

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office
STAR WARS Committee August 25, 2021
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HILGERS: All right, my name is Mike Hilgers, I'm a state senator representing District 21 in northwest Lincoln and Lancaster County. I currently serve as Speaker of the Nebraska Legislature. And most importantly for today, I serve as Chair of the STAR WARS Committee, that's the State Tourism and Recreation, STAR, Water Access Resources Special Committee, STAR WARS Committee, that which was created by the Legislature by LB406 earlier this year with the express purpose of developing a statewide plan to boost economic opportunities, recreational opportunities and tourism opportunities along our water resources areas around the state of Nebraska. We have three subject regions, one of which was the Keith County-Lake McConaughy region. We had our first hearing last week. The second one is Lower Platte South, over near between Omaha and Lincoln, that hearing will be next month. And the third and most important today is this hearing right here, which is the Knox County-Niobrara region. And I think I speak for the whole committee and saying this is the most beautiful location where we could have a hearing that I think I could possibly envision. So thank you for the hospitality here. We-- in a second we'll do the introductions and we'll talk about a few logistics here. But let me just by a show of hands, can-- if you are planning on testifying today, will you raise your hand? OK, great. This is outstanding. So we will start this, this committee, I'll do introductions now, this committee, just so you know, was created by the Executive Board of the Legislature and each member here applied and was appointed by the Executive Board in order to provide a statewide perspective. Including areas such as Knox County, that's Senator Gragert, who represents this area; along with out west, Senator Hughes, and others in between. And so we're very excited to be here. Our purpose here today is just to listen to you, to get information and get your feedback about what we could do here in the Knox County, Niobrara region. So with that, we'll start with committee introductions. Senator Wishart.

WISHART: Hi. I'm State Senator Anna Wishart, I represent District 27, which is the western portion of Lincoln. So if you've ever been to the Pinnacle Bank Arena to see a show, that is part of my district. It's great to be here. Thank you.

BRANDT: I'm Senator Tom Brandt, Legislative District 32: Fillmore, Thayer, Jefferson, Saline and southwestern Lancaster Counties.

FLOOD: Mike Flood, District 19, which is all of Madison County, which includes Norfolk; and just part of Stanton County, which is Woodland Park.

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GRAGERT: Tim Gragert, our District 40.

HUGHES: Dan Hughes, District 44, which is 10 counties in southwest Nebraska: Perkins, Chase, Dundy, Hayes, Hitchcock, Frontier, Red Willow, Gosper, Harlan and Furnas Counties.

McDONNELL: Mike McDonnell, Legislative District 5, south Omaha.

CLEMENTS: Rob Clements from Elmwood. I represent District 2, which is Cass County and parts of Otoe and Sarpy.

HILGERS: I would also like to recognize our committee staff. Katie Bohlmeier, who is serving as our committee clerk today; as well as Beau Ballard, who is somewhere here in the room, who is also assisting in that effort. And last but not lot-- but not least, I want to recognize our consultants who are here today from HDR. If you are from HDR, if you wouldn't mind putting up your hand in the back. The Legislature appropriated a significant sum for this-- to help this committee do our work, to enable us to hire subject matter experts to really think through these issues. HDR has been our teammate on this process. They were at our previous hearing and they're here today. And all of us, HDR and this committee included, are here to listen and take notes and, and have a dialog with you about how we can improve the community and the resources around us. If you haven't, or if you have testified before the Legislature, it's going to work similar to that process with a couple of changes. So what we're going to do is we're going to have testifiers come up. We're-- if you've testified for the legislature before, you might be used to proponents, opponents of neutral testifiers. Because we're here to seek your input and there's no bill in front of us, we aren't doing that. It will just be people, anyone who wants to testify and provide your input, you are welcome. We will do it in an orderly process. We will start here, Governor Orr is sitting in the on-deck circle, and there is a sign. And what I'd like, since we have so many testifiers, as each testifier comes up to testify, if you could work among yourselves to take-- have the individual start sitting in that on-deck circle and we'll just do it orderly through there. The only thing I would ask when you come up, a couple of things would be, one, if, if you're testifying, please have a green sheet and fill that out. If you don't know what that is, if you don't have one and you intend to testify, they are, they are in the chair by the entryway. And we, and our clerk also has some as well. When you come up to testify, please just make sure you say your name and then spell it for the record. This is gonna-- we are, this is gonna be transcribed after this hearing to be part of the permanent record. And this, your testimony will be seen by our colleagues in

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January when we come back with the product of this effort. So please make sure you spell your name. And if you don't, I will politely interrupt you and remind you to do so. Last, we typically in the Legislature have a light system where we try to keep people to five minutes. We are here to hear from you, so we are not going to keep a strict five limit-- five-minute testimony. However, because we have so many people wishing to testify, please try to keep your remarks concise, not duplicative of people who have testified before you, and try, if you can, to be around five minutes. If we go too far along there, I probably will cut in just because we have a lot of people today want to be heard and we want to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to be heard. With that, with the preliminaries out of the way, we will now welcome our first testifier of the afternoon, Governor Orr. Good afternoon and welcome.

KAY ORR: I am so pleased to be here. My name is Kay Orr, spelled K-a-y O-r-r. It doesn't get any shorter than that. Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to come, and for the rest of the special committee. I'm excited for the prospects that face you. And I'm also pleased to be here to have this opportunity to share my thoughts with you. So you have a big mission, and it's a critical time in our state's future. A key issue that you're going to discuss with big ideas, I believe, should include, how does any plan help retain and attract people to Nebraska? Like other states, they're facing the same crisis in terms of the workforce. And but the good news is a lot of people are recognizing they can now take their work wherever it is that they'd like to go. And many people are returning back to Nebraska, having once lived here. But we have a lot of newcomers that have discovered the quality of life that we offer here and have everything that they would need to do their work, put down roots and grow with us. I've visited many Nebraskans who have had family members come back. I've had two recently return from Washington, D.C., put their roots back here in Nebraska. And I think the moving vans' statistics will show that during this recent crisis we've had with COVID-- COVID-19 that many people have decided to get out of the more populated areas and come back and experience their lives in states like Nebraska. But I also come here to caution you, because I think the responsibility you have is enormous. It is important to remember it is taxpayer dollars that you are spending and a plan needs to be transformational. Any investment should be one time and used wisely. In terms of Lewis and Clark, it is one of the best kept secrets in our state. However, Iowans and South Dakotans know about Lewis and Clark. They know where it is and there are numbers of them that come in by on our side of the lake in Nebraska. In the development I live in, there's one full-time

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resident that has moved back from Nashville, Tennessee. Even though they originally lived in South Dakota, they're on our side of the river in Nebraska. Other cabin owners are from Omaha, Lincoln, Wayne and Newman Grove, all Nebraskans. We have one from Austin, Texas. We have Sioux Falls and Elk Point, South Dakota. So they've all built new cabins, hired the local builders, electricians, lawn care workers, and they-- we, I can assure you, we pay significant property taxes [INAUDIBLE] each year. And they've come because they love the view, they love the water toys they have, they love the horseback riding, they love the trails they can walk on, and they like the priest-- peace, tranquility and beauty. You can see right here, out here at this river, Niobrara State Park, but we have it down at the Lewis and Clark. So it's growing in popularity. But there are key factors that will limit our success unless they are addressed. They include roads. Roads happen to be a very important priority for our state, always have been. When I was Governor, I had the good fortune of having one-- a very visionary Director of Roads, Jerry Strobel, also happens to be the father of Senator Deb Fischer. He came into my office one day with this grand plan for expressways, very excited about it. He was astonished when I endorsed and supported immediately after seeing his vision and knowing the importance of connecting those cities together, populations that were growing. Traffic-growing needs would be met with this expressway system. The Legislature approved it, and here we are 30 years later and it isn't done yet. We are making some progress, however, thanks to Senator Deb Fischer and also Governor Ricketts. Bottom line, Highway 81 north of Norfolk was on that expressway system and it needs to be moved up to the top of the list. Needs to be-- Nebraska needs to designate Knox County as a special rural tourism and transportation hub, based on safety, based on the growth of agribusiness and truck traffic, and based on the significant increase in camper and boat traffic and the tourism potential. Today, it's a rather dangerous stretch of road, getting busier and more congested. I can attest to it, I travel it often. Senator Flood, you know well that there are a lot of people in Knox County that travel that road every day to go to Norfolk and commute. And there's a lot of people from Norfolk that are property owners around Knox County, so there's no question that Knox County-- or Norfolk is also used to Lewis and Clark as, as a tool to attract people to their city. There are others that can talk about the main roads by the lake, and that also should be a priority list. But now is the time to make a transformational investment in areas that can grow our state. Also key, I think, is imperative as long as we're considering roads, there are other things that can be considered like bike trails and special tourism zones. And also we must remember that Highway 81 is a Meridian Highway and make

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sure that it is four lane, for it connects Can-- Canada through the United States all the way to Mexico. And it's a major transcontinental highway for the trucking industry. The last thing I'd like to bring up is access to the water. An issue that comes up often is access to the lake, specifically the availability of boat slips. Weigand is Nebraska's largest marina, and it can no longer accommodate the larger boats and increased traffic. I myself put my name on for a boat slip five years ago. I have yet to get one. They have stopped taking names, at one time there were as many as 150. No doubt there are more, that number is higher. Across the lake, there were over 400 on the waiting lists on the marina on the South Dakota side. This represents a lost opportunity. People who buy or invest in lake properties also have boats and jet skis, and all these toys represent opportunity for revenue for our parks. Any plan needs to include major marina expansion of Weigand and also for the boat slips. But also they need to have more camper pads, camper pads, restrooms, shower facilities, concession, event spaces and beaches and more. I'd also like you to consider building more marina at South Shore and Miller Creek. The beauty of boat slips is they can bring in significant revenue for the parks. So people can keep their boat on the lake, there will be an increasing investment in cabins, which translates into new tax revenue, help to reduce the taxes and support schools and local government. And I also want to thank the Game and Parks. I think they do a really fine job up here in this part of the state, and they do it on a pretty lean budget. They've had vision and they've got private partnerships who are willing to invest. I remember well the day that Gene Mahoney took me to a field between Omaha and Lincoln and-- word vision pointed out what he wanted to do with Mahoney Park. It is one of the greatest revenue parks and system we have in our state, so but it started with vision. And that's what I hope many of these people are here to tell you, about their vision for what can be done for this God-created beauty we have before us. So that's why I'm here. I've been coming to Knox County for over 50 years. We used to have a cabin in Iowa. It's a long way across that state to go to over by the Mississippi, so it was a pretty easy decision to come back up here to Lewis and Clark and build my property up here. And tell you the truth of the matter, if I weren't a widow, I'd live up here full-time. But I have family in, in Lincoln, so I make it back and forth. Final, final word. So I encourage you to prioritize any big ideas that you have on the return that it will bring, not only to the county, but to the state. Make it truly transformational, make sure the numbers work. And remember, this is hard-earned money the taxpayers have given to you to invest wisely, to invest it well for the future of all Nebraskans.

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Thank you again. If there are any questions, I will be happy to answer them.

HILGERS: Thank you, Governor Orr. Are there, are there questions?
Senator Clements?

CLEMENTS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Governor Orr. And you mentioned camper pads and restrooms, would that be in state state park grounds or, or elsewhere?

KAY ORR: In state park grounds, yes. Yes.

CLEMENTS: All right, and--

KAY ORR: And I only speak for where I am more familiar with the area, which is around Lewis and Clark. I have been to this Niobrara State Park, but it's been years since I've been here. I'm reminded of the beauty of the landscape, I'm not as familiar with the needs that are, are to be met up here.

CLEMENTS: All right, the state park by Lewis and Clark, camper pads fill up--

KAY ORR: Very fast. Yes.

CLEMENTS: Big demand.

KAY ORR: And, and I think we have to recognize the, the potential that there is. We have good prospects and people coming to this Lewis and Clark. But I tell you the truth, when I'm in Lincoln, I tell people I have a lake house at Lewis and Clark. They say, where's that? They don't know about it.

CLEMENTS: Thank you.

KAY ORR: So we don't want to bring the whole city up here. Just a few more.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Clements.

KAY ORR: I'll be, I'll be available at another time if you have questions.

HILGERS: One second, Governor.

KAY ORR: These people are waiting.

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HILGERS: Thank you. Thank you for your testimony, Governor Orr.

KAY ORR: You're welcome.

HILGERS: Next testifier.

RICK SPELLMAN: Well hi, my name is Rick Spellman, R-i-c-k S-p-e-l-l-m-a-n. I live in Omaha, 705 North 57th Avenue, but we have a second home here at Lazy River Acres just up the river. And we spend as much time here as we possibly can, every other weekend, most of the summers, along with, and I'll get to this, the folks at Lazy River Acres. It's quite a, it's quite a community. Thank you very much for coming. Senator Hughes, it's good to run into a friend of a cousin of mine out in Imperial just today. And Mike, you're familiar with this area. I can't thank you enough for coming. A picture, a picture is worth a thousand words. And there it is. That river has been designated, this reach below Randall down to below Springfield and then up to Niobrara River, part of the way up to Verdigre, has been designated a, a wild and scenic recreational river by the, by Congress. And if you, if you look at the law and the designation of what's required with that designation, it is to recognize, as we do, the beauty, the history of this area, the access for recreational purposes for the state to this area and the, and the preservation of this area for those purposes. There, there are not very many areas in this part of the country that have, carry that designation. And it's very important. And it's, and it's a designation that affects this region. I don't see this being a Niobrara or a Knox County opportunity, I see it as a north-central region destination for many, many purposes, not to mention the obvious ones, which are recreation and access to the Missouri River, which we can talk about a little bit. But this particular state park is a, is a real gem within the park system. These cabins are filled from beginning to end. You have to make your reservations in order to be here. There are, there's trailer parking, but there's not adequate camping throughout this area. There's not adequate access to the Missouri River throughout this area. There is not adequate hiking throughout this area for north-central Nebraska residents to come and enjoy what is clearly one of the most beautiful and spiritual places in Nebraska. This area has been present throughout history by the Native Americans, by the traders that traded through here. Niobrara is one of the oldest communities in Nebraska, that had to be relocated twice because of the river. And by way of just background, that was involved representing the village and the state park to buy this land when I was a practicing attorney in Omaha. And so we've been coming up here for a long, long time. And fortunately, we were successful in every one of

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those efforts to preserve Niobrara in this area. And so we made a lot of friends and so we bought a house up at Lazy River Acres. I don't think if things had turned out differently, we would still, we'd be there. But we're there and we love this area and we love the people. And I like to think I'm a proponent of all of the opportunities that we have. And I've written out a little something this morning. It's rough. It's here to make a part of the record. But I just wanted to point out the, the significance of this area is illustrated most recently, I guess, by the filming of the IMAX movie that you may have seen of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Folks from Hollywood came here and camped out for almost three weeks and they filmed right next to our area up at Lazy River Acres. And they filmed almost a third of that movie up and down the river here, because there just isn't a place where the bluffs, for the river, for the sandbars, for the history, the Lewis and Clark history, obviously. As we sit here, we're, we're sitting within about 150 or 200 yards where they walked up the Niobrara River and visited the Ponca Tribal Headquarters in September. Now, the tribe was on hunt at that time and so the, the site was vacant. But the headquarters of the Ponca Tribe Nation are here, the headquarters of the Santee Sioux Nation are here. Both, both influences are a steady attraction for this area. The Santee Sioux Tribe's golf course was recognized by the PGA three years ago as the best new golf course in the United States in their magazine. And if you haven't played that golf course, you haven't played that golf course. It's, it's on a par with the Sandhills and the other three or four very, very similar courses in this, in Nebraska that we have. There's a casino there. There's a wonderful museum there. The Ponca Nation has its museum and headquarters here. The powwows are here. And during the summer months starting, you know, June-- April through October, there are activities of every kind and description going on in this area. And all you have to, to, to see to realize that is to just take a look at the cars and the license plates and the boats and the people who come here weekend after weekend after weekend. Try to buy a place in Lazy River Acres, they're just not available. So for this region, Neligh, Plainview, all the little towns, Norfolk, where there are folks that are in the north-central part of Nebraska, they don't have a destination really, if you stop to think about it. But this area could be that attraction. This lodge is too small, as we sit here, compared to some of the other wonderful lodges and destinations we have in Nebraska. Very few places have the history that's available to, to absorb it like, like this area for people who may want to come and stay and bring their families. And I've listed a couple of the things on this little handout that I provided in addition. But this park is very important. Take a look at the data and the statistics to

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get a feel, and talk to the people in the Game and Parks Commission who understand the importance of this, of this park. You get a pretty good feel for the demand that's here. Lazy River Acres is a community during the summer months, which is the largest community in the county. There are about 180 homes, many of them are permanent now. People are retiring and moving here year round. There is a restaurant, there is a filling station, there's a motel, storage, and there's the Game and Parks-maintained landing, which on a weekend in the summer, you can't find a place to park your trailer. The sandbars up and down the river, you can go all the way to, all the way up the river to Fort Randall Dam. You can start an infinite number, it seems like, sandbars with your kids. You can bring your sand, sand playthings for your kids. You can go all the way down to the lake and into the lake from here. And you can go up and down the Niobrara River, principally kayaking and canoeing, which is very popular so.

