

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**BOSTELMAN:** Ready? Okay. Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Natural Resources Committee. I'm Senator Bruce Bostelman from Brainard, representing the 23rd Legislative District, and I serve as Chair of this committee. The committee will take up the bill that we have posted on the outside of the room. This public hearing today is your opportunity to be a part of the legislative process and to express your position on the proposed legislation before us. If you are planning to testify today, please fill out the green testifier sheets that are on the table at the back of the room. Be sure to print clearly and fill out-- fill it out completely. When it is your turn to come forward to testify, give the testifier sheet to the page or to the committee clerk. If you do not wish to testify, but would like to indicate your position on a bill, there are also white sign-in sheets back on the table. These sheets will be included as an exhibit in the official hearing record. When you come up to testify, please speak clearly into the microphone. Tell us your name and spell your first and last name to ensure we get an accurate record. We will begin each bill hearing today with introducer's-- Introducer's opening statement, followed by proponents of the bill, then opponents, and finally, by anyone speaking in a neutral capacity. We will finish with the closing statement by the introducer if they wish to give one. We will have a three-minute, three-minute light system for all testifiers. When you begin your testimony, the light on the table will be green. When the yellow light comes on, you have one minute remaining; and the red light indicates you need to wrap up your final thought and stop. Questions from the committee may follow. Also, committee members may come and go during the hearing. This has nothing to do with the importance of the bills being heard. It is just part of the process as senators may have bills to introduce in other committees. A final-- a few final items to facilitate today's hearing. If you have handouts or copies of your testimony, please give or please bring up at least ten copies and give them to the page. Please silence or turn off your cell phones. Verbal outbursts or applause are not permitted in the hearing room. Such behavior may be cause for you to be asked to leave the hearing. Finally, committee procedures for all committee-- committees states that written position letters to be included in the record must be submitted by 12 noon, the last business day before the scheduled hearing on that particular bill. The only acceptable method of submission is via the Legislature's website at [NebraskaLegislature.gov](http://NebraskaLegislature.gov). You may submit a written letter for the record or testify in person at the hearing, but you cannot do both. Written position letters will be included in the official hearing

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

record, but only those testifying in person before the committee will be included on the committee sheet. I will now have the committee members with us today introduce themselves starting on my left.

**HUGHES:** Thank you. I am Jana Hughes, District 24: Seward, York, Polk, and a little bit of Butler County.

**BOSTELMAN:** And my far right?

**BRANDT:** Senator Tom Brandt, District 32: Fillmore, Thayer, Jefferson, Saline, and southwestern Lancaster Counties.

**JACOBSON:** Senator Mike Jacobson, District 42. I'm going to have to start with Thomas County, followed by Hooker, Logan, McPherson, Lincoln, and three fourths of Perkins County.

**J. CAVANAUGH:** John Cavanaugh, District 9, midtown Omaha.

**MOSER:** Mike Moser, District 22. It's Platte County and most of Stanton County.

**BOSTELMAN:** Senator Moser is also Vice Chair of the committee. Also assisting the committee today to my left is our legal counsel, Cyndi Lamm; and to my far right is our committee clerk, Laurie Vollertsen. Our pages for the committee this afternoon is Trent Kadavy and Landon Sunde. Thank you both for being here this afternoon. We appreciate your willing to serve. With that, we will get today's hearing-- we'll get started on today's hearings with LB281, Senator Jacobson. Good afternoon. Welcome.

**JACOBSON:** Good afternoon, Chairman Bostelman and fellow members of the Natural Resources Committee. My name is Senator Mike Jacobson, M-i-k-e J-a-c-o-b-s-o-n. I represent District 42 here in the Legislature. I am here today to introduce LB281 that will require the Department of Economic Development to provide grants for youth outdoor education camp facilities. We are all saddened by the news of the Bovee Fire near Halsey last fall. The fire destroyed about 19,000 acres of forest and grassland in and around the Nebraska National Forest. In addition to the damage to the forest and grasslands, the Bovee Fire also devastated the 64-year-old Nebraska state 4-H camp. Sixteen of the 17 buildings were destroyed, with only the house, the staff house remaining intact. Thousands of Nebraskans, including my wife and children, have fond memories of this amazing facility, having either stayed there as a 4-H camper, Rotary Youth Leadership Awards camper, or someone who attended a wedding reception, high school dance, or

conference held in that facility. Since attending the camp as a boy, I have been fascinated with the area ever since. Like many raised in other parts of the state, it was my first experience seeing the Nebraska Sandhills and seeing the Nebraska National Forest near Halsey, which has only recently been surpassed as the largest man-made forest in the world. I was able to see the damage firsthand and received a briefing with other local officials. It was an emotional event for all those present to see the damage. Since then, I have also been in touch with the leaders of the four other Nebraska 4-H Foundation to determine the amount of the loss and their next steps. Although the Nebraska State 4-H Camp buildings were insured, insurance payments will not cover total replacement of the facility, given the age of the buildings. Senator Brewer and I have met with other-- with local citizens, the university, and others to assure that the camp is rebuilt. The goal is this-- this goal is the basis for bringing LB281. The uniqueness of the Sandhills and Nebraska National Forest at Halsey should not remain a secret. And I believe that we can do more to draw in-state and out-of-state tourists to District 42 if we are willing to make an investment in this area of the state. Just look at what occurred with the Sandhills and Dismal River Club golf courses. When the founders of the Sandhills golf course chose the location off the beaten path to build a golf course where no one had gone before, many wondered if they were crazy. Yet the first year it was open, it was rated as one of the best in the world. Memberships were sold out and a waiting list continues today. All too often we don't dream big enough. Additionally, the total solar eclipse of 2017 illustrated the fascination we all have with the heavens. Dark skies tourism is booming and accelerating during the pandemic. What better place to experience stargazing than in the Sandhills? The Halsey Forest already hosts 12,000 visitors per year. Those visitor numbers could grow substantially with the right investments. The trick to a successful investment is to have a destination atmosphere and easy access. We already know the Sandhills and the Nebraska National Forest at Halsey are two of our state's greatest treasures. If we rebuild with the right services and design, we can continue to grow the number of visitors to the Halsey area. Highways 283 and 97 all provide good driving access to the area. In addition, the Thedford Airport has a newly constructed concrete one-- runway that is ideal for landing many corporate aircraft, as well as smaller single engine piston aircraft. This airport could be a great asset for those coming to the new and improved conference facility located just 20 miles away from Halsey. If the Lied Lodge can be successful in Nebraska City, why can't the facility in the middle of Nebraska Sandhills and next to 90-- a 90,000

acre national forest not also be a draw? LB281 will be the foundation the state investment to allow the 4-H camp to be rebuilt and expanded to be a gateway destination to the Sandhills, as well as opening up grant opportunities for other nonprofit summer camps that have contributed so much to the development and education of our children. LB281 calls for a one-time transfer of \$50 million from the General Fund to the Department of Economic Development to oversee and distribute the funds to 501(c)(3) nonprofit applicants for the purpose of building or renovating youth outdoor educational camp facilities, including physical structures, equipment and necessary infrastructure to ensure accessibility to the public. The grants will-- will require a minimum of 25 percent matching dollars from the applicant, and no single applicant can receive more than \$30 million. Preference will be given to rebuild the youth outdoor camp education camp facility that was damaged due to a natural or manmade disaster. We have passed out an amendment that replaces Section 1 of the bill, line 17 through 21 are the changes. It would also-- I would also add an additional preference-- it would also add an additional preference to grants to build facilities that can be used year round, including lodging, conference and meeting facilities, the related infrastructure to generate local and regional economic development. This makes it clear that our goal with LB281 is to not just replace what was there, but to build 21st century facilities and infrastructure to host youth development camps and create new economic opportunities for residents of the Sandhills. An independent economic impact analysis commissioned by the Nebraska Community Foundation estimates that investments in a combination of facilities, including lodging, conference and event spaces, dining, outdoor education, etcetera, could generate \$4 million of new economic activity every year. Preliminary cost estimates of these facilities total \$37 million, which-- which creates a payback period of about nine years. It's an incredible payback period for an investment like this one. This \$37 million investment sure-- assumes construction is completed in three phases. So if capital were available sooner to do the work in two phases, it is possible these cost estimates could decrease. Four million dollars of new economic activity in this part of Nebraska is substantial. These new jobs created will be a reliable source of off-farm income for ranch families and the catalyst for small business already focused on ecotourism. As you all know, many counties in the Sandhills have experienced outmigration in the past several decades. Much of that outmigration occurred because of lack of economic opportunities. This investment can help stem the tide of outmigration as ecotourism jobs will be complementary of the existing economy, will increase family

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Rough Draft

incomes and diversify the types of jobs available. We have several examples of ranching families diversifying their agricultural enterprise to provide ecotourism experiences. This additional income, using the same number of acres, has allowed these families to have more members of more generations on the family ranch. I'm really excited about this opportunity for my constituents and for all Nebraskans. The Nebraska Sandhills are a world-class destination. We need to simultaneously invest in them, preserve them, and experience them. LB281 helps us to do through all three. The time is now this year to make this investment to create what's next in our great state. This is a-- this is a necessary area for which why we have an eclipse-- an e-clause on the bill. Unfortunately, the snow in that area of the state has made it impossible for several local testifiers to attend in person today. But I think you will see that there are several testifiers here today representing a broad cross-section of Nebraska who support this bill and want to see this facility built. I'll be happy to take any questions.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you for opening, Senator Jacobson. Are there questions from committee members? Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** Thank you, Chairman Bostelman. Thank you for bringing this bill, Senator Jacobson. This camp means a lot to the people of the state of Nebraska, and I mean through generations. So I know you as a numbers guy.

**JACOBSON:** Yeah.

**BRANDT:** So let's-- let's just start off with some numbers here. How much insurance did they get?

**JACOBSON:** They-- I think they'll testify that, but I believe the total insurance proceeds was about \$2,260,000. I don't have the odd dollars or cents, but it would be pretty close to that number.

**BRANDT:** All right. And then you testified that the complete cost of the facility today is estimated at 37.

**JACOBSON:** About \$37 million is the rough estimate.

**BRANDT:** Through all three phases.

**JACOBSON:** Correct.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**BRANDT:** And then in the bill, we're asking for a 25 percent private match. How did you arrive at 25 percent as opposed-- it seems like a lot of things today are one for one or 50 percent?

**JACOBSON:** I think because this is a rebuild of a facility that was lost out there and given the cost to bring this thing together. And what we think the local match could raise, we think this is still a substantial amount of money to put together. We're also including an endowment that would be part of this financial raise to ensure the perpetual nature of that facility. So this is a one-time ask. We're not going to be looking for additional state support once this is-- once this is funded.

**BRANDT:** So is there a fund-raising campaign going on even as we speak?

**JACOBSON:** We-- we've actually started the initial phases of-- of looking at additional land siting, which we believe we have a secondary site available depending on what the ultimate study would show. And we have a number of people in the local area that have already begun looking at other-- what our fundraising will be. The Nebraska Community Foundation will be testifying after me and he can give you some additional insight as to what-- what we're doing in that light as well.

**BRANDT:** Okay. On the fiscal note, in the bill, you asked for \$30 million, but the fiscal note is for \$50 million. What's the [INAUDIBLE]

**JACOBSON:** Actually, the bill asks for \$50 million because this was designed fairly similar to the rail park bill that we had a year ago. So what we included was we're looking for \$30 million for this particular project.

**BRANDT:** Right.

**JACOBSON:** \$50 million overall, depending on what we might think was available for funding. Obviously, we wanted to look at if there were other dollars available that other projects might take advantage of, that we would be open to that. But I'm here, make no doubt about it, I'm interested in funding Halsey camp with the match that we can raise.

**BRANDT:** So the other money could be used for another camp that qualified.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**JACOBSON:** It could, correct.

**BRANDT:** Last question. There is a second fiscal note on here, and I don't know if you've got that from DED.

**JACOBSON:** I saw that.

**BRANDT:** And this is kind of my pet peeve.

**JACOBSON:** It's mine as well.

**BRANDT:** Yes. So let's get this on the record here. Their expenditure, they need one full-time economic development manager for \$74,790 to administer this program that most likely would be a program one-- one-- one or two. They'll need a one fourth of an accountant for \$6,570; benefits, \$36,400; operating cost of \$83,000; travel, \$9,100. You know, I don't understand this. Do you understand that?

**JACOBSON:** I try not to.

**BRANDT:** All right. Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thanks a lot, Senator Brandt. You took all my questions. I even had down specifically, how was the 25 percent match decided? So thank you, Chairman. First of all, I agree. I went to 4-H camp there growing up. All three of my kids went to NREA energy camp there, 4-H camps, super great area. I had one question. Is the \$30 million for technically the-- are there-- are there other camps out there that need redone from an-- that has been destroyed from a natural disaster that would even work toward that other \$20 million that you know of?

**JACOBSON:** I would tell you that that-- that list would be quite short. But there are others that are going to probably testify here today who have an interest in additional fund-- in some of that excess funding.

