

## **WRAP Discusses University Advancements, Water Sustainability Fund**

**By Steve Ress  
Nebraska Water Center**

University of Nebraska's Water Resources Advisory Panel (WRAP) met on May 20 for updates on NU water and environmental education and programming and to discuss what Nebraska's recently passed Water Sustainability Fund legislation may mean.

NU Vice President and Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources Harlan Vice Chancellor Ronnie Green said that NU, and IANR in particular, is in the midst of some of the greatest growth in IANR's 40-year history.

A two-year first phase of a planned faculty hiring initiative, to strengthen existing areas of expertise and fill critical gaps in others, is nearly complete with all but six of a planned 36 faculty hires having been made. This represents a 13.5 percent increase in tenure-track faculty within IANR, Green said. Several of those key hires relate to water.

He noted that IANR is seeing unprecedented student enrollment growth and increases in research funding, as well as facilities construction on the UNL East Campus and at the new Nebraska Innovation Campus (NIC) at the former Nebraska State Fairgrounds.

A second phase of 20 faculty hires will be made in fiscal 2015, though not all of these will be new positions. Some will be filling positions that have been vacant due to retirements, budgetary considerations, etc., Green said.

Roberto Lenton, founding executive director and Robert B. Daugherty Chair of the Daugherty Water for Food Institute (DWFI) noted that the institute now has 50 faculty fellows associated with it and that it recently earned its second, five-year round of funding from the Robert B. Daugherty Charitable Foundation for 2015-2020.

DWFI and the Nebraska Water Center will move to NIC sometime this summer, Lenton said.

He also noted that DWFI's annual global conference would be held in Seattle, Wash. Oct. 19-22. It will focus on the changing dynamics of data, analytics, modeling and visualization— as well as how to capitalize on this ongoing data revolution to ensure a water and food secure world.

Conference registration details are online at:

<http://waterforfood.nebraska.edu/wff2014/>

Nebraska Water Center director Chittaranjan Ray reported on planning that has begun for a March 19-20, 2015 Nebraska and High Plains regional water conference that will focus on groundwater sustainability. It will be coupled with a one-day water law conference. The two-day event will be at the UNL College of Law.

It was also reported that the Water Center's annual water and natural resources tour to Colorado and Wyoming, July 15-18, is sold-out. The key destination of this year's tour is the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's North Platte Irrigation Project near Casper, Wy. Consequences of last year's flooding on the South Platte River will also be examined.

State Senator Tom Carlson of Holdrege, chair of the state legislature's natural resources committee, reviewed legislative progress to enact water and natural resources legislation since he was elected to that body in 2007. He noted the work that has been done to control invasive species on the Platte and Republican Rivers, and steps that have been taken to stop or reduce groundwater depletions as well as other steps he and fellow legislators have made toward sustainable water use in Nebraska. Carlson said his goal is that the state should use no more water than it receives.

Proper management of the state's vast surface and groundwater resources are particularly important to favorably position Nebraska to be part of the solution of feeding a growing world population while using less water to do it.

A key partnership in helping to achieve that goal will be making sure the legislature stays firmly connected to the research, extension and outreach assets within the University of Nebraska, he said.

Last session, state senators overwhelming passed legislation to create a water sustainability fund to help local governments and the state pay for water projects with an \$11 million annual appropriation to help Nebraska better manage its most important resource. An additional \$10 million one-time appropriation from the state's cash reserve was also approved for the fund.

Rex Gittins, natural resources administration director for the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, told WRAP members that he and his staff are now in the process of drafting the rules for how those funds will ultimately be distributed.

Gittins said he anticipates four to eight months to finalize the rules and processes before applications can be accepted for review and that it could ultimately be about a year before projects are approved for funding. There will be plenty of opportunities for public hearings and comment as the rules for the fund are set-up, he said.

He noted that awarding of sustainability fund monies will be collaborative, requiring a percentage of matching local funds and that successful applications will in most cases rely and build upon partnerships.

WRAP members noted that there are several existing and planned University of Nebraska research projects that could benefit from sustainability fund monies and said it was a potential source of additional funding that should be closely watched.

WRAP's fall meeting is planned for Thursday, Sept. 25, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.