

Minutes
UPPER NIOBRARA RIVER COMPACT
SPRING TECHNICAL MEETING

Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment (DWEE)
Wyoming State Engineer's Office (WSEO)
Technical Group

April 8, 2026

2:30 p.m. Mountain Time/3:30 p.m. Central Time
Panhandle Research and Extension Center
4502 Ave I, Scottsbluff, NE

In Attendance

- Matt Manning – Chief Water Officer, DWEE
- Brandon Gebhart – Wyoming State Engineer, WY SEO
- Jennifer Schelpepper – Division Manager, DWEE
- Andy Pedley – Niobrara Basin Coordinator, DWEE
- Jim Ostdiek – Environmental Supervisor, DWEE
- Jack Mensinger – DWEE
- Josh DeBerard – Wyoming Division 1 Superintendent, WY SEO
- Jeff Cowley – WY SEO
- Jeremy Offutt – WY SEO
- Tylor Hanzlik – WY SEO
- Don McDowell – Lingle Fort Laramie Conservation District
- Linda Nichol – Lingle Fort Laramie Conservation District
- Michele Hubbard – Niobrara River Basin Coordinator, WY SEO
- Trevor Massey – Bridgeport Field Office, DWEE
- Wray Lovitt – Niobrara River Hydrologist, WY SEO
- Jeremy Manley – Groundwater Division, WY SEO

Updates

Nebraska

i. Update and Current Conditions

Mr. Jim Ostdiek updated the group on the continued drought in Nebraska. The entire state is in some degree of drought, compared to 35% last fall. Forty-three percent of the state is in extreme drought, compared to 0% last fall.

Administration on the Niobrara River started March 31, with closures to protect the Niobrara River Basin Alliance and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Instream Flow appropriation at the Verdell gage. The Department will begin administration for the Instream Basin Management permits on April 15th.

Average yearly precipitation for Scottsbluff is 15.65 inches of rain. For October through March the average precipitation is 4.29 inches of rain. The actual precipitation during that time was 1.67 inches of rain, which is over 2.5 inches below average since October.

Box Butte Reservoir was at 6,773 acre-feet on October 31, which is about 700 acre-feet lower than a year ago. Currently the reservoir is at 12,473 acre-feet, which is 1,637 acre-feet lower than a year ago.

The Niobrara River at the Wyoming/Nebraska state line gage is running between three and six cubic feet per second, with considerable fluctuation. Mr. Trevor Massey will check the gage to determine whether there is a mechanical problem with the gage or actual fluctuation.

ii. NRD Activities

Mr. Andy Pedley discussed updating and expanding the Integrated Management Plan (IMP) for the Upper Niobrara White Natural Resources District (UNNRD). Currently, UNNRD's IMP covers the fully-appropriated, western part of the NRD, but not the eastern part of the NRD, which is not fully-appropriated. The updated IMP will cover the entire district.

UNNRD and DWEE are working with contractors to update the NRD's groundwater model to the latest version of MODFLOW. The update will include new approaches to modeling such as parcel-based modeling.

iii. NPS and USGS Niobrara National Scenic River Hydrogeologic Study and Modeling

Mr. Andy Pedley reported that the model is complete and calibration is done. USGS provided DWEE with draft documentation for the model. DWEE is in the process of reviewing the USGS documentation and will submit comments back to USGS soon.

Wyoming

i. Update and Current Conditions

Mr. Wray Lovitt told the group that it has been dry and windy, with March being an especially difficult month. Wyoming does not rely on the river for irrigation, but stock water and fires could be an issue if there is no spring rain. Appropriators are concerned about the supply in the river. He confirmed that there may be a problem with the state line gage based on observations following a recent storm. Surface water is not currently being diverted.

ii. Update of applications in the basin

Ms. Michelle Hubbard reported on applications received since last fall's meeting. Applications include one new application for miscellaneous use (described as stock and domestic greater than 25 gallons per minute); two new stock well permits; one new irrigation well; and a second irrigation well that is an enlargement for a divisional

acreage (with no new water or volumetric quantity assigned). In addition, there are pending applications for a test well and a stock and domestic well.

Other Topics

i. Pronghorn H2 Green Hydrogen Project

Mr. Brandon Gebhart reported that there hasn't been much activity with this project. He is aware of ancillary projects, but nothing specific about the H2 Green Hydrogen Project.

Public Comment

Mr. Don McDowell mentioned that he had followed Pronghorn activities related to the Dave Johnson Power Plant. He also asked how to be notified about future meetings. Mr. Andy Pedley got contact information to notify Mr. McDowell about future meetings.

Schedule Fall Annual Niobrara River Compact Meeting

The next meeting will be on October 15, 2026, in Torrington, WY, after the North Platte Decree Committee (NPDC) meeting.

Topics for the next meeting

No topics for the next meeting were mentioned.

Adjourn