

MINUTES - NORTH DAKOTA ATMOSPHERIC RESOURCE BOARD

APRIL 24, 2024

Chairman Chris Theisen called the video meeting of the Atmospheric Resource Board (Board) to order at 10:07 a.m. CDT, April 24, 2024.

ROLL CALL

Roll call was taken. Members present were Chris Theisen, District IV; Gail Yuly, District II; Jessica Magilke, District VI; Kyle Wanner, Director, ND Aeronautics Commission; Rebekah Pfaff, ND Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ); and Andrea Travnicek, Ph.D., Director, ND Department of Water Resources (DWR).

Others present were Darin Langerud, Director; Kelli Schroeder, Program Manager; Mark Schneider, Chief Meteorologist; Daniel Brothers, Meteorologist; Jody Fischer, Weather Modification International (WMI) and Dani Quissell, ND Weather Modification Association (NDWMA).

MINUTES

IT WAS MOVED BY GAIL YULY AND SECONDED BY REBEKAH PFAFF TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 2, 2023, MEETING AS DISTRIBUTED. ALL MEMBERS VOTED YEA. THERE WERE NO NAY OR ABSTAIN VOTES. MOTION CARRIED.

FINANCIAL STATUS REPORT

Kelli Schroeder reviewed the financial status report for the period ending March 31, 2024.

2024 NORTH DAKOTA CLOUD MODIFICATION PROJECT (NDCMP) PERMIT APPLICATIONS

Public Comment

Darin Langerud informed the Board that legal notice regarding the WMI permit applications was published as required by statute for two consecutive weeks in the county newspapers in the target and adjacent North Dakota counties in late February and early March. There was a 20-day period for the public to comment following the publication. The comment period ended March 28, 2024.

Forty-three comments were received by that deadline, which were included in your packets. Langerud reviewed, categorized, and summarized comments in his recommendation memo to the Board and discussed these recommendations with the Board.

In response to a question, Langerud noted that last year we received only one comment. The most previously received was eleven in 2018. Eighteen comments came from outside of the project or adjacent county areas. We are aware of Facebook posts which generated several comments from folks in the central and eastern parts of North Dakota, where there is no impact from the cloud seeding program.

In response to a question, Langerud noted that DWR intends to put out a public survey regarding the program. More will be discussed about that in agenda item 7. We are not actively monitoring social media content. All information regarding this program is public. We comply with records requests and put as much information on our web site as possible. We attend public information sessions when asked.

In response to a question, Langerud noted that positive comments are not received but are not asked for in the permitting process. Comments are requested from those who believe they will receive harm from this program. With the public survey, we will be able to receive positive feedback. Andrea Travnicek noted that we can review how public feedback is requested before the permitting process next year, so that both positive and negative feedback is requested.

In response to a question, Langerud noted that he and Schneider visit with county commissioners every year after the project is finalized. Every five years, the county commission must hold a hearing before they can consider reauthorizing the weather modification authority. Timing coincides with when they started their project. Most states have a notice and permitting process. However, a lot of those states have multi-year permits, unlike our annual process.

In response to a question, Langerud noted that in 2018 when we had a larger set of comments, he created a memo that thanked them for their comments, noted that the board considered them, recommendations and then board approval. We intend on corresponding with those who commented again.

GAIL YULY MOVED TO ACCEPT THE PUBLIC COMMENTS RELATING TO THE WMI PERMIT APPLICATIONS. SECONDED BY REBEKAH PFAFF. ALL MEMBERS VOTED AYE. THERE WERE NO NAY OR ABSTAIN VOTES. MOTION CARRIED.

Weather Modification LLC – NDCMP District 1 & 2

GAIL YULY MOVED TO APPROVE THE WEATHER MODIFICATION PERMIT APPLICATIONS FROM WEATHER MODIFICATION, LLC, OF FARGO, ND, AS RECOMMENDED BY THE DIRECTOR. SECONDED BY JESSICA MAGILKE. ALL MEMBERS VOTED AYE. THERE WERE NO NAY OR ABSTAIN VOTES. MOTION CARRIED.