**HUGHES:** Okay. And then I know this is 4-H. So there's UNL Extension is involved with 4-H and things like that. Have those part-- well, and I mentioned the NREA energy camp. Have those parties come forward and said, you know, we want to help match this or we'll do this or-- and maybe I'm just-- we're not down that road yet, but.

**JACOBSON:** I'm going to let them speak for themselves. They are here to testify.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**HUGHES:** Okay.

**JACOBSON:** And I'll let them speak.

**HUGHES:** And then one more, is it-- this is a facility that could be rented out by private companies and things like that also to use. Correct?

**JACOBSON:** Yes.

**HUGHES:** I'm just assuming there's a little bit of some income that could maybe come in to help and if you're renting out the place or whatever,

**JACOBSON:** Yeah, this is going to be-- I think we have to-- this is going to be far beyond--

**HUGHES:** What was there before.

**JACOBSON:** --what was there before.

**HUGHES:** Yeah.

**JACOBSON:** Okay. You have to think more in terms of the Lied Lodge. I'm expecting there would be a lodge built--

**HUGHES:** Conference building.

**JACOBSON:** --conference center.

**HUGHES:** Yeah.

**JACOBSON:** And start thinking about not only the people who came to the 4-H-- that were campers and came to the 4-H camp and came to other camps that were at this facility, but think of all the visitors that come to the National Forest. Now if you create a destination location,--

**HUGHES:** Yeah.

**JACOBSON:** --conference center and so on, as you well know, the Legislature went to Nebraska City for their legislative meeting before the session began. And so when this is built, I will expect the Legislature to come to Halsey for their--

**HUGHES:** That's a long drive though.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**JACOBSON:** Well, you'll enjoy it. It'll be worth it. So-- so, yes. And-- and then you think about the people that are going Highway 83 runs from Mexico to Canada, a lot of traffic. We're about 15 miles off on Highway 2 east of-- of the 83 interchange. So-- and then you go, so you've got the golf courses, you've got the other attractions, and you've got the scenic byway of Highway 2. There's a lot of traffic that we just need to get them to stop and be there.

**HUGHES:** Make it a destination.

**JACOBSON:** These facilities would be there.

**HUGHES:** And then this is probably a random question, but when it was originally built in the early '60s, was it funded by donations? Do you know how it was originally [INAUDIBLE]?

**JACOBSON:** I believe there was a grant, I want to say, and I'm-- the name is escaping me now, but his name was on the plaque on the original and I'm going to let somebody else answer that.

\_\_\_\_\_: Eppley

**HUGHES:** Eppley

**JACOBSON:** Eppley is what I'm looking for. Thank you. Eppley.

**HUGHES:** I've heard that name before.

**JACOBSON:** Eppley Lodge. And we've heard that name associated with an airport too.

**HUGHES:** Right. Okay. Thank you.

**JACOBSON:** Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Senator Moser.

**MOSER:** So if you need \$30 million, why make the bill 50?

**JACOBSON:** We did it just to be able to open it up for other opportunities so we weren't taking all the money and that this just wasn't for one specific project. But I'm certainly open to have this go down to \$30 million all going to Halsey, if that's what you'd prefer.

**MOSER:** You're the one that brought the bill so I'm asking you.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**JACOBSON:** We-- we brought it to be able to open it up to where youth camps could use this beyond what we're doing. And again, it's designed much around the rail park bill, which did the same concept. And so if you remember the rail park bill where 60 percent of the funds could go to the first-- first priority applicant and then others could use it in an art. In that case on the rail park, \$30 million went to North Platte for their rail park. Grand Island came in as did Fremont and others. And so-- so we initially issued and offered the bill to really deal with parks with our specific need at Halsey. But like anything else, we ordered a steak. We'd be happy to take a really nice hamburger. I'd like you to stay away from the slider.

**MOSER:** Stay away from baloney sandwich.

**JACOBSON:** Yes. Yes.

**MOSER:** Who would own this in your view?

**JACOBSON:** This would be owned by a nonprofit 501(c)(3). We would work through the Nebraska Community Foundation.

**MOSER:** Not-- not Game and Parks?

**JACOBSON:** It would not-- it would not be Game and Parks, but we would bring other partners to come in and be a part of the final one. Three 501(c)(3).

**MOSER:** You're not planning to bring in the headquarters of Game and Parks?

**JACOBSON:** Not at this time. Not at this time.

**MOSER:** It might get you some extra funding.

**JACOBSON:** But I don't-- Never say never. Never say never.

**MOSER:** Thank you.

**JACOBSON:** Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** So I'll ask for a couple of things perhaps if you have them, provide to the committee later. You mentioned a study.

**JACOBSON:** Yes.

**BOSTELMAN:** So if we could get a copy of the study.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**JACOBSON:** That's coming. It will be distributed by the next speaker.

**BOSTELMAN:** Feasibility, has a feasibility study started yet?

**JACOBSON:** Yes.

**BOSTELMAN:** Did you plan to do all that?

**JACOBSON:** I'll let-- I'll let the next testifier speak to that.

**BOSTELMAN:** That's fine. We've talked before a little about the land and you mentioned it. Do you want to explain that a little more to us?

**JACOBSON:** Where we're at right now is that I know there had been some questions raised that the current 4-H camp facility was located on land owned by the National Forest Service, and then the facilities were actually owned by the Nebraska 4-H Foundation. And so there had been a fire before. There were some that raised the concerns about do we want to rebuild on the same site. We're not prepared to say where that would be for sure. In terms of would it make sense on the same site. Needless to say that the trees are burned from the existing site. So it would be-- and theoretically, it could be cleared and made to be isolated. But we've also secured an individual who would be willing to-- to work with us on providing access to land that would be right adjacent to the forest as well, on the same side of the highway that already has access over the rail-- over the railroad and over the river. So-- so we do feel like we have options available for site. This would be feasible land, which would maybe be preferable. But-- but I think the feasibility study would tell us where we need to ultimately site it.

**BOSTELMAN:** Have you started-- has anyone started to kind of put together plans, what might?

**JACOBSON:** We've not gone into actual what the structures would look like. We weren't going to be too presumptuous. We didn't want to think this committee was a pushover. So we're kind of wanting to make sure we've got some funding and kind of what we're looking at, and then we'll be moving very quickly to get those-- those feasibility study done and and design put together

**BOSTELMAN:** Other questions? Seeing none at this time, I'm sure you'll stay for closing.

**JACOBSON:** I'll stay for closing. Thank you.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you. Ask for our first proponent for LB281 to please step forward. And as we go through this afternoon, there's-- be a number of testifiers, if you start moving forward in those seats, it kind of helps us move along through the day. Just as a testifier comes up, just kind of replace the seat, just kind of keep things moving that way. That would be good. Good afternoon. Welcome.

**JEFF YOST:** Good afternoon, Senator. Members of the Natural Resource Committee, my name is Jeff Yost, J-e-f-f Y-o-s-t. I'm president and CEO of the Nebraska Community Foundation. I appear before you today to support LB281. In my professional opinion, the opportunity for ecotourism development at Halsey is unique, possibly a game changer. Combining the natural serenity of the Sandhills, the Middle Loup River, and the Nebraska National Forest is a recipe for a terrific destination. Today's tourists, especially those with options, want a unique experience. This will be a unique experience. Last fall, the Nebraska Community Foundation commissioned an independent economic impact study of ecotourism development at the forest in Halsey. A two-page description of our findings is being distributed. [INAUDIBLE] go around. Okay, so that has a Nebraska Community Foundation logo on it is for that one. Yep. Right. In summary, investments in a combination of facilities including lodging, conference and events space, dining, outdoor education could generate \$4 million of new economic activity every year. Preliminary cost estimates of these facilities total \$37 million, which creates, as Senator Jacobson said, a very attractive payback period of about nine years. These investments will create several mutually beneficial outcomes: a gathering space for local events such as prom, wedding receptions, and family reunions; a variety of lodging options for up to 100 guests, including a 25-room lodge, all-weather cabins and yurts. This is in addition to existing amenities for recreational vehicles and tent camping; a conference and events facility that could accommodate groups of up to 250; a restaurant for onsite dining and meal services for events; numerous activities such as hiking, horseback riding, canoeing, camping, stargazing, hunting and photography; and numerous educational opportunities, including prairie ecology, astronomy, the environment, and other STEM educational offerings. In addition to the investment in facilities and infrastructure, the Nebraska Community Foundation recommends that a \$10 million endowment be capitalized to create a perpetual stream of income for programming, complementary services and ongoing maintenance of this new facility and infrastructure. This \$10 million will be raised privately. Four million dollars of new economic activity in this part of Nebraska is

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

substantial. This investment will create new jobs as well as diversify the existing job pool. It will catalyze small businesses focused on ecotourism to grow and expand, and these jobs will be complementary to the existing ranch economy. More detailed analysis and feasibility studies will need to be completed, but our first analysis of this investment opportunity makes me very optimistic. This will be a wise investment of public dollars. I urge you to advance LB281 to General File. Thank you very much. Do you have any questions for me?

**BOSTELMAN:** Thanks for your testimony. Questions from committee members? Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** Thank you, Chair Bostelman. Thank you, Mr. Yost, for your testimony. Do you know how many jobs you're going to create?

**JEFF YOST:** We have-- I don't have that number right off the top of my head. I do have the study with me.

**BRANDT:** Okay.

**JEFF YOST:** So I'm happy to provide that. And the study we've prepared is a-- it's in a draft form, but we've done these studies in other places and feel pretty reasonable that the estimates we have in there are good. I think a lot, you know, several of these will be full-time jobs and then many of them will be part-time seasonal jobs, again, to be complementary with the existing economy because there isn't a huge workforce pool in that part of the world.

**BRANDT:** And I guess that was my question. With the workforce shortage across the entire state, probably is more severe in our sparsely populated rural areas. Can they find enough people to fill these jobs?

**JEFF YOST:** And Senator Jacobson made reference to this. And given the time constraints, I didn't really dig into it. But we have a number of existing examples, one being Calamus Outfitters northwest of Burwell, where they have taken their existing ranch and over the past 20 years began to provide a whole series of different season ecotourism opportunities. And they've had numerous members of their family be able to come back and join the ranch family because there's a diversified stream of income. So I'm-- I'm optimistic again. I'm not going to throw it out as fact because there's lots of things that are going to determine what works. But I'm very optimistic that this makes a lot of sense in this part of the state, given the workforce challenges that we have.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**BRANDT:** All right. Thank you.

**JEFF YOST:** Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Chairman. Thank you for coming in, Mr. Yost. So Seward has worked with the Nebraska Community Foundation, and I know with your foundation you guys provide a lot of grants through all the different entities. Seward had applied for a wellness center for the Shovel Ready Grant, which was done by the Legislature last year, and it was a one-to-one match. In your experience, and with all the grants you've-- you guys have done, where does the average fall? Do you see a 25 percent match with most of them? Do you see a one-to-one with most of them, 50 percent? I'm just curious with-- I'm sure it can run the gamut.

**JEFF YOST:** Honestly, it's-- it is-- it is the entire spectrum.

**HUGHES:** OK.

**JEFF YOST:** It is-- it is everything from gifts that have no strings attached to gifts that may have a three-to-one match, not a one-to-one match. There's-- there's just an entire spectrum here. I thought the explanation that Senator Jacobson gave was a really good explanation.

**HUGHES:** Okay. Thank you.

**JEFF YOST:** Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** The foundation isn't going to be the entity that's responsible for the facilities or is it?

**JEFF YOST:** I don't-- I don't think so. So the Nebraska Community Foundation has what are called affiliated funds. And we work with about 275 communities around the state. One of the things we've done over the years is we've helped a number of entities like this get started, get organized, get started. We have a 501(c)(3) in place, but we're very, very interested in this being a facility that makes sense for local people in that part of the world. So we'd want the governance to be local people in that part of the world. But the Nebraska Community Foundation is happy to serve as kind of a front-end partner here to share our experiences, kind of work through the process and help this new group get up and started. But I would think

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

ultimately we would want this to be an independent 501(c)(3) governed by people that live and work there.

**BOSTELMAN:** Okay. I'm going to have to turn the hearing over to Vice Chairman Moser. I've got to go for a bill, but thank you for being here.

**JEFF YOST:** Thank you, Senator.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you for coming. I do have one other question you can answer and I'll go back on the record. I'll get my notes. You talked about other activities in the area. Could you speak a little bit to those and what that draw might be and that usage of those facilities, please?

**JEFF YOST:** Sure.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you.

**JEFF YOST:** So I think the key with something like this and again, Senator Jacobson made this point very well, this is going to be a destination. So this isn't something that sort of you add on to your trip. This is a place you're coming. And then hopefully then there's lots of other activities and experiences that-- that people could-- could put together. You know, I mean, so it may be that a local ranch wants to do something with ecotourism and prairie ecology. Another one may want to do something around horseback riding. A third may want to do something. I mean, we don't want to limit the imagination of people, right? But this is a destination. And these destinations tend to then have all sorts of secondary economic impacts. And part of that \$4 million is, of course, the secondary economic impact of this investment, not just the primary economic impact.