HILGERS: If you wouldn't mind, just maybe wrapping up and--

RICK SPELLMAN: I wrapped up.

HILGERS: Oh.

RICK SPELLMAN: I just, I wanted to just really thank you for coming. Absorb this area and see it as a regional destination for, for opportunity. Not just simply a first-class marina, but a place where people can think about north-central Nebraska when they think of Nebraska.

HILGERS: One second, going to see if-- thank you so much for your testimony.

RICK SPELLMAN: Sure.

HILGERS: Are there questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you, Mr. Spellman, very much. Thank you. Next testifier. Welcome.

MARK SIMPSON: Good afternoon. Mr. Chairman, members of the STAR WARS Committee, my name is Mark Simpson, M-a-r-k S-i-m-p-s-o-n, I'm here today as a proud resident of Knox County. I'm president of the Missouri Sedimentation Action Coalition, vice president of the Niobrara Foundation, clerk of the Niobrara Riverdale Presbyterian Church, fireman and EMT. And there's always something, something more going on. Thank you for spending time in Knox County and learning what you can about our wonderful part of the state. First, I'd like to commend Senator McDonnell, Senator Gragert and Senator Flood for making us aware of the opportunities of LB406. Without your input and

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prodding, none of this would be possible. Niobrara and Niobrara State Park are areas that most of the state is unaware of. The people say, yes, I went canoeing there several years ago. They have Valentine in their minds. We want to change that. As we sit, sit here with this magnificent vista out the windows, we would like to introduce you to our area and to the people of the region. The idea, and it's been mentioned of a league-- Lied Lodge-type facility, we, we want to see something like that happen. Niobrara State Park has the infrastructure to support such a facilities. Roads, power, water are all in place. Improvement of facilities in the park would help make this the destination attraction we hope for. As we look out the windows and walk out on the porch, we all see the magnificent Missouri River, the jewel of the area. One problem is that more and more, it's becoming more and more evident that sedimentation is filling the river and the Lewis and Clark Lake, as currently the lake is one-third full from the pool that was started in 1957. And that MSAC, the Missouri Sedimentation Action Coalition, is working with the corps for a sed-- a sediment management plan to come up with some kind of a solution that we'll be talking to the senate-- senators later on that subject. A new marina is greatly needed in the Niobrara area. I've taken care of our marina for a number of years. I built docks down there, it's mostly unusable unless you have a small boat or you're a local. If you know how to put your boat in right, you can get out there, but somebody coming up from other places aren't going to be able to launch their boat. And that's the problem. The state park needs that for, for part of their attraction, and we have land both upstream and downstream where that could be put. Plans are in the works, along with South Dakota residents, to include Highway 12 and a regional bike trail. This would be another draw to the area. Niobrara is within a couple of hours of Sioux City, Norfolk and Sioux Falls. A lot of people don't-- we tend to forget going north, but that's a growing metro area that we could draw on for here. We also are three hours from Omaha, Lincoln, Grand Island and Kearney, so there's a population base to support that. Again, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Do you have any questions?

HILGERS: Thank you, Mr. Simpson. Are there questions? Senator Flood.

FLOOD: Just briefly, and you may or may not be an expert in this. I'm certainly not. But of the different types of fowl, or I should say game, that people come to the Niobrara and Knox County area, also Lewis and Clark, what are some of the-- is this good turkey hunting?

MARK SIMPSON: This is fabulous turkey hunting. In fact, it's surprising you didn't have to shoot a few off the road on the way into

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the park. Deer hunting is extremely popular, duck hunting is extremely popular. We have people from all over the nation that come up here for our hunting in the fall. We got Louisiana, Mississippi, big groups from Indiana, all over the Gulf Coast, Iowa, Minnesota. Everybody thinks it's great and they think they've found something special and they don't want anybody else to know about it. But we'd like to spread that out to get some more even revenue over the summer, spring and the winter. And I think an attraction like this would do it.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Flood. Any other questions? I have one question, Mr. Simpson.

MARK SIMPSON: OK.

HILGERS: On the bike trail you mentioned, is that in the works? And who, if so, who is responsible?

MARK SIMPSON: It's in the works.

HILGERS: What does that mean? Is it--

MARK SIMPSON: [INAUDIBLE] They're up, there up next to talk. It's going to go on a railroad track. And I should probably just let you, let you talk. There's an abandoned railroad bed up in South Dakota that's going to have spurs that will include Highway 12. And anything that we can get to get people around, if we get people here that rent a cabin at the state park and want to go on part of the bike trail, I think that's fabulous. Another thing I didn't mention, then I'll quit, is the canoe and kayaking. That's extremely popular. There's lots of groups that are doing this. The state is getting an interest for the kayakers. You may have noticed that along the bridge coming across, there's a kayak entrance going-- coming into the Niobrara River right down here.

HILGERS: Thank you so much--

MARK SIMPSON: Thank you.

HILGERS: --for your testimony, Mr. Simpson. Next testifier. We have a free on-deck chair here, whoever would like to be next, come up and sit in the front.

BOB FOLEY: OK. I'm Bob Foley, B-o-b F-o-l-e-y.

RON WAGNER: I'm Ron Wagner, oh, OK, I'm sorry. Ron Wagner, R-o-n W-a-g-n-e-r, and from Tyndall, South Dakota, had a cabin down at the

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Lazy River Acres for this is the 40th year. And we are in the process of making a rail to trail, it's going to be called Tabor to Platte Rails to Trail. And I've got a separate map with some brochures here, and we'll leave the big map for you. But we're going to start down over here, actually, now it's based on the old Nappa-Platte rail. And right now, the only thing that's being used is where they put the new Nappa grain facility in and they go up to Tyndall. They have that leased, or that's what they, we want to lease, they lease that part. The first part of it here, going from Platte to Ravinia is already a rail bank, which means we can put a rail to trail on that. It's already with the federal guidelines. Actually, Lake Andes has about a mile of it because they have housing for the natives on the one side and they walk into Lake Andes. And we've talked to the county commissioners from Charles Mix, Bon Homme County. We've talked to the Yankton Sioux Tribe. We've got members on our board that from that. We're a 501(c)(3). We've got our federal ID number. And it's we started earlier this spring, but it's been actually these towns all along here have talked about it for years, doing-- trying to do something with it. But we're proposing a rail to trail and we want to start actually on Gavins Point Dam at the very end of the last part of the park there that you have a rail or trail, and come up Highway 52, we can run up into Tabor, different roads, come across and we can drop down. And we want to come down into Nebraska and Niobrara. We want to be able to come down at Pickstown. We want to be able to come down at past Platte. And we've got to-- I'm very familiar, since I've been on the river for 40 years. This thing is a huge gold mine. It's just unbelievable. People don't know about it, they come and see it. It's-- we're so used to it, it's natural for us. I mean, we don't think nothing of it, but it's very, very good. But what we're doing right now is trying to find support for our health, but it also would help you guys. And we'd like to get a letter of resolution or something from you guys saying you support ours and as a whole trail. We want to make it a multiple-state, and we can make it like everybody is talking about, a destination. I know you guys are familiar with Mickelson Trail. We ride that and there's people from all over the world, just all over. But it's very simple. We'll leave this big map and some brochures. Now does anybody got any questions?

HILGERS: Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Wagner. Are there questions? Senator Flood.

FLOOD: OK, hey, could you keep that up for just a second? So the trail would start, in Nebraska it would start at Gavins Point Dam.

RON WAGNER: Yep.

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FLOOD: And it would go all the way to Niobrara?

RON WAGNER: Yeah.

FLOOD: And what kind of-- and that would cross the Santee Sioux reservation?

RON WAGNER: Right. Now, yours would be on the highways. The, the trail itself would be on the rail bed, the old rail bed, is what we're--

FLOOD: And so what would the, what kind of trail would you be talking? Like a concrete trail or like a rock trail?

RON WAGNER: Out in Mickelson it's mostly crushed limestone.

FLOOD: OK.

RON WAGNER: And they use the top ten foot of it, basically, so we don't disturb anything else. You know, they have some trestles and we have some deals. Right now, we have the department of transportation, the game, fish and parks and the rail commission, we're working with them. Because we have to get from Ravinia down to Tyndall, is what we're trying to do. They want to rail bank that and then we convert that. And we understand this is a long-term project.

FLOOD: Sure.

RON WAGNER: You know, it took 15 years to build Mickelson Trail.

FLOOD: Thank you very much,

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Flood. Mr. Wagner, I have two questions. One is you mentioned you were part of a 501(c)(3).

RON WAGNER: Yep.

HILGERS: What was the name of that organization?

RON WAGNER: It's Friends of the Tabor to Platte Rail to Trail.

HILGERS: And then so for the Nebraska portion of the trail, have you sort of put together an estimate of what you think it might cost?

RON WAGNER: No, that's what the game, fish and parks of South Dakota is now trying. We're-- you got to realize we just started this in about February, March.

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HILGERS: Yeah.

RON WAGNER: So it's really-- but we've gone a long ways. We've picked up a lot of support. And right now, the game, fish and parks is supposed to give us a estimate, rough estimate because we're applying for a grant that we need to have turned in by the end of the year. And we would start with probably the first part that's rail banked already, which is roughly 30 miles. Not quite. And we're looking for probably \$2, \$2.5 million from that thing. But overall, it's going to cost a lot more than that. You got to realize that.

HILGERS: Understood. So you're leaving the big one, but what about the small maps?

RON WAGNER: Yes, we'll leave this one and then the brochure that we have. And I'll get you more too, I didn't realize there was going to be that many people here. It has a little bit about it, it has our Web address, has some of the questions, but it does have a small map in the back of it. So you can do that also, that will have that.

HILGERS: OK.

RON WAGNER: But you can look at our Web site. We got our Web site is www.tabortoplatterailtotrail.com.

HILGERS: Excellent. If you wouldn't mind giving that to the clerk--

RON WAGNER: Yep.

HILGERS: --we'll get copies made. Thank you very much.

RON WAGNER: But if you guys got any questions, I got my phone number. Feel free to call or talk to Bob. Bob has been talking to you guys up here. So we're very interested. We have [INAUDIBLE] between the two states.

HILGERS: Thank you, Mr. Wagner.

RON WAGNER: Thanks.

HILGERS: Appreciate your testimony today. Next testifier. Welcome.

MARILYN SHARP: I didn't plan on talking. I was just coming. But now I see a little bit more of what's going on. Thank you for allowing me to speak. My name is Marilyn Sharp, M-a-r-i-l-y-n S-h-a-r-p, maiden name McGill, one of the founding people in the Verdel area way back when. I

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am taking care of property for my father along the Missouri River. We also have a farm south of Monowi, all in Knox County. I'm up by the Lazy River Acres area. It's all private property. The property line used to be 325-plus acres, we now only have 59 acres left. Fortunately, all the rental lots that we have, we have a total of 37 long-term rental lots along the Missouri River, which is what we see here, 7 miles west. We also have 25 RV campsites and a bathhouse. And this is all private owned. We have, we have waiting lists constantly. As mentioned previously, people are finding this area. They want to come. We have people from throughout the state, South Dakota also. We have hunters that come seasonally for turkey, deer, whatever they want to do. And they hunt more on the farm, and that's after the crops are taken out. I don't know what this proposal of what you're doing will have-- will actually impact private landowners, but this is an area that is rich both in farming and recreational. And farming has, is what started this area many, many years ago, and my folks developed this property where we're at, which Mr. Wagner is one of the leasees and has been there for many years. Our longest person has been there since 1971. So it's been there for a long time. The roads need to be taken care of, not only state highways, county roads. We've had a lot of problems in this area due to, well, like mentioning the sediment built up has caused floods, taken out bridges over the years. The cyclone storm was unreal, not something that we could have even predicted, I don't believe. But some of the road areas, particularly Highway 12 going west, I know they, that is in the works for being widened, because apparently it's not up to code at this point. One of the other issues is that has been brought up was about the Verdel Landing, which is up by the Lazy River Acres. There is a concrete road that is a county road that goes across from Highway 12 to the river north. Between that is a Ponca Creek. Ponca Creek has silted in over the years and now floods, the flooding we had from the storm in 2019 all came from the creek, which required evacuation of a lot of people. Excuse me, I'm used to talk to talking this long. I don't know, I can't seem to get a definitive answer of what is really being looked at as far as roads, so that would be a main thing to make sure that this area is able to be traveled. Excuse me. We have a lot of side-by-sides that come up and they do go through the hills. So they do a lot of scenic traveling. They, they looked at this as a recreational and a relaxation to get away from their everyday lives. And some can be very stressful, so they need that break. It's very peaceful. People are becoming more and more aware, but we need-- it would be more beneficial for this area to, to where we could try to get more businesses to be here. It's a hard area simply because there are-- the population, the residents, the owners, the long-term

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residents in the area, there are few compared to all the recreational retirees, which I happen to be one. I moved here after 50 years of being away and grew up in this area, and more and more people are coming back. We have a lot of towns that could be promoted more for some residential like Niobrara. It's up on a hill, there's a vacant buildings, there's properties. It would help rejuvenate the area for economically and give us more resources locally. That would also support all the people coming in to visit and spend money for tax dollars, which is very beneficial for everybody. And it's all the way up the river. There are a lot of private-owned properties. My uncle, I don't know if he's here today. I don't know for sure, I haven't looked to see who is, he has about 60-- between 60 and 70 at least places just about a, a three-quarters of a mile west of the old McGill farm.

HILGERS: Ms. Sharp, if you wouldn't mind maybe--

MARILYN SHARP: Shorten it up. Yes

HILGERS: If you wouldn't mind.

MARILYN SHARP: But there's a lot of, a lot of area along this Knox County area that would really benefit with resources. Keep in mind, the people that live here don't have a lot of money.

HILGERS: Thank you for your testimony.

MARILYN SHARP: Thank you, I appreciate you.

HILGERS: Thank you for coming today. Are there questions from the committee? Senator Brandt.

BRANDT: Thank you, Chairman Hilgers. Thank you, Ms. Sharp, for your testimony. Are you aware or do you know the counties that border the river, do they have a planning and zoning?

MARILYN SHARP: I know what we have on our property. I work at my parents'. When they started it, they worked with the county to meet all guidelines, environmentally, department of health. It's like a small community. We have long-term renters, so I don't have to do water samples for 37 houses. I only have to do it for our well that services just very few of the houses and our RV campground, and I had to become certified for that. I didn't know this when I was moving back to help my parents. So I've learned a lot. I tried to follow all the regulations, corps, maintaining the banks. I watch the traffic speeds for safety. I know there are some other places up along that do the same thing, I believe, but different counties. But everything we

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do, and it's been grandfathered in because it was started back in the 70s.

BRANDT: All right, thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Brandt. Senator Clements.

CLEMENTS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ms. Sharp. I was wondering how the Internet service is at your facility in Verdell. Do you have Internet broadband?

MARILYN SHARP: I-- we have fiber optics that has been put in by 3 Rivers out of Lynth, that's all along the Missouri River down there. Initially when I moved there, I have my own separate Internet service and I don't provide service, Internet services to all the people along the home-- along the river, excuse me, the long-term rentals. They're responsible for all their own utilities and things.

CLEMENTS: But it's available to them?

MARILYN SHARP: Yes.

CLEMENTS: OK.

MARILYN SHARP: And I think most of them have connected. I know in the RV park, some of those have put up dishes. We had talked about doing that. But that was an expense we didn't want to go to because my folks felt people were coming for relaxation. They didn't-- weren't coming for the Internet and television.

CLEMENTS: Right.

MARILYN SHARP: So if they want that, that's up to them. And with this day and age, with smartphones and such, most people can get it depending on the service.

CLEMENTS: All right, thank you. That's all I needed.

MARILYN SHARP: Yeah.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Clements. Seeing no other questions, thank you, Ms. Sharp, for your testimony.

MARILYN SHARP: Thank you.

HILGERS: Next testifier. As a reminder we don't have a set time limit, but try, if you can, to keep it close to, close-ish to five minutes.

