

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**HILGERS:** Which is District 21, also serve as Speaker of the Legislature, and most important for this morning is I'm chair of the STAR WARS Committee, which is the State Tourism and Recreation Water Access, Resources Special Committee, a committee that was created by the Legislature in LB406 this year, for which \$2 million were appropriated in a mandate with those dollars for this committee to look at ways statewide to help catalyze economic development, tourism opportunities, and-- and other positive impacts for around the state of Nebraska. The three subject areas are, first, Keith County and the Lake McConaughy region. The second is Knox County, the Niobrara River and that, and the community surrounding that area. And the third is the Lower Platte near Lincoln and Omaha. This is the first of three public hearings that we will be having. This committee, which I'll introduce here in a second, was created by the Executive Board of the Legislative Council and represents senators and their communities from across the state, west to east in the state of Nebraska. So we'll start with introductions, beginning at my far left, Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm Senator Tom Brandt from Plymouth. I represent District 32: Fillmore, Thayer, Jefferson, Saline, and southwestern Lancaster Counties.

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

**FLOOD:** Mike Flood, District 19, Norfolk, Madison County, and just a little part of Stanton County.

**CLEMENTS:** Rob Clements, from Elmwood, represent Cass County and parts of Sarpy and Otoe.

**HUGHES:** Senator Dan Hughes. I represent District 44, which is ten counties in southwest Nebraska, just south of here.

**BOSTELMAN:** Bruce Bostelman. I represent Legislative District 23, which is Saunders, Butler, majority of Colfax Counties, and I live by Brainard.

**GRAGERT:** Tim Gragert, represent District 40 up in northeast Nebraska: Cedar, Dixon, Knox, Holt, Rock and Boyd County.

**HILGERS:** Seated at the far end, next to Senator Gragert, is Beau Ballard. Beau Ballard is the committee clerk. In addition, the committee and the Legislature has retained HDR, consultant for this project. They have a large team here who are interested in hearing the

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

input of the community, getting ideas as they help us develop a plan with your input for ways to help really catalyze economic development here in this area. The logistics for this will feel very similar to a legislative hearing that you might have in the Capitol, for those of you who have actually come down to Lincoln to testify, with a couple little nuances. We will-- we will not have proponents, opponents, and neutral testifiers. We are here to get your input and to get your feedback on what we could do here to help your community, this community here. So we aren't-- we will just be taking testifiers, one after the other, no matter-- whatever that input might be. We also usually keep things to five minutes, so I'd ask you to be concise and try to keep it to five. But we won't-- we're here to get your input, so unlike in the Capitol, we won't have a light system and we won't keep you strictly to five minutes. But I certainly reserve the Chairman's right to-- to hurry things along and cut things off if need be, but I don't think we'll have to do that today. With that, we will-- and this is being transcribed for the record. So when you come up, please state your name and then spell it for the record, for the transcribers. In addition, you should all have this white sheet. And if you don't have it and you're planning to testify, please grab one-- it's on the table at the far left-- and fill this out. And when you come up, please make sure you hand it to the committee clerk, Beau Ballard, so that your name testi-- can be associated with your testimony and the record that we're creating here today. With that, we will welcome the first testifier in any order in which you choose who wants to come down and speak. [LAUGHTER]

**MARY WILSON:** I guess I'm going to volunteer. No hard questions.  
[LAUGH]

**HILGERS:** Good morning.

**MARY WILSON:** OK. Good morning. Thank you guys for coming to Keith County and bringing rain with you. We appreciate it greatly. Good morning, members of the STAR WARS Committee, Chairman-Speaker Hilgers. My name is Mary Wilson, spelled M-a-r-y W-i-l-s-o-n, and I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of what this committee was established to do. I'm here today as a local business owner, local housing director, and someone who has been heavily involved with Lake McConaughy issues in my past position as the executive director of Keith County Area Development, a position in which I have recently stepped away from-- from in order to spend more time with my young children. As someone who dreams big, I can't begin to tell you how excited I am for this committee to take shape and the

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

results that are to come. The creation of a vision for this community to grab ahold of and implement in partnership with the state of Nebraska, Nebraska Game and Parks, Central Nebraska Public Power Irrigation District, and other key players is extremely exciting for me. Ogallala and Keith County have been hard at work behind the scenes to put the right tools in our toolbox in order to capitalize on growth opportunities as they present themselves, so to say that we are ready for this is an understatement. Here are some notable examples. The first local option municipal sales tax, or more commonly referred to as an LB840 plan, for Ogallala was approved in November of 2018 and implemented July 1, 2019. This gives Ogallala the ability to put together competitive financial packages in order to incentivize economic development. Quality-of-place enhancements have been supported over the years, recently including a community development block grant tourism development project with you-- which you guys are familiar with, I think, the Driftwood in downtown Ogallala. This cultural event center also houses a restaurant and bar that have significantly-- significantly, excuse me, increased the vibrancy of downtown Ogallala and the foot traffic downtown. There have been multiple other sizable business and residential investments throughout Keith County recently, including that done by the village of Paxton, a very progressive community just to the east of Ogallala. They recently completed a new subdivision, complete with large residential lots that are all shovel ready with the-- the infrastructure ready to go. Community vision planning sessions have also played a role in the future of Keith County, as large gatherings were held throughout 2020 in partnership with the Keith County Foundation Fund, Keith County Area Development, the Nebraska Community Foundation, and Nebraska Public Power District and other community leaders. Hundreds of residents from Keith County were involved in this process in order to identify priority areas that we want to focus on as a community: housing development, early childhood development, and first impressions, which include green space development, murals, and way-finding and signage improvements were identified through that process. Another positive-- I just keep going-- the Lake McConaughy Advisory Committee, which you guys are familiar with, has been working to build a stronger relationship between Game and Parks, Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, and the local community to increase communication and move forward together to ensure the viability of the SRAs and the communities. Due to the local success of this-- this committee, I believe that Game and Parks is looking to implement similar structures across the state, and so I think that's pretty awesome. Most recently, the Keith County Housing Development

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

Corporation was awarded a rural workforce housing grant in April of 2021. This allowed the creation of a million-dollar-plus revolving loan fund for us to address workforce housing needs locally. The Keith County community rallied behind this project. We were able to raise over \$420,000 in less than four weeks to use as local matching funds for that grant application. That's something that I think we can be extremely proud of. As you know, throughout the years, the popularity of the lakes here in Keith County has increased, both for visitors and local residents, unofficially making Lake "Mac" the number-two tourist destination in the state. The lake is a huge economic engine for Keith County in western Nebraska. The results of this study would give leaders a road map, as I mentioned before, a well-designed plan to implement, and a phased approach for the betterment of the area. In my opinion, this plan should consider existing businesses in the area, how can they be complemented, what can be suggested in order to improve what is already here, also taking into consideration the infrastructure needed to sustain proper phase development but also the large number of vehicles and visitors that will accompany growth. Lastly, consider the local residents. How will they be impacted? For those who have lived at the lake for years or who have visited for decades, is there a way to capital-- capitalize on the potential but also keep intact some of the things that they have loved about Lake McConaughy and Lake Ogallala for decades? Last page, I promise. Am I confident that Keith County is the place to be right now? Absolutely. Do I realize that there is much untapped potential here? Another yes. As a small community in rural Nebraska, the opportunity that accompanies the success of this committee, I believe, are certain to be second to none. So thank you so much for your time today, for making the trip out here to Keith County, again, for bringing the rain. Your partnership in progress is immensely appreciated. Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Ms. Wilson. Are there questions from the committee? Senator Clements.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you, Ms. Wilson.

**MARY WILSON:** Yes.

**CLEMENTS:** The local city sales tax, what rate is that?

**MARY WILSON:** It's a half percent.

**CLEMENTS:** One-half percent, is that--

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**MARY WILSON:** Yes.

**CLEMENTS:** Was there already a city tax? Is-- was that in addition to one?

**MARY WILSON:** Yes, our-- our total sales tax percent is 7 percent.

**CLEMENTS:** All right. And in a year's time, do you know how much money that has generated, the half-percent?

**MARY WILSON:** Yes. In the plan, it was written that that is capped at \$235,000 annually, to be allocated to that fund for economic development purposes.

**CLEMENTS:** And the \$235,000 is for economic development purposes only? That's a significant amount. It--

**MARY WILSON:** Yes.

**CLEMENTS:** Have you found that it's able to make a difference here?

**MARY WILSON:** Yes. I-- I don't want to speak to-- to KCAD happenings, as I'm not employed there, so I might defer those to other testifiers today--

**CLEMENTS:** All right.

**MARY WILSON:** --if that's OK.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you.

**MARY WILSON:** Yeah, yeah.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Clements. Other questions? Senator Gragert.

**GRAGERT:** Yeah, thank you and thank you for just--

**MARY WILSON:** Yeah.

**GRAGERT:** Of all that you've listed and-- and you have and-- and what you hope to get out of, what-- what's the number-one priority that you would-- if you had-- was-- something was going to happen, what would that be?

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**MARY WILSON:** I'm fortunate enough that I had some time to think about this question. There's-- there's many things that come to mind. Right? And something tangible, something that came up through our vision-planning process that I-- I've had on my list that I think could greatly impact all of the businesses here, some type of a convention center out at the lake, located close to the lake. But again, working in economic development and-- and understanding-- I think understanding how-- how those things work, just something that the community can rally around and make our own, you know, at-- at the end of this, a plan that we're all on board with and support and we can work together to implement. That's-- that's my overarching goal that if I have to pick one tangible thing, it would be a-- probably a convention center-type structure.

**GRAGERT:** Thank you.

**MARY WILSON:** Um-hum.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Gragert. Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Thank you, Ms. Wilson, for coming.

**MARY WILSON:** Yeah.

**HUGHES:** We've heard a lot about the Lake McConaughy Advisory Committee. How-- how do you get on that? I mean, is it open to everybody? You know, is that just a group of people got together and say, we are this or are they appointed by the commissioners or-- give me a little more context to the structure of it.

**MARY WILSON:** I can give you context, historical context. I would defer that question to somebody else that is now leading that group. But historically, when-- when we started that, we reached out to local leaders, we-- local business owners, the-- our elected leadership, presidents of organization, members of organizations around the community, lake businesses, residents. We tried to have representation from-- from all of those areas. I think we ended up with about 24 people on-- on that initial committee, but it's not-- the doors are not closed. That's my understanding. I'll-- someone else can--

**HUGHES:** So when you said "we," you were talking Keith County Areas Economic Development kind of spearheaded talk-- asking people?

**MARY WILSON:** Yes, that is correct.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**HUGHES:** OK.

**MARY WILSON:** Yes, sorry.

**HUGHES:** OK, very good. Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Hughes. Senator Bostelman.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Wilson--

**MARY WILSON:** Yeah.

**BOSTELMAN:** --for being here. Could you expand a bit more on the workforce housing, what that need is, what you've done? Are you seeing, you know, an influx of folks if you had housing? Just explain that a little bit more--

**MARY WILSON:** Yes.

**BOSTELMAN:** --where you're at.

**MARY WILSON:** Yeah, absolutely. So our housing study does need-- need some updating. In 2017, the Housing Development Corporation completed a housing study showing a need for close to 400 new homes across Keith County. Three hundred and fifty-six homes needed either substantial rehab or demolished throughout Keith County, so really focusing on-- on how can we hit that target number. Specifically, with workforce housing, we're seeing very low numbers of-- of homes on the market. We have several mortgage bankers that sit on the Housing Corporation Board and we're seeing five to ten homes on the market at a time in Keith County, and they're selling like that. And so our goal is to partner with local developers, but also larger developers across the state of Nebraska, that can help us with home-- home funds and implement those, tax credits, and work on how-- how do we plan for larger subdivisions to be put in place, similar to what Paxton has done, that have shovel-ready lots for us.

**BOSTELMAN:** OK, thank you.

**MARY WILSON:** Yeah, absolutely.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Bostelman. Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ms. Wilson--

**MARY WILSON:** Yeah.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**BRANDT:** --for testifying today. It was enlightening yesterday on our bus trip. This last year was the first year that Game and Parks could accurately track visitors. Seventy-nine percent of the visitors last year were from Colorado, and I think that Nebraska had a percentage and then California was the one after that. What do the visitors tell you when they come here that they would like to see? What's the number-one thing they would like to see changed?

**MARY WILSON:** I believe that there's a lot of feedback received for other activities of the lake, other recreational activities, whether that be-- I know we-- excuse me. I know we receive a lot of feedback for hike and bike trails, for water activities. I've heard, you know, ziplining, adventure park style, and that's-- that's not me hearing those directly. That's coming from our roundtable discussions that we have at the Lake "Mac" Advisory Committee.

**BRANDT:** All right.

**MARY WILSON:** So those are-- those are huge, yep.

**BRANDT:** Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Brandt. I have one question, although you did answer one of the questions that I was going to ask you, as you know, and I-- to be fair to any other testifier, so you get the same heads-up Ms. Wilson had, I'm going to ask everyone if there's a concrete, dream-big item that you would recommend, if you've got something. So if you hadn't thought of that already, you've got a few minutes now to do that. You-- you mentioned something I think that's really important, which is taking into consideration local resident concerns. And so especially with HDR here, with us here, what are-- is there anything that comes to mind that would be really important for us to know from a local resident perspective as we start to think about this plan collaboratively with everyone?

**MARY WILSON:** Um-hum, um-hum. And I know there's other local residents here that can probably speak to that question as well. Something that we heard a lot through our Lake McConaughy Advisory meetings were we want to maintain some pieces of-- of this beach that are-- are as they have been for decades. Right? That's not the entire-- the entire lake. That's just portions that the locals remember. I think-- I think that that might be important.

**HILGERS:** Thank you.



Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**MARY WILSON:** Yeah.