**MOSER:** All right, thank you. Other questions? Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** Thank you, Vice-Chair Moser. Because you're another finance guy, I can't help but hammer on this point. So the first year that we're showing a \$10 million expenditure and we have a 266-- \$266,000 cost to administer that \$10 million. Do you think that's fair or that's extreme?

**JEFF YOST:** I-- I would prefer not to address that. I think it's between you guys.

**BRANDT:** All right, thank you.

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**JEFF YOST:** I worked in the Governor's Office once upon a time, so I have a sense of what to stay out of.

**BRANDT:** All right.

**MOSER:** Okay. Any further questions? Thank you very much for your testimony. Next supporter. If you plan to testify, please come forward and take a chair toward the front so we can move more fluently between testifiers. Welcome.

**BRAD MELLEMA:** Good afternoon, Vice Chair Moser. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Natural Resources Committee on this topic today. My name is Brad Mellema, B-r-a-d M-e-l-l-e-m-a, coming as a resident of Nebraska today, although I am director of the Grand Island Convention Visitors Bureau. Formerly for five years and six summers, I was director of the 4-H Camp at Halsey in the early 2000s and wanted to address the importance of this camp to the state. So in doing so, I want to paint a little picture for you and ask you to do something. As senators, you represent your counties, your communities, and your cities, and rightfully so. I'm going to ask you to put that aside and look at this as a Nebraskan, look at the camp and look at the opportunity before you in that manner, if you would. The Bessey Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest is about 93,000 acres in size, roughly a size between Lincoln and Omaha in terms of the acreage. There's not a traffic signal in it, not a one, no stoplights. Okay? To give you a sense for the size and scope and the treasure of what we have. So then to the 4-H camp. The 4-H camp is a unique place within a unique place within a unique place. The camp itself very unique. The forest has an incredible history, a unique place. The Sandhills, the recharge zone for the Ogallala Aquifer. It's a huge sponge, soaks up the water. The economic power and might in Nebraska starts with the Sandhills of Nebraska. It is a unique place certainly. The history goes back to names like Bruner, Bruner Hall, a few blocks to the north here at the university; Bessey, Dr. Charles Bessey, one of the innovators of forestry in the United States, through Gifford Pinchot and ultimately Teddy Roosevelt. The history is directly tied to that forest in our state. The Sandhills are certainly a treasure. That history is as deep as that of Mount Rushmore. So the reasons that you would look for doing this, there's going to be a lot of nostalgia today. That's not the reason. The reason is because of this unique treasure in Nebraska, having a place where people can gather. The economic impacts are going to be real, but that's not the reason to do it either. The reason to do this in Nebraska is to take that unique place within the unique place and do this. We would pull people in

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

midwinter, midwinter to photography workshops where we would sell out in a matter of weeks in January to Halsey, a long driveway down the road. The need is real for a place like this, and it's a shame that it burned down. But to imagine what is being created for something new is certainly not just a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It is generational, certainly. And so I would ask your consideration as you put this forward as a Nebraskan, to create that opportunity. That's what I have to say today and I'm open to any questions that you might have for me.

**MOSEER:** Questions? How large was the original camp?

**BRAD MELLEMA:** The footprint of the camp isn't as big as you might think. It's certainly surrounded by the forest grounds. And so that is grounds that was leased from the forest. And the footprint, I'm going to estimate around 50 or 60 acres in size. But the trails that would go right off of there would go right into the forest. So there wasn't a fence around it, per se. And so it had the, I guess, the illusion of being maybe a lot bigger than it was.

**MOSEER:** And the fire destroyed a portion of the forest or all of it? How did--

**BRAD MELLEMA:** No, there's-- there's still a lot of trees in Halsey. And if you go back to there's documents that can show the V-shape from where it started and then it shoots out across. There's actually more private ground that burned up than there was ground. It hopped the river and went on to the north, north and west of Thedford. So there's quite a bit of that that happened. But-- so the tree chunk of it, I don't know the acreage of trees that are gone. But the trees, if you're familiar with it, by the-- by the fire tower and of course on through the 4-H camp, and it started probably six or eight miles on down to the south and east of-- of there. And so some of the portions that are most accessible are all charred and burned now.

**MOSEER:** All right. Thank you very much. Any other questions? Yes. Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** Thank you, Mr. Moser. Thank you, Mr. Mellema, is that right--

**BRAD MELLEMA:** Yes.

**BRANDT:** --for testifying. There's a fish hatchery there. Is that correct?

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**BRAD MELLEMA:** Tree nursery.

**BRANDT:** Tree nursery.

**BRAD MELLEMA:** Tree nursery.

**BRANDT:** So if-- if you were going to go there beside the camp, are there enough other amenities to draw people there?

**BRAD MELLEMA:** Yeah. Things that-- that you would do, the river's there, kayaking, canoeing, tubing. Those are big activities. The 4-H camp had activities, high ropes, confidence course, those types of things. We did a lot of range activities. So that is the prairie is there of course. Bird viewing, the prairie chickens dance there. And so in the spring, coming up here in April, can't wait to get out there again, I go every year, is an amazing, amazing sight to see. Hiking, biking, horseback riding, ATVing, those are the types of recreational activities that would-- that would rise up other people need.

**BRANDT:** So, I mean, there would be enough activities to draw people 12 months out of the year.

**BRAD MELLEMA:** There are. And okay, so if you think about a destination, you go to a-- an inclusive resort or whatever that has the things that you need when you go to experience something like that. And so if you have the lodging and the housing and the food taken care of, you're able to get out and do those things. The community of Halsey is small. When we lived there, we had seven people in our family and I believe that was 11 percent of the population of the town of Halsey if my numbers are right, very close to that. And there's a couple of cash registers there, the Double T Bar. There's a motel. There's a small goods store that I've noticed popped up and maybe a few other small businesses. So within ten miles, you get to Thedford, there's more, but there's not a lot of cash registers there. Okay. So back to my comment of the economics isn't the reason to do this, although the economics are there. The reports that we're hearing about are there and they're important. But the ability to get out into the Sandhills and have an experience, in my opinion, equivalent to any of the destinations that people may be thinking of like in Okoboji or the mountains, it's there. It is a place to unplug and recharge and enjoy nature.

**BRANDT:** All right.

**BRAD MELLEMA:** It truly is.

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**BRANDT:** Thank you.

**MOSEER:** Thank you very much for your testimony. Other supporters please come forward. Welcome.

**CAY EWOLDT:** Good afternoon. My name is Cay Ewoldt, that's spelled C-a-y and Ewoldt is E-w-o-l-d-t. I live in Thedford, Nebraska, and I'm here in support of LB281. The fourth-- the 4-H camp in Halsey was the last of its kind. This camp is made up-- has made an impact to the youth that attended it. The camp was a unique region of the state. Over the years, tens of thousands of youth across the state attended this camp. While attending, they had the opportunity to-- opportunity to develop leadership and life skills that would help them become valuable members of society. I personally attended several events at the camp. The experience I had helped drive my passion for nature and conservation. I utilized some of the skills and learned at those events and eventually became a supervisor for eight years with the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy. I utilized those skills to work with livestock producers and industry leaders across the state. My wife and I moved to Thedford in August of 2022 after living in Lincoln for 15 years. I came back to take over my family's business, which is Ewoldt's Grocery, and we own a river outfitting business in Thedford as well too. And I am the fourth generation to run the family business. I believe others would like to come back to the area, but they don't have the means to do so like I did. Utilizing funds in LB281 to rebuild a youth camp near Halsey could provide the ability for those with new job creation. Projects such as this could also have a significant economic impact in the area. Local businesses would see that the benefits-- benefits from such a facility in the area and plus any extra development of land also help with adding tax money to the local school system. I believe this could also help the population growth in rural Nebraska. Thomas County is one of the few counties in Nebraska that is experiencing population growth. According to a Nebraska Public Media article on May 6, 2021, Thomas County was one of only five counties in the state that experienced double digit percentage population growth in the 2020 Census. Thomas County experienced a 14.22 percent population growth. At a time when we are looking for ways to grow rural Nebraska, projects such as these are prime examples of how you do it. I'll leave you with one final thought. One life can make a difference. One person can impact a community. If they can impact a community, they can impact a state. If they can impact a state, I believe they can impact the country. Of all the youth that attended the camp over the years, how many have gone on to have a positive impact on society? I believe quite a few. Now more

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

than ever, we need to be investing in our youth in Nebraska. Being able to build a youth camp in Halsey would be a project in the right place at the right time. I ask that you please pass LB281. Thank you. Are there any questions?

**MOSER:** Thank you. Committee have questions for testifier? Thank you very much. Appreciate it. Next supporter. Welcome.

**BRENDA MASEK:** Good afternoon. Thank you, Vice Chairman Moser. And my name is Brenda Masek, B-r-e-n-d-a M-a-s-e-k, and I am here today as a proponent of LB281 on behalf of the Sandhills community where the Nebraska State 4-H camp and the Eppley Lodge once resided. I have lived approximately 20 miles north of Halsey my entire life. Growing up in this community, the camp and the lodge was as much a part of my life as a grandparent's home. And on-- on 10-2-22, I was-- was-- was not wanting to go respond on a fire call, but I did. And I was between Purdum and Halsey with our fire truck when the call came over the radio that the fire was overtaking the lodge. And believe me, this has been chilling, writing this testimony on what has-- what transpired that day. I never-- I actually went-- only went to the 4-H camp once, living that close proximity to it. But the amount of other activities that I went to throughout the years: range camp, proms, weddings, anniversaries, benefits, different things throughout-- Valentine's Day dances, barbecues, and then just taking your friends and relatives to tour it that didn't live in the area to let them experience some of it. But this-- that-- that's-- that-- this is not about sentiment. This is about need. The need for this facility to be built in this community is great and time critical. A few business-- the few businesses that there are in-- in Halsey depend greatly on the national forest and the camp. One business-- business owner is speculating that come spring business will be down 70 percent due to the loss of the camp and the damage to the forest. Sandhill Oil, the gas station in Tedford, estimates that this will be a negative \$750,000 impact per year for their business, estimating another \$400,000 to \$500,000 loss on other retail along with lodging and restaurants in the area. And that's just a prediction estimate. Other economic impact is the loss of the jobs the camp offered: the management, the maintenance, the staff positions. A lot of these-- these were seasonal, but still the locals depended on them. The plan in LB281, excuse me, LB281 will supply even more jobs for the community in the future. We can't do anything to grow the trees any faster in the forest. But Nebraska has the funds to fill the need in the center of our state. Halsey has been a constant destination for decades for adolescents and adults alike to encounter Nebraska's

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

bounty. Rebuilding a similar facility back in the heart of our state that can showcase the backbone of Nebraska, which is agriculture, is needed and would benefit Nebraska as a whole. Communities large and small in Nebraska need to succeed to make Nebraska succeed. Thank you to Senator Jacobson for bringing this bill and thank you for the Natural Resources for hearing this-- this testimony. Any questions?

**MOSER:** Questions? Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** Thank you, Vice-Chair Moser. Thank you, Ms. Masek, for testifying today. A couple of questions. The paper that I got said 5,000 acres out of the 93,000 burned. I would assume that's a fair estimate. Is the Forest Service replanting those trees or what happens in a-- in a forest fire situation? Do they just let new growth come up from what's in the ground? Do you have any idea?

**BRENDA MASEK:** No, I am not-- I'm not one to speak on that, Senator, of any knowledge. I mean, I'm a volunteer firefighter on the-- when it gets to private land site. They have to replant them out of the nursery. I mean, we have the nursery. The nursery was-- was saved, thank goodness, because of the-- the sprinkler systems that it had. I'm a-- I can't-- I can't speak to-- to what the National Forest Service is doing.

**BRANDT:** Thank you for your service as a firefighter, that's appreciated. Which school system is this in? Is it Thedford?

**BRENDA MASEK:** This-- this would be in the Sandhills School District, which would be very close to the Thedfords and [INAUDIBLE]

**BRANDT:** The Sandhills would be which town?

**BRENDA MASEK:** Sandhills is a consolidated school district, which is Halsey, Dunning, Purdum. Brewster.

**BRANDT:** Do they receive any state aid?

**BRENDA MASEK:** I do not believe so.

**BRANDT:** Okay, there we go. That's-- so if you aren't getting any state aid, it'd be nice to get some other state aid, wouldn't it?

**BRENDA MASEK:** You betcha.

**BRANDT:** All right. Thank you.

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**MOSER:** Maybe we should add a school to this.