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If we get to about seven or more, I will, I will, I will break in.
Welcome.

BROCK NELSON: Thank you, Speaker Hilgers, members of the special committee. For the record, my name is Brock Nelson, B-r-o-c-k N-e-l-s-o-n, and I'm here today representing the friends of Knox County. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity today. As a background. I'm from this area, so I grew up hunting, fishing, hiking, golfing, boating and, and enjoying the area. And specifically the Devil's Nest where I am now, of only two residents that are full-time in the area. My wife is also from the area. She's a nurse practitioner in Crofton, which is the closest town to Lewis and Clark Lake, it's about seven miles away. We both graduated from the area and left to attend college. And I share this information only because we represent two young professionals who could be working anywhere, but we chose Knox County. My employer is headquartered in Omaha, my wife's is in South Dakota. And we feel very fortunate to be able to live in Knox County. Some of the points that I just wanted to share were that people our age are more mobile than ever before. And because of technology, we can choose to live, work and play almost anywhere, and water recreation is a big deal with that. This lake, Lewis and Clark, is a big deal in terms of the one million, and some would estimate even more, visitors that it attracts each year. So we need to capture those who are already coming in and provide them opportunities in Nebraska. The private sector sees the potential, but it is critical that we have good roads, access to water, broadband, fire protection and some of the basics on our side of the lake. Access to the lake is a big thing. A marina expansion is a game changer. People who invest in lots, build cabins and pay significant taxes in the area want and need water access, and they're willing to pay a premium for it. This translates into new revenue for our parks and for this county. Lewis and Clark Lake is gaining more attention, but we need your help as we prepare for the growth. More families are reevaluating their lives and looking for work-life balance. We're fortunate that Crofton has one of the best schools in the state and we have people who are committed to the future and have rolled up their sleeves and are ready to make things happen. So thank you for allowing us to be here and have this conversation. Thank you to Senator Gragert, he does a great job representing our area. Thank you to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. They've got limited resources, but they really do a great job. So I'd be open to any questions if anybody has anything.

HILGERS: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Nelson. Senator Wishart.

WISHART: Thank you, Brock, for being here.

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BROCK NELSON: Yeah.

WISHART: Governor Orr mentioned that she's on a waiting list for five years to get a, a boat slip. And I'm looking at your numbers here, which is really helpful, about economic development for boat slips, ramps, basically water access. What are the-- why, why is somebody waiting five years when there is such an economic benefit for the, that to be built?

BROCK NELSON: I've been on the list seven to eight years, so I've been in the same boat. I live on, right on the lake and don't have access. There just, there's a limited slips. I'm not sure how many Weigand has, but that's really the only permanent boat housing slips on the Nebraska side of lake. And I don't know if there's 100 total, maybe, maybe more, but--

WISHART: Is it, and is it monetary, is it environmental? What are the barriers that are causing there not to be public investment that it looks like there would be a pretty quick return on that?

BROCK NELSON: I would say monetary, but I wouldn't be the right one to answer that as--

WISHART: OK.

BROCK NELSON: I, I'm pretty sure most of the ground is run by the Corps of Engineers, so I don't know that there's privately owned access to the lake there to build private docks.

WISHART: OK.

BROCK NELSON: That's just an opinion. I'm pretty certain of that, but--

WISHART: Yeah. Well, hopefully there's someone else here that can speak to why--

BROCK NELSON: There's someone here that can answer it. Oh yeah.

WISHART: --people are waiting so long.

BROCK NELSON: Yeah.

WISHART: So a follow-up question to that. So if you are a resident here and you have a boat, how do you get your boat onto the water?

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BROCK NELSON: There's, there's a few different areas that you can dock a boat. So like at Weigand has permanent slips, but they do have a boat dock that you can dock there and get your boat in the water.

WISHART: OK.

BROCK NELSON: But that's one of only a very few. There's times, Fourth of July weekend, you might have an hour wait to get your boat in the water.

WISHART: OK?

BROCK NELSON: Yeah.

WISHART: And then last question I have is you mentioned hunting. Are there-- if somebody were to fly in, say in a leisure trip with a group to go hunting, where would the nearest airport be for them to do that?

BROCK NELSON: I would say you could find Sioux Falls, South Dakota--

WISHART: OK.

BROCK NELSON: Sioux City, Iowa, you know, are an hour and a half, maybe, away.

WISHART: Hour and a half away. OK.

BROCK NELSON: Yeah.

WISHART: OK, thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Wishart. Are there other questions?
Senator Flood.

FLOOD: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Nelson, for testifying. Friends of Knox County, is this a formalized group?

BROCK NELSON: Yeah, it's a co-- coalition created a kind of like-minded individuals who care about the lake. It was created about two years ago, and then I agreed to chair it, so.

FLOOD: So who would be in, in Friends of Knox County?

BROCK NELSON: Well, we're trying to grow that as many as we can.

FLOOD: How many people are in it now?

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BROCK NELSON: I don't have the numbers for you. I can sure get it for you.

FLOOD: More than ten?

BROCK NELSON: Yeah. Oh yeah, yeah.

FLOOD: More than one hundred?

BROCK NELSON: That's probably where we're at it, so it's-- yeah, I would say that's where at. And we're trying to get more, more people signed on.

FLOOD: And is it, are Friends of Knox County organized solely for the Lewis and Clark Lake area, or is it also for the Niobrara side?

BROCK NELSON: I don't think we would want to limit it. I think ideally the two would work together, you know. The, the more revenue, the more benefits to the county. You know, it helps everybody on both sides, lake and river.

FLOOD: On that Highway 81 expressway.

BROCK NELSON: Yeah.

FLOOD: Obviously, I'm from Norfolk, I'd love a four-lane to Yankton. The Game-- the Department of Transportation would say that in their study, a Super 2 highway is the right way to build that, meaning you have a north and south lane and you have a middle lane for passing, turning, things like that. What would your opinion be on that? That's not a trick question.

BROCK NELSON: Sure. Yeah, no, I would say anything is better than what we have now. With the amount of semis, you know, camper traffic, boat traffic. And as far as the hilly road, it, it gets kind of dangerous people trying to pass and move. But, you know, I would say either would be an upgrade depending on financially what makes the most sense, I guess.

FLOOD: And recreational vehicles, you often find recreational vehicles, people towing boats, campers?

BROCK NELSON: Campers, sometimes followed by a boat. And that's, that's a big issue with what I call the Weigand road, but it would be the nine-mile road from Highway 121 that goes all the way to Miller Creek. And it's, it's in pretty dire straits. And it is, it is packed

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with campers in boats every weekend. And it's just, it's there's no shoulder. I mean, it's, it's a pretty dangerous road.

FLOOD: Last question. And I think this is something we have to, we have to come to terms with as we deal with the opportunity to grow Knox County, and that is grow its population. In the Lewis and Clark Lake area, obviously, there's opportunity to build homes, but a lot of the services will come out of Yankton because you are close to a town of 15,000 people.

BROCK NELSON: Sure.

FLOOD: How do we get the biggest benefit for state investment and create some of those services on the Nebraska side, which I, which I think is the goal--

BROCK NELSON: Yeah.

FLOOD: --ultimately, and to grow that, just like we want to grow it in Niobrara? How do we do that with Yankton right across the river?

BROCK NELSON: It's a challenge without question. I know, you know, when I was here at the first meeting, we threw around ideas. And that's one of the issues that we face, is how do we keep it here? But I think we've got enough entrepreneurial-type individuals who, you know, will seek out ways to, to build that. You know, everybody's trying to find a way to make income. And, you know, I think if we've got the infrastructure and the amenities to go along with, you know, we've already got the hard part by having the attraction that if we've got the rest of it there, I think the rest of it will work itself out.

FLOOD: Thank you very much.

BROCK NELSON: Yeah.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Flood. Mister, Mr. Nelson, I have a question.

BROCK NELSON: Yeah--

HILGERS: I appreciate this list of--

BROCK NELSON: --you bet. Yeah.

HILGERS: --improvements, this is great. This committee, I think, has a mandate from the Legislature to really try to think big and to find

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things that not just improve the communities, but actually change the trajectory in a way that maybe some other things wouldn't. And so if I were to ask you the question, what would be the thing or two things that you would say would be really game-changing, if you were to think big and swing for the fences, would it be something on this list or would it be something different?

BROCK NELSON: I would say it would, it would, kind of maybe tie in together. If you want to think really big, I would say re-- the highway, that road. But also, you know, you could probably go up to [INAUDIBLE]. And in time with that, I know when we were meeting earlier with, like the Game and Parks, one of the issues they have is staffing. You know, I don't know if we've got the ability to tie into some of the state colleges, the university, to have summer internship-type programs. You know, it's kind of it's helping, you know, students build a resume and gain experience. But then you're also getting help for the Game in Parks, you know? So maybe it would bring, I know some of the people have gone before me have mentioned that we're not really known to many people in the southern part of the state. Maybe that opens it up to people from, you know, Lincoln or Omaha from anywhere.

HILGERS: Do you know how, how long the wait list is at the marina?

BROCK NELSON: No, I think they cut it off. I knew, I know it's over 100 for sure.

HILGERS: OK.

BROCK NELSON: And I do know, like the South Dakota side just redid theirs, a lot of theirs are \$3,200 a slip, you know, so it's a significant income for the county.

HILGERS: Thank you, Mr. Nelson.

BROCK NELSON: Yeah.

HILGERS: Seeing no other questions, thank you for your testimony.

BROCK NELSON: Thank you, guys.

HILGERS: Next testifier. Welcome.

KELLY HANVEY: Good afternoon, Chairman, senators. My name is Kelly Hanvey, K-e-l-l-y H-a-n-v-e-y, I'm the director of Knox County Economic Development, and I am so thankful for this opportunity for

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you guys to share some of the views of our very gorgeous area. And you'll see even more this afternoon. And I'm hoping that the clouds will clear and our sunset will be spectacular. I am, I feel like the most beautiful scenic views are seen in person as compared to the pictures that you've seen. We do have the confluence of the Niobrara, the Missouri and the Ponca and Verdigre Creek all in our area. This allows us to enjoy some of the best hunting and fishing, kayaking, hiking and camping. Our outfitters have bragging rights to trophy whitetail annual deer and we have an abundance of game, fish and wildlife, pheasant, turkey and quail, as alluded to by previous speakers. More outfitters could easily obtain success in these areas. Unfortunately, we have a, a long list of what we don't have, but at the top of that list, we don't have a conference or convention center. We don't have that destination point for people to gather for reunions, weddings, celebrations or conventions. Our golfers have to travel two hours after they land at Sioux Falls or Omaha to golf at Tatanka. We, like I said, we lack a marina. We have all of these waterways, but we have very little access to them. Our boat ramps are too few or have sustained too much damage on this side of the county to allow for safe entry or exit. We have a limited number of small motels. We have one lodge, and you're sitting in it, so you can tell that our space is very limited. Cabins and camping have been highly sought after since last summer. There's, they're usually sold out during the peak of tourism season. And after COVID we were able to generate \$50,000 in lodging tax, even after a global pandemic. We collect lodging tax at a rate of 4 percent. That's very similar to Keith County, where you just came from. A recent study, I want to say it's probably five years old, showed that visitor spending, of course, depends on how a visitor traveled, how many people were in that party, if they stayed overnight or not. Some numbers, a day trip without an overnight stay could generate \$22.47 per person. If we captured just 25 percent of the 1.9 million people that were in Keith County, that comes in at about \$11 million for Knox County. With overnight stays at about \$61 per person, we could see \$29 million for our area. So we know that we're abundant in natural resources and we enjoy a lot of outdoor recreation. Lodging tax dollars have continued to increase even with a catastrophic flood in our county and a global pandemic. So this would indicate a continued interest in our area. So we would love to see future dollars invested to enhance and attract more development. Do you have any questions for me?

HILGERS: Thank you for your testimony, Ms. Hanvey. Questions? Senator Wishart.

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WISHART: Thank you so much for being here. One of the things that I've noticed, because I love being along-- around water and around people who love water. And one of the things I've noticed that goes really well with boating is having like the restaurants--

KELLY HANVEY: Right.

WISHART: --and the bar sort of activity close by. Could that happen here? Like, are there bars and restaurants where you could pull up to with your boat? Would that work here or does, does this water--

KELLY HANVEY: We don't have any currently. We have untapped potential, absolutely.

WISHART: OK.

KELLY HANVEY: That could be on the horizon.

WISHART: OK, so you could-- there wouldn't be a concern about flooding in terms of putting, if potentially private development where you have bars, restaurants and opportunities where people are boating, they're able to pull up and, and enjoy a, a hamburger and a beer?

KELLY HANVEY: I don't, I don't know that I have, I think I have to defer to the Corps of Engineers. I know that a lot of the land along the river is controlled by that. So I'm not--

WISHART: OK.

KELLY HANVEY: --I'm not exactly sure.

WISHART: OK, that is something I'd be interested in knowing more about, is just the opportunity for development along the land in a way that offers additional recreational activities--

KELLY HANVEY: Absolutely.

WISHART: --beyond just boating.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Wishart. Senator Flood.

FLOOD: Thank you, Speaker Hilgers. Thank you, Kelly, for testifying. One of the questions that Speaker Hilgers has asked a lot, especially in Ogallala, which we had our hearing there last week, is if you had a big swing, a big dream, and you're in a unique position because you represent the whole county. Let's take, let's say you had \$10 million, I'm only using that just for reference, just-- let's say you had \$10

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million for Lewis and Clark Lake and you had a separate \$10 million for Niobrara, if you can wave a wand and hit a big shot out of the park, what would you do at Lewis and Clark to make a big impact? And what would you do at Niobrara area to make a big impact?

KELLY HANVEY: Oh, I would love to see the marina expanded at Lewis and Clark. I would love to see that destination of Lied Lodge concept specific to this area, preserving and capturing our beautiful scenic areas. But also we have two tribes in Knox County, so something that could bring enhancement and awareness of the presence of those two. So I would love to see a convention or conference center in this area and possibly a marina, but definitely expansion at Lewis and Clark.

FLOOD: And what can we do at Lewis and Clark Lake that would compete very aggressively with South Dakota?

KELLY HANVEY: Oh, amenities. We need more amenities. We need bike rentals and kayak rentals and, and I would love to see parasailing, although I'm afraid of heights. But wouldn't that be great, if we had more amenities.

FLOOD: Are there things we could do--

KELLY HANVEY: Adventure--

FLOOD: Are there things we could do at Lewis and Clark Lake to make-- to really compete with Yankton and to South Dakota? Because right now, a lot of people are going up there to go-karts and whatever else. Could we, where would we build that infrastructure in Nebraska? The marina, I get that, then there's Lewis and Clark State Park. If we use that for some of those amenities, is that where you'd put them?

KELLY HANVEY: Absolutely. Absolutely.

FLOOD: Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Flood. Is there other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony, Ms. Hanvey.

KELLY HANVEY: Thank you.

HILGERS: Next testifier. Welcome.

MICHAEL GUENTHER: Hello, everyone. Mr. Speaker, members of the special committee, my name is Michael Guenther, M-i-c-h-a-e-l G-u-e-n-t-h-e-r. I'm here today on behalf of the Crofton Volunteer Firefight-- Fire

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Department, as a lifelong, lifelong Knox County and Crofton area resident, small business owner and involved in many different other organizations. I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to come to Knox County and visit us. I just got my bullet points here. As far as Lewis and Clark Lake area, the biggest thing I have worked for the last four years pushing for a satellite firehall for up at the lake area. The biggest issue we've had up there is the water supply, because if you build a new firehall, you got to have sprinkler systems. And the rural water up there isn't suffice to provide the adequate water that we-- hookup that we need where we are. We've got land that has been going to be given to us to build a hall on, but water supply is the issue. Another issue up there, and I'm not opposed to this, but there's been, there's a couple RV parks going in. One's, one's established, another one's being established at the moment with continued development up there. We're nine miles in Crofton, where we're based out of now. One issue that I see with it is, I mean, we're all volunteer, we've got 35 firefighters, a dozen or so EMTs or first responders, so we've got a little bit of a jaunt. We've got a population up there that I know, you know, could be brought on board with the RV parks. You know, I just, quick figures, like a couple thousand dollars, \$2 to \$3,000 is the property tax coming off of that. Well, that's comparable to property tax of a nice home. And you're talking four to six people in the home, you're talking 300 to 400 people in these RV parks. So and I mean, just with more people, you have more chances of something to happen on. The roads in the area are, like that's been stated before, are narrow and some of them are even unsupportive of the larger apparatuses that we operate. The county does as good of a job as they can to maintain them and, and build what's needed. But, you know, they could definitely use some help in some areas up there. And then all along the lake up here, I mean, we are in one of the highest fire dangers in all of Nebraska. I think we rank second behind one out west, you know, so, so water supply is a big issue. And then, you know, some fire safe practices, I know the fire service-- or the forestry service has got a lot of programs out there. It's just really daunting trying to get those property owners to, you know, go along with it and create firebreaks and stuff. Another thing I totally agree with on a lot of fronts is the Highway 81. I would say just guesstimating without figuring the numbers, 75 percent of our calls are accidents on 81. Now, whether that's due to just, I mean, I drive it plenty and, yeah, it's terrible to try to get past something that's going slower when you're-- and everybody's in a hurry and whatnot. Another thing I don't know it's been brought up yet is like your four-wheeler and side-by-side licensing. I think the state is missing out on a huge opportunity of

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being able to license them. Just in Crofton itself, it's, it gets real muddy, muddy water when you want, you want to drive it and whether it's OK. And I know the fire department helped with the dam race, that's an organization that puts on a triathlon up at the lake. And there's some people, you know, people getting guff about, you know, driving the side-by-sides on the county highway there, because it's OK if it's farm-related. But once it's off of that, then it's no, not on highways, I think there's a huge revenue potential. I mean, they're getting driven anyway. We could definitely use that. So in closing, I want to thank you all for coming here and visiting with us. If anyone has got any questions, I'll do my best to answer them.