**HILGERS:** Seeing no other questions, thank you very much for your testimony this morning.

**MARY WILSON:** Yes, absolutely. Yes.

**HILGERS:** Next testifier. Good morning.

**DEB SCHILZ:** Good morning. It's great to see you all here again. Good morning, Chairman-Speaker Hilgers, Senators, staff. My name is Deb Schilz, D-e-b S-c-h-i-l-z. And I want to thank you coming to Ogallala and Keith County and getting an opportunity to talk to you today. Currently, I serve as the chair of the Keith County Visitors Committee. I'm president of the Ogallala City Council and also on Lake "Mac" Advisory Committee, and so I'll be talking in those capacities this morning. The lo-- Ogallala community and Keith County are heading in a great direction with the L-- LB406 study, and we're looking forward to seeing the results to move the needle forward even more. As mentioned, in early 2020, the Lake "Mac" Advisory Committee was formed as a result of proposed changes to Lake McConaughy. Over the past 20 months, our local leaders and business owners have developed a relationship with Game and Parks officials and will continue to build on that with the LB406 study. Local businesses, whose livelihood is directly affected by the visitors to the park, are excited to see the parties come together and address issues and find collaborative solutions. The LB406 study would help bring more revenue by creating attractions and more ways for visitors to spend time and money in Keith County, as well as the rest of Nebraska. With the ownership of the Lake "Mac" area by Central Nebraska Irrigation/Public Power District, Game and Parks has been tasked with managing the recreation of the lake and has operated in that capacity for decades. Throughout the years, popularity of the lake has increased, both for visitors and local residences. Visitation from people living out along the Front Range of Colorado has propelled Lake McConaughy to become one of the most popular vacation spots in the region. To illustrate this, half of our nonresident permits sold by-- in the State of Nebraska for park permits are sold within a 40-mile radius of Lake McConaughy. Our visitors committee was recently awarded a grant from the Nebraska Tourism Commission to do a visitor impact study and how those dollars are being used while visiting Keith County, including Lake McConaughy. This grant was done in partnership with Nebraska Game and Parks, and we are looking forward to seeing the results of that study in the first quarter of 2022. Our visitors committee recently completed our

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

2020-21 year and we have lodging tax dollars exceeding \$444-- \$440,000 this year. That is a record figure for our group, and this increase in the vacation rental business over the past two years, we anticipate that this number will continue to go up. Our improvement fund has \$500,000 available for capital projects, and we partnered with Nebraska Game and Parks over the past ten years to contribute over \$300,000 dollars in capital improvements to Lake McConaughy. While we're making great strides in Keith County to be a destination oasis for western Nebraska, we do have some challenges to take care of as well. New home building around Lake McConaughy has taken off in the last five years. Some of the homes are for full-time residents, while others are building to use as investment property, including Airbnbs, BRBOs. Covid really increased our residency around the lake this past year, with people from Colorado and other states now living here longer during the year or deciding to make this their primary home and-- and Colorado a secondary home. This is stressing our EMS services around the lake area. Our EMS teams are all volunteer, with the exception of the city having a contract with Regional West out of Scottsbluff for ambulance services. Responses can be lengthy depending on time of day and traffic around the lake. I believe having additional station areas would be beneficial to get first responders to equipment faster and response times quicker. Private development is needed to add to our lake for visitors in the area. Modern campgrounds, additional lodging, amenities for families to have additional activities to do during times of either inclement weather, such as last night, would continue fostering our family friendly atmosphere. Hike-bike trails was mentioned before; ATV/UTV trails have been mentioned and other items that could be done for shoulder season to increase our visitors throughout the year. For all that to happen, housing and employees are needed to have-- to be success-- successful. Lake McConaughy continues to be a big draw to our county and our community. The results of this study will assist our community leaders and business owners on how to take the next steps. We do look forward to these study results and how we can collaboratively move forward. I do thank you for your time and, if you have any questions, be happy to answer them.

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

**GRAGERT:** Yes. Thank you for your testimony. Thank you, Chairman.

**DEB SCHILZ:** Yes.

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**GRAGERT:** You said that the advisory committee was formed in 2020?

**DEB SCHILZ:** The-- I would-- I should say it was resurrected in 2020. Originally was like 2016-2017, when then-Senator Schilz worked with Game and Parks to set it up. Originally took a little hiatus and was resurrected in 2020.

**GRAGERT:** What were-- what were some of the reasons for that?

**DEB SCHILZ:** Some of the reasons were some of the proposed changes to the beach camping at like McConaughy. There was a lot of public input that there needed to be some-- some-- the best I can say is collaboration to come to a medium-area beach camping, which we were able to accomplish.

**GRAGERT:** How many members are on the committee?

**DEB SCHILZ:** Core members, I would say there are probably eight to ten. We do have business owners that are also participating when they are available, and we can have up to 15 there at a time, including Game and Parks officials and-- as well as Central.

**GRAGERT:** So it is maxed out at 15?

**DEB SCHILZ:** No, we allow-- if other businesses want to come in, we welcome them to come in to give input.

**GRAGERT:** OK, thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Gragert. Other questions? Senator Clements.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you, Ms. Schilz.

**DEB SCHILZ:** Yes.

**CLEMENTS:** I have a question about the study results that you are coming in with. What report will that study contain? What items that you're looking for?

**DEB SCHILZ:** We are looking for employment figures. The study will provide that, how much per capita is being spent in Keith County. There are three main triggers and off the top of my head, I'm trying to remember the third. I believe it's just the traffic area that is coming through the county. And like I said, the Nebraska Tourism

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

Commission was the one who put the study together and they are using that firm out of Oregon that will be compiling all that information.

**CLEMENTS:** And it's January '22 you're [INAUDIBLE]

**DEB SCHILZ:** I would anticipate probably March of 2022.

**CLEMENTS:** OK.

**DEB SCHILZ:** There are stu-- their results normally come out in the March-- in March from other studies that they've done in the past.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you. And you did well-- 4 minutes and 38 seconds.  
[LAUGHTER]

**DEB SCHILZ:** I had to cut-- I had to cut quite a bit out. And Mary-- and Mary did a very good job of overview, too, so. Someone had mentioned-- I do want to make a comment. Someone had mentioned the LB840. The city does oversee that. Our current balance is \$417,000 since inception of the-- of that fund in 2019, so.

**HILGERS:** Thank you.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Senator Flood.

**FLOOD:** Thank you, Speaker Hilgers. Deb, good morning.

**DEB SCHILZ:** Good morning.

**FLOOD:** So in your role as president of the city council, is that the same, essentially, functionally, as mayor--

**DEB SCHILZ:** Yes.

**FLOOD:** --of the city of Ogallala?

**DEB SCHILZ:** Correct.

**FLOOD:** So you are intimately familiar with the operations of city government.

**DEB SCHILZ:** I got a great learning curve here a couple of years ago.

**FLOOD:** How long have you been in that position?

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**DEB SCHILZ:** Three years.

**FLOOD:** Great. We-- I was told yesterday that there is more-- there are more homes or more valuation around the lake than there are in the city of Ogallala.

**DEB SCHILZ:** That is my understanding as well. Our assessed values just were released this week. And I believe we have a couple commissioners here that will probably allude to what that increase is going to be.

**FLOOD:** OK, so--

**DEB SCHILZ:** But, yes, I would agree with you on that.

**FLOOD:** --from a public safety standpoint, and when it comes to, does the city of Ogallala have a mutual aid agreement to enforce law violations in the Lake McConaughy region because it's outside of the city limits?

**DEB SCHILZ:** Normally-- so there are several arms of that. Nebraska Game and Parks has conservation officers here that have ability to cite. Nebraska State Patrol, the Keith County Sheriff's Department, and the city is the last one to engage if needed. And normally, except for this year, we do assign officers on the busy weekends of Memorial Day, July 4, and Labor Day.

**FLOOD:** So city of Ogallala officers are patrolling?

**DEB SCHILZ:** Very rarely, but they will assist with Keith County Sheriff's Department and State Patrol.

**FLOOD:** And then your fire department. Is that a rural fire district extension from the city of Ogallala?

**DEB SCHILZ:** Yes, we do have a rural fire department for the city of Ogallala, as well as the Keystone-Lemoyne Fire Department is on the north side of the lake. Brule responds to a portion of the south side of the lake. And then there's also a Blue Creek, which is further west of Lemoyne, and then Lewellen also has, and they're all volunteer.

**FLOOD:** I'm only asking this because I'm-- seems to me like you have a-- a large valuation around a lake that's unincorporated. Have you ever, as the city of Ogallala, considered-- and I'm not saying this is in your best interest.--

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**DEB SCHILZ:** Yeah, I would agree.

**FLOOD:** --annexing-- annexing the lake?

**DEB SCHILZ:** There's been-- I mean, there's always talk about where to annex next. It would be quite a challenge to do the lake. Whether the lake itself would incorporate, that's a whole nother ball game.

**FLOOD:** And that may--

**DEB SCHILZ:** But that may be a way to look at that as well.

**FLOOD:** Because it sounds like you have a population living up there that doesn't have the types of services that you enjoy in the city of Ogallala.

**DEB SCHILZ:** That would be correct, mainly water, sewer, and if we were to annex any part of the outside community in, that is one of the things that we annex-- that-- that we would have to provide. And so we've always talked it'd be great, but [INAUDIBLE]

**FLOOD:** Is there any discussion of having a specialized municipal corporation for around the lake, to have that?

**DEB SCHILZ:** There has been talk, but has there been action? No. But, yeah, there's-- we need to look-- take it up and put it on the drawing board and see what would work the best.

**FLOOD:** There's not even an SID or anything like that?

**DEB SCHILZ:** No, uh-uh.

**FLOOD:** OK. Thank you.

**DEB SCHILZ:** Yep.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Flood. So I-- I have two quick questions.

**DEB SCHILZ:** Yeah.

**HILGERS:** One is-- so I heard yesterday whether-- that I understand that maybe the number of incidents this summer had declined and that might be in part because of the reservation system. Is that something that you saw-- have seen?

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**DEB SCHILZ:** I can't speak to that, but our county attorney is here and I'm sure he'd be able to answer--.

**HILGERS:** OK.

**DEB SCHILZ:** --that question for you.

**HILGERS:** OK, sounds good. The second question is just the question I asked before, or was asked before, which is, if you were to envision one or two kind of concrete, visionary, big-- dream-big ideas, what would they be?

**DEB SCHILZ:** I would love to see at some point a-- I call it a ferry system, but some way to get across the lake besides just going over the dam. You know, with the amount of mileage that we have of water, and amenities are on both sides of the lake, it'd be great to find some way to be able to take people back and forth via the lake. As an example, we'll be soon living on the south side and my in-laws live on the north side. It's a 45-minute drive, one way, around, so--

**HILGERS:** It sounds like a good idea to me.

**DEB SCHILZ:** Yeah. [LAUGH] There-- there are-- there are-- yeah. But if I were to take something across the water, it's about ten minutes, so that's one thing. Trying to find some way to make a mobile-- marina, so to speak. With the water fluctuations that we have, it's very difficult at this point in time to do, but, man, it would be great to have somewhere down the line. And I-- I agree with Mary on the convention center. There's a way to expand the visitors center. At one point there was an initiative to do that, and it's-- it'd be great to pick that up and make that happen.

**HILGERS:** Thank you. Senator Bostelman.

**BOSTELMAN:** I want to follow up on that portion.

**DEB SCHILZ:** Yep.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thanks for your testimony on-- talk-- come meeting with us today. Two things-- one is we spoke a little bit last-- last night on the ride back in about marketing. And that's really something, I think, either signage or other type of things. Can you speak a little bit to what you've done, marketing, or what you think is needed to expand that, you know, that outreach--

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**DEB SCHILZ:** Yes.

**BOSTELMAN:** --to the-- to areas?

**DEB SCHILZ:** Great question. With our visitors committee, we have two funds, the promotional fund, as well as the improvement fund. So on our promotional side, we did work closely with Game and Parks this year with the changes in the reservation system. We helped advertise along the Front Range, as well as the Lincoln-Omaha area, radio, Facebook, you know, lot of methods, however we could, to inform them of the changes. We'd like to see some more user friendly-type messaging going forward with the billboard pieces of things. Our chamber received a lot of calls saying I have a reservation, but it says, you know, you have to-- we're full or there's something going-- you know, used differently, worded differently than it could have been. I think going forward we-- we'll tweak our messaging for 2022. I mentioned normally the visitors committee has a booth at the Denver sports show in January. Well, this year it didn't happen, so we couldn't message anything even if we wanted to. So we do try to message the lake and we will message the reservation system going forward, any tweaks that are made to that. We do plan to go again in January of next year.

**BOSTELMAN:** The second question is, as access-- as the lake is surrounded by private property, has the advisory committee looked at additional roads, private property, talked to property owners? Is there access that you've discussed with someone, you know, some of those property owners? Are you willing to allow-- you know, either sell or allow access across your land to-- to get to the--

**DEB SCHILZ:** Well, with the land being owned by-- [INAUDIBLE] and managed by Game and Parks, I'll let you ask them that question because they would be the ones that would initiate those conversations. There are access points around the lake for public use, as well as there is private-access areas too.

**BOSTELMAN:** So-- so the big so the-- the advisory committee hasn't reached out to those folks at all?

**DEB SCHILZ:** No, no, uh-uh.

**BOSTELMAN:** OK. Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Bostelman. Seeing no other questions, thank you--



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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
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**DEB SCHILZ:** Great.

**HILGERS:** --for your testimony.

**DEB SCHILZ:** Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you very much. Mr. Fair, welcome.

**RANDY FAIR:** Good morning.

**HILGERS:** Good morning.

**RANDY FAIR:** Randy Fair, Keith County Attorney. I'll [INAUDIBLE] questions are going to get directed to me. So my name is R-a-n-d-y; my last name is spelled F-a-i-r. I'm the Keith County Attorney. I've been in this job for ten years. I also have a private law office and I also own businesses in Keith County. I came here 20 years ago. I'd like to thank all of you for coming. This is fantastic. I wasn't aware I needed to get as good a speech as my previous speakers, but I'll try to do my best. You talked about-- I think this is great for a potential long-term investment. It was-- I would tell you, when you discussed the reservations and the things that were changing, I was very concerned, a lot of my clients were concerned in my private office, because of the impact to our economics, and it's actually turned out well. I didn't make a secret that I was a little bit against that because of those concerns, but obviously it's worked out well. I think it's doing a great job, and we're very happy about how things are doing. There's some economic limitations to that. I think that's happened. But I think overall we're working well with those changes. Excuse me. I've got a little bit of a cold. So with those reservations, we have had a lessening of, I would say, assaultive behavior. Law enforcement officers feel better about going into situations because we don't have the large crowds that cause issues with-- you saw the video cameras, you would-- you would understand those-- those ramifications with people who, I would say, would get very angry and try to become involved in situations they didn't need to be involved in, and I think that's helped immensely those individuals. Our citations give you a little history. Ten years ago, when I started as the-- as the county attorney, we probably had-- I would-- I started keeping track and it's virtually impossible now. But I would say I probably roughly had somewhere between 30-- 30, 40 marijuana cases over the course of a year, not as much assaultive behavior at the lake as the changes in the marijuana laws in Colorado. I get over 300-plus. I couldn't even tell you. It's astronomical, the

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

number of cases and citations that result from-- from those things, not just at the lake but just our-- our travels. I jokingly tell people when I see the-- in eastern Nebraska and someone says, we got-- we got a car and it's got 40 pounds or 50 pounds of marijuana, I probably get that every three to six months, 100 pounds. It's not that unusual for us to see those kind of activities on-- on the interstate. But at the lake, we've had a much-- a larger number of drops in the assaultive behavior, which we're very happy for. It's giving conservation officers and-- and other individuals out there more of an opportunity to interact with people. We-- we still have the same number of alcohol cases, but most people are pretty-- and probably a little bit of a rise in that, but that's allowing our officers to kind of make it safer out there, in addition to looking at some of those other things that we need to make sure it's a safe place to be. And our responses from the individuals and locals that call our office, even when they have had something happen with a ticket or-- has been very positive. They're really loving the getting back to more family-friendly environment, less of the chaos and the partying and-- which we're all happy for and those families coming here and-- and investing in our community, which-- which we like to see happen and-- and we welcome those people. When you talk about-- someone asked about how the-- kind of the different law enforcement agencies work together, we generally tend to have a meeting, myself, Game and Parks, we have a-- before the busy weekends, we kind of get a whole communication together about how things are going to proceed. We have extra officers that come out, which is necessary, State Patrol, sheriff's office, Game and Parks. And put the timer on if you need to, but-- but what ends up happening is they're very good about cooperating. I would tell you, in terms of infrastructure, we have a-- a difficult time communicating because of the radio type-based systems that all these different law enforcement agencies use and our ability to communicate and have good reception with radios and radio towers at the lake. It's very difficult sometimes for us to get communication because of that body of water and the hills, and so we do have some-- some issues with that. But I do think that this development piece you're looking at and-- this is a great opportunity here, I-- I'm also licensed in Colorado and I have tons of people and tons of-- all of these people probably have tons of people from Colorado who say, if we had the opportunity to come out here and invest money in your state, to be able to get closer private ownership, commercial development around the lake, they would do it in a heartbeat. We have a lot of people that ask us about investments, buying property, can we come out there, is there any opportunities? And if you haven't seen, with the

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

price of housing in Colorado, there's been a large influx of people that have moved here because of that. I could go on forever because I think the lake is fantastic. I love being here. But I'll let you ask me some questions if you have anything in particular.

