that receive notification. The House committee added the Public Service Commission to the list of entities and gave the bill the a do pass recommendation.

Passed (with amendment), House, 92-0, March 20

[SB 2113](#) Flexible Transportation Fund

Monitor

SB 2113 would create a flexible transportation fund to hold federal, state, or private dollars to fund road and bridge construction and maintenance and to match available federal funds. If

passed, it is anticipated that some motor vehicle excise tax dollars and general funds could be put in this fund.

Passed, House, 92-0, March 28

SB 2192 Term Limits

Monitor

SB 2192 would authorize an interim study to look at the impact term limits will have on the legislature and make recommendations to the next legislative assembly.

Signed by the Governor, March 22

SB 2251 Land Access for Eminent Domain Proceedings

Oppose

SB 2251 would require an entity to receive written permission, or a court order, to access a landowner's property to conduct surveys. The House committee gave it a do not pass recommendation. The bill failed on a tie vote on the floor.

Failed, House, 46-46, March 28

SB 2313 Legislative Management Study on Eminent Domain

Monitor

SB 2313 would direct a court to increase the damages award in an eminent domain case by 33% above what was established by the court. The bill was amended to request a study.

Failed, House, 40-51, March 28

SB 2330 Infrastructure Revolving Loan Fund

Monitor

SB 2330 makes changes to the way the Legacy Fund is invested. It changes the amount of investment made in North Dakota. Of interest to the water community, the bill makes changes to how the Infrastructure Revolving Loan Fund and the Water Infrastructure Revolving Loan Fund. In the 2021 session, legislation was passed to allow these loan fund to be backstopped by the Legacy Fund. This would have allowed the Bank of ND to utilize the Legacy Fund should there be more interest in the funds than the funds have available. SB 2330 removes the ability to use the Legacy Fund as a backstop for these funds. During testimony the bill sponsor indicated that there was a plan to find an alternative funding source to fund these programs. There was much testimony regarding the importance of the infrastructure loan funds. No action was taken by the committee.

Heard, House Finance and Tax Committee, March 14

SB 2364 Garrison Diversion Easements

Monitor

SB 2364 would limit the use of easements by the Garrison Diversion Conservancy District (GDCD) to building, operating, and maintaining water pipelines and would clarify that easements from GDCD can only be assigned from GDCD to the state. The ND Water Users testified in favor of this bill. The committee amended the bill to clarify that easements would first pass to a local water authority before going to state. The amended bill was given a 'do pass' recommendation. The House committee heard the bill and additional amendments are in the works. The bill was amended to include non-pipeline components of the project. The committee brought the bill back and made some further amendments. They gave it a do pass as amended recommendation.

Passed (with amendment), House, 91-0, March 28

SB 2359 Tax Levies to Pay for Special Assessments

Monitor

SB 2359 would remove the levy limitation to cover the costs of land acquisitions. It also requests a legislative management study studying the impact of political subdivisions levying special assessments against other political subdivisions and the overall impact on taxpayers. This bill was amended in committee to remove the levy limitation section but maintain the study. After amending, the committee gave the bill a do pass recommendation.

Signed by the Governor, March 13

Hearing Schedule (April 3-7)

No hearings are scheduled, but various bills will likely be worked on and potentially passed by committees in committee work throughout the week. SB 2020 will likely be passed out of division early next week.

How to Submit Testimony This Session

During this Legislative Session, individuals and organizations still can [testify](#) at committee hearings both in person and virtually. This session, however, the permitting of virtual testimony is left to the discretion of each committee chairperson. An instructional video on how to submit written and oral testimony remotely in a committee hearing is available on the Legislative Branch [website](#). To view the video, [click here](#).

How to Contact Your Legislators

During the session, legislators can be reached by email, phone or mail as listed in the legislator's online bio: [Senate](#) or [House](#). Detailed information on legislative activities is available on the [Legislative Assembly website](#).

Legislative Calendar

- May 4: Final day of session (limited to 80 legislative days)

For more details, check out the complete list of [legislative deadlines](#).