

NEBRASKA TAXPAYERS FOR FREEDOM ISSUE PAPER:
ANALYSIS OF THE FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024 PAPIO-MO. NRD BUDGET.

BACKGROUND. The Papio-Mo. NRD board and general director continue to hoard and spend taxpayer dollars on wasteful and unnecessary expenditures, despite our taxpayer group annually advising them to rein in such spending and more frugally appropriate taxpayer dollars. One constant accounting trick the NRD uses is appropriating a large sum for a project or program, use only a small percentage, then the following fiscal year request the same or larger appropriation, thus amassing a bloated budget. The main purpose of the NRD originally was to prevent catastrophic flooding and subsequent property damage and loss of life along the watershed, but the NRD management and board continually have expanded the scope of their responsibilities to include frivolous and unnecessary programs, empire-building. The board is amassing millions through taxes and bonding to construct unneeded dams that mainly benefit developers, not average residents and businesses in the watershed.

OVERBUDGETING. This budget would lower our property tax levy by a miniscule number of cents, yet total expenditures continue to rise in several categories, the total budget increasing by almost 18%. This spending includes several categories of gross overbudgeting. The budgets would sharply increase for Erosion Control, Water Quality, and Recreation, despite past overbudgeting. Only 16% of the Erosion Control budget used, 40% of the Water Quality budget used, and 24% of the Recreation fund utilized. This chicanery resulted in the carryover of almost \$15 million from these categories, with about \$40 million of the current budget not appropriated, a too great sum not even deposited in the Cash Reserve Fund or invested wisely. The NRD spent only 49% of its total FY 2023 appropriations and carried over a whopping balance of almost \$25 million (p.1). The carried over amount for projected dams is unsatisfactorily high (p. 2). Several line items lowered in cost for FY 2024 only because so much funding unspent. The NRD underestimated the fiscal year increase in valuations, 4.5%, because county residential increases hovered at about 9% (p.2). This avoidable mistake will cause our property taxes to the NRD to push higher.

NTF SUGGESTED CUTS. Budgeting for dues and memberships in organizations continue to rise (p. 5); the NRD could drop several of these affiliations. Employee health insurance premium costs remain the same, yet the budget increases the costs here by \$75,000 (p. 3), so negotiate higher employee contributions. Eliminate service awards, saving \$135,000 (p. 3). Administrative salaries would rise by 11%, technical salaries by 24%, and maintenance salaries by 20%, much higher than normal inflation-time salaries granted (p. 4). Eliminate the pollinator habitat and ADA accessible hunting equipment (p. 5). Eliminate special projects, information support programs, exhibits and displays, and most publications (pp. 4,7), also trade shows, public information campaigns, educational programming (p. 8), and special events (p. 9). End appropriations for Celebrate Trees, tree planting, and Heron Haven (pp. 5, 32). Decrease the amount held in the Cash Reserve. End the contribution to the Urban Stormwater Program, where expenses are higher than incoming revenues (p. 11). End several expenditures, where monies appropriated but not spent, followed by a higher appropriation the next fiscal year, called stacking appropriations, e.g., Flood Mitigation (p. 12). Too many appropriations carried over to the next fiscal year, sometimes for 2 years, with new appropriations added, e.g., Lake dredging (pp. 20,22,25). NRD budgets need a cap on carryover funds, because these large carryovers artificially inflate the property tax requirement. Instead of paying costs for mowing on NRD-owned but not used land, rent the land to farmers (p. 33). The NRD spends so much, over \$1.1 million on dam repairs, it should stop its effort to build additional dams (p. 14). The NRD should finish paying for current projects instead of assuming new financial liabilities, like planning for new dams. Several of the dam sites appear overbudgeted (p. 35). Available federal grant money is decreasing, so the NRD should not plan ventures dependent upon this future funding (p. 17). The budget lists attorney fees for watershed construction, though no construction planned (p. 34). Too many professional fees; request staff to handle these duties. The budget should explain for how long a period contributions will come from the Game & Parks Comm. (p. 19). Restrict NRD contributions to other government entities (p. 20). Reconsider NRD contributions to cooperative agreements, such as the well abandonment program (p. 21), dredging (p. 22), and stormwater program (p. 23). Eliminate cost sharing with local cities, especially as \$490,000 in appropriations carried over from this fiscal year (p. 25). Decline to accept new applications from cities for recreation equipment or picnic facilities, etc. (p. 25), saving over \$325,000, or trails assistance programs, saving over \$1.5 million (p. 29). Eliminate solar light expenditures (p. 26). Too much cash on hand for the Total Watershed Fund and totally; the NRD instead should invest these dollars to gain interest (p. 36). The sum of cash on hand is so enormous that it surpasses the total amount of property taxes collected. There also is too much reserve cash in the Southern Sarpy Watershed Partnership, \$2,748,997 (p. 47). Be



specific about locations of land purchases (p. 31) and pay only market value instead of inflationary sums as done now. The \$1 million plus in interest income again shows that accrued revenues not spent in a timely manner (p. 34). Institute zero-based budgeting in all programs.

TAKE ACTION NOW. The NRD board includes no fiscal conservatives and will continue to spend our property tax dollars recklessly and continue to expand its responsibilities unnecessarily, unless taxpayers strongly and persistently protest. Cutting non-basic services from the budget should afford a property tax cut. Taxpayers also must oppose the board continuing to seek bonding authority that will raise our property taxes for unneeded dams instead of utilizing low impact development. This reckless dam building unnecessarily confiscates private property and productive farmland, creating lakes not fit for swimming or fishing for healthy fish. Using the information above, attend the NRD public budget hearing on **Thu. Aug. 10 at 4 PM at the NRD hq at 8901 South 154 Str., south of Giles Rd.** If unable to personally attend, email your budget objections to NRD board members before or after the public hearing as follows.

PAPIO-MISSOURI RIVER NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT.

District	Board Member	Phone Number	Email Address	Re-election Date
District 1	Ted Japp	402-427-5120	Tedjappnrd@gmail.com	2024
District 2	Fred Conley	402-707-8915	fconley@daviscompanies.com	2026
District 3	Larry Bradley	402-444-6222	papadmin@papionrd.org	2024
District 4	Tim McCormick	402-444-6222	timmccormicknrd@gmail.com	2026
District 5	Richard Tesar	402-359-2705	tesarduck@msn.com	2024
District 6	Jim Thompson	402-342-4371	zippijd@aol.com	2026
District 7	Josh Henningsen	402-444-6222	josh.henningsen@gmail.com	2026
District 8	Tim Fowler	402-990-1794	TFowler007@cox.net	2026
District 9	Patrick Bonnett	402-444-6222	Patbonnett@encoretaxprep.com	2024
District 10	Kevyn Sopinski	402-444-6222	skipapio@gmail.com	2026
District 11	Phil Davidson	402-444-6222	Phil3950@gmail.com	2024

Research, documentation, and analysis for this issue paper done by **Nebraska Taxpayers for Freedom**. This material copyrighted by Nebraska Taxpayers for Freedom, with express prior permission granted for its use by other groups in the *NE Conservative Coalition Network*. 8-23. C