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

**FLOOD:** Thank you, Mr. Fair, for being here. You were talking about the changes that were made at the lake that have resulted in the less assaultive behavior. For those of us that aren't super familiar, what changes were made and is-- and what-- who championed those changes?

**RANDY FAIR:** The reservation system, you know, with Game and Parks, that's-- that's made a huge difference. Then we-- as a result of that, in order-- and they've opened the gates. They've kept better track of people coming in, being able to keep people who aren't the type that are going to buy a park sticker that would come in and park and sneak in at night. Those are the same type of people that are-- when they're inter-- so if they interact with someone else or someone else at the lake, they're assaultive, they're disrespectful, and it's not the type of people we want here.

**FLOOD:** And so when did the reservation system start?

**RANDY FAIR:** This-- just this last year. This is our first-- I mean, obviously, we had COVID and it's--

**FLOOD:** And before the reservation system, how did it work?

**RANDY FAIR:** Kind of a free-for-all. Get your Game and-- get your park sticker, come in, or wait until no one's at the gate and just come in, don't pay, do whatever you want. So it was a lot more free-for-all, I mean. Someone may disagree with that, but it-- but very much like that, if you have a park pass, I drive past the gate, I go wherever I want, I-- you know, there's camping requirements, but, you know, it's not easy to enforce that when you've got all of these people just going wherever they want. And quite frankly, it's-- if somebody comes in without a park pass and they're not at their vehicle, or if you give them a ticket and they go back to California, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa for a park sticker, I'm not going to spend \$500 of man hours in my office and try to get someone to come back for something less than \$100. You want to help me? Make the penalties higher for those type of things, make the penalties higher for glass on beach, make those

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

individuals understand that-- that it's not appropriate to act that way.

**FLOOD:** If-- if-- how much of an impact did the reservation system have on the city of Ogallala's ability to make some more money off of the visitors? I would assume if you reduce the number of people that can come to the lake, there's going to be a corresponding drop in-- or was there no drop in like the benefits to the local business owners?

**RANDY FAIR:** I can't necessarily speak about all of them. I will tell you I-- I am a part owner of Scooter's Coffee and it-- and didn't hurt us at all.

**FLOOD:** Good.

**RANDY FAIR:** So-- so I-- I don't know if that's-- going to the restaurants, it appeared there were a lot more people, so I don't know if they were just--

**FLOOD:** More families?

**RANDY FAIR:** More families, more people coming into town.

**FLOOD:** OK, two more questions and I'm all done on this one. On the-- on the law enforcement, say we were-- you know, if we-- if the state of Nebraska makes a serious investment at Lake McConaughy and we increase interest and capacity and people, one of the things that usually doesn't come with any investment from the state is money for the ongoing cost. Those are usually borne locally. What is-- you know, if we were to-- if the state of Nebraska through Game of Parks and Central, you know, through-- through the COVID money we have, if there was a significant investment here, how open would this region be to figuring out-- because you're going to need more police officers, if there's more people coming, and I think that's something we've learned. Do people around the lake want to pay for that?

**RANDY FAIR:** You know, I-- that's a good question. It's probably better for one of our county commissioners. Myself, I think that I would tell you, with-- now with the reservations and a more structured environment, we've actually, I would say, had less problems to where we have to have as many law enforcement officers out there and less people responding on-- on busy weekends, because that's what does it for us. And I think if we have those people coming here that are paying, spending money here, increasing sales tax, we've never looked-- or we've discussed but never looked at a countywide sales tax

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

that would be used strictly for law enforcement. I think that we've got some options, and I think if people understand that they-- coming here, if business people-- if we're going to get the benefit of all these tourists and infrastructure being put here, I mean, obviously there's going to be a cost that we have to make, so I'm open to it, but I'm just--

**FLOOD:** No, I appreciate that.

**RANDY FAIR:** [INAUDIBLE] many.

**FLOOD:** That's all I had. Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Flood. Senator McDonnell.

**McDONNELL:** Thank you for being here. The-- you mentioned the penalties that, you know as-- as a deterrent and then for your actually to be able to cover your time. What is that, double, triple? What do you think those penalties should be increased to?

**RANDY FAIR:** Depends upon the nature of the charge. I mean, for a park sticker, you know, it's minuscule. I-- I think it's \$10 or \$20 plus the court costs. I mean, I'm not going to go after someone in Colorado for something like that. With regard to glass on the beach, it's something also minuscule. And-- and we have people that call our office and complain about glass on the beach because somebody throws it into a fire pit, it breaks, somebody cuts their foot, and, you know, we're giving people very light penalties for those kind of things. So to-- to that extent, the ones that are affecting a much greater and-- and making sure that it's-- we get a return on our investment is always the thing we look at.

**HILGERS:** Are those [INAUDIBLE]

**RANDY FAIR:** Of course, I don't get-- I don't get any of that money. Obviously, we don't get benefit.

**HILGERS:** I'm sorry to interrupt. But are-- are they-- are those the two? Are there any others? You said that for lack of a park sticker and the glass on the beach. Are there any others that fall within that bucket?

**RANDY FAIR:** That's probably more of a Game of Parks sticker about-- about how that costs them with their stuff problems. For me-- for--

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**CLEMENTS:** There's a no-alcohol policy.

**RANDY FAIR:** Yeah, there's a no-alcohol policy. That's-- the ramifications for that are pretty good for us. I mean, they-- it does deter them. It does. We have a-- do-- that is a deterrent, quite frankly, because we also take all their alcohol. When you take \$300 to \$500 worth of someone's alcohol, that kind of deters them quite a bit. And so it's more of that, plus the penalty for those things when you're a minor, because we do have people celebrating graduating high school come out here. And so we have programs for them, like diversion programs that they have to complete. Those tend to result in much more ramifications depending on age.

**HILGERS:** Senator McDonnell, I'm sorry for interrupting.

**MCDONNELL:** That's all right. How about impounding? How about the idea of the vehicle, the camper, the--

**RANDY FAIR:** That's pretty difficult to do under the current state of stuff. Impounding someone's vehicle for-- you don't really do that with alcohol and stuff. You do that with a drug-fund type of thing. It's a-- or with drugs. It's a much greater difficulty for me than it used to be in the state. There's some-- there's some more significant requirements if I want to impound someone's vehicle through the judicial process now than it used to be. That's a much broader discussion.

**HILGERS:** Senator Gragert.

**GRAGERT:** Thank you, Chairman. And thank you for your testimony. I'm going to ask you this question, and maybe there's somebody that better can answer it. But I want to go back to communications. Throughout my life, communications is always my married life and military life and all that. But communications-- and I heard yesterday on the tour everybody has their good communication with-- within themselves, you know, the Game and Parks, the sheriff, the State Patrol. Has there been looked at of one system? And maybe I'll just throw this out there, like piggyback on or-- or associate to the Nebraska State Patrol and everybody gets to the-- to that one system where if something happened out there, in terms of a communication gap--

**RANDY FAIR:** There wouldn't be any communication? Yeah, but it's a cost. I mean, that's assuming a cost. That's probably a-- Corey Crandall, our county commissioner, can talk a little bit more about

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

that. But-- but it's the cost. I mean, it's significant, and when you're talking about a small community and you've got to come up with hundreds of thousands, a million dollars to revamp your entire system, it's not easy. But, yes, that-- that is something we've looked at to make it easier for us to communicate effectively and we're still working on that.

**GRAGERT:** Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Gragert. Any other questions? Any tangible, big-- big-picture, dream-big ideas on-- that you'd like to see us consider?

**RANDY FAIR:** I'd love to see that-- that there's a better ability for someone, if they want to have an investment inside the leased area, Game and Parks area, that that would be possible, That it's not just a-- if I come up with an idea, I think having to put it out to bid or do things that someone else gets an opportunity to take advantage of is not fair. I mean, if I wanted to come invest money inside the leased area, I should be able to get long-term leases, so that way, my investment pays off. And you're not-- you're not going to put a bunch of money in something if I can't have it for a five- or ten-year period to actually see a return on that investment.

**HILGERS:** So-- so my understanding-- so you can correct my understanding or just walk me through this, so that-- that there are-- the oppor-- there are opportunities to get leases for 20 years. Is-- is that-- is that-- is that-- but I also understand maybe it's in five-year increments. Is that what you're saying, the 20 years isn't long enough?

**RANDY FAIR:** Huh?

\_\_\_\_\_ : That's the housing.

**RANDY FAIR:** That's the housing, yeah. For economic-- for me to own a business inside, it's restrictive. I can't say--

**HILGERS:** And it's five years at a time or is it--

**RANDY FAIR:** I don't think it's even five years, is it? It's-- is it five years? Yeah.

**HILGERS:** Five years. And then the second piece of that-- so length of time, which makes sense, and then the second piece, which is-- which

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

is something I've heard before, which-- so I'm just saying this, right, is-- it's sort of this idea that you could come up with an idea, but then they have to, because of the way that government procurement might work or bidding process might work, they can take that idea and then bid it out to other people who--

**RANDY FAIR:** I think they have to give opportunities for other people to look at that. Is that right, Colby? [PHONETIC]

\_\_\_\_\_ : We do.

**RANDY FAIR:** All right.

**HILGERS:** I think Game and Parks is going to testify and we-- we'll ask--

**RANDY FAIR:** Game and Parks [INAUDIBLE]

\_\_\_\_\_ : [INAUDIBLE]

**RANDY FAIR:** Yeah.

**HILGERS:** OK, we'll-- we'll ask that question.

**RANDY FAIR:** Sure.

**HILGERS:** Those are good points. Any other questions from the committee? Seeing none, thank you very much for your testimony, Mr. Fair.

**RANDY FAIR:** Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you. Next testifier.

**COREY CRANDALL:** Guess I'll go next, since the subject keeps on coming up.

**HILGERS:** Good morning.

**COREY CRANDALL:** Good morning. Good morning, members of the STAR WARS Committee. I appreciate your time. I appreciate you guys all coming up and traveling to Ogallala. My name is Corey Crandall, spelled C-o-r-e-y; Crandall is C-r-a-n-d-a-l-l. I appreciate the opportunity to be able to testify today. I am here today to testify in the capacity-- I am the Keith County Commissioner Chairman and my viewpoints today just represent myself just because we're a voting



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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

board. And so these are just my opinion-- opinions and projects that we-- that I've been working on, as well as a business owner here in Keith County. Just listening to the demographics of where you guys are all from, I just wanted to notate I'm originally from Hartington, Nebraska, went to college at the university and moved to, actually, Mullen, Nebraska, was there for eight years, and then a business opportunity here brought me to Ogallala. Growing up in northeast Nebraska, I really enjoyed the Lewis and Clark Lake, grew up up there, know a lot about the topography up there and spent a lot of-- a lot of time vacationing and whatever. So that's what helped bring me to Ogallala and the love for the water and the community, and this is a great community and they do a great job. But three years ago, I had the opportunity to run for commissioner, so I did. And it didn't take long to figure out some of the shortfalls that we were up against with the lake. Obviously, as you see in your maps, the lake has a unique topography. It-- it's a-- it's a tough animal to be able to deal with, and all the testimonies that you've heard already, I think, merit that. One of the things that happened last-- little over a year ago, we had the city fire chief, we had local fire departments all come walk into our meeting. And they were on the agenda, by the way, but [LAUGHTER] they-- they come into the meeting showing the need for the upgrade of communications in Keith County. Keith County to this day operates on an analog system. OK. They have a hard time communicating, as it was noted by Randy. They-- you know, these-- there's grass fires that get into canyons. They can't communicate. I've heard stories where we have volunteer fire-- firemen running up on top of a hill trying to communicate out of a valley, winds blowing. It just makes dangerous situations. So they presented this \$1.1 million upgrade project to us. It actually includes the upgrade for our communications in itself to switch from analog to digital. It includes upgrades on towers to increase the-- to multiple top groups. Analog system now isn't able to do that. One of the things that gets kind of "oversight" here is that our communications here in Ogallala actually dispatch is out to six, possibly seven counties, all right, includes Hooker, McPherson County, Grant County, Deuel County, and there's one other one, Arthur County. So for all of their needs and communications up there, that is-- it includes all those. So if they have weather-related items, if they-- you know, clear up in the Sandhills, if they need to communicate something up there, we're responsible for that. I will note those counties up there, our interlocal contracts that we have set up and have doubled in the last year-- our interlocal contract for a year for those counties is \$4,000. So they op-- and that's actually doubled of when we had walked in there. It used to be

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

\$2,000 a year, is what they'd pay for those services. And with those counties, the way it's set up, that's-- that's not easy on those budgets when you sell three candy bars a day in some of those counties, OK? But anyway, going back to the-- the rescue, the fire chiefs, the emergency responders coming in to us, they have a great plan. They have it-- they have it set up to where it's going to improve our-- our infrastructure of our community to increase communications. We are working hard on this budget year to try to get this upgraded, OK, but our portion of it, so we're talking handheld radios in-- in vehicles that are digital for Paxton, Brule. One of the things-- and our city. But one of the things that was brought up to us by Region West-- that's our ambulance service that we would upgrade to their digital radios also-- is that they had talked about one of their kind of the dream things is a permanent helipad up on the north side of the lake to possibly set a helicopter down that could sit there overnight, just because of the influx of people and being able to helicopter emergency patients out of there. With that, the dollar amount is very difficult for us to just come up and budget. OK? It-- we have not passed our budget this year. We're thinking that our portion that we would be able to budget would be around \$700,000, OK, but this has not been passed, so it's not been stamped. it's just what we've been discussing. With that, the-- with the studies that you guys will go with LB406, I would hope that this would be an earmark for our-- for our infrastructure portion of the county simply because of the residents that are moving to-- to Keith County. With the business that I have, we have numerous tourists stopping in. We get a lot of people coming to Ogallala and just fall in love with the town and figure out that that's a nice place-- nice place to live. We see a lot of family reunions that meet from the Front Range. They drive from Iowa, Illinois, eastern part of the state, and meet out here to convene.