**BRANDT:** Yeah. How do you know they are?

**MOSER:** Any other questions? Good. Thank you very much.

**BRENDA MASEK:** Thank you.

**MOSER:** Next supporter. Welcome.

**AL DAVIS:** Good afternoon, Senator Moser, members of the Natural Resources Committee. My name is Al Davis, A-l D-a-v-i-s. I am the registered lobbyist for the Nebraska Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Independent Cattlemen of Nebraska or ICON. Both organizations support LB281. Last year, rural Nebraska lost one of its treasures when the Bovee Fire destroyed the 4-H camp located within the Nebraska National Forest at Halsey. That camp was constructed in the late '50s through a grant from the Eugene Eppley Foundation, with matching funds raised through contributions from others. My father was one of those who helped raise the matching funds to build this unique camp. The loss of the facility is a terrible blow to the region and to the state. The camp holds a special place in the hearts of so many area kids who attended there through the years, but is just as relevant today as it was 60 years ago. It offered many unique and special experiences for Nebraska's young people, both rich and poor. And I can speak from personal experience since I attended the camp during my youth. We learned about the forest ecology; worked with paint to produce art; swam in the river; hiked through the forest; studied the stars; learned to recognize different types of trees, flowers and grasses; learned new songs and made lifelong friends. Attending the 4-H camp was a rite of passage for all area youth, and no one was turned away so the children whose parents could not afford to attend the camp were welcome, along with those who did have the resources. Decades later, the 4-H camp still fulfills its initial purpose: giving children the opportunity to stretch their legs, learn new things, make new friends, experience nature, study the stars, and broaden their reach. The camp also served as a resource for other organizations that operated their own camps. They look at pre-COVID numbers of children attending the camp showed that 464 children attended 4-H camp that year, while non-4-H camper numbers totaled 1,148. The camp served as a resource for community schools, teaching students archery, canoeing, and environmental education. Lastly, the camp was a must used resource in the off season serving wedding parties, family reunions, regional meetings, hunting parties, and retreats. While the fire destroyed a

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

legacy, a new and more modern camp can rise from the ashes. With adequate funding, the opportunity is there to make the camp more than a 4-H facility by providing many more adult and youth activities. Partnering with the Park Service, the facility has the potential to fill many niches throughout the year and could become a significant economic driver for a region in need of a more diversified economy. Both ICON and the Nebraska Chapter of the Sierra Club are in full support of Senator Jacobson and LB281. Thank you. And so listening this morning a little bit to some of the testimony that Mr. Yost gave and Senator Jacobson, I think the vision they have is very unique and very special and can really drive economic development in an area, which we desperately need because we are unfortunately reliant on one industry which, when it has its ups, is great; when it has its downs, it's not so good. So I urge this committee to move forward rapidly on the bill and hopefully get to full debate in the Legislature. Thank you.

**MOSER:** Questions from the committee? Thank you for your testimony.

**AL DAVIS:** Thank you.

**MOSER:** Next supporter.

**CAROL THOMPSON:** I'll be brief, really.

**MOSER:** Welcome.

**CAROL THOMPSON:** Thank you. Good afternoon. My name is Carol Thompson, C-a-r-o-l, Thompson, T-h-o-m-p-s-o-n, and I am a resident of Blaine County, which is Senator Brewer's district. I'm here in support of LB281. My husband and I have ranched in Blaine County since 1979. His grandfather, Lawrence Thompson, homesteaded our ranch in 1909. As you can see, we have a vested interest in the area. Craig and I have 5 children and 12 grandchildren. All of our children and grandchildren, except the three youngest ones, have attended activities at the Nebraska National Forest and the 4-H camp. The outdoor education days sponsored by the local public schools, and it's not just Blaine County, but Thomas County and Custer County, was a wonderful experience in the spring. We are happy to say that our children have gone on to have successful careers. While they were participants in the camps offered by the Extension Service, they met many students from other areas of the state that they never would have met without the opportunity of attending these camps. As all of you know, while running for an elected office, it's not just what you know, but who

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

you know and how to work with others that achieve your goals. The Sandhills of Nebraska is a sparsely populated area, and the opportunity to meet and form friendships with students from different backgrounds is-- and locations has provided a valuable part of their education. While our family's main enterprise is our ranch, we also own a business in Dunning and several rental units. With ranching being the main business in this area, there's little diversity of employment opportunities for spouses of ranchers and their help. With the proposed lodge and the associated buildings, this project-- prospect of drawing more people to the area is greatly improved. We need people to come to the area and find good-paying jobs and services. We have quality schools and high speed internet and would allow residents to work from anywhere. Making a lodge that will become a destination for outsiders to visit and exposes them to the beauty and the resources of this area. I strongly support LB281 as a means of creating economic development opportunities and population growth of this area. Thank you. Do you have any questions?

**MOSER:** Thank you. Do you have questions? Just looking to see if anybody else wants to ask before. Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** But I'm kind of waiting too. I've carried all the load here. So thank you, Ms. Thompson, for testifying today and for the drive down here.

**CAROL THOMPSON:** Yeah.

**BRANDT:** So as a business owner in Dunning and in the area, do you feel there will be enough workers available to fill these new jobs?

**CAROL THOMPSON:** I think there are a lot of people who are looking for employment up there if there was the right thing that come along. I mean, I employ several people on a part-time basis because I don't need them all the time. But if we had something like this, we could give them full-time employment. No, I need more people.

**BRANDT:** Well, this should-- this should draw more families into your area. I would hope.

**CAROL THOMPSON:** I would hope so.

**BRANDT:** \$37 million investment.

**CAROL THOMPSON:** Um-hum.

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**BRANDT:** So how long is the drive from where you live to here?

**CAROL THOMPSON:** Well, it's 225 miles, and if the wind's blowing and it's snowing, it might take me a while to get home.

**BRANDT:** All right. Thank you.

**CAROL THOMPSON:** [INAUDIBLE]

**MOSER:** Other questions? Thank you. Other supporters. Welcome to Natural Resources.

**NANCY FURMAN:** Thank you, Chairman and committee. I'm Nancy Furman, N-a-n-c-y F-u-r-m-a-n. Since its demise, so many memories have been shared about the Nebraska State 4-H Camp. I can name 30 camp activities that are good for kids. However, what I really want to get across is camp is more than just the activities, more than the environment education, and more than the building. As a 4-H leader for ten years and sending my kids to the state 4-H camp every summer, being office assistant for the Sandhills Extension Office, and also as the State 4-H camp director for five and a half years, I know camp and I know what residential camp does for kids. I was also the executive camp director of the Omaha YMCA camps and a team builder for YMCA Camp Kitaki. Kids come from residential camping with a liberty-- a library of knowledge about life, people, and themselves. As Sarah Davis wrote in a 2010 article in the American Camping Association Magazine: What's going on inside this open-air classroom is something that could never be captured by the walls of any proper educational establishment. It's hands on, hands getting dirty, and helping hands. It's the feel, the feeling you get when making new friends, truly being yourself, and learning all that surrounds you. It's using all five senses of smelling the outdoors, hearing the wind through the pine trees, seeing the stars at night, feeling the wooly bear or the snake skin and tasting the marshmallows over the campfire. Why Halsey? It has a tradition for over 60 years. It's getting people out of the city to the country. It's getting youth out of eastern Nebraska to learn about the rest of their state. It comes with the pine forests, thousands of acres, trails, river, and sandy soil, surrounded by ranches established by the pioneers and the incomparable Sandhills. It's a spec-- special destination with U.S. Forest and local support. We can dream big and make it more than just a kids camp. Think of it as a year-round conference center that offers adults, teens and young children programs, family reunions, weddings and so many more other retreats. The original camp was built through donations and from

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

hundreds of 4-H clubs. This can be a new opportunity to build 4-H camping numbers, have cabins and bunks built for today's lifestyles, and a lodge that can serve Nebraskans in many capacities. Foundations, grants and kids can make this happen again. As a committed camp executive, I am prepared to campaign and support rebuilding the 4-H lodge and cabins at Halsey. I'm available to discuss any plans and look forward to new opportunities. I do support LB281.

**MOSER:** Questions? Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Vice Chair. Thanks for coming in. I was waiting for the 4-H and Extension people to come forward. So 4-H leader, went through 4-H as a kid. My kids are-- I still have one still in 4-H, huge supporter. The-- there are no more residential 4-H camps in Nebraska.

**NANCY FURMAN:** Not 4-H.

**HUGHES:** [INAUDIBLE] because the Gretna facility closed three-- two years--

**NANCY FURMAN:** There used to be three.

**HUGHES:** There used to be three. Those two have closed that were kind of around here.

**NANCY FURMAN:** Right.

**HUGHES:** Why did those close? Did they close because there weren't kids signing up for camp? Did they close because they didn't have kids, older kids to run the camp? Do we have--

**NANCY FURMAN:** I can't answer that. I do not know.

**HUGHES:** Okay.

**NANCY FURMAN:** I've been out of camp for--

**HUGHES:** Long enough.

**NANCY FURMAN:** --several years now.

**HUGHES:** Okay. All right. I will save it maybe for someone that might be later. Thank you for coming. Appreciate it.

**MOSER:** Okay. Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you.

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**NANCY FURMAN:** Senator Brandt didn't ask me anything.

**HUGHES:** Oh. That's a good thing. Be happy.

**MOSER:** He's cutting you some slack. Next supporter. Welcome.

**JAMI BIODROWSKI:** Hi. My name is Jami Biodrowski, and I'm the director of Easterseals Camp and outdoor education programs. And I'm here today in strong support of LB281. Imagine yourself having a child or a loved one that is unable to walk or requires the use of a power wheelchair. Now imagine them at camp, unable to do any camp activities because it rained all day yesterday, and the only way to get to the activities is by taking the dirt paths that have turned into mud. They attempted taking the path this morning, but their chair quickly sank into the mud so badly that after four camp counselors tried to dig them out, they had to get a tractor to pull them out of the mud instead. This story may seem like a story I've exaggerated, but it's not. It really happened. In order to prevent a similar loss of dignity from happening again and to provide accessible access to overnight outdoor education and camp programs, it is important for LB281 to pass to help rebuild Camp Easterseals Nebraska, which will be a barrier free camp. Easterseals has provided camp and outdoor education for individuals of all ages and all abilities for over 50 years. We are the only overnight camp option in the state of Nebraska for individuals with disabilities who cannot attend other overnight programs because facilities are either not accessible or because their programs are unable to safely support campers who require complete medical, behavioral, physical, or social support. In 1999, the Easterseals Camp in Milford, Nebraska, was destroyed when a train derailed and spilled diesel fuel. We spent many years since then leasing other camps that were not built for campers with disabilities, sometimes making it unsafe for our campers. In December of 2022, Easterseals purchased 64 acres of land on the former Dana College campus in Blair, Nebraska. This land allows us to rebuild a barrier-free facility that will serve an important demographic that is often ignored. And while we have proceeds from the legal settlement of the train derailment, it only covers a small fraction of what it will cost to build a barrier-free camp. What does it mean to be barrier free? It means going beyond what the ADA laws require. It means there will be no ramps at camp as everyone will enter camp through the exact same door. The passage of LB281 impacts not just the camper who was stuck in the mud. It impacts everyone. A barrier-free camp will provide desperately needed respite for caregivers, provide job training for teens and a space for learning not just about the outdoors, but for respect for one another.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

I have seen this firsthand. As a mother, my ten-year-old son often tags along with me to camp. After learning that one of our campers loves Hot Wheels, he, without prompting, he brought his own Hot Wheels cars to share with him. When one of our campers wanted to endlessly play pass the ball, he was the friend who said yes and never once complained. He has learned to not be afraid of those who communicate or move differently than he does. He has learned how to be a better friend and has been empowered to always choose kindness first. His experiences at camp has shaped him to be the empathetic, helpful, and compassionate little boy he is. I urge you to pass LB281. Thank you.

**MOSER:** Thank you. Questions. Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Vice Chair. Thanks for coming in. You are the other \$20 million then.

**JAMI BIODROWSKI:** Yes, hopefully.

**HUGHES:** And I'm like, did you see me pull this out? Like, okay, is that going to count? Man-made disaster--

**JAMI BIODROWSKI:** Yes.

**HUGHES:** --is a train.

**JAMI BIODROWSKI:** Yep.

**HUGHES:** All right. Very good. Thank you for coming. That's all I have.

**MOSER:** Okay. Could you please spell your name?

**JAMI BIODROWSKI:** Oh, yes. I'm sorry, J-a-m-i, and my last name is B-i-o-d-r-o-w-s-k-i.

**MOSER:** Great. Thank you. Yes, Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** All right. Thank you, Vice Chair Moser. So you guys already own the Dana campus, is that right?

**JAMI BIODROWSKI:** No. We own 64 acres that Dana used to own. So not the whole campus. It's just a piece of it. And most of it is just raw land right now, a cornfield and then two dorms.

**BRANDT:** Okay. So using two of the old-- two of the old dorm buildings.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**JAMI BIODROWSKI:** One dorm will need to be torn down and the other dorm will be converted into staff housing.

**BRANDT:** So you need to build a camp from scratch.

**JAMI BIODROWSKI:** Yes.

**BRANDT:** Do you have a cost on that project?

**JAMI BIODROWSKI:** Terrible at remembering numbers. But if we get-- do what we want to make it completely barrier free, it was around \$50 million.

