

## **WRAP Group Comes to Campus!**

From the Director – Kyle D. Hoagland

You may have seen reference to the Water Resources Advisory Panel (WRAP) in the newspaper or through materials published by the University and wondered how it relates to the UNL Water Center and our Water Resources Research Initiative (Water Initiative). Given all of their good work already, I thought it pertinent and of interest to explain more of this in-depth.

Several factors prompted UNL administrators to form this external advisory group (in addition to its cool acronym). Water has clearly become a defining issue for our state, and a myriad of serious challenges face Nebraska's water resources decision-makers.

How these challenges are addressed will impact the future of water management in Nebraska, and ultimately the sustainable use of this invaluable resource. Both UNL's Land-Grant mission (teaching, research, and extension), and its significant educational and research capacity in water positions UNL to help address these challenges.

The Water Initiative represents an internal "push" toward integrating and promoting excellence in water research efforts at NU, on both the state and national levels, that is, to "*Become a national leader in water resource research, education and outreach*". By recognizing water as a program of excellence area, UNL has made internally reallocated funds available for conference development, new water faculty hires, infrastructure improvements (i.e. major equipment), research workshops and retreats, etc.

An objective of the Water Initiative is to enhance the University's connections with state and federal agencies, as well as with Natural Resources Districts (NRDs), irrigation districts, agri-business organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and others with strong ties to Nebraska water resources concerns. With these factors converging, the time was right to better connect the University with those who often rely on NU water-related research; thus, the WRAP was created.

*What is the WRAP?* To gain wide representation of water-decision makers, while keeping the group small enough for effective communication, flexibility, and decision-making, Dr. John Owens, NU Vice President and IANR Harlan Vice Chancellor and Dr. Prem Paul, Vice Chancellor for Research and Dean of Graduate Studies, asked ten members, representing a wide cross-section of the water-decision making community, to serve on the WRAP to provide advice and guidance to the University of Nebraska on state water research needs, education, and outreach programs.

Formal invitations to the ten chosen members were sent on February 14, 2006 and the WRAP convened a month later and has had several meetings since.

*Current WRAP members include:* Ann Bleed, Nebraska Department of Natural Resources; Eugene Glock, Cedar Bell Farms; Glenn Johnson, Lower Platte South NRD; Mark Brohman, Nebraska Environmental Trust; Don Kraus, Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District; Kirk Nelson, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission; Lee Orton, Nebraska Well

Drillers Assoc.; Jay Rempe, Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation; Ed Schrock, former Nebraska state senator and chair of Legislature's Natural Resources Committee; and Susan Seacrest, The Groundwater Foundation.

*What the WRAP and NU Water Faculty have accomplished so far:*

- (1) WRAP surveyed a wide variety of water stakeholders, including NRDs, environmental groups, and Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality representatives, to determine Nebraska's most critical water research needs;
- (2) WRAP compiled and examined the results of the state-wide query, and synthesized the information into a four-part state water research priorities list;
- (3) During a half-day forum, more than 40 NU water faculty members from diverse disciplines examined the list of research priorities and began identifying how they could make contributions to address the state's needs;
- (4) At a second retreat, water faculty prepared ten proposals, to address issues identified in each research needs category;
- (5) Panel members met with representatives from each of the 10 proposal teams for a Q&A session;
- (6) WRAP ranked the proposals in the order of importance for the state;
- (7) University administrators and WRAP members examined the panel's findings and identified internal and external funding options for the top four proposals;
- (8) The number one ranked project has been fully funded internally for the first year, with a combination of NU dollars, including a generous amount from the NU Rural Initiative and from NU's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR). Funding for the remainder of this project is being sought from external sources;
- (9) Substantial IANR funding for equipment for two of the other leading four projects, on top of NUs in-kind funding, provides a significant step toward getting this research underway;
- (10) With support of the WRAP members and other state water leaders, potential funding sources the WRAP identified for the top-ranked projects are being aggressively pursued.

*Where do we go from here?* Significant progress has been made with cooperation from a large number of people, both from within the University and from across the state, to better understand Nebraska's water issues and to collaborate to address water research needs. The University and WRAP are poised to move forward with several of the projects identified through this successful and evolving process. The WRAP and the University will continue to work together to address current and future water issues facing Nebraska.

Jessica Harder, our Water Outreach Associate in the Water Center (a position funded by the Rural Initiative), has served as the liaison and coordinator for Panel activities, and for water faculty activities associated with WRAP. She also contributed significant portions of this column!