**HILGERS:** Can I ask you-- maybe if you could wrap up [INAUDIBLE]

**COREY CRANDALL:** OK. All right. We can wrap up. Is there any questions? [LAUGHTER] We're done.

**HILGERS:** Didn't have to be so aggressive [INAUDIBLE]

**COREY CRANDALL:** Sorry, no problem, no problem. But you guys ask a lot more questions now.

**HILGERS:** Sen-- Senator Clements is getting antsy over here. Are there questions?

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**McDONNELL:** I--

**HILGERS:** Senator McDonnell.

**McDONNELL:** So your total budget, what is that for a year for-- you're talking about the total 1.1-- to switch over to digital was \$700,000, potentially--

**COREY CRANDALL:** Yeah.

**McDONNELL:** --putting it in this year's budget. What is your total budget?

**COREY CRANDALL:** Our total county budget?

**McDONNELL:** Yes.

**COREY CRANDALL:** It's around \$14 million.

**McDONNELL:** OK.

**COREY CRANDALL:** Yes, sir, Mr. Flood.

**HILGERS:** Yep. Senator Flood, go ahead.

**FLOOD:** Thank you, Speaker Hilgers. Thanks for your testimony, Mr. Crandall. Is it-- when you talk about the \$1.1 million, is that to join the State Radio System?

**COREY CRANDALL:** That is be able to-- we can switch to D ROC on that, so that-- that is part of the State Radio--

**FLOOD:** OK.

**COREY CRANDALL:** That's the State Patrol.

**FLOOD:** Yeah.

**COREY CRANDALL:** But to-- to get on the SRS, yes, we would be able to switch back and forth, and the-- the main portion of this is to be able to have multiple talk groups and digital is what we need to do to maintain these multiple talk groups.

**FLOOD:** Right. Can't you do that by just jumping on the state system? Because I-- I know that--

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**COREY CRANDALL:** But that--

**FLOOD:** --police departments in counties all over the state have jumped on the state system.

**COREY CRANDALL:** Absolutely, absolutely. But our fire chief, Dell Simmerman, has come up with the most economical way that we could possibly do that. The State Radio System, what I've been told, is like three times more than that.

**FLOOD:** Oh.

**COREY CRANDALL:** So it's-- it's a cost issue of we're trying to be fiscally responsible on that.

**FLOOD:** OK.

**HILGERS:** Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** Thank you, Chairman Hilgers. Thank you for your testimony. We've sort of hit on EMS calls through all the speakers so far. Do you have a number, or will somebody testify, how many EMS calls you usually have out in that recreation area?

**COREY CRANDALL:** Yeah, I don't have those numbers. I don't know if there's anybody that would, actually.

**BRANDT:** OK, that's fine.

**COREY CRANDALL:** Randy.

**RANDY FAIR:** I can tell you that there are a lot less inside the Game and Parks area this year than they were before. We had a lot of them. I can't give you a number off the top of my head, but previously we had a lot of drunk calls inside the actual Lack McConaughy Game and Parks [INAUDIBLE] that way you have to pass the gate. And we had a significant drop in that due to the reservation system. That's been reported from Ralph Moul, who's on the north side, who runs most of the dive rescue [INAUDIBLE] fire department there.

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

**RANDY FAIR:** Yep.

**HILGERS:** Senator-- Senator Flood.

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**FLOOD:** Mr. Crandall, what if the state of Nebraska makes a sizable investment here and it requires more ongoing police, fire, sewer, water? What, in a-- ultimately there's got to be some way to maintain that infrastructure and my sense is that if you're living around the lake now, there's really no-- you're not incorporated. What would be your-- if you could dream the best scenario for the ongoing costs of maintaining all this extra infrastructure you may have, what's the best way to do that?

**COREY CRANDALL:** Well, that's a good question, but obviously, if a percentage of the-- the assessed values on our properties would be directed towards that, and the number is too low right now.

**FLOOD:** But-- so what's that--

**COREY CRANDALL:** The-- the percentage that we can assess on our properties to be able to pay for that, it's-- what we send off to the state, it's just-- it's-- we would want to be able to adjust that.

**FLOOD:** What's your levy at right now as a county?

**COREY CRANDALL:** That's a good question. I'd have to look at my-- I-- I don't know.

**FLOOD:** You have 45 cents of authority plus an extra 5 cents of interlocal agreement authority. So you have a total of 50 cents. But should the entire county pay for that or should the people that are benefiting from the infrastructure pay for the increased services? And-- and I-- and I don't-- I don't know. Maybe that's not a fair question, but it kind of begs the question is, do you need some kind of municipal corporation to be able to have the structure, to have the EMS response times? Because otherwise people in a county, somebody that's got land 20 miles away from the lake, will be subsidizing a development that has all this infrastructure. So I think the-- one of the questions I have going forward is, who's-- we can-- we could ship \$50 million to this project. Who's going to pay to maintain all of that? The people that benefit directly, I think, should probably help to maintain the increased infrastructure.

**COREY CRANDALL:** And that-- yeah, that's something that really needs to be looked at and--

**FLOOD:** Thank you very much.

**COREY CRANDALL:** OK, thank you.

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Flood.

**COREY CRANDALL:** Thank you for your good points.

**FLOOD:** Yeah.

**COREY CRANDALL:** I appreciate that.

**HILGERS:** Any other questions from the committee? So you said the helipad was a-- was something you've heard is-- could be a-- it could be sort of a game changer. Anything--

**COREY CRANDALL:** That was a suggestion from Region West, yes.

**HILGERS:** Anything from your-- your perspective?

**COREY CRANDALL:** This-- this project would be my perspective. I'm--

**HILGERS:** Which project?

**COREY CRANDALL:** Of the radios. And--

**HILGERS:** Oh, the radios.

**COREY CRANDALL:** And I think it is a good idea to have something up there. They've already-- you know, they landed a helicopter on the beach here once already this summer, I believe.

\_\_\_\_\_: Correct.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Commissioner.

**COREY CRANDALL:** All right. Thank you for your time.

**GRAGERT:** Real shortly [INAUDIBLE]

**HILGERS:** Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead, Senator Gragert.

**GRAGERT:** Thank you. Can I just interject? And are you familiar with the capabilities of the Army National Guard and their helicopters, their Bambi bucket, their hoisting capability, their-- do you know how to contact directly to the--

**COREY CRANDALL:** We have never-- to my knowledge, we have never contacted them.

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**GRAGERT:** Longtime member of the Army National Guard, I will tell you that there are-- there are always missions that on request have a helicopter come up here and stand by for-- I mean, you're not going to get them every time, but maybe on your high-- when-- you know, a lot of people out there, you might be able to do that.

**COREY CRANDALL:** Yeah, I appreciate that suggestion. That's great.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Gragert. Seeing no other questions, thank you very much for your service.

**COREY CRANDALL:** Thank you. Thank you for your time.

**HILGERS:** Next testifier.

**PAM ABBOTT:** Good morning.

**HILGERS:** Good morning, welcome.

**PAM ABBOTT:** Thank you. Welcome to you as well.

**HILGERS:** Thank you.

**PAM ABBOTT:** My name is Pam Abbott. I might want to wait till I-- I'll spell that: P-a-m, last name A-b-b-o-t-t. I'm here to speak to you on behalf of my role as chairwoman for Keith County Foundation Fund, which is an affiliate of the Nebraska Community Foundation. I want to welcome you again. You are now in the middle of everywhere. And in this day and age, we know that we can work from anywhere and live anywhere we choose, generally speaking, and we think we really do have something special right here in the middle of everywhere. Our location offers lifestyle choices that 30- to 40-year-olds with young families are looking for, like quality of living, simpler pace of life, outdoor recreational opportunities like hunting, fishing, water sports, as well as our arts, culture, and history, and affordable housing. Our location also offers travel conveniences, and we certainly offer abundant natural resources in our area as well. But last and not least, we offer really wonderful people that care about our area and they get involved in the community. Our foundation has-- has an un-- \$8.3 million unrestricted gift that was endowed to us in 2019, and that boosted our granting power annually to about the tune of half a million dollars so far. This gift has afforded Keith County margin of excellence money, and that is money that goes above and beyond the ordinary. Our endowments total a little over \$13 million now with our total assets over \$14 million. That gift in 2019 catalyzed our

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

foundation and community to prepare ourselves for opportunities that we knew would present themselves in the future. We just didn't know what they would look like. And here you are today. So I'd like to tell you a little bit more to-- just about what-- what work we've done and how we are preparing and have prepared to date since that time today. We've done-- one of our first major efforts was doing a data study, which you have in your hands, and a graphic snapshot. That was completed in 2019, prepandemic. Now I realize HDR is doing another study, which is wonderful, to update these numbers, but it may be-- give you some benchmarks right now to work from. Three statisticians-- an economist, a demographer, and a rural sociologist-- participated in the study for us in collaboration with the Nebraska Community Foundation, and it helped us better understand our people, our economy, and our education. We created that snapshot highlighting some of the data that was shared through multiple visioning sessions in the year 2020. I won't walk you through that whole piece, as well, but I want to lift up just a couple, two or three snapshot points, data points in there that I think it might be important for you to know about us. On the first page, at the bottom of the page is a migration graph. Keith County has a 20 percent in-migration rate of our 30- to 34-year-olds. So why are they choosing the rural areas? It says right there, obviously, in addition to that, employment opportunities, choice of working remotely, and especially postpandemic or if-- wherever we're at in that situation. And Keith County also has the unique factor of-- of the lake as well. We've also seen, though, an increase of 20-- about 24 percent in-migration of our preretirement and our retirement-age citizens, and that's a unicorn for most of our rural Nebraska areas. We have a pretty good idea of why those preretirement/retirement adults are choosing Keith County, but it's also predicted that Keith County will have a thousand more seniors in 2030 than-- than we did in 2010. If you look at that second page, on the economy section in the middle, you'll see the annual income of our retire-- retirees in 2018 was \$135 million. That's the single largest generator of household earnings in our county of about \$8,000. And from those visioning sessions that we conducted, I spoke of, three major areas did actually rise to-- to the top consistently: housing needs; first impressions, which included the arts, green space, and wayfinding; and young families with an emphasis on childcare quality and capacity. So since those visioning sessions, let me tell you how we continue to prepare. Our community created a \$1 million housing fund that was leveraged with dollars from the DED, NIFA, community members, and certainly our community foundation, and that was an unexpected opportunity that we were prepared to help fund. We also



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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

completed a market analysis and survey for early childhood and early childcare in this current year, 2021. We've just begun discussions with the community to develop strategies to add value for our families, our providers, and our businesses, as well. Our first of many art murals has been completed, and I hope you saw it as you drove north over the-- from the interstate. We have another potential mural that's been identified, as well, and green space to complement both of those pieces are planned and in the works and some of this will be realized as soon as early fall. A wayfinding committee is in place and, I have to say, there are so many opportunities with-- with that piece, both realized and unrealized. I know we have people that will be speaking to that more directly, as well, today. This beautiful library is a testament to the passion, planning, and tenacity that our city and our library board has-- has undertaken. And our newest completed project, a splash pad in town, will have its ribbon cutting occur tomorrow. Those are all people-attraction pieces within our community that our foundation has helped to support in one or more ways. But I want to talk a little bit about entrepreneurship, because I think that will really segue into your lake efforts and this committee. In an effort to foster a stronger entrepreneurial ecosystem, eight Keith County participants will join five other communities from across the state, beginning September, in a three-year learning experience to build locally driven, community-centric, entrepreneurial ecosystems. And this is in collaboration, of course, with the NCF, also with NetWork Kansas, and with the Valley County Economic Development Committee, which is Ord. Our far-- our found-- our foundation is helping support this-- this effort. And as those eight core members go through the experience, they will connect to neighboring communities to peer mentor, and that's going to build a lot larger cohort of communities in this area, this region, that will then be connected to other entrepreneurial programs like business builders of Nebraska, SourceLink, Nebraska Extension-- those are some examples-- with the ultimate goal of us doing our part here and building critical mass to change the statewide approach to economic development in our state to a more entrepreneurial focus. Finally, a few of our foundation members have begun introducing themselves to lake residents, and we've had some wonderful conversations with them through barbecues, coffees, things like that, and that has just started to occur this summer. There is a wealth of talent that is either commuting from the lake to other locations to work, currently, or are retired at the lake, and that population, as you have heard, is growing here and they want to connect with our community. They really bring a unique perspective to

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

our area-- area, and we've had wonderful conversations about potential opportunities with their input. I won't even go into some of those questions. I can if you-- if you-- if you're interested later. But-- but I just wanted to share with you that by being in the middle of everywhere, we know that there's a wealth of opportunities. We suspect you do, too, as well. And the data that we've collected has created more questions that we believe will really, truly lead to responsive, successful, sustainable outcomes for Keith County. I know that there are a wealth of other-- there's a wealth of knowledge in here that can give you more detail about each of those projects that we're doing our part in collaboration and partnership with our community. Thank you for being here.

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

**BRANDT:** Thank you, Chairman Hilgers. Thank you for your testimony. Last year, we passed LB1107, the Nebraska Imagine Act. Do you feel that these business-enhancement programs that the state currently has helps a community of your size?

**PAM ABBOTT:** I cannot speak to that directly. I'm sure our KCAD would probably be better to answer that question. I think any efforts that we can make in-- in terms of helping these situations is-- is necessary, especially where-- where we're living in-- in western Nebraska.

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

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Brandt. Are there other questions? I have a couple questions. So this is very valuable. Thank you for-- for writing this.

**PAM ABBOTT:** You're welcome.

**HILGERS:** So this-- this-- on this front, this migration chart that you're walking through, that's-- you said that's from 2019, or at least prepandemic, is that right?

**PAM ABBOTT:** It is, yes.

**HILGERS:** I know you don't have refreshed data on this, but what is your sense of postpandemic-- with people coming in here and can work now, telecommute around the world in some cases, and living here, what's your sense of how this may have changed? Or are you-- are there

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

maybe more people in the 20- to 24-year-old cohort who are staying?  
Are you seeing even more influx of people in that 30 to 34 range?  
What's your sense?

**PAM ABBOTT:** I think we've retained those people for certain. There could be a little-- a-- a growing sense of that, slightly, but I think that our largest growth in that area during-- since 2020 is going to be in that preretirement and retirement age group.

**HILGERS:** And then on the entrepreneurship, you said-- so that's a-- think you said Nebraska Community Foundation, that the multi-community entrepreneurship--

**PAM ABBOTT:** That is in collaboration with Nebraska and-- and with NetWork Kansas as well.

**HILGERS:** NetWork, OK. And-- and is that-- is that a focus? So we oftentimes, I think about entrepreneurship, you know, small business ownership, with a traditional service like a Scooters, versus where you might see in some communities where they try to build, you know, a tech collaborative and really try to go high growth, you know, venture capital-type entrepreneurship.

**PAM ABBOTT:** Right, right.

**HILGERS:** Is there-- is it both of those, either of those, or a certain focus?

**PAM ABBOTT:** It is-- it is both of those. And you can see on that insert on that second page, you know, kind of where we were at in 2019 in terms of the four stages on economic development. I think we were fairly strong in stage one, stage three. We-- we decreased a little bit in stage two on that execution piece. But-- but that program should help elevate that and, like you said, bring larger, more grander entrepreneurial ideas to the table.

**HILGERS:** I would say, and you may be aware of this already, but the Legislature last year in our-- or this year in our budget increased the funding through the Business Innovation Act, which helps fund Invest Nebraska and which helps focus on local, sort of, you know, new startup businesses that-- especially high-growth business-- businesses, so at least some out of the equation. But to the extent you're not plugged into that group already, I would highly recommend doing so--

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**PAM ABBOTT:** Thank you.

**HILGERS:** --because they're-- they're constantly looking for good projects and opportunities to invest in.

**PAM ABBOTT:** We have something going-- happening now, I'm pleased to say, but I'm sure KCAD will be represented today and tell you-- tell you more about those too.