HILGERS: Thank you, Mr. Guenther. Are there questions? Senator Gragert.

GRAGERT: Thank you for your testimony. I got a real quick question on your fire department. Your bylaws, do you have a maximum distance that if somebody did want to be on your fire department, at Creighton [SIC], from there, could they?

MICHAEL GUENTHER: When I first got on there was. I spent many years changing that philosophy. Like up at the lake area, we have five or six guys that are active on the department now. They live up there. Some of them work in town, some of them we've got guys that live in town and work up by the lake. So, so we broaden that horizon.

GRAGERT: Would the satellite fire station, kind of help that situation around?

MICHAEL GUENTHER: Oh, yes. I've had numerous people that have wanted to volunteer, but they feel they're too far from town to justify being a part of it because, well, by the time we get there, everybody's gone. You know, we cover everywhere from Highway 84 all the way to, to the lake and river and all the way up to Devil's Nest. So I don't know how many square miles we cover, but we cover a lot of area.

GRAGERT: Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Gragert. Are there other questions? Senator Brandt.

BRANDT: Thank you, Chairman Hilgers. Thank you for your service on the fire department. It's a thankless job. When you talk to the State Fire Marshal about the sprinklers in the, in the fire hall, was he willing to grant you any exception? I mean, I assume your satellite station

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could be a two-car garage or something of that nature. Would he exempt something of-- like that?

MICHAEL GUENTHER: There's no exemptions that they've told me. They're willing to work with us, you know, as long as there's a plan in place, you know, say if rural water was going to be upgrading the lines, you know, to feed the capacity we needed. Then we can, you know, they can give us like a grace period, you know, of something. You know, so we wouldn't have to have it right away. But it would come, I mean, it would be, it would be built in but you wouldn't be hooked up to the water supply until that happened down the road.

BRANDT: All right.

MICHAEL GUENTHER: But there's no, there's no exemption on this.

BRANDT: Did you, do you have a cost estimate for the satellite station?

MICHAEL GUENTHER: At this point, if I can remember the numbers correctly, we figured about \$400,000 for the hall. There was an option to go two miles south and run a water main up there. But even at that, they were restricting us to below what we needed. So it really wouldn't have benefited us. Right now, with construction prices the way they are, I'm guessing \$5 to \$600,000.

BRANDT: All right, thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Brandt. Are there other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

MICHAEL GUENTHER: Thank you.

HILGERS: Next testifier. Good afternoon.

LARRY WRIGHT, JR.: Good afternoon, Chairman, members of the committee. My name is Larry Wright Jr., L-a-r-r-y W-r-i-g-h-t, J-r., I'm the tribal chairman for the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska. To my Ponca relatives here, to our ancestors here in our homeland, I say [INAUDIBLE] to all my relatives. And I appreciate this committee and the work that's being done and having LB406 passed to do this study, because it does align with what our tribal nation is trying to do here in our homeland. As many of you know, the Ponca Tribe doesn't have a reservation. We have a service delivery areas that cover 12 counties in Nebraska, specifically, Knox and Boyd being two of those. This area is our homeland for, for hundreds of years. This is where our

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ancestors are buried and, and before I go too, too much further, to all the testifiers before me, I say ditto on behalf of the tribe. We agree with everything that they, that they have shared. Our people have lived here for as long as our history shares. And when we look at this place and we think of the history the Ponca Tribe has with this area, to know that our ancestors in the late 1800s were forcibly removed from this area, in the testimony that you heard today and in other opportunities, you've heard and see the beauty of this place, what this means to people here now, what it's meant to people within the last hundred years. And I think you can get a feel, however slightly, of what it meant for [INAUDIBLE] Standing Bear and our people who were willing to die to come back from Indian territory to be here. And to those of you that were on the Legislature at the time, who graciously passed the opportunity for Standing Bear to be in the U.S. Capitol, that connection from there to here is one of the things that should be part of this report. And to the things that are being shared here today for all of the opportunities that this area can provide from an economic development standpoint, to tourism, to all the things that were shared to finish that circle, if you will, to see the impact that this place has on, on all of those that are from here. I live in Lincoln. My father lives here, he takes care of our buffalo herd. My relatives are buried here. We have relatives here today that their relatives are buried here as well. But to that point, we do a lot as the Ponca tribe. Our headquarters is here, as was shared earlier, and most of our population lives in other parts of the state. But I would say over the last seven to eight years, our tribe has injected no less than \$15 million into this county alone. Within the last year we put in, and I'm sure my numbers are, are off, but it will be close, over \$500,000 just to, to buy and renovate the local grocery store in Niobrara. So we have a vested economic interest in this area. Most of the people that we employ or non-native from this area, and that number continues to climb. And so from an economic development standpoint, we are very interested in seeing this area grow. We think there's a lot of potential for this and a lot of our internal plans within the tribe previous to LB406 being passed for this study looked at those kind of opportunities for economic development, tourism, and we have our own plans moving forward. And we think what's being shared in the committee meetings and group meetings that I've attended and others have attended, those are all along the same line that we're looking at. We're planning on-- we just within the last couple of years and with here in the next couple of months have bought back over 2,000 acres of our traditional homeland. Over 1,200 of those acres are along the Niobrara River. So all those things, again, have our alignment with what we're looking at. We have plans to develop,

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continue to develop our educational trail out on our land just south of here. And we think that, and we see a lot of visitors year over year, that number increases. And one of the things that we hear consistently is, can we camp on your grounds because there's no room out here? And it took us a few years, but we said we should answer that call, and we are looking at that, to increase cabin space, RV space. But I think the alignment comes with what's being shared here and the opportunities from, from all the things that, that have been said. The increased traffic, 81 is terrible. I don't even drive down that way anymore just because of that. But all of these things are in alignment with each other and we feel we're a part of the solution when it comes to Knox County and working with the community as a whole. The Ponca Tribe takes great pride in trying to be a good neighbor. And so we have businesses here in Niobrara, we have a business in Crofton, and we look at opportunities as we continue to grow as a tribe. We have significant investments in our other areas, Omaha, Lincoln, Norfolk. But this is our homeland and we always have an eye toward here and what this means to our people, even if they only come back here once a year for our annual powwow. But this last year, there were people from 15 different states and three other countries that came back for that powwow. And so that's the kind of impact that just our tribe has alone in this area, and we think it will continue to grow. And we look forward to those partnerships with other local businesses and the people of the community. And so with that, I'll end and answer-- be happy to answer any questions you might have.

HILGERS: Thank you, Mr. Wright. Are there questions? Senator Wishart.

WISHART: Thank you for being here. It's good to see you.

LARRY WRIGHT, JR.: You, too. Thank you.

WISHART: So similar to previous questions, if you could-- if there were additional dollars to be invested in this area, what big picture would, would you like to see happen?

LARRY WRIGHT, JR.: Well, I think they all go together. I mean, infrastructure is key. Water is, is key, as you've heard. I think the ability to look at growth from a housing standpoint alone is crucial. It's hard to attract people here when that availability is, is limited or expensive. And so but when you increase rooftops, you increase demand on infrastructure, and those things haven't kept up. That's a thing that we looked out through our own housing program. That's very difficult for us, and one of the reasons why we look to buy new land

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for potential housing for ourselves to, to, you know, the town alone isn't, doesn't have adequate housing. When you look at if it's a single family or even one, just as an example, my own brother had a hard time moving back here just to work for the tribe because there was no housing available. And he fortunately got that worked out. But I think that also limits growth from that standpoint and also contributes to a lack of available workforce, people may go elsewhere. When you look at broadband access, that's crucial. That's one of the things that's a key component for my tribe and investment in here. And I would say even a decade ago, we installed our own T1 line because it didn't exist. We had to get it into our facility and spend thousands and thousands of dollars to do so, and just to service our own buildings. And so I think as a community, as a whole, when we talk about the state as a whole, is has looked at the broadband issue. From the national level, that's a, that's an issue and will continue to be so, as was shared earlier. But when we look at the opportunities for telehealth and being able to tie not only our tribal citizens, but others in the community into accessible health care from a telehealth standpoint, I think that's crucial. When you looked at a pandemic that happened last year and the quarantine and all of that, it exacerbated people's systems and not having that connection to-- and I was just talking from my tribe, to our elders to our youth who couldn't go to school, to be able to have that broadband in their homes so they could, it was it was a game changer for them. It allowed them to continue on as normal as possible. But that's not always available. And I think that's crucial to things that happen there that will go on here as well. I think if you, if you said what, what could you do? I think what was being shared earlier with the Lied, a Lied-type facility here with this view alone, I put this above Mahoney any day. And, and I think that's an opportunity. And even that public-private partnership and that Mahoney has, I think is doable here. And I think the tribes are definitely part of that equation. Without being disrespectful, a lot of other people over the years have told the stories of our tribes and it hasn't come from the tribes. And I think when people come to this area, they look for that authenticity. They want, want to have that, see that opportunity. And we're here to say we can tell our story best and be part of the solution for this area.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Wishart. Are there other questions?
Senator McDonnell.

McDONNELL: Thanks for being here. You mentioned you guys purchased 2,000 acres recently, 1,200 along the river. Having the discussions with possibly having spots for people to camp, what's the timeframe for that?

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LARRY WRIGHT, JR.: Well, I kind of, we're pumping the brakes to see what happens here. I'm not the sharpest knife in the drawer, but I don't want to get out in front of my skis either. But, you know, we again, we think there's a great synergy there. You know, if you're not at the table, you're on the menu. But just, you know, I think we've proven that over the years. You know, we, we built a paved highway that connected the oil road down to our, our, our property and over a mile long. And that was 2008, 2009. And that saved the county \$1,800 a month in maintenance fees on the gravel road. And so we think it's those kinds of things that we bring to the table. I don't speak for Santee at all, but that's just Ponca and what we've done. And so I think that we will continue to have that commitment to this area. Obviously, it's our homeland, we want to see this succeed. And historically, we've always had a good relationship with those first settlers that came here when we were here.

McDONNELL: Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator McDonnell. Other questions? Seeing none--

LARRY WRIGHT, JR.: All right, thank you.

HILGERS: --Mr. Wright, thank you for your testimony. Thank you very much. Next testifier. Welcome.

CHRIS KREYCIK: Yeah. My name is Chris Kreycik, C-h-r-i-s, Kreycik, K-r-e-y-c-i-k. We had the Kreycik elk and buffalo covered wagon tours for 23 years at our place, and the year of the flood we quit. My thing was that if Nebraska wants to have tourism as one of their main industries, we need signage. We need to be able to have signs on the highways. I fought that for 23 years, they did not. And, and that signage really doesn't have to cost the government that much money. Everybody has to buy their own sign. It's just we need the right to put it on the roads so that people can find us. We had a sign out by, just out here by the Niobrara State Park across the road there, and it said Kreycik Riverview Ranch. And people would say, well, there's a ranch there. What does that mean? You know? And, and I said, can I put "tours" at the bottom of it? And they said, no, they'll take it down if you do that. And so I, we did not get any signs. And people say, well, we'd come if we knew that it was there, you know? So that's a big major thing for people. And I think we-- I've gone to tourism meetings and that's a big deal for a lot of people that are in tours. We got probably around 3,000 people every year, and we could have had a lot more if we would have been able to get it out, you know, like that. But we took people out in a covered wagon and took them through

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the elk and the buffalo. And I still get calls for tours, but we're not doing them any more. But that's one big thing that I am interested in getting. You know, I guess I just want to help everybody else. The other one is that they mentioned trails. I think there needs to be a trail between Niobrara and Verdigre. That is the prettiest road that there is to drive on in the fall and in the spring and any time of the year. You know, it's just beautiful. And people like to just drive it and see the different colors and stuff. But so I'm real simple, that's all I need to say. Does anybody have any questions?

HILGERS: Thank you for your testimony, Ms. Kreycik. Is that--

CHRIS KREYCIK: Yes.

HILGERS: I would have one question. So Senator Flood at our last hearing in Ogallala really focused a number of his questions on placemaking, this idea of signage, which I think is such a great point. To roll out the welcome mat for a community. If we were to think about signage, placemaking, really making the welcome mat beautiful for this area, where would you be-- where would you visualize the beginning of that conversation? On what-- on a particular highway, at a particular egress point?

CHRIS KREYCIK: Well, we could get them blue signs or whatever they call them, but them things cost quite a bit of money. And we were a small business, you know, and I, I couldn't afford to have that, you know, them kind of signs. And I would think that we would want to have a sign like on 81 and then down on Highway 20 and like that. But I mean, that's what I would have did if I was doing tours yet today. But it, they just wouldn't allow us to do it. And every state in the United States has the same law. It was when Lady Bird Johnson was in there for the beautifying the Nebraska, or the states. And if we put up signs, then the state fortifies some of their money for this federal aid for the roads. But South Dakota has signs all over and they say that they get more, the tourism brings in more money than what they don't get off of the, from the federal government. But I don't have those figures or nothing like this. But I'm going like you go across town to South Dakota and there's all kinds of signs, but you don't have any here.

HILGERS: Thank you. Are there other questions? Senator Gragert.

GRAGERT: Yes, thank you, Chairman Hilgers. Thank you for your testimony. I was just wondering, have you worked with the National Park Service as far as signage, do you know anything that--

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CHRIS KREYCIK: Not with the national parks, but I did with the roads department, and they don't like me very well. So, I've been, I always tell them that when we go to the national-- or to the state tourism conventions. And they told me if I mentioned it again, they was going to ask me to leave. And I said, well, then you'll have to ask me to leave because I want a sign. [LAUGHTER] But I still didn't get one, you know.

GRAGERT: And it might be an avenue we can investigate on.

CHRIS KREYCIK: OK. I mean, it's not going to help me any.

GRAGERT: Right.

CHRIS KREYCIK: But maybe it will help some other people along the line, you know? But and, and I really would like to get a, a trail, you know. But I don't know where you would do it or anything like this, but that would be wonderful if a person could do that. And but a lot of people like to bike anymore, you know, like with bicycles and, and like this. And so I think that it would be something that would benefit the area, you know?

GRAGERT: Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Gragert. Are there other questions? Seeing none, Ms. Kreycik. Thank you very much for your testimony.

CHRIS KREYCIK: Thank you.

HILGERS: Next testifier. Welcome.

