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Advisory Panel Helps Set Course of State Water Research

LINCOLN, Neb. -- A public advisory panel continues to make headway in helping the University of Nebraska plan and prioritize its water-related research priorities into the future.

The 15-member Water Resources Advisory Panel (WRAP), begun in 2006, is one way NU, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in particular, partners with a wide cross-section of the public for open discussion and advice on what the state's most pressing water challenges are and how best to address and manage them.

"The panel has shown strong support for promoting excellence in water research efforts across the University of Nebraska system," said WRAP facilitator Rachael Herpel of the UNL Water Center and NU Rural Initiative.

WRAP members have prioritized research topic and areas and identified potential researchers and funding support to help get new research projects moving and to help keep existing projects going. Herpel uses a comprehensive online database to keep track of NU researchers and projects and report on the progress made to the WRAP. The reports are available online at <http://watercenter.unl.edu/researchDB/wrap/wrap.asp>.

The panel's current priorities for NU water and water-related research includes quantifying water supply and demand for Nebraska river basins, beginning in the west; identifying opportunities for conjunctive management of water, especially where surface water could be stored as groundwater until needed for compliance with surface water compacts; determining the relationship between surface water and groundwater supplies; assessing better management options to reduce the impact on water supplies during drought and exceptionally wet periods; developing realistic state standards for nutrients in flowing waters; mitigating water contamination from livestock operations and agricultural production; and evaluating and measuring effectiveness of riparian buffer strips.

Other priorities on the list are developing ways to measure consumptive water use and to maintain beneficial use while reducing non-beneficial use; study current water management concepts and research options for improving the relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of current approaches; identifying ways to recognize the value of water for uses not easily determined in terms of money such as recreation, aesthetic and wildlife uses; looking for ways to establish fair and equitable water market systems; determining impacts of climate change on Nebraska's water resources, especially in areas where demand is greater than supply; and develop actions that mitigate the potential impacts of climate change that may also have other supplemental water management benefits.

The list encompasses the diversity of the panel's membership and interests, Herpel said. "When asked to project how NU should serve the state (in water-related matters), some members are satisfied with how the university currently provides data and educational information and stress that the good work currently being done should be continued. Others see a need to focus on basic water research and data gathering and still others think it's important for existing research projects to be directly applicable to regulatory or management needs," she said.

Founding panel member Eugene Glock of Cedar Bell Farms, Rising City, said he's pleased with the emphasis on water research but urged NU to be even more aggressive in addressing Nebraska's water research priorities.

"The university must lead in educating the population, both urban and rural, that we do not have an unlimited supply of water and that we must develop a plan for sustainability which will provide future generations with the opportunity to keep our state growing socially and economically," Glock said."

"Members have commented that they view their collective role as critical to providing citizen and stakeholder input into water resources programming; to bring a dose of reality to the university by providing the perspective of people who deal with water issues everyday and to help keep researchers and other faculty and staff members grounded in what Nebraska really needs," Herpel said.

The panel next meets on UNL's East Campus in April.

Current WRAP members are Mark Brohman, Nebraska Environmental Trust; State Senator Tom Carlson, Agriculture Committee, Nebraska Legislature; Brian Dunnigan, Nebraska Department of Natural Resources; Eugene Glock, Cedar Bell Farms; Frank Kwapnioski, Nebraska Public Power District; Marian Langan, Audubon Nebraska; State Senator Chris Langemeier, Natural Resources Committee, Nebraska Legislature; Mike Linder, Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality; John Miyoshi, Lower Platte North NRD; Kirk Nelson, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission; Jerry Obrist, Lincoln Water System; Lee Orton, Nebraska Well Drillers Association; Jay Rempe, Nebraska Farm Bureau; Dennis Strauch, Pathfinder Irrigation District; and Dayle Williamson, Office of U.S. Senator Ben Nelson.

Panel advisors are Alan Moeller, assistant vice chancellor of NU's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources; Ron Yoder, head of UNL's Department of Biological Systems Engineering; and Bruce Dvorak, interim director of the UNL Water Center.

For more about WRAP and its activities, go online to <http://water.unl.edu/wrap>

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