**HILGERS:** OK. Wonderful. And then from a-- from a big-picture, sort of big-swing perspective, are there one or two things that you would like to see for the lake?

**PAM ABBOTT:** From a community community foundation perspective? You know, I think that whatever tourism-- tourism opportunities happen, we would hope that they create more value-added opportunities for the region around us, just the close region around us, that encourages attraction and retention of both businesses and people. That's what we-- that's where we would like to see that happen.

**HILGERS:** Thank you very much.

**PAM ABBOTT:** You bet.

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

**PAM ABBOTT:** Thank you, sir.

**HILGERS:** Next testifier. Good morning.

**CHRISTINE VAIL:** Good morning. Thank you so much for coming here. My name is Christine Vail and I'm the executive director of Keep Keith County Beautiful. I'm also a resident--

**HILGERS:** Would you mind spelling your name for--

**CHRISTINE VAIL:** Oh, I'm sorry.

**HILGERS:** --for the record?

**CHRISTINE VAIL:** C-h-r-i-s-t-i-n-e V-a-i-l.

**HILGERS:** Thank you.

**CHRISTINE VAIL:** I have a very unique position, like most of the people here. We wear lots of hats. First and foremost, my real position, my job, is funded through the Department of Environment and Energy and I work very closely with Game and Parks to do sustainability at the lake. We currently have 11 recycling containers that are placed in various locations. As a matter of fact, you made the visitors center last night. You pulled in. You saw those recycling containers. Those belong to Keep Keith County Beautiful from a grant from DEE. We also pay for the transportation of those, so we have worked with Game and Parks to minimize waste management, and environmental sustainability is a very important factor of where we're going forward with. As a matter of fact, a couple of weeks ago, I met with the current supervisor and said, Lee, what-- what can we do, where can we go next? We would like to see recycling bins in all of the-- all the registered campgrounds. We want-- we do beach cleanups the second Saturday of every month here. We have a program called the Beach Crew App where people can actually sign in on their phone, collect waste at the beach, and give volunteer hours to Keep Keith County Beautiful. So we've worked with Game and Parks in that aspect. We also help promote Adopt-a-Beach. So we work very closely with Game and Parks to help them manage their waste. My goal is to have zero waste in this community, and I seriously doubt that will happen, but we're working towards it. We have a very, very good infrastructure of waste management in this community. We actually have a dump that is located south of town, and we also have the largest MRF, which stands for Materials Recovery Facility, in western Nebraska. Through WRG, which is a nonprofit organization here in town, we collect the recycling from all over western Nebraska: Alliance, Kimball, Sidney, Bridgeport, Bridgewater, Oshkosh, Chappell all comes to Ogallala and then we in turn consolidate, bail, and move it to Omaha to FirstStar Fiber. So we are very intricately involved in creating local economies and also sustainability. That is a very important factor for my organization and the community alike-- alike. As a matter of fact, our community for the past ten years has been in the top ten in the PepsiCo recycle rally the nation. We've garnered over \$200,000 to our schools because our kids recycle. So it's a very exciting time to be in recycling. We know that a lot of the green energy infrastructure-type things are going forward, but we are people that do it just because we are conser-- conservationists. We know the farming and ranching community has always been conservationist and we just extend it even further. It's not the tree huggers; it's real life. Our kids come out of our high schools with-- they go into environmental sustainability. As a matter of fact, my intern from two summers ago is graduating from UNL

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

this year with a degree in environmental sustainability and will be going to work for the Nebraska Recycling Council. So I'm very-- I'm very passionate about recycling, but I also live at the lake. I'm one of those people that came from Colorado, and I moved here ten years ago, before the curve. I have watched our property values go from, let's just say, \$200,000 to \$800,000 in three years. It's hard for the people that live at the lake that bought out there a long time ago that they can't even afford their property taxes anymore. And I know you guys are actively working on that also, but it is an issue that we have. We don't want so much value that we can't afford to live here either. My background is sales and marketing. I worked for Procter and Gamble out of college. I lived in Vail, Colorado, for a number of years, worked for Vail Associates in marketing. And I will tell you, this is a tourist community. We need to embrace that. We need to say, they're here for a couple days and they leave. One of the best ways we can do it is some of the programs that we already have in place. One, starting with, is our wayfinding program for the per-- first impressions. I had the opportunity to work on that for three years. I chaired the actual committee when we brought people together. And we have found that one of the things we don't do is tell people where to go when they come here. You come off the underpass, you don't even know where you're going. You just see a new highway. So we would like to put some very high-end, very good developmental signs to show people how to get around. The other thing is, is that I see that we have other opportunities through not only wayfinding and beautification, but we also have things at the lake that we can do. A couple months ago I went with people from Central and other people on the Lake Committee. We took a tour like you guys did yesterday. We looked at opportunities and one of the first ones we looked at was a bike and hike trail that could actually go from the very top of the dam all the way down to the little lake, do a little bike trail around there, and we basically said, let's-- let's talk about the future because there's a lot of things that are changing. I personally believe, with the reservation system that has just been put into place, it gives this area a brand-new opportunity to say come here, enjoy this lake, rebrand, remarket this place to high-end, family-oriented glamping, bring the right people. As Randy said, we've had many major issues over the course of the past couple of years of-- as being a resident at the lake, we don't want people coming in or disturbing our peace. We don't want them camping on our beaches if they're causing problems because we live here. And that's another aspect. We-- we're not tourists anymore. We're investors. We have invested into this lake. We've put our retirement here. So we want to

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

see it grow and-- but in-- in a place that is something that we can control. As we've seen with our law enforcement, we have issues and we need-- and this year has been completely different. I will tell you that at our Kites and Castles, which is a very large event that we always hold the last Saturday in July, it was like a resort. It wasn't crazed; it wasn't people everywhere. It was so calm and cool and collected that it was a pleasure to be there. So with your new funding-- and some of the money, some of the numbers I've heard are absolutely phenomenal-- these little projects that we're talking about, wayfinding and bike and hike trails, are very minuscule. I think there's more that we can do. But we are a community, as you've seen. We have lots of big visions and we have lots of good people. Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank-- thank you, Ms. Vail. Are there questions? Seeing none from the com-- committee, are there any big-- you've mentioned a couple ideas, a couple we've heard with the bike trail, etcetera. Are there any big swings for you?

**CHRISTINE VAIL:** I personally think that we need a high-end luxury hotel somewhere at Diver's Bay, deepwater marina, something that could have year-round attraction. Casinos have always been an option. They do generate good money. I don't know where we'd find the workforce. But I do think something that could draw on a year-round basis, especially in the shoulder seasons, and bring people to-- here to spend time and spend money.

**HILGERS:** Thank you.

**CHRISTINE VAIL:** Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you very much. Next testifier. And how many testi-- who-- who is left planning on testifying, wouldn't mind raising your hand? OK, great. Thank you. Good morning.

**BARBARA MEISMER:** Good morning. My name is Barbara Meismer, B-a-r-b-a-r-a M-e-i-s-m-e-r. I want to thank you all for being here. This is so exciting and very fortuitous for us. I'm the president of the Keith County Historical Society. Keith County, as we-- we refer to it as the gateway to the West. And I know a lot of other communities in the state have targeted the same motto, but Keith County is uniquely positioned because we were on the Or-- Oregon Trail. We were on the Mormon Trail. We were a significant contributor to the Pony Express. In fact, tomorrow we have dedications of three Pony Express--

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

Express stations that are going to be going on right here, very close to Ogallala. There's the Alkali Station, which is going to be-- it's east of Roscoe, west of North Platte. There's a historical marker there marking the Alkali Station. Then there was the Gill's Station-- excuse me, the Gill's Station, which is-- was between Roscoe and Ogallala. And there is a historical marker there called the Cheyenne marker, all on Highway 30. And then the third one is out by what it-- was known as California Hill, where you-- if you travel to California Hill, you can still see the Oregon Trail ruts. So it's-- historically we-- we just have a vast, vast history. The railroad came through here and Ogallala was designated as the terminus for the Oregon Tr-- or the Texas Trail, so the-- the cattle that were shipped or traileed up came to Ogallala to be shipped to Omaha or-- or Denver for sale. We are on the edge of the-- of the Sandhills, which is the greatest cat-- cattle country in the-- in the country-- the cattle-- the greatest cattle area in the country and we have some very large ranches there. Because of the growth to the north, there was the North Platte River and the South Platte River and the North Platte River was about a mile wide, had a lot of quicksand in it, so the northern ranches wanted to get their cattle to-- to market. So they-- they ra-- excuse me-- ran a spur up the north side of the North Platte River. So we had the-- the-- the railroad coming through the south part but also the north part. There were six centers that were collecting places for those-- excuse me-- Paxton, Roscoe, Ogallala, and Brule on the South Platte; Sarben, Keystone, and Le-- LeMoyné on the North Platte. So there-- there were a lot of things going on in terms of development. We have in Ogallala a historical campus that we have put together. There's the mansion on the Hill, which is-- has been renovated to show how the wealthy lived in the 1780s. Right next to that, we have a one-room schoolhouse that was, from District 17, brought in and it's been renovated and is used to-- to bring in third and fourth graders. And they have a day of old-- old-fashioned schooling and that kind of thing. We also have a homesteaders cabin, which is right next to the schoolhouse. In addition to that, we have purchased the building to the north of that, so we have that whole block and we have purchased the lots on the-- behind the-- that. And now we have purchased the building directly to the north of that, so we have a whole new-- a whole new area that we want to develop. And what we would like-- our goal is to create a Keith County historical-- educational historical museum. We are really concerned about the lack of history being taught in the schools, the-- the lack of involving our kids in learning about where the-- where-- what came before them and what-- where they can go and tying that to their futures, and so we are-- have had community



Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

meetings and have determined that the-- the community is interested in something more than just the Mansion on the Hill and the homesteaders cabin. They want to be able to represent the-- the prehistory, which is the-- the Indians that were based here, the Oglala Sioux, the Brule Sioux and so forth. We have-- we just have a massive amount of history that we want to portray. And so we are looking to build a Keith County historic-- educational historical museum. And we have just started moving in that direction. As I said, we've purchased the properties, so we have the-- the place. We envision a-- a museum that will encompass all of that and all of Keith County and with educational interactive displays, with movable outdoor displays, with a campus feel to it so that people can walk and-- and have a place to-- to-- we-- we would like to have a place where people can sit down, gather, enjoy. And we are-- we are located right on Spruce Street, the north side of Spruce Street, which is the main road out to the lake. And so we would be-- we're a great destination now. We also own the little church in Keystone, which is the only church in the world that is a-- has in its little-bitty confines-- has a Catholic altar in one end and a Protestant altar in the other end. It was built in the 19-- early 1900s under the auspices of Mrs. Georgia Paxton. There were 13- and 14-year-old girls in a-- in a group and they called themselves the King's Daughters. And they-- they-- Keystone at that time had about 300 people. It doesn't have-- have that many people now, but it had about 300 people and they had a school, they had a hotel, they had liveries, they had general stores and all kinds of things, but they did not have a church. And these little girls decided that we needed a church. And so they set about fundraising to get the money to build this church. They raised three--

**HILGERS:** Ms. Meismer, if you could-- if you could start-- begin maybe--

**BARBARA MEISMER:** OK.

**HILGERS:** --begin wrap up, we have a--

**BARBARA MEISMER:** Well, then I'm done.

**HILGERS:** Oh.

**BARBARA MEISMER:** I-- I'll just-- I was just going to tell you more about the little church--

**HILGERS:** Yeah.

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**BARBARA MEISMER:** --but I don't need to go any further.

**HILGERS:** You don't have to immediately wrap up, you know, just--

**BARBARA MEISMER:** Yeah.

**HILGERS:** --just begin to.

**BARBARA MEISMER:** I'm done. OK.

**McDONNELL:** Plea-- please finish on the little church.

**HILGERS:** Yes. We have a question from Senator McDonnell. Please--

**BARBARA MEISMER:** Oh, OK. Well, the girls raised about \$300 and then they went to the ranches in the valley and they raised-- they got it up to about \$700. The Paxtons kicked in the rest. For \$1,200 they brought a car-- a trainload car of lumber out from Omaha to build the little church and the library on the main street in Keystone. They had a dedication and they had to get a special dispensation from Pope Leo to have the Catholic altar in the same building as the Protestant altar. And it's-- it's been completely renovated now, and so it's something that we're very proud of and we enjoy showing that. It's shown by appointment only, but I live across the street, so--  
[LAUGHTER]

**McDONNELL:** Thank you.

**BARBARA MEISMER:** So I can show it. I'm really proud of it.

**HILGERS:** Thank you. Thank-- thank you, Senator McDonnell. Are there other questions? Any-- are there any big-- big-vision things that we should be thinking about from your perspective?

**BARBARA MEISMER:** Well, we want-- we want to build this museum.

**HILGERS:** All right.

**BARBARA MEISMER:** We have-- we have been-- we have been given-- we have had-- had fundraisers. We've been given-- we-- got \$11,000 from the 100 Women group. We were part of the big give and got several hundred-- several thousand dollars. We've had two people who have passed away and in their-- in their-- can't think of the word I want--

**HILGERS:** Will?

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**BARBARA MEISMER:** Anyway, they will-- they have given us funds in their estates, from their estates. So we have a-- a start. We want to create an endowment program to be able to continue to-- for it to continue on its own. And we were advised to create the endowment before we created the museum so that we were sure that we could continue on to do that. All of the members of the board, there are 15 members on the board and-- and we have each taken one or two museums in the area that have, the same kind of idea, that campus feel, Stuhr Museum, Dawes County, and there are several museums that have this kind of an-- that we would want to replicate for this county. We just feel like we are so historically important that we really need to have something significant here.