JOYCE STEVENS: Hello. Thank you. My name is Joyce Stevens, J-o-y-c-e S-t-e-v-e-n-s. Mr. Speaker and members of this committee, thanks for coming to Knox County and listening to us all. As I'm sitting here, my mind is going because a lot of different people have already mentioned what I was crossing off of my notes here. But I'll quickly go through what, I'll tell you about ourselves. My husband Doyle and I were born and raised in Nebraska, not too far from here. We lived along Highway 81 for 44 years, but currently, about 15 years ago, we bought a cabin along the Nebraska side of the lake. And we have just moved there as permanent residents now, because we love it so much. We're pretty involved with the community, there's a Crofton community club. And we have three children who went off to college, came back. We have 10 grandchildren all in the Crofton area and go to Crofton to high school, or grade school and high school. So we're pretty-- this is important to us. We love this area. We're never any plans to be

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snowbirds or anything. We just want to stay here. So that's my commitment to the area. And now to go on to elaborate what Kay Orr had talked about on 81 and our experience of living along that busy highway and how much, how busier it got in the years of living there. We've witnessed many tragic and fatal accidents right on our stretch of road, which is, we're south of Yankton a few miles. We've had several very near horrible bus, school bus accidents. One was our son, nearly within seconds of getting hit by a semi. It's just really dangerous. So at that point, I'll just move on and say I do support that expressway system along there to help with the safety. Another dangerous stretch of road is that 54 C that comes from 121 to the Weigand to the state recreation area. It's county-maintained, as Michael talked about also. And it's wavy, bumpy, curvy. We have been told by many people that they do not want to bring their boats and campers on that road to our side of the lake because of that road. And if it was a nice state wide road with shoulders, that would make all the difference in the world to keeping tourism in Nebraska. Living along 81, we watched the campers and the boats go by us to South Dakota all the time, every day. It wasn't just the weekends, it was constant. They went to South Dakota for two reasons. First, the road, then South Dakota state parks has a lot more development and possibilities. They have the biking trails and all the restaurants and all the-- the marina is larger. So that would come to my second point of our wish to expand the state parks on this side of the lake. The Weigand state recreation area, as everyone here has talked about, who is talking about that area, really needs to be expanded. We also were on the boat slip list for many years and just finally took ourselves off, we got tired of waiting for that. And we need the camp, camping pads, the electricity, the biking trail, all that to compete with South Dakota. And yes, we do have a Corps of Engineers land on this side of the lake, but I believe there is enough area in that area to expand that and several other areas as Kay Orr had mentioned. One of the things that we've done in Crofton and that shows the commitment of the community and the young people, our kids, like Brock Nelson mentioned with coming back to the area and they're really committed, were involved and helped with a-- we called it the dam race because Crofton is the best little town by a dam sight, you know? Gavins Point Dam. Anyway, this, it's the dam race has been going on now for three years. And it's a fundraiser in hopes of putting a biking and hiking trail starting at the state park, but then continuing into Crofton, to keep people in Nebraska and to just encourage that instead of going to Yankton when they want to go out to eat, et cetera, et cetera. So it's been very successful. It takes over 70-plus volunteers and we work with the state park in doing that [INAUDIBLE]. And it's been more than

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just the money that is a little bit that we bring in. It's just very fun. We've had people from all over the country coming to participate this year. That's in July. Another thing that I wanted to mention then also was, as Michael Guenther mentioned, the fire. Our son in law is on that volunteer fire department and also talked about having that satellite building here by the lake in place. And then it was put to a halt because of the water usage and the, just that the Cedar/Knox Public Power was not able to promise enough, just enough for them. And there's water, but just getting it cleaned fast enough to get it through to what they needed. And along with that, I've been told that by some of the firemen that it's really not a matter of if we'd have a large fire out here like they have in California or Colorado, it's when. So that living down by the lake now with all of the cedar trees, which are actually fire bombs, that it is a concern of ours not to have a good fire and good water, use of water potential to have that there. So with that, I think that that touches on the top points that someone else may not have mentioned, and that's what's important to us in that area. And if there's any questions, I'd--

HILGERS: Thank you, Ms. Stevens, for your testimony. Are there questions? Senator Flood.

FLOOD: Thank you for your testimony, Ms. Stevens. There is, I think in the Crofton areas, or in Lewis and Clark Lake there's Murdo's, CJ's. What kind of business? I mean, it's not-- are they, they're fairly busy, aren't they?

JOYCE STEVENS: Yes.

FLOOD: Are they busy in the winter and as well?

JOYCE STEVENS: Yes, I believe so. And with more and more people moving there permanently, there really is. And with the new, several new campgrounds that have gone in across from the state park, you know, when all, more potential of more people. There is a need for more restaurants. Just I, I would say that a big event center of some type or just ice cream shop, just a mall with different types of things, giving variety with, you know, a Mexican restaurant or just a burger joint and all that, there's definitely places for that. There's a lot of privately owned land along there with pastures and things that I think could be worked out.

FLOOD: Last question. And we had talked a lot about our income taxes compared to South Dakota. How do our sales taxes compare to their

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sales taxes and our taxes on beer, cigarettes, other things? How do we compare to South Dakota? I don't know a lot but--

JOYCE STEVENS: When you talk about cigarette tax, I know that Yankton, we get a lot of people coming over and buying that in, in Crofton at that place. Or in Shop E-Z, which is just in South Yankton in Nebraska. That brings people over. But as far as the other, I, I can't speak to that.

FLOOD: Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Flood. Senator Gragert.

GRAGERT: Thank you, Chairman. I'm very familiar over the years with Crofton, the, the eating facility Bogner's, and now Argo. What do you, what would you say, you know, something like this, even pulling them to Crofton and from the lake, very possible?

JOYCE STEVENS: Yes. The Argo currently does not serve meals. They did. And we are part own-- part owners in what we call the Crofton haymarket. We bought an old building in Crofton, and that's an event center, and serve some meals there with pizza parties and things like that. It's, it's in the makings yet. COVID shut us down, of course, last year. But there is a need for that all along there. We have Wiebelhaus', but I think out here-- of course we want people to come to Crofton, that's constant. When I talk to people that we live neighbor to down here now and they are, many of them run to Yankton for groceries, et cetera. And I say, you know, Crofton is closer. It really is. Not that we dislike Yankton, of course, but.

GRAGERT: Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Sergeant Gragert. Senator McDonnell.

McDONNELL: Thank you for being here. Your home on the lake, do you own or lease the property?

JOYCE STEVENS: We own.

McDONNELL: You own?

JOYCE STEVENS: Yes.

McDONNELL: And then you mentioned you were on the list waiting for a slip. You do not have the ability to put your own, your own dock in?

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JOYCE STEVENS: No, we live in Walker Valley, which is the, we have a private dock and it's, that's there for us, yes. But we many times take our boat over to Weigand when we did dock our boat, because it's a little bigger and it's easier to dock there. But it has gotten more and more difficult with the crowds.

McDONNELL: Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator McDonnell. Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Yes, thank you, Chairman Hilgers. Thank you, Mr. Stevens, for coming today. So I guess the question is why-- and you may not be able to answer this, but somebody behind you may. I'll throw it out to them as well. Why is the South Dakota side more developed? Is it because there's more population? Is it because the state invested money? Or is it because they have more laws or less laws? You know, do you have any idea why, why the disparity just across the river?

JOYCE STEVENS: My guess would be just that they poured a lot more money into their state park. Their state park goes for miles along the South Dakota border from-- and then, of course, you have Yankton and that road going down the bluff clear down along to the Gavins Point Dam is full of businesses. Just full on both sides of every type of thing you can imagine, and that's private businesses. But they are there because of the Gavins Point Dam and the state park. And right in the state park marina they have a restaurant and just, it just goes on from there. Just I wouldn't even guess how many miles is State Park. And I'm sure they just poured a lot more money into that.

HUGHES: OK, thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Hughes. Senator Wishart.

WISHART: You mentioned that your children came back, and did all of them go away to college?

JOYCE STEVENS: Yes.

WISHART: Outside of the state or--

JOYCE STEVENS: Omaha and Buena Vista in Iowa

WISHART: OK.

JOYCE STEVENS: And Norfolk.

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WISHART: OK, what brought them back and has kept them in the state?

JOYCE STEVENS: Well, jobs. My daughter, our daughter married an engineer who worked in Omaha and he bought a business in Yankton. But they live on a farm, a family farm. They bought the family farm by Crofton. My other daughter, her-- she's a marketing person and she married a guy who started his own agronomy business. And that's, of course, with agriculture. And so he works in northeast Nebraska with the agronomy farmers. And our son is buying our, our construction business and bought our house up on 81. So I get to worry about our grandkids out on the highway at the busing but-- so that's where he is too.

WISHART: So there's good opportunities to be an entrepreneur here?

JOYCE STEVENS: I believe so, yes.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Wishart. Seeing no other questions, thank you very much, Ms. Stevens for your testimony.

JOYCE STEVENS: Thank you for being here and thanks for having us.

HILGERS: Yeah, thank you so much. Next testifier. And for those of you who aren't aware, there is a bathroom here down on this side, if you'd like to use that. Welcome.

TRAVIS BARNEY: Welcome, guys. My name is Travis Barney. I'm also on the--

HILGERS: Can you spell your name, please?

TRAVIS BARNEY: Oh, T-r-a-v-i-s B-a-r-n-e-y. I almost forgot how to spell it. I'm that nervous, guys. No, I'm up at the Lewis and Clark Lake too. I am one of, you've heard about camper spots getting put up at the lake. I am the one that's developing 128 camper spots right now, my wife and I and another partner, Jason Hefner. We are, I would guess, 75 percent down with that. They will be permanent spots. We probably have them-- as we're going along we're selling lots. They'll all be leased out. But everybody asks the same thing about boats lets, you know, do you have some available? Are you on the water and can we get them? So on and so forth. We can't get on the list at all. We tried last year. And at either place, South Dakota or in Nebraska, they won't even take our name. So which is totally fine, there's lots of need. The other thing that we hear a lot about is accommodations for people that are maybe coming to visit, whether it be they're coming to visit people on campers or people at their permanent or

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their personal residence. Where can we stay? You know, the closest is Crofton, which has a, a very nice motel-type situation. And then Yankton of course. Somebody asked, how do we keep them here? How do we keep them on the Nebraska side? Well, accommodations is the key in my mind. We have to have somewhere for these people to stay when they come up to visit, whether it be, I mean, and I shouldn't say we don't have any, because we do. There's some small cabins and some things of that nature there. I think it is an untapped potential as far as to do an event center/motel or hotel, something like that in that area. The corps does own a lot of the personal ground that adjoins the, the lake. I think there would be tons of people that on the personal side that would, would like to do some business, maybe right on the water. Whether it be boat ramps, whether it be whatever it may be, if there was some of those regulations maybe pulled off where you could buy some of that ground, rent some of that ground, whatever it may be. We also put an 11-- we're selling 11 lots in a little subdivision, three to six-acre homes. We had we, of course, went through all the zoning regs with Knox County. They were wonderful to work with. Some of the things that we struggled with was township, trying to get the township guys to, to take care of the roads that were just leading to the subdivision. These are just my personal deals that-- so we made a deal where, where I'm taking care of the roads forever, so on and so forth. Which is fine. It's just part of the association. But I think if you're going to open things up, we have to think about, you know, the total package of how can we open it up as a whole, you know, to make more, to make, I guess, things a little easier to get something in there. So I guess that's kind of where I'm at.

HILGERS: Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions? Senator Flood.

FLOOD: So if there were ten million bucks, I'm just using that number roundly, and we put it all in boat slips.

TRAVIS BARNEY: Uh-huh.

FLOOD: And we expand the marina, we made areas available for private vendors to come in and have restaurants so that people would come to our side of the river and spend their money, what kind of private investment would that ignite or would it fill up like that?

TRAVIS BARNEY: Oh, it would fill up quick. Yeah. The private, I mean, if there was a way to actually have more private type individuals coming in for businesses they would fill up quickly, especially if the, especially if we had a better marina and some of those things and

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we had the corps, some of the corps' ground to, to, use to our advantage.

FLOOD: So when you talk about a marina, you're talking about Weigand. How, I don't know how many slips are in there, but how much bigger can you make that. Because as I remember, it's kind of in a cove.

TRAVIS BARNEY: Yeah, well, I believe there are several other coves along there. I understand. I'm sure somebody will testify that's smarter than I am about this, but it looks to me like--

FLOOD: You have to buy a state park sticker to get in there.

TRAVIS BARNEY: Right, yeah, and I don't think anybody has a problem with any of those things. In my, I mean, I don't. I think you could be much, much bigger. I mean, I don't think 200 slips is enough, to be quite honest.

FLOOD: How many do you think is enough?

TRAVIS BARNEY: Five hundred for now. I mean, that's just, I mean, as we go along things get busier and busier and busier. If somebody said we were going to have over 200 permanent camp spots right there on Lewis and Clark five years ago, they would have said, you're crazy. And now there's somebody that has between me and another guy, there's probably that many there.

FLOOD: How many spots are there? Say, I have a spot in South Dakota, but I want to spend the day on the Nebraska side. Where can I park my boat?

TRAVIS BARNEY: There is no real area. Now, I know that you can probably rent a spot, I believe, from Lewis and-- at Lewis and Clark. And it's like a day rental-type thing. I don't think there's a ton of those, or a weekend rental type deal. Now you can park, you know, you can get towards the water, into the water because there's ramps, there's three or four ramps along there that-- and Weigand's ramps are very, very nice. Maybe not enough of them, but still very nice.

FLOOD: Say I was in Nebraska and I wanted to go to South Dakota for the day and spend the day in Yankton. How much trouble would I have going over there for a day just with my boat and parking it, docking it?

TRAVIS BARNEY: I'm assuming there's day rentals. I'm not positive about that. And I don't want to--

FLOOD: No, no, it's fine.

TRAVIS BARNEY: I have a couple of friends that, that do the weekend rental or the daily rental. That's the only reason I know about Nebraska's.

FLOOD: Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Flood. Senator Wishart.

WISHART: Is there-- following up on that, could you take a boat from the Nebraska side over to South Dakota, park and have access to a restaurant?

TRAVIS BARNEY: I believe so. There used to be a restaurant there. I haven't been there yet this year--

WISHART: OK.

TRAVIS BARNEY: --but there was one--

WISHART: OK.

TRAVIS BARNEY: --at one time. And you could pull right up to the restaurant with your boat. We've done it several times. It's very nice.

WISHART: There's nothing like that on the Nebraska side?

TRAVIS BARNEY: Not that I know of.

WISHART: OK.

TRAVIS BARNEY: Would definitely be real nice.

WISHART: [INAUDIBLE]

FLOOD: Let the record reflect you just give [INAUDIBLE].

TRAVIS BARNEY: And I said real nice.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Wishart and Senator Flood. Are there other questions? So you are investing private capital into the area. What are some of the obstacles that you see that would, that they could be, potentially could be removed to draw in additional private investment?

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TRAVIS BARNEY: It's a great question. I mean, honestly, the, the road is horrible. There is no doubt about it, going into, which, you know, you've heard several times that would be a huge one to get fixed. We have to figure out a way to, and there's lots of personal ground there that you could purchase, maybe purchase, I don't know. But if you could figure out a way to lease some of that corps ground that, that was along there, that would, I mean, I think people could really do something with it. Obviously, the campgrounds are not full. I mean, they could be full, but they need to have more electrical hookups and on the state, in the state park side of things.

HILGERS: Does South Dakota had the same problem as it sounds like Nebraska does in terms of the amount of land that's owned by the corps? And if so, how do they--

TRAVIS BARNEY: I think so. Just South Dakota has just so many more camp spots. They have just developed that whole lake area so much, so much more than what Nebraska has. And it's nothing against the local guys or anything like that, I just don't think they have the funds to do it.

HILGERS: Is that private capital, do you know, on the South Dakota side?

TRAVIS BARNEY: I, it's, it's all state, I believe.

HILGERS: OK, thank you very much. Are there additional questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

TRAVIS BARNEY: Thanks, guys. Appreciate it.

HILGERS: Thank you. Next testifier.

JODY STARK: My name is Jody Stark, J-o-d-y S-t-a-r-k, I represent the village of Niobrara, currently the board chairman. I guess more comments more than just a testimony, but I, I'm in support of just about pretty much anything people said here today. I guess whatever we can do to better utilize the dollars and get the most bang for our buck to bring more people here, I'm very supportive of. But I guess speaking on behalf of Niobrara, I guess probably our biggest thing is I like the Lied Lodge concept, bring more people to the area. Water access is really, really huge for us, not only for the recreation for the summer, but I know somebody previously mentioned like hunting opportunities, waterfowl. This is probably some of the best waterfowl hunting in the nation here. And we've had little, little access since the flooding the last few years. And I think that's probably hurt not

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only the area, probably the community. Businesses in general depend a lot on access to the water, and those people that come in for the water, waterfowl hunting. Another comment that I would like to make on behalf of the village is probably one of our biggest things is the housing infrastructure. We're, we're very short and we just can't expand. You know? We could support people, but we just don't have no place for them to go. You know, the water system, we after the flood of 2015, we had, you know, that was all devastated and we had to rebuild that. We continue our lagoon system, it's actually down here along the river below Niobrara. And we're still continuing today trying to get that. We had a bunch of destruction there as well in the flood. So that's probably some of our biggest challenges right now. Opportunities, you know, we'd love to have the people there, but we've got to have the infrastructure and the housing for them so.

HILGERS: Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Stark. Are there questions? Senator Gragert.