**BRANDT:** All right, Thank you.

**JAMI BIODROWSKI:** Um-hum.

**MOSER:** Five zero.

**JAMI BIODROWSKI:** Yes.

**MOSER:** Okay, just couldn't tell if it was 15 or 50.

**JAMI BIODROWSKI:** Oh, no.

**MOSER:** All right. Thank you very much for your testimony. More supporters. Welcome to Natural Resources.

**SUSAN LITTLEFIELD:** Well, good afternoon, Vice Chairman Moser and members of the Natural Resources Committee. My name is Susan Littlefield, S-u-s-a-n L-i-t-t-l-e-f-i-e-l-d. I'm a 4-H alum from Minnesota, a 4-H mom and leader in Platte County and currently serve as a member of the Nebraska 4-H Foundation Board of Trustees. I'm here on behalf of the Nebraska 4-H Foundation in support of LB281 and want to thank Senator Jacobson for introducing this important proposal and to Senator Brewer for cosponsoring. LB281 is a vital tool for the future of outdoor camp opportunities, not only for our 4-H members, but youth and adults across Nebraska. The 4-H camp world was devastated in October of last year when word spread of the fire at the campsite in Halsey and then the late night word that the camp was completely destroyed. As the Halsey campsite smoldered in the hours and days that contained, the push was already there for us to rebuild. Unfortunately, at this time, we can't bring the Halsey camp site back to its former glory because insurance settlement proceeds will not cover the total costs of cleanup, design, and rebuild at the site. For

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

background, the Halsey campsite insurance settlement proceeds will be roughly \$1.8 million after demolition and cleanup of the campsite and expenses related to the fire. Hence the need for LB281. To reinforce our support for the future of the Halsey site, the Nebraska 4-H Foundation Board of Trustees met in January and shared the following resolution in support of the camp: The Nebraska 4-H Foundation is grateful for the years of support from the Halsey community and values camping experiences for our youth. We resolve to commit proceeds as necessary for the demolition/cleanup from the complete loss of the facilities at the Nebraska National Forest in Halsey. We are committed to reserve the proceeds from the insurance settlement, net of cleanup expenses during this exploratory process, and we are honored to be part of shaping the future. As the process unfolds, we will base our decisions on the future on the best fit to fulfill our mission of supporting positive youth development through Nebraska 4-H. And as we continue to move forward, the Nebraska 4-H Foundation Board of Trustees is responsible for working with the Nebraska Forest Service on the demolition and cleanup of the 4-H Halsey camp. Excuse me. Our foundation will partner with Nebraska 4-H, Nebraska Extension university, the Nebraska Community Foundation, and other community stakeholders to explore new possibilities and opportunities. So at the end of the day, it's not only the bricks and mortar that held this campsite like Halsey together. It's the people. From staff to youth to volunteers to Nebraska Extension, 4-H alums, and our rural communities, they, too, make up the brick and mortar of the former Halsey site and will be the future bricks and mortar as we move towards a better campaign of camping and youth outdoor experiences envisioned in LB281. Thank you again to Senator Jacobson for your leadership with LB281 and I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**MOSER:** Questions? Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** Thank you, Vice Chair Moser. Thank you, Ms. Littlefield, for testifying. What are the cleanup costs on that?

**SUSAN LITTLEFIELD:** Right now for-- the initial numbers that I received for the demolition part that we've contracted out is right around \$180,000 to \$200,000.

**BRANDT:** And so you have to make a greenfield site. You have to restore it just to-- as if there were no buildings there. So has your organization already told the Forest Service you're going to vacate that-- that lease?

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**SUSAN LITTLEFIELD:** That part I would have to get back to you on that. I know that they have turned over the building, the one building that did survive, has turned that over to the Forest Service.

**BRANDT:** Does the foundation have any-- any more resources besides the insurance settlement to invest in this property?

**SUSAN LITTLEFIELD:** None at this time, sir.

**BRANDT:** Does the foundation, and I know I was in 4-H, my kids were in 4-H. There's thousands of us out there, hundreds of thousands. Have they looked at fundraising?

**SUSAN LITTLEFIELD:** I'm sure that will be an option down the road. Right now, we're just focused on getting the cleanup done. As you well know, buildings have collapsed upon themselves and there's just a lot to do. So that's the first step as we move forward.

**BRANDT:** They haven't even started the cleanup?

**SUSAN LITTLEFIELD:** Not that-- the initial has been They've been out there. They surveyed the site and have started to take care of the process.

**BRANDT:** All right. Thank you.

**SUSAN LITTLEFIELD:** Thank you.

**MOSER:** Yes, Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Vice Chair. Do you have answers? I know 4-H Foundation is separate, but with the camping, the other sites that closed down like [INAUDIBLE]

**SUSAN LITTLEFIELD:** No, ma'am.

**HUGHES:** Thank you. Thanks for coming.

**SUSAN LITTLEFIELD:** You still working for the radio consortium?

**SUSAN LITTLEFIELD:** The-- the one-- the Rural Radio Network, yes, out of Lexington, yes, I am.

**MOSER:** Yeah. She worked in Columbus for a number of years, so I know her.

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**SUSAN LITTLEFIELD:** I knew him as Mayor Moser.

**MOSER:** Yes. It's okay to admit we're friends.

**SUSAN LITTLEFIELD:** Yes, we are.

**MOSER:** Okay.

**SUSAN LITTLEFIELD:** All right. Thank you, sir.

**MOSER:** Thank you. More supporters.

**JAMES DUKESHERER:** Vice Chair Moser, members of the committee, thank you for having me. My name is James Dukesherer, J-a-m-e-s D-u-k-e-s-h-e-r-e-r. I'm the director of government relations for the Nebraska Rural Electric Association. NREA is testifying today in support of LB281. The Nebraska Rural Electric Association represents 34 rural public power districts and electric cooperatives throughout the state. The more than 1,000 dedicated employees of our system serve 240,000 meters across nearly 90,000 miles of line. Since 1980, the Nebraska Rural Electric Association has hosted our Youth Energy Leadership Camp at the 4-H Camp at the National-- Nebraska National Forest. Over this time, we welcomed more than 2,700 students to the camp. While at camp, participants enjoyed all the typical summer camp experiences like pickup volleyball games and canoeing. But at Youth Energy Leadership Camp, they've also had the opportunity to learn more about the state's all public power system. They can run to serve on a mock board of directors. They toured the Gerald Gentleman Power Plant and Kingsley Hydropower Station. They can wear gaffs and climb a utility pole. They learn about electric safety, the history of public power, the careers that are available in the electric industry, and they're challenged with games and exercises that work to develop their leadership skills. Perhaps one of the best opportunities presented to the students who attend the leadership camp is the opportunity to win a trip to Washington, D.C., as part of our annual NREA youth tour. Each year NREA takes between 20 and 30 students out to our nation's capital. They visit Gettysburg, they go to Mount Vernon, they meet with our elected officials out there. We do that every summer. NREA has seen our youth programs make a real difference in the lives of the students that attend. The camp facilities at Halsey have provided a beautiful location, often previously unvisited by many Nebraskans, especially the youth. We encourage the state to rebuild this camp and to continue to support the youth development that occurs at Halsey. I

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

would encourage you to advance LB281 to ensure this experience can continue for many more students in the years to come.

**MOSER:** Thank you. Questions? Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thanks, Vice Chair Moser. Thanks for coming in, Mr. Dukesherer, which is the funnest name to say. Will the NREA do some matching grants for this also, or do you just rent the camp space so that's kind of good enough? Or what's your thoughts on [INAUDIBLE]?

**JAMES DUKESHERER:** I think we would be an excellent group to put on that fundraising list as they start to look for people to fundraise.

**HUGHES:** Good to hear. Perfect. Thank you.

**MOSER:** Any other questions? Thank you very much.

**JAMES DUKESHERER:** And just to add one more comment.

**MOSER:** Sure.

**JAMES DUKESHERER:** We have in the past donated to the camp as well. So things like the picnic tables that are out there were donated by our members.

**HUGHES:** They're not out there now.

**JAMES DUKESHERER:** No, we actually were able to save those. We just put new ones out there.

**HUGHES:** All right. Those can go in the new camp.

**JAMES DUKESHERER:** They never actually got used during camp because it burned up, but we were able to recover them.

**MOSER:** That's great. Thank you so much. Other supporters. Welcome.

**SETH BARNES:** Good afternoon and thank you for taking the time to hear comments about LB281. My name is Seth Barnes, S-e-t-h B-a-r-n-e-s. I'm here on behalf of myself and my parents, Randy and Roberta Barnes, who own land directly north of the 4-H campground. My comments are twofold. First, to express my personal connection to the 4-H camp and the need for continued youth leadership development in the western part of the state. And second, to stress the great opportunity this represents to support the economic viability of Halsey and neighboring communities. Growing up across the fence from the 4-H camp was

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

something I took for granted, and I'm going to go off script and save you the song and dance. My older brother Austin was involved in the camp as a staff advisor and camp counselor. And while I wasn't as involved in the camp, I did find my way there when girls were involved. I'd like to say that I met my wife at one of these camps, but I can't. Niki, my wife, and I met at UNL. But as it turns out, we were sitting across the same campfire at one of those camp campfires, and I was just the boy from the forest. She was there because of the RYLA leadership camp. And this serves to illuminate my first point: how important the 4-H camp is to the leadership development of Greater Nebraska. My wife is from Chappell, which is over three hours from the camp in Halsey. She and I have both served as educators at Lincoln High for the better part of a decade and have worked with some of the best and brightest students Lincoln has to offer. She and I marvel at the access to leadership development opportunities for our students and that we could have only dreamed of. If there is no longer a 4-H camp in the western part of the state, it's furthering the divide between opportunities for youth across the state, and your decision determines whether our state government is doing anything to address this. How much potential is going untapped? How many students across the state are being-- going to be ill-equipped to handle the very pressing needs of our schools, communities, businesses, industry and society? And now to my second point that out of this great tragedy presents opportunity. My three brothers and I were-- and our families were home in Halsey that weekend of the Bovee Fire for my parents' 40th anniversary. We took family pictures. The next day we were getting ready to leave and we saw the smoke rising out of the southeast. We could still see the smoke on our way back as far as Broken Bow. And then by the time I reached Lincoln, I turned right back around to go back and do what I could. I can almost guarantee that I was the first to see the devastation of the fire at the 4-H camp in the daylight. After a long night of checking on active fires around our house, I was up before dawn to see the extent of the damage. I watched the sunrise on top of the hill across the fence from the 4-H grounds, looking out over the valley of charred pasture ground and blackened tree skeletons. As the sun was coming up, the gray sky wept with a bit of rain, soothing in and of itself. But as I soaked in the shock of my new surroundings, I began to see a rainbow peek out of the clouds and eventually span the whole horizon. In all of this despair, this brought me hope in a new day. The conversations around LB281 and the opportunity of a public-private partnership run by local community organizations to serve the needs of not only youth leadership development, but also all of the other things the previous

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

4-H camp couldn't. You can go on to read the rest of my comments and I'm happy to take questions.

**MOSER:** Thank you. Questions? Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** Could you please continue with the rest of your comments?

**SETH BARNES:** Yes. So the public-private partnership run by local community organizations to serve the needs of not only youth leadership development, but also all of the things the 4-H camp couldn't brings hope in a new day. Why not build a multipurpose facility that could host residential youth camps and community events, but could also be used for things like corporate retreats or agrotourism efforts to bring more people into the area? What an opportunity this is to bring hope to the community, invite more people into the area to see the beauty of the forest and the Sandhills and its people. Take a definitive step in reversing the flow of people and resources out of the heart of Nebraska. So in conclusion, I urge you to support the passing of this bill because of the need to continue youth leadership development in rural Nebraska and also the opportunity to bring hope to the heart of Nebraska.

**MOSER:** Okay. Any further questions? Yes, Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** I'll be quick. Thank you, Senator Moser. And you said-- thanks for coming in. You and your wife are both teachers at East?

**SETH BARNES:** Lincoln. High.

**HUGHES:** Lincoln High.

**SETH BARNES:** And I'm in a different position, but I served as a math teacher for eight years.

**HUGHES:** Okay. I think we should start a little camp and take Lincoln High School kids and run them out to Halsey and get them out there to check out Sandhills and everything else.

**SETH BARNES:** And vice versa.

**HUGHES:** Right [INAUDIBLE]

**SETH BARNES:** As a student from Sandhills--

**HUGHES:** Yeah, right.

**SETH BARNES:** --I wouldn't imagine--

**HUGHES:** Be like share.

**SETH BARNES:** --what happened at Lincoln High.

**HUGHES:** Right.

**SETH BARNES:** That's a dream of mine. And another reason why I'm here is I represent one of those people who's not able to go back because of the lack of opportunities.