**HILGERS:** Excellent. Thank you. Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony, Ms. Meismer.

**BARBARA MEISMER:** You bet. Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you. Next testifier. Good morning.

**KEN SCHILZ:** Good morning, Senators. My name is Ken Schilz, spelled K-e-n S-c-h-i-l-z, and I'm here today as a registered lobbyist for Keith County Area Development. And first, before I get started, I would just like to say I was remiss last night in thanking Game and Parks for their wonderful hosting of our dinner last night while the deluge commenced outside. So thank you very much, guys. We appreciated that very much. Well, as you've heard and as you've seen, we are prepared in Ogallala for growth. And we've been working on this, as we've told you, for about the past, jeez, 20 years to get to this point, probably, maybe more. But I think-- I think somebody had asked the question about how the advisory committee got started in the first place. Well, back in 2014, when I was still in the Legislature, we were having some of the same issues that we'd had before. And local folks were talking, hey, you know, problems at the lake, we've got issues with arrests, we've got issues with alcohol, we've got issues with assaults and just, I mean, up- and down-the-line problems. So I went to the-- I introduced a bill in Appropriations Committee to give \$600,000 dollars to Game and Parks for law enforcement. Well, you know how that works: Pretty hard to throw \$600,000 at a problem when there's no people to do it. So we-- we took a step back and what we decided to do then was create the lake-- well, I introduced a different bill. It morphed into this basically to where-- to where what we would do was sit down with a group of folks, the Lake "Mac" Advisory Committee, work with Game and Parks collaboratively to come

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

up with the master plan that was passed and developed in 2016. So that's where; that's the first time the advisory committee came to be here at Lake McConaughy. And so we worked on that for about 18 months from 2015 to 2016. And then we the-- master plan was developed by Game and Parks and-- and that's that's part of why we're here today, too, because we're into the second phase of that master plan. And you'll hear-- you'll hear more about that, I'm sure, from-- from Mr. Swenson. So that's basically how it got started and then as the-- as that moved out and things were-- things had seemingly calmed down, they-- the need for that advisory committee did not seem as large. Fortunately, what we've figured out is that the best way to move forward and the best way to work is collaboratively with those folks. And I would just like to ask you all here today, when was the last time you've heard the public talk about how good it is to work with Game and Parks? Well, it's happening here today. [LAUGHTER] And I just-- I just want to say how-- how excited we are to have this newfound relationship, because without it we've-- we've been in the spot that we've been in, in 2014, since about 1970. OK? So we've been fighting this problem, dealing with this problem forever. Finally, we've-- we've-- we've been able to bring the right people to the table and-- and it seems to be making a big difference. So the advisory committee, in conjunction with Game and Parks, has really worked well. Their commercial services plan that we're talking about, I think, is going to get to some of the issues that-- that we all have talked about that Randy was discussing up here as to getting-- getting some development more around the lake. You know, I-- I just-- I just want to-- I just want to bring up one little thing. You know, we heard from-- from Barb Meisner with the Historical Society that Ogallala was the end of the Texas Trail. And I don't know if you've-- if you've ever been to the Front Street show over here, but it's the longest running variety show in the state of Nebraska. And it's all high school seniors that have graduated up to college kids that come up in a-- and, you know, they-r- they apply and then they have to audition and if they get it, they get to-- they get to be in this thing. But just as a little bit of defense for Ogallala and Keith County, when you're at the end of the Texas Trail, right, and you've got 3,000 to 4,000 cowboys that have been on the trail for months and months, do you think they're going to cause a little trouble when they get to town? And as you know, some of these places, there's always kind of a vortex of that. And I think it's just kind of residually stuck around, so it's kind of a place to have fun. It was always known as the Gomorrah of the Texas Trail. Any one time, we'd have about 130,000 head sitting in the South Platte Valley and the-- the cowboys that brought them up would be anywhere from 20-- 20 hands

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

to 200 hands that would bring out the big 3,000-, 4000-head-of-cattle herds. And so when they got to the-- to Nebraska at the end of the season, they were ready to cut loose. Casinos, poker rooms, brothels, everything was here. I'm not saying we want to get completely back to that, [LAUGHTER] but I think as a historical spot in the state of Nebraska, I think there is all sorts of opportunities to exploit that, to use that, and to-- and to expand what we've got. As you've heard today, we have many organizations that have all been working and pulling in the same direction, so I think your timing with the study and with the community is right on track. I've never seen Ogallala and Keith County so ready for growth. I've never seen them so prepared for growth. We have our LB845 fund; we have our Visitors Committee Fund, the Community Foundation. We have other things that we have not implemented yet that were also put in place while I was in the Legislature, and one of those is county sales tax. County sales tax, if you don't have a tax within a-- if you're in a community or you're outside of a community that doesn't have a municipal tax, you can add a half-cent sales tax and be able to charge that in the county. And I looked at that as a great opportunity for others that didn't live here to subsidize the kinds of things that we need to go on. And so that tool is out there and available as well. Nobody really likes to raise taxes, obviously, but it's one of those things where if you're being pragmatic about it and you're looking at it, you will see that probably 70-- 60 to 70 percent of the people that are using that are-- are not your citizens. So it's a subsidy. And I think it's-- I think it's something that they should think about. And with that, I will-- oh, somebody had asked about-- about the entrepreneurship and-- and stuff when Ms. Abbott was up here. Keith County Adrea Development did-- did a program called Keith County Launch, which was in conjunction with Mid-Plains Community College, Keith County Area Development and the-- and the Oga-- or Keith County Community Foundation. They had nine applications and then three finalists. And what they did was those finalists came in and gave a Shark Tank-like presentation. And the winner of that for-- for the first KC Launch was a person that decided to open up a transportation service and have a party bus and things like that. And so they've been-- they've been awarded that and she is actively working on putting that in place right now. So we will continue to do that and move forward. But, you know, if you're asking-- if you're asking me what the biggest thing that we can do is to-- to make the difference here in Keith County, I think-- I think one of the things is-- is more process. How do we-- how do we work together amongst all the entities that are involved out here? Ogallala and Keith County are in a much different position than

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

many other places in that we have a, you know, a state resource that's sitting here, that is owned by an entity, managed by another entity, and sits in our county. It makes for a very, very complex way of doing business. And so we have to continually work on that to make sure that we're all communicating and that we're all understanding the challenges and that-- that each-- each person or each entity has and moving forward to develop what we have. Good thing is, is that we've got plenty of land around the lake that does not get into the FERC area or anything like that, that can and is ready to be developed. Thank you very much.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Ken. Are there questions? Senator Bostelman.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you. Thank you, Senator Schilz, for being here today and for last night, for the--

**KEN SCHILZ:** No problem. Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** You hit on it here, just your last comment. And I'-- I asked the question before. I'm kind of curious, just because we're hearing about high land prices and rates are going up and those type of things, trying to keep part of it the way it was, part of it to keep it from, you know, that feel of remoteness, you know, isolation, if you will, or just a nice place to be [INAUDIBLE] bunch of people coming in.

**KEN SCHILZ:** Right.

**BOSTELMAN:** But-- and you did mention there's a lot of land around it. Has-- has there been-- can you speak to any more-- has there been any more discussion really about how to develop that land? Are there-- has there been any discussion about, OK, maybe this area would be good for this type of a development in this area?

**KEN SCHILZ:** Right.

**BOSTELMAN:** And have the landowners been approached for that?

**KEN SCHILZ:** Well, there has been-- there has been some discussion about-- but mostly it's been kind of on an ad hoc basis, so what'll happen is you'll see somebody go out there and a piece of ground will come up for sale, and so they'll buy the ground. And mostly what happens is they're developing it for ten-acre plots, for, you know, ranchettes and things like that. But there really hasn't been an overarching planning session on what to do around the lake, and I

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

think that's one of the big things, too, is what should that lake look like in ten years?

**BOSTELMAN:** Right. And then that's been part of my thing is yesterday and-- and today, too, is, you know, access. You've got a large area. You're restricted in-- on the north by the railroad as far as access, how you can access it from on the north side of the road; south side, you've got a train that's a little bit different. But really, it's, you know, how do you open that access? Where do you want open that access areas to benefit you and those? And then obviously it comes down to landowners. If you got large parcels of land, that's one thing. But if you have a lot of other land that they've divided up already or looking to divide up, that's-- that's [INAUDIBLE]

**KEN SCHILZ:** And most-- most of what we talk about when-- when I talk about those developers, they're buying 300, 400, 600 acres at a time. Now there's some land-- there's some land that's owned down there that people have thought about developing before that never saw it happen. And now it's kind of caught with the bank and has troubles kind of getting unencumbered. And so-- and so those are issues that we do need to think about. But, Senator, you're exactly right. We need-- we need a planning session that includes all the stakeholders to sit down and say, OK, what should-- what should the area around McConaughy look like, absolutely.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Senator Flood.

**FLOOD:** Do you have county zoning?

**KEN SCHILZ:** Yes.

**FLOOD:** And does county zoning have a compre-- does the county have a comprehensive plan?

**KEN SCHILZ:** Yes.

**FLOOD:** OK. And that county zoning, does it have-- does it apply around the lake?

**KEN SCHILZ:** Yes, it does, yes. And-- and the-- and the question becomes, you know, most-- most of the area around the lake has been agriculture for, you know, forever. And so as we start to develop different areas, we need to take a look at that and say, OK, what

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

should-- which areas should be changed over to-- to maybe commercial or-- or residential and what area should stay agriculture, because one of the problems that-- that people run into is you'll maybe have a campground or something, right? And right across the street is somebody's ranch working facilities, you know, where they're working cattle and the flies and all that. And so-- and so those types of-- those types of issues are things that we need to-- we need to think about so that we don't-- so that we don't end up with conflicts.

**FLOOD:** If the state were to make a sizable investment in Keith County as it relates to this committee or just through the action of the Legislature, is the-- it seems to me like the community is-- what it wants, it gets, from a fundraising perspective. Do you think that the community is willing to accept or consider being successful at the ongoing costs of the infrastructure? Which I think we could spend all the money we want here, but we all know the state doesn't come in and contribute directly to a municipality.

**KEN SCHILZ:** Sure.

**FLOOD :** And that has to be handled by the local government. Is there a willingness for that?

**KEN SCHILZ:** Yes. I think that as you-- as what we've all learned as-- as we've gone through this process is that we're-- we're ready to grow and we're ready to take on those challenges that come with growth. And-- and looking at, you know, the number of houses, the number of families that are living at Lake McConaughy, you're exactly right that we need to look at some sort of an incorporation or some sort of a political subdivision to-- to help not only-- not only the county stop paying for that overall, but to help those folks out there to get the services they need, absolutely. So I think we are ready for that. And I think-- I mean, I-- I-- I can't tell you how many times, not so much recently but in the last ten years, people would tell me, jeez, why can't Ogallala grow, what's going on? And I think-- I think part of the problem has been is that we just haven't figured out that-- that relationship to have growth at the lake. And I think it creeps over into the overall growth of the community, just-- just as it is. And so-- and so having that influx of money would be huge. I don't know if you guys have ever heard about such a thing as a-- well, you've heard of a boom town, right? Ogallala is classically set up to be what's going to be known as and in-- is known as a zoom town. We've got the Front Range of Colorado three hours away. Five million people live there. Those people are looking for places to go. We have fiber to the



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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

south side of the lake. We have fiber in Ogallala. I-- I think that they're working on it on the north side of the lake as well. And we feel that that is a huge opportunity and is going to be a huge area for growth here. And when we see that, we're going to have to be ready for that. And I'm not sure what that looks like yet, but those are all the types of planning that we need to have.

**FLOOD:** Last question: Some of the roads I saw yesterday look pretty dilapidated up and around the lake. Those are-- the roads we traveled primarily, are those inside the park system or are those county roads?

**KEN SCHILZ:** The-- the best roads that you rode on yesterday were inside the park system. The-- the north, the-- the shoreline road that we first went, where we took the northeast side around there, those roads were just put in this year, last year.

**FLOOD:** By the county?

**KEN SCHILZ:** Those-- those are-- those are park roads, I believe. I'm not sure we can find out for you, yeah. Now there are other roads that-- that-- I-- I know that Jim Swenson with Game and Parks will speak to that, so he could tell you. But-- but all the highway that we were-- and that's all-- that's all state or county roads that we would run. But almost everything that we turned on to go into the park, except for the Van's road-- Van's would be a county road, but most of the rest, I believe, are-- are state park roads.

**FLOOD:** Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Flood. Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** My-- my question is pretty much what Senator Flood had about your local P&Z. And I know in my counties down there, anytime you have a question about how many acres or anything on a development, you mail it out to the local property owners and God forbid you have a hog house, a chicken house or a windmill, because you'll pack that courtroom. And I would think it would be the same out here in Keith County, that the local people could determine the future of this. True or false?

**KEN SCHILZ:** Oh, absolutely. I mean-- I mean, it's a-- you know, we-- we live in-- you know, we live in a democracy and everybody has-- has the ability to have their say. But I can-- I can tell you this, that the people of Ogallala have dealt with the lake for so long and the issues out there that this whole thing has been a breath of fresh air.

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

And we commend everybody in this room for-- for stepping up and-- and taking that on. And I think the-- I think the community of Ogallala and-- and Keith County are-- are ready. Now will you have-- will you have outliers and people that-- that will have complaints and stuff? Absolutely. But I think overall as a core, the leadership and the vast majority are ready to move forward.

**BRANDT:** And you do know "Schumachistan" is still looking for a place to land.

**KEN SCHILZ:** "Schumachistan" is-- I'm telling you what, having served with Senator Schumacher, I learned a lot about dreaming, so let me know, thorium maybe, or something. I'm not sure.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Brandt. Any other questions? Senator Hughes.

**HUGHES:** Yeah. Senator Schilz, you talk about your overarching development plan. So what can the state of Nebraska do? What agency, what body, legislator, Legislature, what does that look like?

**KEN SCHILZ:** Right.

**HUGHES:** And what-- what--

**KEN SCHILZ:** Well--

**HUGHES:** --do you want from us as the Legislature to kick-start-- to-- I mean--

**KEN SCHILZ:** Well--

**HUGHES:** --we've brought Keith County, Lake "Mac," Game and Parks together. What more do we need to do to move forward?

**KEN SCHILZ:** Sure. Thank you. I-- I think-- and first of all, thanks for that bringing everyone together, because that was the impetus that-- that made all this happen. I think-- I think that as we look at the study, at the LB406 study and HDR coming in and helping, they can help us a lot with-- with land use and things like that. So just having that is going to give us a framework and kind of a straw dog of-- of what's possible out here. And then I think the next steps after that are sitting down as a community, and-- and I think this is going to happen within-- over the next few weeks, and talking about, OK, what does fit here, what does fit there, and so I think that's the

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

next step. And then I think where the state comes in is, once we find-- once we find the types of development that we want and once we find where that should be, then the state can help us with, you know, site prep. The state can help us with access. The state could help us, you know, just using the-- using the tools that are-- that are somewhat there already. I do think-- I do think, though, that we have a little different-- how shall I say it? Our economic development opportunities are much different here than in other places because of the tourism, OK? Mo-- most places aren't looking at a lake the size of this. They-- and so-- and so that gives us some opportunities that other places don't happen. So-- so when we devel-- when we decide on what those opportunities are, then we'll sit down and look and see if there's a program that's in place that can help us or if we-- or if we need to-- to design something else, absolutely.

**HUGHES:** Thank you.

**KEN SCHILZ:** One thing I did want to say, and I was-- I think it might-- nevermind. I'll think about it later, but somebody asked about valuations. I will-- I will make sure and get those differences between the lake and the city together for everyone so that everybody has that answer.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Hughes. Seeing no other questions, thank you, Senator Schilz.