GRAGERT: Thank you, Chairman Hilgers. Just a quick question on housing. How many of, how many of the residents are seasonal residents there, not full-time?

JODY STARK: Oh, I think the village clerk, Mona, could probably answer it better. What we got, 40, maybe?

MONA WEATHERWAX: At least.

JODY STARK: Probably at least 40 that are seasonal.

GRAGERT: Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Gragert. Senator Flood.

FLOOD: Kind of a hard question, one, and then follow up. If you polled a majority of your citizens that you represent in, in Niobrara, what would their opinion be of what they feel like is a partnership with the state? Meaning, would they have a lot of confidence in Nebraska spending money to support Knox County?

JODY STARK: I believe the majority of residents are going to support, yeah, the state spending money.

FLOOD: They will support it, but would you say that if, if we actually follow through and invest here, they're not used to that. Would, you would you say that's accurate, that people up here in Knox County aren't used to the state--

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JODY STARK: Yeah, I think we probably feel like we probably get left behind.

FLOOD: So what do we unlock with an investment in Knox County? By that, I mean, if we, if the state actually does come here and does spend a significant amount of money to make a long-term commitment, what does that do to the people here in terms of what they're going to do? And I, the reason I ask this is in Ogallala the question was we could spend a lot of money around Lake McConaughy, but we have to have the support of the people there to, to help leverage the investment. Do you think we unlock people and their treasure and their time, they say, hey, we've got something here, we're going to double down, we're going to work on workforce housing, all these other things?

JODY STARK: I feel like, yeah, I feel like the community, you know, if we got what it, if it's brought here, I think, yeah, there's people that's going to invest time, money, whatever, businesses, you know, do what we've got to do. You know, speaking for the town, we'd be willing to invest what we need to, too, to do what's right to bring the people and have things done properly as well so.

FLOOD: Do you think if there were more houses in Niobrara that you would get these people that just love to hunt and fish that would say, hey, there's affordable housing in Niobrara, I'm just going to choose to live there and take advantage of the area?

JODY STARK: I think, yeah, I think there's a lot of avenues with it, with we're a little bit locked, too. We don't have a lot of ways to go. I mean, the town, when they built the town this last move back in the 70s, it's pretty limited for expansion. I mean, there are some, there are some areas we could build maybe more towards the north. But yeah, I think, you know, whether it's hunting or, you know, people that want to relocate here and work mobile, I mean, I think that it's getting to be a big thing like other people have said. So, yeah, I think the possibilities are endless if we had the housing.

FLOOD: Where do you go for health services? Do you go into South Dakota or do you go to--

JODY STARK: Majority of people are going to go, you got a 40, 45-minute drive to Yankton or Creighton, which is about a half-hour.

FLOOD: Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Flood. Mr. Stark, I have a question. So one of the themes I think from today is the opportunity or the maybe

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the existence of world-class hunting opportunities here. What would you say if there are impediments? What would you say would those impediments be to growing that as an industry? Is it lack of housing for travelers? Is a lack of awareness around the country or the world? What are the, what are the things that might be stopping or prohibiting growth in that, in that space?

JODY STARK: I think, I guess my opinion at this point is we just don't have-- I think most people are aware of the birds and the waterfall and the habitat in this area. We just don't have, we just don't have the places to support them and get them on the water.

HILGERS: Where, where do people stay when they come and [INAUDIBLE]?

JODY STARK: There's local motels and rentals that people stay in town. We've got, you know, some bed and breakfasts and stuff like that.

HILGERS: Any, any specific hunting lodge-type facility?

JODY STARK: Yeah, there's Whitetail Lodge. They have a hunting lodge that they take into some hunters in the fall time, yeah.

HILGERS: OK.

JODY STARK: Yeah, we're also limited on that as well.

HILGERS: Thank you. Any other question?

JODY STARK: All right, [INAUDIBLE].

HILGERS: Thank you, Mr. Stark. I appreciate your testimony. Next testifier. How many, how many people do we have left to, intending to testify? OK. Welcome.

SCOTT FIEDLER: Thank you. Thank you very much for everybody coming up here today and spending time with us. My name is Scott Fiedler, S-c-o-t-t F-i-e-d-l-e-r, I am with Cedar/Knox Rural Water. I am the project manager there and just kind of want to-- and you've heard a lot of it already, how the water infrastructure is kind of holding back some of the development up in along the lake area here. When we first started out in 1981, they went into it knowing they weren't going to build for fire suppression or anything like that. So therefore, a lot of our water mains are not adequate, just like Mr. Guenther said with Crofton Fire Department. And there's other areas, too, like the South Yankton area is a huge untapped potential there. But there again, water mains are too small. We are already maxed out

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there. Along the lake, I think it was 10 years ago, we added in the six-inch water main that looped around to accommodate the growth that has developed there, but even that is nearing its limits also. So with that being said, we are working, and I could go on and on for hours with the sedimentation in the lake, and that's where we draw our source water from. With the sedimentation and things like that, we are looking to move our source, expand our capacity. But all it takes a lot of money. And with that comes distribution line, sizing up on some of that, too, so we can accommodate our growth. So we've come a long ways over the last 40 years since we started. We're kind of a large main-- or large small system, you might say. We get no money from taxes. We're a self-supporting system. We start in the Devil's Nest and we go all the way down to Obert, kind of following along the river and lake. So if we can get a new source and get some infrastructure built, we could really, really help promote this area and get some infrastructure built. So is there any question?

HILGERS: Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions? Senator Hughes.

HUGHES: Mr. Fiedler, is that correct?

SCOTT FIEDLER: Yes.

HUGHES: So I missed what you do. I mean, I, I-- you're supplying water, but is it a, like a rural water district?

SCOTT FIEDLER: Yeah, rural water.

HUGHES: OK, so are you affiliated with the NRD at all?

SCOTT FIEDLER: Yep. We're under the Lewis and Clark NRD.

HUGHES: OK, and but you are taking water out of the lake and treating it, is that correct?

SCOTT FIEDLER: Yep. Yep. Right up in the Devil's Nest area. When they developed that and they went bankrupt way back in the 70s, the NRD bought that treatment plant that they had built and then they renovated it and then we serve water from there.

HUGHES: So how many households or what, what's your metric that you serve?

SCOTT FIEDLER: We have 910 rural customers. We serve the city of Crofton, Fordyce, St. Helena and Obert. We've got now with Mr.

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Barney's campsite going in, that will be the third campsite, not counting Weigand, that would make four, the Devil's Nest SID and the Kohles Acres SID.

HUGHES: So the source of the water or just the physical plant and size of piping is kind of the limiting factor of allowing additional development on this side? Is that an accurate statement?

SCOTT FIEDLER: Yep. All of them in conjunction. Yes.

HUGHES: OK, very good. Thank you.

SCOTT FIEDLER: Yep.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Hughes. Senator Gragert.

GRAGERT: Thank you. Just a real quick question. You drawing the water out of the way, there's been sedimentation. Are you, you got future plans for possibly digging wells?

SCOTT FIEDLER: Yep. We're working with engineers right now. We've got a couple of little sites in mind. We've done some test holes. We're in works putting in a small test well, so we can get a good gauge on water quality and then our engineers will review that. And our board is-- and then we'll try to make a decision on how we're going to move forward here in the next couple of months.

GRAGERT: One final quick. So quantity of water, is that an issue right now, then? If that fire, the satellite fire station, if we can get the piping over there, do you have the quality quantity of water to serve something like that?

SCOTT FIEDLER: If we could get the pipe there, we can get. You know, it would be somewhat taxing on our system the way it is now, but in the short term, we could get it done.

GRAGERT: Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Gragert. I have one question, and I see your Lake Okoboji hat. I think that's what that says. So one other thing that's been on the mind of the committee is, at least in some of the conversations we think about all the Nebraska dollars, tourism dollars that are crossing the border to our east and going somewhere like Lake Okoboji. Do you see people in this area choose to go out of state to somewhere like Iowa, the lakes outside of the state, instead

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of spending their dollars here? And if you see that, are their reasons why?

SCOTT FIEDLER: No, I would venture to say quite the opposite. I live in Hideaway Acres, it is the, when you go north of Crofton, you hit the C 54 everybody is talking about. It's that first housing development on the north side there. And I would say probably close to half of the homeowners are from Iowa in that neighborhood.

HILGERS: OK.

SCOTT FIEDLER: And since we're talking about boat slips and stuff, we're kind of unique where we have two small marinas within the Hideaway area. And I know when they built the second one, it was just an all-out dogfight with the Corps of Engineers to try to get that done. And I, too, was on my, on the waiting list, and I was fortunate enough to get one of them in Hideaway bought. And it was like two weeks later they call me and my name was drawn, so I had to turn them down.

HILGERS: Thank you. Are there other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

SCOTT FIEDLER: Thank you.

HILGERS: Next testifier. Welcome.

ANNETTE SUDBECK: I'm Annette Sudbeck, general manager of the Lewis and Clark NRD.

HILGERS: Can you spell your name, please?

ANNETTE SUDBECK: Oh, yeah. My name is Annette Sudbeck, A-n-n-e-t-t-e, Sudbeck is S-u-d-b-e-c-k, and I'm general manager of the Lewis and Clark NRD out of Hartington which oversees the Cedar/Knox Rural Water Project. If I'd known we needed to come testify to get it to rain, we would have done-- asked you to come a lot sooner.

HILGERS: This is the second-- we went to McConaughy, they had the biggest storm in six or eight months, think. So we're two for two.

CLEMENTS: [INAUDIBLE] last week--

ANNETTE SUDBECK: Wow.

CLEMENTS: --because of us.

ANNETTE SUDBECK: Well, hopefully you bring us some good rain.

HILGERS: Sorry. Sorry to interrupt.

ANNETTE SUDBECK: No problem. No problem. So I reinforce what Scott has said. We are looking to re-- to establish a well field to be able to meet need in the area, but part of that is understanding demand. So when, with our engineering that we're doing right now, we're basing that demand on our past, which has grown and shrunk, grown and shrunk, but tends to be pretty flat over time. So to know what type of development we should be planning for is pretty important with developing a well field and increasing our line sizes as needed. So it would be nice to be-- work with you as things go forward, or with this project, as things go forward. In addition to that, most of the items I have on my list were said multiple times, and I know I don't need to be restated, but when it comes to promoting and enhancing natural resources, I really think that we could advertise that more as well. Just in addition to the water, there's a lot of hiking grassland opportunities, describing what hiking means in the area, whether they're challenging trails, easy trails, family-friendly activities as well when it comes to our natural resources are important. The other thing that came to mind when listening to people is getting the community buy-in for the long term. We do have that flat type of growth over time, it's not very steep growth. So with the community needs to be willing and ready to make the changes that are needed for anything that comes in. Infrastructure and that emergency management response is really important, whether it's ambulance or fire. In particular, we talked a lot about that already, but for instance, Devil's Nest and some of the other SIDs along the lake are one in, one way and one way out. So if you can get in, you can't necessarily get out if you have a fire truck set up, fighting fire off the road, or even if the fire trucks need to turn around and get out. So there's some concerns there. But also brings up we've talked about the road as far as to Miller Creek, but after Miller Creek that's where it becomes privately owned by the Devil's Nest SID and, I believe, some other entities own pieces of the road in there, too. For the Cedar/Knox Rural Water Project, that road's important. We have our lines on one or both sides of that road in areas, and it's in really poor condition. If there were fires to fight in that area or ambulance getting in now, probably not as bad, but it's challenging. I don't know what the long term of that road will be if there is someone else that comes in and takes that over. It would also be a good opportunity to tie that lake road around back to Highway 12 so that you have a full circle route. Right now you kind of, well, you have to get on gravel to go out back to Highway 12. And then one last point. No, I

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guess I got two, sorry. Continued support for operation after anything's done, whether that be staff, resources to keep things moving along, they do a great job currently with what we have. But I know it's hard for the staff to keep up, whether it's Game and Parks or others, with what we have. So keeping that in mind. And then also we're focused on Knox County, but we have mentioned it's the Missouri Recreational River and there's need for development downstream of the dam as far as fishing opportunities, boating opportunities, boat docks between the dam and Ponca, or at least to the Yankton area and a little further south to St. Helena. There's quite a bit of use on the river between that area too, so it would be nice to see increased development in that area as well. And that is everything I have, so thank you for your time today.

HILGERS: Thank you for your testimony. Are there questions? Seeing none, thank you so much for coming down.

ANNETTE SUDBECK: Thank you.

HILGERS: Next testifier. Ms. Peetz, welcome.

NATALIE PEETZ: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, members of the committee, for the record, my name is Natalie Peetz, Natalie P as in paper -e-e-t-z. I'm here today as a registered lobbyist for the Friends of Knox County. We are doing this in a voluntary capacity. I am born and raised in Knox County. I'm excited about the discussions that are happening today. We formed this coalition a couple of years ago, as Mr. Nelson mentioned to you, to work on another issue. And at that time I said we'll work on it for free. But here's the deal, you're going to be chair of this coalition because we have big things we need to accomplish for Knox County. A couple of quick points, in the interest of time, I've given you copies of my testimony. You might think it's odd I'm handing out a magazine on Yankton, South Dakota. And it's timely because there's been a lot of questions about Yankton today. What I want to share with you is not only do the parks say there's a million visitors to their second most attended park on the South Dakota side, the tourism bureau in South Dakota says two million visitors, and they've printed it in this book. To me, that is key to this entire discussion today. By virtue of South Dakota, Iowa and Nebraska, we have a built-in base of people that are already coming here every single year. A lot of the businesses that are listed in this book are Nebraskan-owned, and they're Nebraskans that live on the Nebraska side of the lake. So the economic impact of Yankton, South Dakota, on Knox County is huge and the potential is so great to do more. The other thing I wanted to mention, by the way, it would not be

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a trip to Knox County until you experience one of our beautiful thunderstorms. You can only imagine what it's like when you're on the lake in a boat and a storm blows up like this, and you will see the size of the lake tomorrow. For those of us that have been around a while, we watch our phones and we can get off. And I hate to say this, I'm one of the few privileged people that actually have a slip to get into, but a lot of people don't. And so I think the safety issue is a huge factor that has to be discussed. In terms of waiting for slips, the waiting list on the South Dakota side is 400. They have 400 slips there now, they're expanding another 60, but there's still over 400 on the waiting list. And they quit taking names. The fees over there range from \$1,500 to \$4,000 a slip depending on the size of the boat. So Senator Flood and Senator Gragert, thank you for bringing attention to this. What I would tell you in terms of big ideas is 500 new boat slips in a marina on the Nebraska side at \$1,500 a slip or \$2,000 a slip is a million dollars a year for the park. And when you park your boat there, you don't really require a lot. You just want to have it on the water. So that's the kind of math I wanted to bring to you today that I think is really important to this discussion. I think the last thing I will close with, in light of this storm, COVID has presented an incredible opportunity. And my husband, Jack, and I can speak to experience. We are seeing an increase in the development we were fortunate to work on. And people that literally are changing how they think about where they want to be and where they want their families to be. If I could wave a magic wand, I would take that two million people that South Dakota has on their list and I would put money in a marketing campaign and ask them to choose Nebraska. And I would ask them to think about moving their families here because it's safer. It's a great quality of life. And I think we have an incredible opportunity before us that we just aren't taking advantage of. Our lots sold in two years. The property tax base along the Nebraska side is about \$1.2 million a year. That's going to skyrocket because there's a lot more people willing to invest. But we need the roads, we need to access to boat slips on the lake. Finally, and then I'll get off the stage, I think we do need to market the whole county. It can't just be about Lewis and Clark. It can't just be about Niobrara. And what I can tell you being from this area is there's nobody that will roll up their sleeves and work harder than the people in this area. And so we're all in, and we will have 500 members by the end of the year. And our goal is a thousand of our coalition. So with that, thanks so much for your time. I'm happy to try to answer any questions.

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HILGERS: Thank you, Ms. Peetz, for your testimony. Are there questions? Senator Flood.

FLOOD: Thank you, Speaker Hilgers. So on the South Dakota side, it's my understanding the state of South Dakota owns a lot of the real estate along the bank. Where on the Nebraska side, the U.S. Corps of Engineers on the ground on the Nebraska side and it's operated by Lewis and Clark Lake. Is that accurate?

NATALIE PEETZ: It's operated by Game and Parks.

FLOOD: Game and Parks, sorry.

NATALIE PEETZ: And I, I would defer to the folks behind me who are the experts, but that is a huge difference. South Dakota has a lot more flexibility in how they develop that side of the lake. It's night and day. But it's also, again, we get a lot of advantage out of that. We are reaping the benefits.