**HUGHES:** Sure.

**SETH BARNES:** I got a degree in math education because that was a way that I could. Life circumstances happen differently, but I mean, that would be the only way that I'd be able to go back to that area.

**HUGHES:** Yeah. Thanks for coming in, appreciate it.

**BOSTELMAN:** Other questions? Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** Thank you, Chairman Bostelman. Is your family the one that's making the land available for the new 4-H camp?

**SETH BARNES:** As far as I know, we haven't been approached for that.

**BRANDT:** Well, you just said you own land across there. Thank you.

**SETH BARNES:** Yeah, we are close.

**BRANDT:** All right.

**BOSTELMAN:** Other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony.

**SETH BARNES:** Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Next proponent, please. Afternoon. Welcome.

**ALEXA SPURLIN:** Good afternoon. Members of the Natural Resources Committee, my name is Alexa Spurlin, A-l- e-x-a S-p-u-r-l-i-n. I'm the information and education coordinator for the Upper Loup NRD located in Thedford and a member of the Adventure Camp about the Environment Committee. I am testifying today for the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts or the NARD. The NARD supports LB281, which will allow for the rebuilding of the youth outdoor education camp

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

facilities at the State 4-H camp, located in the Bessey National Forest, west of Halsey, Nebraska. In 2010, the state's natural resources districts developed an outdoor educational youth camp called Adventure Camp About the Environment, better known as ACE Camp. All 23 NRDs have been committed to ACE Camp by providing speakers, funding, and camper scholarships so that all Nebraska youth wanting to attend may, regardless of their financial status. Our camp's main goal is to engage and teach our youth about their environment and Nebraska's natural resources. While there, students also gain a sense of self-awareness, have many opportunities to connect with their peers, environmental professionals, as well as grow in their appreciation for the natural world. When deciding where to host the camp, several locations were discussed. The ACE Camp Committee wanted a camp that was centrally located, making it more accessible to Nebraska youth and our educational presenters. We also needed access to environmental teaching tools such as trees, rivers, rangeland, and wildlife. We require facilities with large enough areas for indoor instruction, dining, and enough cabins to accommodate at least 50 campers overnight. Only one camp met all of these needs, the State 4-H Camp at Halsey. In our 12 years of hosting ACE Camp, we've had youth from every corner of the state, from Syracuse to Hartington, from Benkelman to Harrison, and many places in between. The camp has been accessible to individuals statewide. Unfortunately, in 2022, the Bovee Fire destroyed the 4-H Camp Lodge and all its cabins. The State 4-H Camp provided a location with facilities that cannot be found at any other camps in Nebraska. The Nebraska Association of Resources Districts support LB281 and the rebuilding of a youth outdoor education camp facility at the Bessey National Forest. Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you for your testimony. Questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony today.

**ALEXA SPURLIN:** Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Good afternoon and welcome.

**JASON SMITH:** Good afternoon. Mr. Chairman and members, my name is Jason Smith, J-a-s-o-n S-m-i-t-h. I'm the executive director of YMCA Camp Kitaki, an overnight summer camp and outdoor education center with the YMCA of Lincoln. I'm here today on behalf of the Nebraska State Alliance of YMCAs, which include 14 Y's throughout the state. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of LB281. Each summer I have the privilege to watch nearly 3,000 campers age 7 to 17 grow in a classroom that, while certainly not traditional, is decidedly

consequential. For a week at a time, they practice the skills of navigating the world independently from their caregivers. When campers find success in that independence, the results are immediately visible. On the last day of our overnight camps, a common thing I overhear parents telling their camper is, you look taller. It's not physical growth. It's self-esteem, visible to everyone. In studies conducted by the American Camp Association, campers and their parents reported statistically significant increases in self-esteem as a result of the camp experience. Critically, these gains were maintained in follow-up surveying six months after the conclusion of camp. In the spring and fall, Camp Kitaki literally becomes a classroom as we welcome entire grade levels from local schools to camp for our outdoor education partnerships. As part of the school day, these students conduct pond studies, challenge themselves on our climbing tower, learn to fish, and build shelters, which supplement their in-class curriculum with hands-on experience and skill development. ACA's 5-Year Camp Impact Study shows that relationship skills, independence, responsibility, appreciation for diversity, perseverance, and willingness to try new things appear to be the most essential and lasting outcomes of camp. And these are transferable skills that benefit participants in school, in college, and into their first jobs. This bill would allow outdoor education camps to reach more youth and to welcome more diverse populations the opportunities of learning in the outdoors. It would develop more connections and youth to the natural environment of our state, encouraging a greater sense of place and connection to Nebraska. A current project at my camp is building a dedicated health lodge and welcome center facility to address and support the physical and mental health of guests to meet the changing needs and expectations of youth and families today. The support of LB281 would go a long way to helping expand our services through this new facility. I and my fellow YMCA colleagues are excited by the potential that LB281 represents to invest in more youth serving camps, which is an investment in today's youth, an investment in the future leaders of Nebraska. Thanks for your time.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you for your testimony. Any questions? I do have one question. The bill says "rebuild a youth outdoor education camp facility that was damaged due to a natural or manmade disaster." Has any of your camps had that happen to them?

**JASON SMITH:** No, they have not. The text of the bill that I read said that preference would be given to camps, that experienced those events, which our interpretation was that--

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**BOSTELMAN:** Okay. Thank you, appreciate it.

**JASON SMITH:** --that left room for folks that hadn't.

**BOSTELMAN:** Okay. Understand. Thank you.

**JASON SMITH:** Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Next proponent. Afternoon. Welcome.

**SHERIDAN SWOTEK:** Good afternoon, Senator. Members of the community--committee, my name is Sheridan Swotek, S-h-e-r-i-d-a-n, Swotek, and I'm here testifying in support of LB281. I'm a high school agriculture teacher and FFA advisor at Kearney High School and a proud camp alumni of the Nebraska State 4-H Camp, located in the Nebraska National Forest near Halsey, Nebraska. Here I spent several of my childhood summers as a camper. My positive experience as a camper inspired me to become a counselor for two summers and eventually a full-time summer staff for one summer. My second summer as staff, I was appointed interim onsite camp director for a single summer season at the ripe age of 19 years old. I also spent many of the college weekends coming back to facilitate school groups in the fall and spring. Through my experiences as a camper, counselor, staff, interim director, and now as a teacher, I can confidently say that camp changes lives for youth for the better. The positive influence camp has on youth education about nature, others and themselves is second to none. The opportunity to be immersed in nature through activities such as kayaking, hiking, nature programming and s'mores around a camp or starlit campfire develop an appreciation for youth that carry them many years after they leave camp. A camper's environmental education they receive at camp is the best kind of hands-on learning they can have about nature. But the social emotional learning that develops at camp for youth is also extremely beneficial. Campers learn how to work as a team while also learning more about themselves in the process. It's a place where kids that may come in nervous and lonely leave as individuals that now have new friendships, experiences, and an appreciation for the environment around them. Our youth are the future of Nebraska. Investing dollars into grants to be used for youth camping facilities to foster the opportunity for outdoor education through residential camps not only benefits the summer campers, but also youth leadership camps such as Rotary Youth Leadership, Rural Electric Association, NRD ACE Camp, and support groups, church groups, schools, conventions, affiliated groups, and many others that use the facilities year round. With over 20 youth residential camps across our state, these camps are

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

catalysts for substantial economic activity and help contribute countless dollars in local communities and businesses. Natural and manmade disasters do occur, and unfortunately, Nebraska experienced a prime example of this on October 2, 2022, with the Bovee Fire that devastated the Nebraska State 4-H Camp, with 16 of the 17 buildings claimed as a complete loss. Other camps are also prone to similar disasters, and it is important that Nebraska is proactive with offering funds to help support camps with getting back on their feet, to contribute, to offer the outdoor education programs they provide. With the funds allocated with the passing of LB281 to help rebuild camp facilities, we are investing in our youth, our local communities, and inspiring tourism across our great state. I'm asking you to strongly consider the importance of LB281 with the betterment of our youth, our natural resources, and the future of Nebraska. Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you for your testimony. Questions from committee members? Senator Moser.

**MOSER:** So what facilities did the camp have before it was destroyed?

**SHERIDAN SWOTEK:** We have the Eppley Lodge and several cabins and staff house along with the nature barn and other sheds around the facility as well.

**MOSER:** And I know somebody mentioned swimming in the river. Is the river adjacent to the campgrounds or?

**SHERIDAN SWOTEK:** Yes. The Middle Loup River runs just north of the campgrounds and was about a five-minute walk from the lodge.

**MOSER:** How big was the lodge?

**SHERIDAN SWOTEK:** The lodge? There were several components to it. We had a full service kitchen, a ballroom, a downstairs dining area, and multipurpose activities area, along with a nurse's station, and a couple offices.

**MOSER:** Had, like, a basement?

**SHERIDAN SWOTEK:** It did not have a formal basement. No.

**MOSER:** Or do you hit water when you dig three feet there?

**SHERIDAN SWOTEK:** I'm not sure. Not to my knowledge, no.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**MOSER:** Yeah. How many people did the ballroom facilitate? How many would it hold?

**SHERIDAN SWOTEK:** I am not familiar with the formal numbers. I know that a group of 200 comfortably be in the ballroom, but it just depends on what kind of activity you're having up there.

**MOSER:** Yeah, I was just trying to get a scope of what was there and then what we're going to build for \$30 million. Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Other questions? Were there any cabins or outbuildings?

**SHERIDAN SWOTEK:** Yes. Yes. We had several cabins. Some of them had bathrooms attached to them. We also had a bathhouse as well. And we had a nature barn also on site that had-- where we kept all of our high ropes equipment, but also NRD resources such as pelts and other things to teach kids about nature. And we had other sheds for storage as well.

**BOSTELMAN:** Okay. Thank you.

**SHERIDAN SWOTEK:** Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thanks for your testimony. Thanks for coming in. Next proposal, please. Good afternoon.

**SHAWN POLLOCK:** Good afternoon, Chairman Bostelman and members of the Natural Resources Committee. My name is Shawn Pollock, S-h-a-w-n P-o-l-l-o-c-k. I have the honor to be the president-elect of the Nebraska Association of County Extension Boards, also known as NACEB. As a resident of Sarpy County and a leader with the Douglas-Sarpy Extension Board for the last six years, I'm here today representing NACEB and the organization that represents 65 county extension boards across Nebraska, with over 550 members representing all 93 counties. We are here in strong support of LB281. We want to thank Senator Jacobson for his leadership in supporting the work of Nebraska Extension and in particular the work with Nebraska 4-H and youth development. Your Nebraska-- Nebraska Extension programs have reached thousands of Nebraskans over the years. In 2021 alone, in Douglas-Sarpy County service area, over 15,000 youth were impacted by 4-H. We've got a couple other numbers there in my testimony. I can let you read that later. NACEB's been at this for over 50 years. We've been extending programs and activities from the university to communities and individuals across Nebraska. We have eight key program areas of which 4-H youth development is one. Our mission brings us to

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

why we support LB281. It is places like Halsey 4-H Outdoor Education Campsite and many other 4-H facilities across the state where many Nebraskan Extension programs take place, the places where youth learn about our state and many aspects that make Nebraska unique. It's a great place to grow up. It's a great place to learn. It's a great place to raise a family. That's why I'm here. I'm a fifth generation Nebraskan. I have roots that run west of St. Libory and east of Worms, Nebraska. I was in 4-H in Hall County, beef and hog projects. My daughter showed 4-H calves in Sarpy County. I've personally been to outdoor youth facilities in several counties. I have to revise my testimony a little bit here with the amended bill because Thomas County and the Halsey camp is the one that would benefit the most. But I think there are other camps that I've actually been at that could benefit from this bill, but I'm not 100 percent certain. These facilities promote our Nebraska families. When my great-grandparents passed away, my Worms family actually had many family reunions at the Halsey 4-H Camp. Conversations with leadership at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institute of Ag and Natural Resources and Nebraska Extension that committed publicly to partnering, supporting, and contributing educational experiences to a replacement youth education and outdoor facility near Halsey, NACEB is committed to help bring these ultimate vision of the new Halsey camp in concert with the Nebraska 4-H Foundation, Nebraska Community Foundation, and other regional stakeholders. With NACEB Extension board members who live and work in the Halsey area, we have leaders that will serve as our sentinels for the project. We support LB281 because it's an investment in 4-H youth development and foster rural economic development and serve to attract and retain people in rural communities. On behalf of NACEB and our 550 members, we would ask that you respectfully advance LB281 and support our rural education efforts.

**BOSTELMAN:** Questions from committee members? So was-- was Association of County Extension Boards, were they the overseers for the camp. Who was--

**SHAWN POLLOCK:** No.

**BOSTELMAN:** --response-- if this was answered before, I apologize, when I was out.

**SHAWN POLLOCK:** No, it's a 4-H Camp. All the-- what NACEB does is provide programming that can take place. 4-H is one of the programs that we run. There's eight programs.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**BOSTELMAN:** And the numbers you have here, are those from the camp?