NORTH DAKOTA CLOUD MODIFICATION PROJECT

Budget

Darin Langerud reviewed the draft budget for the 2024 NDCMP.

County contracts

Darin Langerud noted that a draft county contract has been reviewed by DWR's attorney. We plan to complete county contracts after this meeting.

Staffing

Mark Schneider reported he and Dan Brothers conducted interviews and reference checks on meteorologist applicants. The radar meteorologists have been chosen and accepted. They are in the process of wrapping up hiring intern meteorologists.

Kelli Schroeder has completed hiring on all 5 intern copilots. WMI may need to pull one for a captain. We will still be left with a few good candidates remaining if that is the case.

Darin Langerud noted that tomorrow afternoon Kelli and Dan are headed to Grand Forks. Dan will be a guest speaker for the weather modification class and they both will staff a booth at the Student Aviation Management Association (SAMA) Career Fair on Friday.

Jody Fischer mentioned that their team members generally live in the same locations every year. Captains have usually already been in contact with field housing management by now. The interns usually don't have to worry much about setting that up. Regarding the SAMA Career Fair, four WMI and Fargo Jet staff will be on a discussion panel Thursday morning. Three of them are former interns and will be promoting the internship. There will also be a WMI / Fargo Jet booth at the fair.

Seeding agent and supplies procurement

Mark Schneider reviewed remaining chemical inventory from last year and discussed procurement of chemicals. Due to the remaining inventory, we will not be purchasing additional silver iodide or flares.

COOPERATIVE OBSERVER NETWORK UPDATE

Growing season rainfall totals and grid maps

Daniel Brothers reported that there are currently 401 active precipitation observers, 154 of which report online. Maps will be updated online in a few days.

Pushing Remote Sensors (PRESENS) – 2024 site deployment

Daniel Brothers reported there are currently 33 PRESENS sites throughout the state that have rain gauges and soil moisture sensors attached to them. We are hoping to get 30-40 more sites installed this year. He noted that we are working with staff in the Water Appropriations division to identify existing sites for observations wells, etc., that would be good areas for rain and soil sensors. We are also in contact with North Dakota State University (NDSU) Extension agents to identify local landowners who may want to participate.

In response to a question, Brothers noted that data is currently being managed internally on DWR servers. The public can access the rain and soil data from our web site (dwr.nd.gov) under Information and Education tab, then clicking Maps/GIS & Data link, and finally the Water Resource Sites link. Langerud offered to send the Board a direct link to this data.

NDWMA PUBLIC INPUT SURVEY AND MEETINGS

Darin Langerud reviewed plans to solicit public feedback about the Board and its programs. DWR and NDWMA staff coordinated a survey to post to our web site soliciting comment from the public. Another survey will be tailored to the county weather modification authority members and county commission members in the project areas. We will share those surveys with the board via email and ask for feedback by May 1.

Langerud also reported on a couple of public listening sessions that are being planned for Bowman and Stanley, later in May.

In response to a question, Langerud noted that the makeup of the Board is set by North Dakota Century Code. Any board changes that are recommended after the survey results are analyzed would have to be approved by the legislature. If changes are policy related or below the policy level, we can integrate those without legislative involvement.

Darin Langerud briefed the Board on the status of the Bowman radar replacement project. He also briefed the Board on the Weather Modification Association Distinguished Service Award for Administrators that was bestowed upon Kelli Schroeder.

GAIL YULY MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. SECONDED BY REBEKAH PFAFF. ALL MEMBERS VOTED AYE. THERE WERE NO NAY OR ABSTAIN VOTES. MOTION CARRIED.

Being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 11:14 a.m.

Chris Theisen 11/25/2024
CHRIS THEISEN
CHAIR

Rebekah Pfaff 12/3/2024
REBEKAH PFAFF
SECRETARY

Transcribed by Kelli Schroeder