FLOOD: And what benefits do we get out of that arrangement on the Nebraska side?

NATALIE PEETZ: On the Nebraska side, we have--

FLOOD: We're getting-- you're saying we're getting a benefit out of how South Dakota manages their side.

NATALIE PEETZ: Yes. If we didn't have the amenities that Yankton, South Dakota, offers, when we recruited people from Omaha, Lincoln, Texas, Nashville, the first thing they ask you is do we have access to a boat slip? They got over that. And the second one is they love the brewpubs, they love the restaurants. They love-- the largest camper sales is owned by a Nebraskan and it's on the South Dakota side, the largest Yamaha dealer owned by a Nebraskan, it's on the South Dakota side. We're all in this together. It's a great opportunity.

FLOOD: What would be the big win if we made a significant investment in Lewis and Clark Lake? What would be the big win from your perspective, 10 years from now?

NATALIE PEETZ: So great question. I appreciate it. You know, I'd echo what a gentleman said earlier, a huge marina expansion with at least-- we can't talk 200 slips. Let's look at the revenue. Let's talk 500. Let's see what the opportunities are. Let's allow private investment to invest in, in boat slips. I think, I think it's there. Unfortunately, I hate that the infrastructure needs are on the big

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idea list, because those aren't big ideas. But those are critical to making anything else happen. There are a lot more people that are willing to move up here full-time, but they look at the roads and it's a real problem.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Flood. Ms. Peetz, I have a question. If we want to compete and beat South Dakota, is it a matter of just matching them on their amenities or is there something that they don't have that we could, that we could fill a void or a need?

NATALIE PEETZ: See, I, I don't, I don't really, I mean, I love to compete, but I don't like the us versus them because frankly, together we can do big things, especially when people are moving from the coast to get out of the congestion and they want quality of life. And there's room for them here. And both, both states are going to benefit greatly. Unfortunately, South Dakota does a lot better job on the tourism front. But frankly, I think we can compete. Knowing the number of people from Iowa and South Dakota that live on the Nebraska side. And you'll see that development tomorrow, they like the Nebraska side better. They feel like they're closer to the lake. It's a different feel. When you're on the South Dakota side in the developments, there's a two-lane highway in front of you and then you see the beautiful marina with huge sailboats. In Nebraska, were in the trees, where it's a different feel. And we have great hiking trails, we have really some great opportunities thanks to Game and Parks.

HILGERS: Thank you. Other questions? Seeing none, thanks for your testimony.

NATALIE PEETZ: Thanks.

HILGERS: Next testifier.

JIM SWENSON: Chairman Hilgers, members of the committee, good afternoon. My name is Jim Swenson. I have the honor of serving as the parks administrator for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. 2200 North 33rd Street, Lincoln, Nebraska. My name is spelled J-i-m S-w-e-n-s-o-n. First, let me thank you for your initiative to invest in the great recreation opportunities here in north-central Nebraska, a region anchored by our state park destinations: the Niobrara State Park, Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area. Know this, I'm inspired every time I come to this region. The beauty, the wonderful vistas, the large reservoir, I get to enjoy it frequently. But there's a lot of folks that haven't. I challenge our team oftentimes to find your rewards and what it is you do on the landscape. Rewards I've seen here

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today are when you first arrived out on the deck, looking out over the reservoir. And for some of you may be experiencing for the first time what we, what is offered here in this area in state. The other reward is the testimony offered by the public here today to speak loudly about what we can do to improve things up here and the support they have shown towards the Game and Parks Commission. I think that's a testament that there is a partnership opportunity here to really move things forward. Enhancing and expanding family-friendly recreation opportunities in this region, the parks, the trails, the fishing, the hunting, the wildlife viewing, will draw a larger audience and boost economic vitality for the communities and businesses that rely upon the tourism industry. The natural splendor of the area is enough to capture that. Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area is a popular destination for camping, water-based activities. You'll see that tomorrow. In the recent master plan that we crafted in partnership with the Corps of Engineers, we've identified several features that will allow our Nebraska recreation facilities to rival those features offered in South Dakota. We need to draw visitation from there into Nebraska. For example, as mentioned many times today, our Weigand Marina is undersized and cannot fulfill the huge demand for boat slips, an issue that will continue to burden us as more private campground development occurs and we become the bottleneck for access onto the reservoir. Our offering of 10 cabins at Lewis and Clark does not meet the demand, the public desire to have more cabins and they desire more campsites. Presently, our number of electrical sites is far below what we need it to be, and we're investing that direction to improve on that. One of our goals is to develop some shoreline protection in front of our park cabins that will allow for the installation of docks, mooring docks and better fishing access that will allow us to market that facility as a family-friendly fishing and boating resort complex. I think that's a marketable aspect that will bring people to that area. Niobrara State Park, with its rich cultural history, offers some of the best scenic vistas in the state and serves as a base camp for numerous hunters and anglers visiting to take advantage of the great hunting and fishing opportunities offered in this region. Park and region can also benefit from renovations here in this park to the cabins and by the development of a conference facility or a wedding facility tastefully done and designed to match the needs of this area that overlooks the great confluence of Missouri and Niobrara Rivers. What a beautiful sight for a wedding. This area, it would be a home run yet to do something well-crafted here. Full-service campsites are also important because it will bring people from further destinations to come here to stay for the extended stays. That's a critical element necessary here. Beyond the parks,

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enhancement of the critical infrastructure, the roads, the water, the wastewater and investment towards fire, EMT services cannot be overlooked. Those are necessary to facilitate the type of recreation development as well as private development that you've heard here today. A viable workforce is also critical and dependent upon affordable housing. An improved road system that links the two parks with associated bike trails could entice members of the biking community, which is a new audience. I look at cities such as Lanesboro, Minnesota, as a prime example of what can be accomplished with that tasteful design. These are all items that need consideration as development plans are designed. I thank you for your time and I'm hands-- happy to answer the questions that you have and that you've already weighed and I've written down, so.

HILGERS: Thank you for your testimony.

JIM SWENSON: You bet.

HILGERS: Are there questions? Senator McDonnell.

McDONNELL: Thanks for being here, we--

McDONNELL: Happy to be here.

JIM SWENSON: --enjoyed your information you gave us last week. So thank you. So tell me the difference between, you have one person that's living on the lake, they own the land. They have the ability to put a dock with a slip versus another person who owns the land, lives on the lake, they don't have that ability. How is that decision made?

JIM SWENSON: Well, we started a number of years ago when the popularity for the boat slips started to grow and overwhelm us. We created a waiting list, of course. We give first, first opportunity for renewal of slips and then we generate the waiting list. Waiting list is presently around 100. We stopped taking names in 2019 because it was overwhelming. The turnover we've had in recent years has been as few as two, maybe three slips. So as you can see, we cannot keep pace with the demand on that. So it ties itself to the waiting list, and we recognize the need to expand that. And in fact, a question was asked earlier about why we haven't done it yet. A couple of reasons. One, we, we waited until we re-upped our agreement with the Corps of Engineers and identified that as a major element of development that we wanted to achieve in the master plan. Therefore, we can identify it, do the cultural work and everything needs to be done. The other thing has been funding. We, we first identified this need probably

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three to four bienniums ago, but now we've got opportunity made available by this great effort. And we hit the accelerator already. When this conversation first started, the first thing we did was we moved out and hired design work by a private firm to start looking at that landscape and how we can expand that marina operation to give us a couple options, to expand many hundred slips over and above what we offer right now. Right now, we have 122 slips, and we know it needs to be far greater than that. So it's going to be a costly project, \$10 to \$12 million, perhaps, to do what we need to do. And it may involve some realignment of our, our marina facility and the parking that goes with it so we can provide all of the accommodations that are necessary. There's some good ideas offered here today. Pull-up slips for, for a restaurant-type operation, things of that nature. I think those are all things that we need to roll into that design.

McDONNELL: So right now in the marina, you're at 123?

JIM SWENSON: 122.

McDONNELL: One hundred and twenty-two. And the idea of 300, 400, I mean, maybe not just that spot, but that's, that's the marina.

JIM SWENSON: Yeah.

McDONNELL: Now, I want to ask the question about I own the land. Jane Doe owns the land. I have the ability to put my own slip in front of my own property.

JIM SWENSON: If, if the Corps of Engineers is conducive to that, so.

McDONNELL: How is that decision made then with the corps? Is there a checklist of where they're located of course on the lake, possibly? And how many people are we talking about that have that ability? Is there a percent versus the people that don't, that own the property?

JIM SWENSON: I, I can't answer that question. Well, we can try and figure that out and get back to you with that information. But there is a process they go through. They communicate with the corps. We've been down this path a couple of times with individuals that have had interest in developing on the areas. And, you know, the corps has parameters, both cultural, cultural-- culturally driven, as well as the sedimentation issues and such that they look at, property holdings, public access scenarios into some of those private holdings, perhaps, if they, if the corps is going to support it. So those are all elements that need to be discussed with them.

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McDONNELL: All right. Thank you.

HILGERS: I have a few questions. By my-- so I think I heard in your testimony, and thank you for coming down.

JIM SWENSON: Sure.

HILGERS: I appreciate it. You mentioned a master plan. Is there a master plan for Lewis and Clark and another master plan for Niobrara State Park?

JIM SWENSON: We have a master plan for Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area right now in conjunction with the corps. We do not have a master plan developed for Niobrara. It's on our list to do. We do have capital development ideas of what we want to see done here. So it's an extensive list, a lot of it is new construction, inclusive of a wedding-type facility, some education opportunities, and a lot of it is renovation-type work to be done to upgrade campsites and expand campsites.

HILGERS: On the Lewis and Clark, when was that plan complete?

JIM SWENSON: Oh, I think that plan was, I'm going to say three to four years ago it was completed. So it's relatively new.

HILGERS: Is it a ten-year? I think the McConaughy was a 20-year plan, is it 20 years?

JIM SWENSON: It's 10-- 20-- I think it's 25 years, to be honest with you, in the agreement that we have.

HILGERS: And can we get a copy of that?

JIM SWENSON: You sure can.

HILGERS: And then on the Niobrara, I understand there's not a master plan, but you said there's a list of capital investment ideas.

JIM SWENSON: Yeah.

HILGERS: In what form is that list? Is it just sort of brainstorming or do you have that written down somewhere, is that something you can share?

JIM SWENSON: It was brainstorming and we committed it to paper as something we'll share with HDR.

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HILGERS: OK, perfect. You mentioned that you have cabins on Lewis and Clark.

JIM SWENSON: Yes.

HILGERS: How many of those do you have?

JIM SWENSON: 10.

HILGERS: Ten. And then--

JIM SWENSON: Right on the lakefront, beautiful cabins.

HILGERS: Can you do more than 10?

JIM SWENSON: We need to do more. And yes, we want to.

HILGERS: Is that in the master plan?

JIM SWENSON: Yeah.

HILGERS: OK. And then you said you have, how many campsites do you have?

JIM SWENSON: We got roughly 260-270 campsites. Only maybe a hundred of those are basic, the rest are electrified. So there's some work we need to do there.

HILGERS: And of the hundred that electrified, are any of those full service with sewer and everything else?

JIM SWENSON: The hundred are the basic, they, they're not electrified. We'd want to get those electrified. We do not have any full-service sites, but that's in our design to get that done.

HILGERS: And what's the demand for those campsites during the summer season?

JIM SWENSON: Well, for the full-service or for the electrical sites, the demand is very heavy because it is, as was mentioned earlier, they're lakefront opportunities that are very, very comfortable. And we are in the process of bidding right now for a septic system, lagoon system design, which will help facilitate our growth there.

HILGERS: And then you mentioned-- thank you. You mentioned the marina and I heard you say maybe around \$12 million, but I, I-- and I know

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you said it, but I didn't quite hear. How many slips would that be? Was that 400, did you say?

JIM SWENSON: We asked them to design, you know, for initial parameters, you know, 300 additional to what we have already, but to also look beyond that, depending on how the landscape could be molded in, in the larger footprint. You know, the challenge we have there is Nebraska does not have a lot of the flat land on our side that South Dakota has. So they've had better development potential opportunity. Plus, we have a watershed that comes in this area that we got to be careful of so that we don't create flooding issues. So a lot of the project will involve excavation of soil, which will probably require a relocation of parking, of the marina, potentially. But to do it, to do it to the magnitude that's being discussed here today is what drives it probably to that \$12 million, and it may give us a potential to go higher than 300 additional.

HILGERS: And so the \$12 million, I know it's not the exact number, but that includes not just the marina, but the ancillary work around it, parking?

JIM SWENSON: Yeah, that's a--

HILGERS: Kind of all in.

JIM SWENSON: What we call swag.

HILGERS: Who is-- and who did you say was doing the analysis of that plan for the marina?

JIM SWENSON: Right now we've consulted, you know, I was trying to remember who that firm was, but we've got, we met with them a couple of weeks ago to start doing the conceptual design. I'll have to get that information, confirm it so. They've got to get their proposal back to us to see if we'll buy into it.

HILGERS: And how far along are they? When do you expect their work to be complete?

JIM SWENSON: We hope that they'll have something here by the end of the summer, at least a 10 percent-type scenario.

HILGERS: And would it, would it be disruptive to their planning if you asked them to look at maybe 500 or more slips?

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JIM SWENSON: No, I don't think so at this point in time. It's pretty preliminary right now.

HILGERS: OK. I think that would be helpful if that's something you could pass along.

JIM SWENSON: OK.

HILGERS: I would like to ask you just a couple more questions. We've heard a lot about the Corps of Engineers and the ground they, they own on the Nebraska side. And I know when we were at McConaughy, we talked a lot about the FERC restrictions. Can you talk about, and I know you asked-- you answered a similar question, but maybe you can answer this. You didn't have the information to ask-- to answer a similar question, but maybe you can answer this question. Do you know how many, how much on the Nebraska side as a percent that the corps owns? Is it greater than 75 percent?

JIM SWENSON: You know, if I, if I could, I have a gentleman in the room here that's stationed in that area. I might ask Tyler Wolf to see if Tyler could answer that question for us.

HILGERS: As long as you answer what he tells you in the mike, we'll get it on the record. Go ahead.

TYLER WULF: So the, the acres of the Corps of Engineers--

HILGERS: Go ahead and say your name and--

TYLER WULF: Tyler Wulf, park superintendent of Lewis and Clark state rec area. The area the Corps of Engineers owns is relatively small. A majority of the land that the corps owns is leased to us, which is just under 700 acres. And then there's small plot of land, approximately 90 acres of deep water that the corps owns and manages. And then they have some acres around their headquarters, which I'm not sure the acres of that, which they own to manage as well. And then they do have along the whole lake some like line, but take line is very narrow, slide along the shore line, we really couldn't do any development.

HILGERS: OK, thank you very much, Mr. Wulf. Thank you. Did you get that, Katie? OK. And just to, just to clarify, you do-- or confirm, I should say, the, the Game and Parks owns and operates the marina? The current marina.

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JIM SWENSON: We own and operate the marina, yes, upon at leased parcel of ground.

HILGERS: And then I guess one, one other question that I meant to ask spawned-- [INAUDIBLE] one spawned by a comment Governor Orr made about seeing Mahoney before Mahoney was built. How would you compare the opportunity for a Mahoney or a Lied Lodge, that's come up several times today, in this area, the Niobrara near Lewis and Clark, as compared to the places where we already have a Mahoney?

JIM SWENSON: Right.

HILGERS: Near the Platte River.

JIM SWENSON: Right. Well, I have the privilege of actually standing on that landscape of Mahoney before it was ever developed. So I'm very familiar with it. The potential there, of course, is driven by the proximity between Lincoln and Omaha and the opportunities there with the massive population base. We have a population base here, too, not as immense, a little more spread out, but certainly we've got attributes here that don't match what was offered in Mahoney, the vistas, the hunting, fishing opportunities, all those things. I think those become the strong aces in the hole, if you will, for drawing people to many miles. I know for a fact that here in Niobrara State Park, we are the base camp oftentimes for many out-of-state travelers who come here to duck hunt, turkey hunt, deer hunt and do those types of activities. So that, that can, that can be expanded and that can be built upon and be successful. Some of the best turkey hunting in the area occurs up in this vicinity. So the potential is there. Yes.

HILGERS: Thank you very much. Senator Brandt.

BRANDT: Thank you, Chairman Hilgers. Thank you, Mr. Swenson, for testifying today. Last week at McConaughy, you talked a great deal about vendors, and there are a lot of vendors at McConaughy. Do you have any vendors up here?