**SHAWN POLLOCK:** No, that is just from Douglas-Sarpy County in 2021. So it's an example of what NACEB does. NACEB is in all 93 counties. So there's all programming and 4-H activities in all those counties. And it's a-- it's-- it's a reach to the community and involvement that impacts all of us and just personally Halsey and the 4-H Camp there is-- is a great place to be. I can't believe nobody's mentioned tanking at the camp yet because that's the first place I ever tanked and my grandma tanked there. I mean, it was tanking before it was tanking, so I don't know why that hasn't come up yet.

**BOSTELMAN:** All right. Thank you very much for coming in, appreciate your testimony. Next proponent, please. Good afternoon. Welcome.

**CILINDA MEYER-SCHIDELEER:** Welcome. Thank you. Members of the Natural Resource Committee, my name is Cilinda Meyer-Scheideler, C-i-l-i-n-d-a M-e-y-e-r-S-c-h-e-i-d-e-l-e-r. I'm here to testify for LB281 In favor. Nebraska National Forest Halsey, one of my favorite places on this earth, so many memories, so many friendships made. I was just there in June to take my son to camp. I loved going back, walking around the camp to remember all my precious memories. My first camp was when I was eight. Fir-Locust was my cabin. I was scared, especially at night because the trains were so loud. But during the daytime I had so much fun. I remember canoeing, the [INAUDIBLE] course, learning how to grill, parts of the skit we performed up on the stage, and the scavenger hunt games, the crazy wake-up alarm and the buzzer. I was determined I was going back the next year. I went 15 years straight as a camper, junior counselor, to three years on staff. I often think of all the kids I sent down the zip line, but one always sticks out. We often had kids that were scared to go down the zip line. I always took the time to explain how fun and safe it was. I never wanted anyone to miss that opportunity. One girl climbed the ladder twice and I strapped her in both times, but she just couldn't make the leap. That night, after the campfire, she came to me and asked if she could try one more time. I told her yes, that we would try the next day. So before the group session started, I and another counselor took her to the zip line. Once again she climbed the ladder, and I strapped her in. She hesitated. I reminded her that it was going to be an adventure if she just took the leap. She finally stepped off and went on her adventure. Afterwards, I met her at the top of the hill. She was so excited and had the biggest smile on her face. She replied to me, I did it and it was so much fun. I think about all the canoe instructions explained on the Middle Loup River, trying to get 20 kids

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

at a time underneath that last bridge. I remember sleeping on the old metal bunk beds, the hot nights without air conditioning, all the skits on the stage, the crafts made in the craft room where I learned to cook for big groups of people, waxing the large floors, cleaning the mats in the kitchen, the campfires, the singing, having to go around the table for elbows on the table or no napkin on the lap, meditations up on Inspiration Point where I found my love for snakes, the smell of pine trees, which to this day takes me back to the forest, the loud sounds of trains and trying to sleep, where I shot my first beebie gun, the walks to the pool on picnic night, buzzing the lookout tower, grinding the gears on the old bus, flag raisings and lowering ceremonies, the drinking fountains, splitting up the girl and boy sides, and just sitting out on the balcony of the lodge enjoying all the beauty. As a kid, I was bullied in school. I was made fun of, pinched, hit. But at camp I was safe. I could be myself. I made friends and we always looked forward to reconnecting the next year. We remained friends to this day. I can-- I can't imagine what life would have been like if I wouldn't have been able to go to camp. I was lucky that my parents felt that it was important. I have five kids. When my kids were old enough, we wanted to have the same opportunities. Even though it was difficult, we found that money to send them to the very camp we attended as kids. One year I wanted to send my son to robotics camp. They did not offer that up at Halsey, so I sent him to Eastern Camp near Gretna. He came back and he said, Mom, they have no stars there and you can hear the traffic. Halsey is so much better. My kids attended the range camp. They attended the NRD camps. They attended them all as-- as high schoolers.

**BOSTELMAN:** You need to-- sorry, but your red light is on so if you could--

**CILINDA MEYER-SCHIEDLER:** So I just--

**BOSTELMAN:** --close to the end.

**CILINDA MEYER-SCHIEDLER:** --I want to let you know that my son, my 12-year-old son, he wanted me to send or to show you these. He went to that ACE Camp last year, and this is what he said. I learned how to be adventurous, stepping outside the box, doing scary things for the first time, how to have fun in general, learned all about edible plants, different types of range plants in the prairie. I learned how to cook. I learned about microscopic organisms in the river. I learned how to shoot a bow and learned how to plant a plant. I learned about different ecosystems and how they all have a role. Tell them we need

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

the camp back. I made-- I learned how to make friends at camp. And yes, we do.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Are there any questions or are there any questions? Thank you for coming in today. Appreciate it. Next proponent, please. Good afternoon and welcome.

**DELANEY ROGERS:** My name is Delaney Rogers, D-e-l-a-n-e-y R-o-g-e-r-s. I live in Logan County and I'm a 17-year-old junior from Arnold Public Schools. I'm here to represent the younger generation who are Halsey Strong. Halsey National Forest and 4-H campground means the absolute world to me. I could see the fire that took it in the skyline from my window. The smoke was hanging in the air for what seemed like a month. It broke my heart to hear that the place where my father, myself, and where I imagined my kids to go to camp had vanished overnight in a puff of smoke. I was one of the last to enjoy the camp. I was there for ten days in a row at two different leadership camp-- leadership camps in late July of 2022. I was one of the last to walk from the cabin to the lodge or from the lodge to the observation deck. It was my home away from home. That camp meant so much to me and to so many of my friends. For me and my friends, it was like a death in our family. I remember dropping to the floor in tears and calling my camp friends right away. As soon as I picked myself up off the floor, I knew I had to help out. I went to every one of my leadership activities and we as a whole decided to sell T-shirts to hopefully raise money to help in any way possible. The T-shirts on the back say: Leaders aren't born, they're grown. And I can't think of a better-- I can't think of a better quote to describe Halsey 4-H Camp. Leaders are grown and have been grown for generations at the camp. We raised \$563. And that may not sound like a lot, but for a group of teenagers just trying to save something they're passionate about, it was enough just to get people invested and in the know about the rebuilding process. I went to two camps that had roughly 100 kids. That's almost 200 kids from around the state and parts of South Dakota that were devastated by the loss of our camp. In the summer of 2022 alone, the campgrounds hosted 14 4-H camps and approximately 300 4-H campers. That doesn't include the multiple leadership-- leadership camps, such as the two I attended. The camp was opened in 1959, so if 300 kids went every year, that's nearly 19,000 kids who had the opportunity to learn and grow in the forest. I can tell you from the campers I'm still in touch with that kids appreciated the opportunity to learn at the unique 4-H Camp. This campground has affected so many kids and parents in Nebraska. Whether it's going from-- whether it's going to the actual 4-H Camps, RYLA leadership, NREA youth energy leadership camps, quiz bowl

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

competitions, art festivals, proms, FFA activities, field trips, and faculty team building days, all of which I have attended myself. I could list camps and activities for days, but I was told I only have three to four minutes. The eastern side of the state has a lot of places to go to develop leaders, but the western side has Halsey. If you take away anything from this testimony, I hope it's the fact that so many kids have benefited from Halsey 4-H Camp and campgrounds. We cannot deprive our younger generations from the chance to learn and grow in the middle of a forest, in the middle of the great grass desert. This camp has not only grown me as a leader and as a person, but it has grown so many of my classmates, teammates, and statewide peers. I'd like to thank everyone that's considering rebuilding the camp and investing in Nebraska's future generations. Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you. You did a very good job. Questions from committee members? Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** Okay. Thank you, Ms. Rogers, for your testimony. Unfortunately, the old camp is gone. We're going to build a brand new one. What would you change?

**DELANEY ROGERS:** Honestly, my favorite part about the camp was the fact that I could go there and it was like stepping into my dad's shoes-- shoes when he went there. So it was very devastating when I lost, when we lost it. So I wouldn't change a thing about it. But that's just me personally.

**BRANDT:** Do you think some high schoolers of your generation should be on the board that's making the decisions on the design on the new camp?

**DELANEY ROGERS:** I do, yes.

**BRANDT:** All right. Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Chairman. Thanks for coming in, Miss Rogers. Can you-- I just-- I think it's an easy question. What were the two leadership camps you did that were back to back?

**DELANEY ROGERS:** RYLA and NREA.

**HUGHES:** The NREA camp and--

**DELANEY ROGERS:** Yeah, I'm actually an ambassador from the NREA camp.

**HUGHES:** You get to go to Washington, D.C.?

**DELANEY ROGERS:** Yeah.

**BOSTELMAN:** I want to follow up on some, Senator Brandt's question a little bit. Outside of the activities they participated in, what-- you kind of said [INAUDIBLE] something that your dad or what was that? I mean, if we're going to capture that, if you want to recapture the things that you see, you remember that draws you back, if you're thinking of buildings, facilities, what would that-- what do you-- how would you explain that? What would you--

**DELANEY ROGERS:** It was kind of the structure of the building, just the EP lodge that--

**BOSTELMAN:** I've never been there.

**DELANEY ROGERS:** OK.

**BOSTELMAN:** I've driven by it on the highway--

**DELANEY ROGERS:** Okay.

**BOSTELMAN:** --several times. I never-- I've never been on it. So was it-- were these log cabins? Were these steel buildings? Were these--

**DELANEY ROGERS:** They were log cabins. They were-- every-- it was in the middle of the forest so everything was made out of wood and everything was kind of designed by wood

**BOSTELMAN:** Kind of rustic I would call it--

**DELANEY ROGERS:** Yeah.

**BOSTELMAN:** --rustic type feel that type of things that-- that you really appreciate or like going back to. Okay.

**DELANEY ROGERS:** Yeah.

**BOSTELMAN:** I appreciate that because not being there and not experiencing it, it's-- it helps to understand what was-- what you thought was drew you back to the camp, what you felt was really important. If-- if the camp is going to be rebuilt, how do you incorporate some of those type of things into that for future

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

generations? So thank you for coming in today and thank you for what you're doing.

**DELANEY ROGERS:** Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Next testifier, please. Next proponent. Good afternoon. Welcome.

**AARON BARROW:** Good afternoon, sir. I'm Aaron Barrow, A-a-r-o-n B-a-r-r-o-w. I'm the assistant city administrator of the city of Blair. I'm here today to testify in support of LB281. In 2010. Dana Campus or Dana College in Blair was forced to close its doors. The Blair community struggled for several years trying to find a use for the historic campus. The city of Blair, working with a number of not-for-profits and businesses, led the effort to repurpose much of the campus. Eventually, Angel Shares, a charitable organization, acquired the entire campus. They've worked diligently to find uses for the existing structures and undeveloped portions of the property. Recently, Easterseals Nebraska purchased 65 acres from Angel Shares with the intent of building a year-round camp facility for Nebraska's disabled residents. The city of Blair has committed to work with Easterseals Nebraska in order to help facilitate the construction of this barrier-free outdoor education and recreation facility. The construction of Camp Easterseals will improve undeveloped land as well as repurpose and remodel one of the former dormitories on site for staff housing. Easterseals, Nebraska, having lost their original camp facility to a disaster in 1999, should qualify for the assistance described in LB281. The legislation could potentially encourage partnerships between Easterseals Nebraska and other youth camping programs, which would have a greater impact on our state and the region. Nebraska, excuse me, passage of LB281 would directly benefit some of the most deserving of Nebraska's families by providing disabled family members outdoor recreation and education and give their caregivers a well-earned respite. The city of Blair fully supports Easterseals Nebraska in their endeavor and respectfully requests the committee's support of LB281. Thank you for your time and consideration.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you for coming in. Are there any questions? Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** So thank you, Mr. Barrow, for your testimony.

**AARON BARROW:** Sure.

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**BRANDT:** They bought 65 acres on the campus.

**AARON BARROW:** Correct.

**BRANDT:** What is the status of the rest of the campus?

**AARON BARROW:** Some of it is being used and some is not. Angel Shares, their mission is to help youth that are aging out of foster care, transition into life as an adult. So, say, for instance, you have a youth that was in foster care up until the age of 18, and all of a sudden they're out on their own. And they're helping them trans-- in transition, you know, help them find jobs, help them find job training. They partner with a number of local employers as well as Metro Community College in order to do that. So they have one dorm fully reserved for that purpose. They're also using some of the dorms that are-- they're converting into townhomes, condominiums. We've had to-- it's been 12 years since the campus closed. And a lot of those buildings, as I'm sure you can imagine, if they were unused, they-- they-- they're vandalized. They're-- they're-- they're really close to, you know, needing a wrecking ball. And so we're-- we're scrambling, trying to find ways to repurpose them or interest developers to come in and-- and convert them to some other kind of use. We're working with the EPA to try to get it designated as a brownfield and-- and make it available for some funding. Just as an example, one of the buildings is the old science building. When the college closed, they just shut the doors and walked away. And it's full of chemicals and, you know, specimens and everything. And so the developer coming in and trying to repurpose that, you know, is going to bear the cost of trying to clean that up and make it, you know, a worthwhile project.