**KEN SCHILZ:** Thank you very much.

**HILGERS:** Next testifier. Morning.

**TIMOTHY MCCOY:** Good morning, Chairman Hilgers, members of the STAR WARS Special Legislative Committee. My name is Timothy McCoy, T-i-m-o-t-h-y M-c-C-o-y, and I'm the deputy director of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. You know, there's been a lot of talk already about Lake McConaughy and-- and Ogallala State Recreation, the-- the popularity they have as a tourist destination and-- and with a really unique part of that tourism that-- that in a typical year as high as 80 percent or higher is from nonresidents. So it's a huge economic driver for this region, way beyond just what our agency does. And it's a-- those management activities have to keep economic impact in mind. There's been-- you've heard about the local advisory group. That has been a huge effort, both from-- from-- from the community out here and-- and for our staff, to make sure that we're sitting down and having direct conversations, honest conversations. And-- and I think

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

that we have all learned a lot from each other. A lot of that is sharing our understanding of the community's challenges and the challenges we face at the lake with our management. I think the management activities that we changed last year in terms of establishing some caps on the amount of camping units that were available out there, putting some limitations on beach camping and requiring reservations, has had a huge impact from our standpoint, from what we hear from our conservation officers. On big weekends, we will-- we will bring-- you know, our standard here is about four officers at any one time. We'll bring in usually around 12 for big weekends, 12 conservation officers to assist. The-- the difference has been night and day. I would say our officers are spending a lot more of their time being able to make proactive contacts with the public and talking to them and-- and also what-- what they've heard from people on the beach is, it's great to see you guys out here. And part of that's because on busy weekends in the past the beach was so crowded that-- that, first of all, you couldn't really drive-- drive and get around, so you had to move on foot. There's just-- just the ability for-- for people to be seen. We think it's-- it has done well. When you look at our camping activities up to date in terms of number of campsites rented, I think we're at the highest we've ever-- ever been, with the exception of last year. And in the COVID year, we did have a lot of packing that went on at Lake McConaughy. But-- but a lot of that success, I will say, has come from the work with the-- with the advisory committee, and that's going to continue forward. And as we move forward, we want to think about very managed growth, controlled growth of what we do at the lake also. I think there's some huge opportunities. You've heard, and-- and I think Jim Swenson will come up here and talk more about this, in terms of the-- the ability to look at different areas of the lake where there are opportunities, especially on the south side, away from most of what we manage on that-- on that north side of the lake, for concession opportunities and vendor opportunities to provide more services and to potentially also have some of that, you know, some of that-- some of that responsibility. While it will still be private beach, they will be managing it. And part of that is just to-- to not add additional burden onto our state and more state employees, just because I think that's more effective. And it also brings in that public-private opportunity benefit that we think has a lot of potential. We-- you know, we have been doing work continually-- continually at the lake since the master plan started. We've invested about \$6 million the-- of completed projects. There's two big projects under-- underway right now. We have the two boat ramp improvements that are going on as part

of a larger connecting both Martin Bay and Cedar Bay to improve our boating accessibility. That's about a \$3.5 million project. And hopefully, I think it's-- I believe next week there will be a bid letting for some additional recreational roads work at Martin Bay to help manage traffic there and stacking and try to prevent cars coming into the lake or campers coming into the lake from backing up on the highway, because that's a very dangerous situation. The preliminary estimate-- until we have bids, preliminary estimate is about \$3 million. Hopefully those bids come in good. And we, as the other stakeholders, have had the great opportunity to sit down with HDR and talk about potential ideas. We've shared information on a lot of various ideas relative to our master plan and-- and things of, you know, dream the really big dreams beyond that master plan. But we want to-- we want to do a couple of things. We want to continue to improve-- maintain and improve our ability for-- for camping, boating, fishing, and other recreation activities at the lake. That is-- that is the biggest draw out here and it is very seasonal. So-- so looking at things like, you know, maybe equestrian trails or potential to have motorized trails for ATVs, hopefully help us broaden our season and gain more in those shoulder seasons, you know, presummer and-- and into the fall. But the other point, and I know it's came up, is we also believe that some-- that there's a great opportunity here to focus on some of the road improvements in and around the lake. Some of those are on our-- some of those, like the roads into Van are-- Van's are a county road. I think there's the potential to utilize, in many of those cases, if, if this committee would consider those sorts of funds, to, to move, move to pay for something like that. From a county standpoint, normally there's a required county match on a, on a recreational road development. I think utilizing this source of funding, rather than the typical rec roads funding, provide an opportunity to, to waive that match, to get those roads updated because they're important infrastructure for access to the lake, they're important infrastructure for th, thee local community and the develops around-- developments around there and then for the concessionaire. So we just-- we do think that those are some pretty unique opportunities. We're really excited to, to see how it goes as HDR goes through the, the wide variety of ideas that we, that we've put before them. And we want to encourage continued-- we want to continue to work together with, with the local advisory committee on how any of that moves forward. There's the potential for developments, you know, of, of improving boating ramps-- boat ramps and providing a new opportunity maybe for somebody to have a marina there. Now, the challenge with this lake, as you all saw on our tour, is, is the-- as

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

the lake goes up and down, it changes a lot and it, it does make it challenging for permanent infrastructure out here.

**HILGERS:** Thank you for your testimony, Mr. McCoy. Are there questions? Is that a question or-- Senator Flood.

**FLOOD:** Thank you, Speaker Hilgers. Mr. McCoy, thank you for your testimony. We have heard from several folks in the community and I'm going to ask you a series of questions as it relates to your authority under your lease with Central Public Power and Irrigation. Under your-- which you essentially are the contractor for Central Public Power and Irrigation to provide recreational opportunities, manage game, wildlife around the lake, is that right?

**TIMOTHY McCOY:** That's correct.

**FLOOD:** OK, so under that current arrangement, going through the dream big questions that Speaker Hilgers asked, would a convention center qualify under that arrangement with Central Public Power and Irrigation?

**TIMOTHY McCOY:** There, there may be a potential with that. The challenge I would see is the length of time and anything that we did of that, of that sub-- of that substance would-- we would actually have to go through Central-- we would have to sit down and make sure that that was approved as a, as a new type of concession activity. I believe that's how you're probably thinking about it. I, I really don't think we're probably in the right position to--

**FLOOD:** Do a--

**TIMOTHY McCOY:** --as an agency to build a high-end hotel and, and deal with all the staffing of it would be a huge challenge from a state standpoint.

**FLOOD:** That could be-- it could be essentially contracted out to a, a vendor, you know, a management company that could do that. Let me ask you a question: could you, under your current agreement with Central, operate a ferry system across the water?

**TIMOTHY McCOY:** I believe that would be done-- that would be likely to be able, be able to be done as a concession. It would, it would-- I mean, almost everything we do under concession agreement still has to be approved by Central, but it would be-- it would-- the challenge

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

would be having good landings on both sides to ensure you weren't stuck in the sand.

**FLOOD:** Let me ask you a question about allowing for investments inside this area that you manage for long-term leases for, for businesses. Now, and let me clarify, I understand this may be pursuant to a state statute, which would be up to us entirely. If we were to change that statute, what about your relationship with Central?

**TIMOTHY McCOY:** Our estab-- well, our, our relationship with Central would still-- we would still have to comply with all of Central, Central's requirements that, that they have identified in their land and shoreline protection program, which I believe there's the-- lies within that entire FERC boundary. There may be some areas that we manage-- I don't know, right off the top of my head-- at the lake, if any of those are considered completely outside of that FERC boundary. I believe there are areas that are and actually Jim Swenson and, and Colby may actually be able to answer more of those better than I can.

**FLOOD:** OK. Last question: as it relates to the statewide radio system, the Game and Parks Commission is currently on the statewide radio system.

**TIMOTHY McCOY:** That is correct.

**FLOOD:** And what other agencies are on that system with yours?

**TIMOTHY McCOY:** Well, it, it varies by area, but in, in many cases-- you know, in, in this area, it's us and the State Patrol. In other counties, you know, there are other counties have switched everything over, so so they've got their fire, their, their sheriffs that are on--

**FLOOD:** So currently you have a good communication system as an agency around the lake?

**TIMOTHY McCOY:** It's not perfect. There's still some spots where it's-- where you can lose signal, but it is a huge, huge improvement over where we were when we were running analog. People were using-- our officers were using their cell phones to communicate around the lake till-- prior to upgrading this.

**FLOOD:** What if the state of Nebraska purchased the equipment? I mean, it seems like the state is relying a lot on the city of Ogallala and the city of Ogallala's resources. What if-- and the Keith County

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

resources to manage the state recreational activity. What if the state just said, we're bringing you onto the system, the state system?

**TIMOTHY McCOY:** I-- you know, I think that would be a potential solution as part of this project, really, that would provide a lot of benefit for all the parties.

**FLOOD:** Yeah, because you're already on it, you've already got the system set up.

**TIMOTHY McCOY:** Yeah.

**FLOOD:** Yeah, thank you very much.

**HILGERS:** Thanks, Senator Flood. Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you. Oh, Senator Bostelman.

**BOSTELMAN:** That's all right. Thank you. Thanks for being here today.  
[INAUDIBLE]

**HILGERS:** Hand up.

\_\_\_\_\_ : I told him to.

**BOSTELMAN:** I just want to-- one thing. Last night I had the opportunity to sit down for a little while and visit with the owners of Admiral's Cove retreat, I think it is. As the deputy director, just want you know, they didn't-- they said one thing, if they could have stood up and, and expressed their appreciation for all the work that they-- as far as cooperation with Parks Department out there, with, with the superintendent and those, just all the way through. They got into the game late, if you will, and they own that. They just had nothing but glowing remarks about that type of thing and so I think that's a really good statement, I guess, or an example of what's changed maybe or what's happening up there. They're just extremely excited to be here and, and had a very good experience coming in. It's a new concessionaire, new owner with that, just so-- I just want to say that for their, for their benefit or for, for-- because of them because it's something that they did want to express and so that was, that was good to hear. The WMAs, can you-- who has the ability to say what can be-- those can be used for? In other words, can you put a corral there? Could you put a shelter there? Could you put a campsite there to have, like, to have a certain time here. You could have horses out there to do trails, maybe connect with another part of the park or something. Is that allowable or no?



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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**TIMOTHY McCOY:** We do, we do-- we have-- we do have the ability to allow some horse trail and I know that we have other areas that use-- get used on WMAs as horse trails as long as it's not disruptive. And the other thing we always try to do is to make sure it's not happening during the hunting season because we have had that conflict where people started to use wildlife management area for horse trails. Nobody's happy when that happens.

**BOSTELMAN:** Sure. The other question I have-- and then it may go a little bit to some of the other folks who come in and talked with this morning, especially with foundation or with a development-- when we look to the east side, the state, one thing where we see-- let's take Mahoney State Park, for instance. There's large contributors. Foundation, whatever they are, they come in with large sums of money and they will sponsor a project. They will build a project. Have you heard, have you engaged, does anyone know is that-- is there a similar type of interest out here? So you develop a water-- you, you-- to develop a water activity or, or they do zip lines or they do the trees, you know, going-- you know, ropes through the trees and those type of things or whatever might be-- have you-- do you know-- has there been discussion along those lines to bring that type of funding in? Those type of--

**TIMOTHY McCOY:** There was that sort of funding that was brought in I know when they developed the water center and there was-- there were, there were some fundraising efforts being, being driven by some folks out here that were talking with the foundation at one point when they were talking about expanding it. That seems to have settled down, but I think it's going to come back up in this project. Yeah, there is some potential opportunity. One of the, one of the, one of the challenges we-- you know, and that's through the Game and Parks Foundation, which is separate from our agency and independent, but, but you know, a lot of their resources are primarily in eastern Nebraska. That's where most of their connections are. They do have some in western Nebraska. They've helped fund projects at Chadron and Fort Rob, Wildcat Hills, so they focused primarily on brick and mortar type projects. So, you know, the-- there is a-- you know, we did-- we have a, we have a concessionaire that's providing the zip line ropes course that's, that's at Mahoney State Park. And there are probably-- there might be potential for something that-- like that out here. Those concessions that do those are always concerned about how long your season is, so-- but there are other opportunities like that that I think we could look at and, and I think there is an opportunity to

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

try and engage the foundation and other fundraising-interested parties in this.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator, thank you, Senator Bostelman. Senator Gragert.

**GRAGERT:** Real quick question and just get it on record maybe with HDR, shooting ranges at the state park and/or at wildlife management areas, do we have them? Can we have them?

**TIMOTHY McCOY:** We have several shooting ranges, especially sort of our family-friendly introductory shooting ranges. We have shooting ranges that include pistol ranges and are- at-- and small arms, small firearms at, at Platte River. We have one at Wildcat Hills. We've developed-- on wildlife management areas because of the type of funding we use, we've not developed large-scale ranges. Typically, their sight-in ranges for somebody that's sighting in a rifle, but we have both of those. I, I don't know how that would work or confer with any limitations that Central might have with their FERC license here. The other thing is, is you'd want-- you always want to look at where you have neighboring houses. There's a lot of development around the lake that can always create a-- it's a real challenge.

**GRAGERT:** Thank you and I was more or less getting that up into Knox County, but I didn't want to forget about it.

**HILGERS:** Thanks, Senator Gragert.

**TIMOTHY McCOY:** We-- you can ask me that when we're up there too.

**HILGERS:** Any other questions? Seeing none, thank you for your testimony this morning. Next testifier. Good morning.

**JIM SWENSON:** Good morning to you, Chairman Hilgers, members of the committee. My name is Jim Swenson, J-i-m S-w-e-n-s-o-n. I have the pleasure of serving as a parks division administrator for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission at 2200 North 33rd Street in Lincoln, Nebraska. You know, Tim covered a lot of the points, but I think it's very, very, very important to call reference to the cooperation that we have gained here and the support we've gained with the advisory committee that is making things very successful for us. It's a tremendous privilege and a challenge to manage the recreation resources of the magnitude that, that we have here at Lake McConaughy and a partnership with Central Nebraska Public Power Irrigation District. You got to tour that facility yesterday and see what some of

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

the extensive challenges are. We can't do it alone. It, it takes the community and I, I have benefitted tremendously over my career from having these types of relationships: Ponca State Park, Mahoney State Park, Fort Atkinson, other venues around the state where we have developed these types of committees and gained this type of partnership support to push things through. I can remember back, Senator Hughes, you and I attended a meeting, I think it was August 5, 2019. Things were pretty contentious on that day. That's not that way anymore. You know, we've had great support from the Legislature. We've had great support locally. We have built the resources and the energy that we need to be successful. And we find ourselves here in a very enviable position, having you here today to talk about how we bring things to the forefront. That's a great place to be. We have a great resource. We have a great master plan, 20-year plan. We're into year five in that plan. There's a lot of work remaining. We got some success stories right now. They're good to talk about, but there's still more work that remains. A lot of what we hear right now is not only support, but also some interest on how we move a little bit faster. The reason it's a 20-year plan is because funding was pretty much a limiting factor for us as we looked to develop infrastructure and push things forward. So hopefully some resurgence of funds could move that timeline on that plan a little, little quicker and we could achieve some of the goals and outcomes that drive the economic vitality that everyone is looking for as a part of this process. So we're excited about that. Infrastructure needs, regional development, and potential that we will look at under our commercial services plans out there at the reservoir can help drive a lot of that. We're seeing some sustainability right now with what we have done thus far. That was our first goal, our first objective. We feel real good about that and now it's time for some measured analysis and growth and we're excited about those opportunities and there's some great things in that plan that we can accomplish. There are some more great ideas generated here today. I've got a page of notes just from listening to, to our fellow community members here on what some great ideas are. Tim talks about some of the development issues that we-- or things that we can do out there, the zip line activities, the floating playgrounds and things that we can do under a commercial services type agreement. I feel confident that Central will work with us on that thing based on discussions that Colby and I have shared with, with those partners and there's some great things that we can accomplish. So great days ahead is what I see. You know, I'm excited about the opportunity to continue. We're going to continue to meet. A lot of our success, I think, is because we've brought our state agency located in Lincoln,

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

Nebraska, to the landscape here to see what the challenges are first hand and invite those folks to travel with us through the operation on a daily basis and see just what we're up against and we're going to continue to do that, so I enjoy my trips out here. It's like a second home. When I walk into the motel now, it's not how can we help you? It's how are you doing, Mr. Swenson? So it's great to be a part of that and have that relationship. So with that, I'll take some questions. I know that you have many for me, so I'm excited to answer those for you. Thanks for the opportunity.