JIM SWENSON: You know, there's some private vendors. We operate that marina, of course, which, you know, we-- is our concession operation. There are some, some limited number of vendors available. We don't have any contractual agreements with anyone on the areas other than what we manage. So there is potential for some of that, I feel, that some of the services that are going to be necessary to expand the family opportunity. We'd look into that. You know, I heard kayaking

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mentioned, for instance. You know, there are some things like that that we, that we could consider. We're open to those opportunities.

BRANDT: And I believe you mentioned this, somebody in your organization did, about casinos out at McConaughy. Would that be a viable option out here?

JIM SWENSON: A casino? On, on the, on the landscape that we manage?

BRANDT: Somewhere along the lake.

JIM SWENSON: It would have to probably float past the Corps of Engineers first.

BRANDT: All right. Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Brandt. Senator Flood.

FLOOD: Hey, thank you, Mr. Swenson, for being here.

JIM SWENSON: You bet.

FLOOD: Good to see you again. Appreciate your willingness to think outside the box on both these parks. I want to start with Niobrara. You made a point that the draw here versus Mahoney is more hunting and fishing and the natural landscape than the proximity to the population. Are you familiar with the Lied Lodge in Nebraska City?

JIM SWENSON: Yes, very familiar.

FLOOD: And that is not operated by the Game and Parks Commission.

JIM SWENSON: Correct. That is correct.

FLOOD: What it has is a partnership, or it's owned by the Arbor Day Foundation.

JIM SWENSON: That's correct.

FLOOD: And what is their mission?

JIM SWENSON: Their mission is tree conservation, tree planting is their primary mission. Secondary mission is celebration of Arbor Day.

FLOOD: And so they are able to generate money year round that helps offset their expenses to run that lodge.

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JIM SWENSON: They, you know, I'm not 100 percent certain what their funding mechanism is through the foundation and how they provide those dollars. They try to self-sustain themselves, but I know that they have struggled with food service elements and such down there in that operation.

FLOOD: The reason I ask is what I see-- and how much land do you own up and down this riverbank in the Niobrara area here?

JIM SWENSON: Well, you know, Tyler identified approximately 700 acres there on the Lewis and Clark side. We've got, you know, with park area, another couple hundred acres here at Niobrara. Plus we have a large wildlife management area holding in this quarter too. The acreage, I'm not sure.

FLOOD: Is your wildlife management area, does it abut the river, or is it--

JIM SWENSON: Yeah.

FLOOD: And is it to the west of here?

JIM SWENSON: There is one to the west to here, and we also have some wildlife management areas to the east of here as well.

FLOOD: What would it look like, you know, if we are really a hub for turkeys or waterfowl, what if Nebraska aligned ourselves with a foundation that supported that so that we go to the National Wild Turkey Federation and say, hey, the state of Nebraska is willing to partner with these resources, land, money, conservation officers, all the things that you bring to the table, and partner with a foundation that could pour money in from other states to make us a hub of turkey hunting? I mean, I worry that if we just do this as the state of Nebraska and we don't have a draw that's generating income, that we're not going to bring enough money in to help it be sustaining and to be spectacular. Do those foundations for the other game species, do they ever do anything like that?

JIM SWENSON: Yeah, you know, with our-- a lot of our success as an agency is through the partnerships that we have, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Wild Turkey Federation and others who, who do lend partnering support force, financial and promotional expertise. I think those are viable options, especially if there's mitigation-type areas that are needing funding. Those opportunities exist, yes.

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FLOOD: See, as opposed to Lewis and Clark Lake, I think the opportunity here is in hospitality with tourism draw, where the Lewis and Clark Lake is a different kind of hospitality. I want to switch to that real quick, then I'll be done. On that road 54 C, is that a county road?

JIM SWENSON: That is a county road, yes. It's in our rec road program that was developed and is supposed-- is maintained by Knox County, yeah.

FLOOD: Do you have any recreational funds, road funds that you can, I mean, do you know how much it's going to cost to improve that?

JIM SWENSON: Yeah, that's an extensive project. It's, you know, they want to put shoulder in on it. There's some, a bridge that needs attention there right close to the Weigand state recreation area. It's a multimillion dollar project. Precise number, I don't know. We, we have identified it in our rec road program as in need, but that would be a primary objective through this initiative to get that, get that taken care of.

FLOOD: Has it been, have the improvements been designed?

JIM SWENSON: They are right now. I think the bridge work is under design by Knox County. The road itself has not been designed, no.

FLOOD: I have constituents of mine that complain that our showers facilities in Nebraska are extremely poor compared to South Dakota. Is that part of your plan looking forward?

JIM SWENSON: Yeah, we've already taken great effort to step that plan forward with some of our changes in CMF funds that were provided to us. We've done some of that work here at Lewis and Clark already.

FLOOD: And then maybe my final question is places like Niobrara and Lewis and Clark Lake, how open are you to having private [INAUDIBLE] relationships come in and run hotels or run food service? Do you, would you prefer to keep that in-house or what kind of risk do you take by letting it go off premise, and what has your success been with outside vendors?

JIM SWENSON: That's a great question. I commend you for that foresight. Know this, you know, when we look at sustainability and, and measured growth, we know that right now with our current workforce and the demands that we have on the great team that we've got already, we're, we're stretched pretty thin. We have to look at these

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public-private-type partnerships to be successful. Now, I do know from experience that there's risk involved in that. You turn over a little bit of control. You have to very clearly define the expectations and, and goals that you want to share for the public and the public's best interest, and then have an evaluation component in there to make sure that those goals are being satisfied. But we are open to those. And quite honestly, moving forward, those are going to be key to success in the future.

FLOOD: Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Flood. Senator Gragert.

GRAGERT: Thank you, Chairman Hilgers. Thank you for your testimony.

JIM SWENSON: Sure.

GRAGERT: I'm familiar, I have been on the phone with the Corps of Engineers and they're actually developing their master plan. Is your master plan within, somewhere within their master plan and they're addressing some of the issues or what you want to do?

JIM SWENSON: Yeah, we worked very closely with them in the development of that plan. I had several meetings with them to identify those projects. And we threw a plethora of ideas into that, because if it's not identified in that plan, you know, it, it causes the brakes to be pumped a little bit. But know this, we-- this vision that, that we're sharing here today, we've been thinking about for many years. And we, we threw everything but the bathtub into that plan the best we could so.

GRAGERT: OK, thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Gragert. Are there other questions? Seeing none, thank you very much for your testimony.

JIM SWENSON: Thank you for the opportunity.

HILGERS: Next testifier. Welcome, Mr. McCoy.

TIM MCCOY: My name, my name is Tim McCoy, I'm the deputy director of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, T-i-m M-c-C-o-y. I work at 2200 North 33rd Street in Lincoln, Nebraska. I'm hoping that Mr. Swenson answered all your questions. And I'm glad that you brought rain to this region. And if you have any other questions, I'd gladly answer them.

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HILGERS: You did go first last time so. Are there questions? Senator Gragert.

GRAGERT: I have to bring forward the question from out, out west. Shooting ranges, I've been asked by a number of people, you know, shooting ranges either on the state park and/or wildlife management areas is a possibility.

TIM McCOY: You know, if you're talking a more complete shooting range, most likely on a state park, just because of the, the, the lands we buy as wildlife management areas are designated with the federal. And most of all the ones we have up here have federal funds in them for, for, for wildlife conservation purposes. But they obviously provide hunting opportunity. We do, we, we have developed smaller siting ranges that are typically more of a single shooting opportunity for somebody to go shoot their rifle or go play with a gun. And we do have some that are open just to generic target shooting, but that has created challenges in some places where we end up with people not taking care of it or abusing it or dumping things out there and shooting them and leaving them in a parking lot or out in the parking lot.

GRAGERT: Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Grager. Senator Flood.

FLOOD: Does Road 54 C connect, it connects to Highway 121, I believe so?

TIM McCOY: I believe it's 120-- yeah, I believe it's 121.

FLOOD: What would be the process of having the state take ownership of that road again? Was it at one time owned by the state of Nebraska or has it always been a county road?

TIM McCOY: My under-- my understanding is it was always a county road. It was, it was developed as a paved road through the rec roads program. But actually the Department of Transportation enacts that. But it's essentially in partnership with us and the county, and then the county has the maintenance responsibilities.

FLOOD: And then on those wayfinding signs, last time Senator Gragert and I were here there was somebody from the National Park Service that said that the Park Service would do the same thing for Nebraska that they did in South Dakota by having those brown signs put up everywhere with the wayfinding information. But as my office is understanding

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that the font doesn't match the font in Nebraska and the Department of Transportation doesn't approve those signs. Is that accurate?

TIM McCOY: That is absolutely correct. I met with your staff and had part of that conversation. They were-- they actually in South Dakota, they would allow them to put logos on their signs. In Nebraska they're saying they can't because we were, where they were-- the Park Service wanted to identify them as the rec river, we wanted to put our logo on there when it was an area that we actually manage and operate and take care of. And so there, there are issues, those sorts of issues, I think, really require some conversation with NDOT regarding their signage limitations and requirements.

FLOOD: Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Flood. Senator Wishart.

WISHART: Thank you so much for being here. I want to go back to kind of the beginning of the conversation we had today with Governor Orr. And she was talking about the responsibility to think big, but also to be responsible with, with taxpayer dollars to know that the investments we're making have a long-term positive impact. So if the state were to invest one time in a marina expansion, maybe more than one marina, expansion for boat access, not just for what is needed now, but thinking out into the future, would there be a way to work with Game and Parks where the profits and proceeds from that expansion-- so, you know, you could charge \$2,000 per year, for example, for a slip, would go into a revolving fund that would then go back into investments in this particular area?

TIM McCOY: Historically, we have never done that, and there has been demand to do that throughout our park system. And then I'll explain a little bit of that why. We manage the park system across the state. We have a lot of parks that, on an annual basis, don't make a lot of money. But, you know, we, we utilize it as an entire system to provide benefits across the state to all the citizens. This has been brought up before in other venues on other areas, like Mahoney State Park. We've actually, when we, you know, we make profit on, off Mahoney State Park, that's used to help with the rest of the state. So the only reason I get nervous about that is, is what you can do is create a park system where in the long run you only have winners and losers. And I worry that for, for different parks that haven't been developed very much, it could, it could create some challenges. And that's, that's just my, you know, that's just how we've always looked at it, and especially our budget folks have looked at it. You know, it goes

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into our parks cash fund and, and, you know, we continue to work on increasing our ability to better predict our capital maintenance needs through time. We've had a lot of, we've had a lot of, I would say, support with capital maintenance from, from this Legislature and from previous Legislature that's really helping us address some of those backlogs. Those are foc-- those aren't focused on new development. And so it's, it's always a balancing act. And I worry, I worry about putting ourselves in the position long-term where we're going to do this on, on any new project and I don't know what will happen. I think it would, it would starve some of the smaller parts and a lot of our, what I would call our more regionally used parks that aren't big draws, that aren't quite-- they're not necessarily destinations, but they're important locally.

WISHART: OK.

HILGERS: Thank you, Senator Wishart. Other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony, Mr. McCoy.

TIM McCOY: Thank you.

HILGERS: Thank you for hosting us here. Any other testifiers? Going once, going twice, sold. I will-- we're about to close the hearing. Let me just to make-- oh, did you have something. I'm sorry, yes, sir. Please come.

BUTCH BECKER: My name is Butch Becker, I can fill out the form and fill it in.

HILGERS: Please do, and if you wouldn't mind spelling your name. Maybe restating it, I'm not sure if the microphone got that.

BUTCH BECKER: Butch, B-u-t-c-h, Becker, B-e-c-k-e-r, a longtime resident of the area. I grew up at Weigand, my dad built the place. Built all the docks, that's back when it was leased. That's what happens across the river in South Dakota. Besides having a five-lane highway coming to the marina and the campgrounds, which is a little short right now, and they're going to add another three or four lanes of four-lane, three or four miles. The, the way South Dakota is run, it's leased, the land. The people put up the buildings. There's a couple of buildings that were put up, the main restaurant area was put up by the state. But even the campgrounds, the resort there, all those cabins are put up by the resort owner. They have 20 of them right now, and they're going to expand it to 40 this next year. They've already broken the ground on that. And they have the topography over there

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where they have approximately three miles of flat, and that's all, all leased by the state or all controlled by the state on the South Dakota side. Where on the Nebraska side you can be within 50, 50 feet of high water. That's why some people, like when Joyce sat here, she's probably the closest person I know that lives next to the lake, and she can't get her boat in. She has to find a place to do that. But the-- my dad had a 99-year lease on the Weigand with the corps before the state got involved, but he let that go due to some business dealings back when. And then the state took it over after there was some mismanagement by the people that bought him out. So but there's the amenities that are put in, in like the Yankton marina, they have an expansion going on for putting in another 60 docks or replacing all the docks, I understand. But that is private, that's private money. And they have, the lessor has to do so much, put so much into that every year. So they have to, they have to, have to add to the amenities every year that are over there, whether it be in the marina or whether it be in the camper, camper, camp area where the cabins are. But it's something that the access is the big thing. I live overlooking the dam and I got five lanes, four lanes of traffic and a turning lane in the middle coming out from Yankton. As far as access for hunters and fishermen and everything, we have people coming in to, we have 5,000, over 5000-foot runway at Yankton. So there's people coming in, come in for hunting and fishing and travel back and forth to Oshkosh. You know, it's a waypoint, waypoint. We don't have as many jets and stuff as Mitchell or Pierre does, but we get our, get our share of people that come in all the time. So Weigand, when my dad built Weigand, we used to come up the lakes and come up the Niobrara river and go under the bridge in the boat standing up. Then for years, and went on for, oh, eight or 10 years, then pretty soon you couldn't go under the bridge anymore. We used to go up to the Niobrara or up to Verdigre Creek and make the turn before we came back down. The sediment, I'm also treasurer for the MSAC, Missouri Sediment [SIC] Action Coalition, and that's one thing that I think you're going to have to get behind and work with, is to try to find some way to keep the sediment going into the lake. And it's backed up there, they're going to have problems-- it backs up all the time, but it's going down in all the water, in the water access, or the drinking water for the NRD, makes a-- going to make a big, be an issue there, too. We're working with the corps. We have meetings, two meetings in the past month with them and trying to get that portion worked out so there is a lake in 50 years, 75 years.

HILGERS: Thank you, Mr. Becker.

BUTCH BECKER: Any questions?

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HILGERS: Are there questions? Seeing none, thank you very much for your testimony.

BUTCH BECKER: Thank you.

HILGERS: Is that your green sheet? Any other testifiers? Seeing none, I have three quick closing comments. The first is a big thank you. Thank you for hosting us here, Game and Parks, it is an incredible facility. Someone said seeing it is worth a thousand words, far more than a picture. I think that's absolutely true. This is gorgeous. Thank you to everyone for coming here, for the commitment that you put in your community and for coming forward to take your time out of your afternoon to come here and give us your feedback and information and, and all the, all that you've given us has been incredibly valuable. So I know I speak on behalf of the entire committee and say thank you to all of you. Secondly is this is an important part of the process, but it is not the end. Frankly, it's not the beginning. We started this process at the beginning of the year. We, as many of you know, there was an idea raiser earlier this year. We've been working on this for many months. There will be opportunities afterwards, maybe not in a formal hearing. If you have ideas or thoughts, if you testified or didn't testify, but you have something to share, the two primary ways I would recommend getting it to us and the committee would be, one, you could contact me as Chair of the committee. I'll make sure it's disseminated. But maybe even more, more, would be more effective would be contact either Senator Flood or Senator Gragert, those of-- these two senators are outstanding advocates for this part of Nebraska. They know the area, they know the people, they know the community and have just been really amazing partners in this process. So you can contact any of us. I might start there, but you can always certainly contact me. And the third thing I'll say is, just to give you an overview of where we think this plane will land process-wise, is this committee is technically in existence until the end of next year, the end, December of 2022. Having said that, it is our intent and goal, and frankly, the mandate the Legislature has given us, is to have a plan by when we go back into session in January of next year. And so after this hearing, we have one more hearing, and we will be working very aggressively with our partner and HDR to come up with a plan that will focus on the three subject matter areas, including this one, as our primary goal, to try to develop something and make a transformational difference in 2022. So I just want to let you know, this is, there is a-- this is, this process will hopefully make-- have its big inflection point in the beginning of next year. So this is around the corner. So we feel the urgency, and I hope you all do as well. And with that, thank you. And we will close the hearing. Oh, Senator Gragert, go ahead.

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GRAGERT: Thank you, Chairman. If I could, just five minutes, HDR, could you give us your, the breakdown on October, the week of October 11 that you'll be in Niobrara and just real fast?

HILGERS: Do you want that on the record. Do you want that on the record? I can close the hearing.