**BRANDT:** So the previous testifier, Miss--

**AARON BARROW:** Biodrowski.

**BRANDT:** Biodrowski, okay, she testified they would be getting two dorm structures, one of which, which needs to be removed.

**AARON BARROW:** Yeah, one of those dorms was really badly vandalized and it's just not salvageable. So that-- that dorm itself is going to be razed. And the plan is, as I understand it, that we would make one road access through where that dorm is now to get access to the northern part of their site and then be another road that would be working with them to develop on the southern end.

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**BRANDT:** So they're basically going to build a-- it's a greenfield site--

**AARON BARROW:** [INAUDIBLE]

**BRANDT:** --they're going to build a brand new facility from the ground up--

**AARON BARROW:** Absolutely.

**BRANDT:** --and just salvage-- salvage one dorm for housing for staff or something like that.

**AARON BARROW:** That's correct. Yes, sir.

**BRANDT:** All right. Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Any other questions? Seeing none, thanks for coming.

**AARON BARROW:** Thank you. Appreciate your time.

**BOSTELMAN:** Any other proponents, please? If we have other proponents, please come populate the front seats. It sort of just helps things-- moving things along a little bit so. Good afternoon.

**TWYLA WITT:** Good afternoon. What?

**BOSTELMAN:** Good afternoon and welcome.

**TWYLA WITT:** Good afternoon and thank you to both you and the staff or the senators here. My name is Twyla Witt, T-w-y-l-a W-i-t-t, and I'm probably the oldest testifier to come see you today. I was a 4-Her in the mid '50s in central-- and grew up in central Cherry County on a ranch. Our 4-H club spanned an area of over 40 acres and we had 4-Hers of all ages, with many parents being our project leaders. Each and every member wanted to attend 4-H Camp at Halsey. I'm so old that when I attended camp we slept on army cots and under a big circus tent. That was a long time ago. We loaded up in a straight truck and rode into Halsey, where Eleanor Horst staff-- and her staff fed breakfast, lunch and dinner. Three trips we made every year, every darn day. I remember our Goose Creek 4-H Club eagerly doing everything to raise money for the 4-H Camp to build a new one. Our most successful moneymaking project was thanks to our neighbor Fred Johnston, who was a roper and steer wrestler, and he had an arena at his ranch. He would hold timed events there on Sunday afternoons or Saturdays, and we as

4-Hers would have a concession stand. But the real moneymaker was Freddie would always pass the hat all around the arena, and it was a huge benefit to the 4-H Camp. He did that for about three years. It was wonderful. And the fundraising by many 4-H clubs across the state made a reality of the new lodge, cabins, and bathhouse built in the early '60s, which was quite different from army cots and circus tents. I was also a 4-H leader when we moved to Broken Bow at Custer County, and our daughters attended the new 4-H Camp. After the loss of the 4-H Camp during the Bovee Fire, there have been many people asking questions as to what would happen. Locals in Blaine and Thomas County asked me what's going to happen earlier and not a lot of answers at that time really. A new facility would be an amazing destination for a youth camp such as 4-H, but it could also be used by adults for a multitude of camps, conventions and education about the world-class unique Nebraska Sandhills. There's nothing like them in the western hemisphere. We must show and tell people about the amazing Sandhills who produce the best beef in the world. Now that the Scenic Byway National-- has been designated a national scenic byway, that's another reason that people will be traveling through that area. And I do know that the 4-H-- the campground at the forest each year is full. It's reserved and full every year. So there's more people coming all the time. I want to make some suggestions on what would happen on those shoulder seasons regarding when the 4-H Camp was not there. Community colleges could use it for workshops, fire and EMT training and educational workshops. Ranch groups could use it for educational workshops, astronomy camps, dark skies, a geology, birding camps, church camps, conventions. There's many more opportunities, so it just doesn't have to stop in the summertime or when summertime is. Please give the people of north central Nebraska the opportunity to help build economic development in the Sandhills. I urge you to pass LB281 forward.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you for coming in today and for your testimony.

**TWYLA WITT:** Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** What questions might committee members have? Seeing none--

**TWYLA WITT:** OK, thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Wait. You mentioned a couple of things before you leave.

**TWYLA WITT:** Yeah.

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**BOSTELMAN:** So I'll ask you the same. You talk from the tents and army cots until this last year.

**TWYLA WITT:** Uh huh.

**BOSTELMAN:** What is it with the buildings, the facility do you think resonates the most with you that you would like to see captured if-- if the camp is rebuilt?

**TWYLA WITT:** I think it's the rusticness. You know, I really believe people like to come out to that. Eleanor Horst, after she cooked it there, she was also an instigator at the camp and her husband was the one who built the camp. It was amazing how-- I don't know how the plans came about, but he did an awesome job and you know, they had these cabins and the two-story lodge with this big balcony. Well, it wasn't quite so big, but it was a nice long balcony. And you could oversee the river and oversee the area. It was just-- it's a special place. The-- everybody wanted to come. Families with their family reunions and proms. And I mean, there could be oodles more. And in fact, I'd heard one time that the last few years the-- the 4-H Camp was not making money to support itself. And so they said that's probably one of the reasons they don't want to rebuild. It's-- it's just a different way of living out there and-- and staff out there is willing to work weekends and work nights. You've got to be that way if you're going to help hold a camp. So and those-- that rusticness made a big, big difference in that whole area with-- you could see the Sandhills to the north, you know, and the forest to the back. It's just a phenomenal place. I invite any of you. I'll be glad to take any of you there. I really will. I guarantee--

**HUGHES:** Field trip.

**TWYLA WITT:** Yeah. You can have a field trip. We'd love to have the Natural Resources Committee come out.

**BOSTELMAN:** No more army cots though. Thank you for coming. Thank you for your testimony.

**TWYLA WITT:** Thank you. Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Next proponent, please.

**TOM WITT:** Good afternoon, Senators. Thank you. My name is Tom Witt, T-o-m W-i-t-t. And that was my wife. She just testified. I do have to correct her on one thing. She's not the oldest one to testify. She's

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

not as old as she thinks she is. I'm probably one of the few people that actually got splinters in their fingers hauling lumber to the 4-H Lodge to build it. The lumber came in to the lumber yard in Thedford by rail car, parked at the siding in Halsey. My dad had a contract with the lumber yard to haul lumber from the railhead to the building site. Somebody just testified it was completed in '58 or '59, so I had to be like ten years old helping him haul lumber up there. So it's been part of me since 1958, '57, whatever. Last fall, we were at our guest house, which is just outside the forest, four miles west of the main entrance, and watched the flames when that 4-H Lodge went up. I can't tell you how high it is. I'm not that kind of an expert, but I'm guessing it was over 150 feet up. It was devastating. On our car and pickup we have the name of our guesthouse, Halsey, Nebraska, on there. And no matter where we go, we got stopped in Alabama one time, how is the forest at Halsey? Loved that place. So it is a major, major economic developer and driver for Thomas County. I'm part of the Thomas County Visitors Committee. That was exempt from lodging and sales tax, which means it doesn't make any difference, but just being aware of where Halsey is and bringing people to Thomas County and Blaine County was major. So I would really, not the word I want to use but, encourage the committee to Exec this out of committee to the floor as soon as you can so we can get the floor debate started, so we can get the rest of these steps going. So thank you very much.

**BOSTELMAN:** Sure. Thank you for coming and testifying. Any questions from committee members? I'm always amazed that somebody two years old can lift so much wood and do so much work, you know?

**TOM WITT:** No kidding.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you for coming in. Next testifier, please. Next proponent. If anyone else would like to testify in support of LB281. Anyone like to testify in opposition to LB281? Anyone like to testify in opposition to LB281? Anyone like to testify in the neutral capacity? Anyone like to testify in the neutral capacity? Seeing none, I'll invite Senator Jacobson to come up. We did receive 42 letters of support on LB281. So with that, Senator Jacobson, you can close.

**JACOBSON:** Thank you, Senator Bostelman, and thank you all for your patience to hear all the testimony today. I think it was a broad range of people, giving various experiences of being a part of the camp, being a part of building the camp, and-- and really what this could mean for this area of the state. I know there were a few questions asked that I wanted to kind of reiterate. I know Senator Brandt,

questions about personnel and how do we-- how do we staff it? I can tell you that when the Sandhills golf course was built in and when the Dismal River Club was built, which is straight south of Mullen; and, of course, Mullen is on west of Thedford, they had no problem finding staffing. And I think a big part of it is when you start looking at not so much unemployment as much as underemployment, I think that had been mentioned by one of the testifiers. There are people there that this is an interesting part of the state with some people that are incredibly hard workers that understand what hard work is about. They understand what service is about. I can tell you, if you go, if anyone has been to the Sandhills Golf Course or Dismal River Club, you will find outstanding service and people that really want to build that area and are looking for that second income. I can also tell you that when you look at ranching, there is some excess capacity there at parts of the year. This isn't one of them when you're in the middle of calving and dealing with snow. But there are some breaks along the way in the summertime. And I think we've talked a lot about the ability for people to come back. You start looking at the other tourism activities that can be developed that are being-- have been developed there already and that more could happen. I know different times and I've gone to different conferences with bankers, whether you're in Florida or whether you're in California or wherever you go, normally you're at a hotel site and then you've got buses are going to take you out to all these various excursions. There are limitless opportunities out there in terms of the things we mentioned: horseback riding, hunting, fishing, the stuff that's right there with the-- with the Middle Loup River running right along this site. So, again, I think the vision of what we're trying to do and I know Senator Brandt, you asked, too, about the 25 percent match. Why 25 percent? Why not more? I would tell you, we need to keep in mind that we're replacing something that was there. This was a disaster that occurred. And this is something that if it would have been a year ago with the ARPA money, it would have been a huge candidate for ARPA money. Needless to say that ARPA money has been spent. But this is-- we're trying to replace something that has been a real treasure for the state, in addition to making it more than what it was before. And that's why I took that into consideration as well when we start looking at the matching. I am not concerned at all about us raising the match. I think you heard today that there are people that are very, very focused on doing something. I also want to mention that we do, when we look at the siting, I know the Barneses testified. They're-- they're on the west side of-- of the-- just west of where the camp is at. The camp was kind of on the western part of the forest. The property that

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

we're looking at as a potential alternative would be on the east side of the ranch. It would be between Halsey and the-- and the forest, but it would also be adjacent to the forest. There would be access over the river, over the railroad tracks today. And we want to just kind of figure out what makes the most sense. We've had good cooperation with the Forest Service. I think you heard the testifiers today in terms of the university, in terms of Extension, in terms of the 4-H Foundation, in terms of the local, and in terms of-- of the Nebraska Community Foundation. There are a lot of people that are firmly behind this project, want to see it rebuilt. Just imagine tapping in to all the alumni of 4-Hers across the state that are interested in being part of raising additional funding to be able to make this reality. So again, I appreciate your time today. I would stand for any questions you might still have and-- and would encourage you to move this forward.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you. Are there questions from committee members?  
Senator Moser.

**MOSER:** Well, just kind of a comment, but probably 25 years ago or something like that, we were playing for a dance in Alliance, myself and some of our buddies. We got done about 1:00 and we took off and we thought, you know, why go all the way down to take the interstate? We'll take off across Nebraska through the middle. Well, that was a city boy foolish thing to do. So two, three, four o'clock in the morning, here we are trying to stay awake driving through the middle of Nebraska. And I got to looking at my fuel gauge and I thought, uh-oh, we're going to need some gas. Well, no problem. We'll stop at a gas station. Well, there weren't any gas stations open. There were hardly any towns, let alone gas stations. But luckily, here was a sheriff's deputy sitting in his car, kind of watching the highway, you know, to see what's going on. And I drove up. I said, we're almost out of gas. I said, is there anywhere we can get gas here? And he said, well, he says, I've got a card for the co-op. He said, if you want to buy gas, I'll put it on my card and you can give me the money and I'll run it. So, you know, that's the kind of help that you get. If you're going to break down somewhere or do something stupid, not illegal, but just ill advised, middle of Nebraska is a great place to do it because they're very helpful. We got back home about quarter to nine. The sun was up and-- and it was the next day already. But just a story that kind of illustrates the friendly, helpful nature of Nebraskans.

**JACOBSON:** It's an amazing group of people out there. It truly is.

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Natural Resources Committee February 15, 2023  
Rough Draft

**MOSEER:** Well, he probably could have arrested us if he'd have looked closer.

**JACOBSON:** Fact is he probably should have.

**MOSEER:** Bunch of musicians driving across Nebraska at four in the morning.

**BOSTELMAN:** Any other questions, comments? We will have some remedial training on gas gauges for Senator Moser. We'd like to thank everybody who traveled in today to testify on this bill. Some of you traveled some long distances [INAUDIBLE] out there coming out there. Please be safe going home. That will close our hearing on LB281. Thank you all.

**JACOBSON:** Thank you.