**HILGERS:** Questions? Senator Bostelman.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you, Mr. Swenson--

**JIM SWENSON:** You bet.

**BOSTELMAN:** --for being here. One thing that we talked a little about yesterday, I think one need-- you know, we talk about concessionaires, talked about those other things, but one thing that, that I think you could really improve on out here is-- and we talked about a little bit is, is the, you know, full hookups. You've got a minimal number and bathhouses. I go to Kansas. I go to South Dakota. And that's what-- I mean, majority of what they have: concrete pads, electric water, bath house, dock stations, those type of things we talked about. I'm really encouraged-- I think that should be part of what you do with the thousand sites you have now and a very small number that, that are-- that is that, you know, that was perhaps in what you're working on now, but I think that, that would help a lot in bringing people to those areas maybe. Maybe part of it's still that beach, they want to be on the beach, but I think some longer-term campers, if you will, to stay longer and some of the older campers, perhaps. That's pretty key. And, and what we usually do is when we come into a community-- I think what a lot of other campers do is you buy your groceries and you buy your stuff from the local community. You drive there and you fill up there, fill up with gas, those type of things. So when you give them that opportunity, especially that portion of the facility, I think that's really important to look forward to do in the future, so with that, I just want to thank you.

**JIM SWENSON:** You bet. We got a couple of goals in mind. First goal is to get you to quit going to Kansas and South Dakota, so-- but your observation is great. Thanks, thanks for sharing that. We-- you know looking at what we're doing with our development plans, a lot of our efforts across the state are afforded by our CMF abilities now. The

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

full-service hookups are what, what they desire and we have a design on that here, so we will be working in that direction to get that done. And we're hopeful that under our commercial services, opportunities to expand some of that, we'll be able to do it in a sustainable manner for our state agency and still accomplish those goals without having to increase our operational means.

**BOSTELMAN:** Is there anything else that-- I'll ask that, that thing that you're-- what's the one thing, two things that you see?

**JIM SWENSON:** You bet. Yeah, absolutely. You know, it's-- I'll be like my grandkids. I'll give you a couple answers, OK? First and foremost, for us, it's the ability to fast track some of the recreation camping developments out there. That, that I-- that decision is mine because of what I'm starting to hear at some of the meetings that we're having. A little faster pace, you know, we want to make sure that the economic side of what we've done out here in the last year does not haunt the local businesses or ourselves, so fast tracking that is, is a good thing for us. The second part of that would be to have the infrastructure network not only within the park, the roads that Senator Flood talks about, but also infrastructure in the form of the communications, the EMT service, things like that that are really the backbone for our ability to fully realize what we can accomplish at the lake, so--

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you.

**JIM SWENSON:** --those a couple of things.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Bostelman. Yeah, Senator Flood.

**FLOOD:** Thank you, Speaker, Mr. Swenson. One of the things that struck me yesterday entering the park is that our entrances don't inspire me to say the people of Nebraska want you to be here. And I'm not saying that's anybody's fault. I think that's-- my sense is that there's a lot of work that goes into the park that people like me don't see, but I think we form a thousand judgments the minute we cross on to the Game and Parks effort. Does this plan have in it any improvements, aesthetic placemaking? I know you were talking about a new check-in place. Does this plan over the 20 years improve those entrances?

**JIM SWENSON:** You know, it's spoke to, you know, not, not gravely within the plan, but there is, there is the idea that we need to make ourselves more attractive to the market out there. And a lot of our

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

initial actions have been to really address very quickly the, the situations that exist at our entrance points, you know, the, the traffic stack up and the congestion that's occurred. We are moving some of those entrances further into the park, which will create more opportunities for us to be more welcoming, the landscaping, the, the, the informative signs, the bilingual signs, and all those things that will make it all better. That's another great thing and we can work with the community on. You know, we were going to have a seven-mile stretch of road that leads out there to the lake they can actually become enticement as people approach that reservoir and get them excited about the opportunity they got, so I'll add--

**FLOOD:** So when I--

**JIM SWENSON:** --those--

**FLOOD:** Yeah--

**JIM SWENSON:** --to my notes.

**FLOOD:** --when I, when I look at that from a-- I'm in the business and marketing too, but I see-- you know, my family and I just went to Dollywood. God help us. But when you're coming in there and you're going through those gates, they're automated.

**JIM SWENSON:** Yep.

**FLOOD:** There's not even somebody standing there and we put a sticker on our car and we-- you know, I can see us having a way that if you got these young families coming from, from Colorado and they had this conception that Nebraska is whatever, less-forward thinking than, than them and they come here and there's automated sticker and there's bar code that we can know where their car is and the-- you know, we can find them. They've registered online, we know if there's any medical conditions, we know where they're at, like, I think that that moment when they come into the park is where we are going to create a future resident or not. And right now, I don't, I don't think we're, we're getting there, so I-- as, as we look at the-- we need some placemaking, I think. The other thing I was going to say is on your 20-year plan, did Central sign off on that, Central Public Power and Irrigation?

**JIM SWENSON:** Yes they did.

**FLOOD:** And so they were at the table the entire time?

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**JIM SWENSON:** Yep. We've had them in very close communication with us as we developed that because obviously we have to comport everything we do, you know, with their requirements as well, so--

**FLOOD:** And that's something I think Senator Schilz has given me a copy of that. I may need another copy just to familiarize myself with it.

\_\_\_\_\_: Jim, they're actually in the packets that we bring.

**FLOOD:** Oh, are they right there?

\_\_\_\_\_: Yeah, they're right there.

**FLOOD:** Is that the plan? OK. Oh, and finally--

\_\_\_\_\_: That was my fault.

**FLOOD:** August 5, 2019, on behalf of Senator Hughes, I want to unpack that. No, I withdraw that question.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Flood. Other questions? Senator Clements.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Swenson. ATV trails was mentioned. Is that something in the master plan?

**JIM SWENSON:** You know, ATV trails, there is a growing interest across the state for that. We did-- at one time, we were looking at an option at a couple locations here. One was in conjunction with our Ash Hollow State Historical Park. That did not meet well with public sentiment and we withdrew that effort. We then attempted something on the south side. We were looking at a parcel of land and we actually went out and did some of the noise studies and such that were required for the federal funding assistance. And again, that did not meet with a public acceptance on that. I think it is an issue that could generate some great seasonal-- spring and fall season activity out here at the lake. I don't necessarily think it's an issue that should go away yet. It should be researched a little further to see what opportunities exist that, like shooting ranges, have certain requirements and expectations from the public, of course, but yeah, it needs, it needs more investigation.

**CLEMENTS:** And also the reason I brought that up was if you did ATV trails, could it be used for a snowmobile trail as well?

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**JIM SWENSON:** You know, we could-- you know, the design-- it's open template right now on design if we do something like that, so, you know, if, if that's the goal, you know, that's what you try to design for to see what we can accomplish.

**CLEMENTS:** And just, just thinking of more year round in such a short season, with all the investment we're talking about shutting it down six months. That's not efficient. You know, you, you manage the parks system statewide and how do you compare this park with some of the other parks and how it's, how it's going in the development here?

**JIM SWENSON:** Well, my position commands that I say they're all very valuable, so-- because I have to maintain an alliance, you know? You know, it-- truly, this, this is very unique. I used to work in southwest Nebraska down at Enders Reservoir. I always envisioned Lake McConaughy as one of the greatest attributes of our state. When you look at the water acres, the fishing opportunities, the hunter-- hunting opportunities, the boating, the sandy beaches, the camping uniqueness that we can bring, it is a destination in the state of Nebraska And that's what this master plan is, is designing-- or designed to accomplish and do, a safe, family-friendly, sustainable environment. It's a top notch facility and it's one other states will be envious of, so--

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Clements. I want to touch-- circle back on two, two of the issues that Mr. Fair raised regarding business investment--

**JIM SWENSON:** Yeah.

**HILGERS:** --and one of them was the length of time for, I guess, non real estate investment leases that could be executed. Is that-- can you speak to me a little bit about that?

**JIM SWENSON:** Yeah. Traditionally, you know, that thing is back-- it's been back and forth a number of times. You know, a lot of, a lot of our agreements, you know, we look at short term in case it-- things go sour. There's, you know, an easy out or a quick out for us. But a lot of conversation, as we recognize, it is very difficult for an entrepreneur to get established if it's a short-term lease so we have, we have expanded that a little now, you know, average, maybe five years, but we're open to go a little longer if that's what necess-- is



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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

what's necessary to get that. The out clauses can be designed in by an evaluation process that we would conduct, so I don't think that's an obstacle for some of the things that we want to do and certainly if we're talking magnitude and development that we are, it's going to take a longer term with the banking and so on and so forth to get it balanced.

**HILGERS:** And when you say we, is that Game and Parks or Game and Parks in conjunction with Central?

**JIM SWENSON:** That's pretty much with Game and Parks. I think, you know, we would definitely keep Central involved of what the offer is and the design to make sure we gain, gain compliance there, but the length of term would be primarily ours.

**HILGERS:** Is there an hour limit on the term? Twenty-- is 20 years and outer limit--

**JIM SWENSON:** I think my state statute, we're limited to a 20-year term right now, which is-- that should be plenty adequate, I would think, so-- with renewable options.

**HILGERS:** And then the second question or the, or the second issue that he raised and I recall something you I-- you and I spoke when I was here in June-- is, is the, the confidentiality of potential business proposals. In other words, if an entrepreneur comes to Game and Parks with the concession idea or a concept that maybe you would have to bid that out to other individuals or-- can you speak a little bit to that and, and maybe with the eye towards any legislative change that could maybe help accomplish the goals that you're striving--

**JIM SWENSON:** Sure, sure. That's a great question. You know, when we look at the landscape out there and what we would think we could accomplish with input from our advisory friends as well, with what they would like to see out there, there are several things that can come to mind. But we know as a managing entity that too many of one thing means that most of them do not do well. So the RFP process, commercial services plan that we propose in concept at this point would be I-- to identify what those best needs are on the landscape, probably bring a little bit of a design to that so it matches in with the licensing requirement with Central. It meets with the expectations of the community and have a template ready to go that we can kick out to bid so that ideas that come forward, while some of them may be unique, are somewhat captured already to make sure that everybody's

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

comfortable with that. Then the RFP process will be designed to see how-- what their services are going to bring, how that can be of benefit to the region, to the state, and then those will be evaluated for the best, best proposal out there.

**HILGERS:** Do you see, do you see a reduction or-- I mean, it's hard to maybe speculate and it would be speculation, but I-- you and I discussed, I think before, that those proposals are open to the public. And you-- do you see that that-- the fact that those-- the proposals, the bids themselves-- would be open to the public maybe creates maybe some headwinds of people actually submitting-- do you see fewer proposals because of that? Do you think any change in the law there might entice additional investors or investment?

**JIM SWENSON:** Oh, I-- you know, to be honest with you, I'd, I'd want to become a little more familiar with what, what their concerns may be perhaps. Right now in our RFP process, I don't see a lot of that other than some of the food service agreements that I've worked with to where they've got a secret ingredient, you know, they want things of that nature. If someone were to come forward to us with an idea that we had not thought about yet, that may be something that they would want to keep confidential, you know, and to fast track that to avoid an RFP process would require some evaluation. However, in this situation, if that proposal were outside of the management area that we're looking at on, on some of the ground that surrounds the reservoir, there's a lot greater flexibility. So we do have that option to try and steer that back to the community to see how they could maybe take the lead on that.

**HILGERS:** Thank you. Senator Brandt.

**BRANDT:** Thank you, Chairman Hilgers. Thank you for your testimony and, and this thought is sort of kicking around in my mind. I represent part of Lancaster County and they've got a very active fair board over there. They just did the high school rodeo. Because of COVID, they didn't do their, their camper thing, but I think that's on, on board for next year. They're going to bring in 1,200 campers in one spot. And I'm, I'm looking at this out here and the reason you can't do that today is because everybody gets to reserve a spot individually. Do you see a plan or a contractor or some way that the community working with the lake could create a situation-- that's just-- that big hill on the south side, you could put thousands of campers up there all at one time and, and have an Airstream reunion or, or Winnebago or whatever this group is. Have you guys kicked around anything like that?

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**JIM SWENSON:** That's a good, good question and, and thanks for asking. We actually got a couple options in how we could approach that. You know, one, we could, we could ourselves designate an area that we, we have, a qualifying factor or for large group type outings or special event type scenarios that we could focus on providing that service. A better scenario, perhaps, would be to work with a private vendor on that under a concession agreement and give them the flexibility to offer different forms of camping or term-limit type requirements and have them do that. And my reason for that is if we, the state, are doing it, we want to make sure that, you know, what we're doing here. I can replicate around the state and can maintain some continuity and conformity with our rules and regulations so that we're not confusing the public with what we offer. However, with one of those special agreements, we could say to them you can do longer-term camping, you can do glamping opportunities, you can do big-group camping with further advanced reservations. You, you identify what it is you want to do in there and hopefully we can write off on that, so it's not an obstacle we cannot overcome.

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

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Brandt. Senator Clements.

**CLEMENTS:** One more follow up. Are there other state parks that have ATV or snowmobile trails?

**JIM SWENSON:** We have snowmobile trails on, on various-- a few parks in the state. I know that we've got them at Branched Oak. We-- there used to be a greater interest in it when we had more snow back when I was a kid and the snow was three-foot deep, you know? But ATV parks, no, we do allow ATV use on frozen surfaces or lakes to accommodate hunting opportunities during the fall season. We've looked at some scenarios at various parks, but we just have not been able to get that accomplished yet, but some that we remain interested in I've had some conversations-- and I won't disclose where right now, but some opportunities potentially where that could, could play out for us, so it remains a question mark.

**CLEMENTS:** Right now, your-- it's hiking and bicycling at McConaughy is what you're looking into adding, is that right?

**JIM SWENSON:** Yep and equestrian activities would be one of our, one of our goals here too.

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Clements. Seeing no other questions, thank you for your testimony, Mr. Swenson.

**JIM SWENSON:** You bet. Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Any other testifiers? How many-- do you have any left?

\_\_\_\_\_ : He's got some stats for you.

**HILGERS:** All right. We got some stats in the corner. Two left. Good morning. Welcome.

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** Good morning, Chairman Hilgers and members of the STAR WARS Committee. My name is Devin Brundage, D-e-v-i-n B-r-u-n-d-a-g-e, and I am the general manager for the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, two years now. So first time testifying before a committee, so be gentle. First, I want to thank the, the committee for the work on this. I think you're kind of hearing a theme throughout this, this collaboration between the advisory committee, HDR, the Game and Parks, and, and Central-- thank you-- able to hear Jim talk about the, the close relationship we, we enjoy, enjoy with them. Just going to talk just a couple of moments, you know. The committee had a chance to see the video of Central's history and there's a lot of history there. It's a big lake. This lake provides hydropower, irrigation, and a whole lot of economic impact for a big portion of the state and our job in that infancy was to make sure that we were doing that and doing that right. As part of that, the federal power act gave FERC the, the exclusive jurisdiction over us and our ability to, to do those functions and as part of that, we work diligently. One of the big components of FERC's governance over us is, is public safety and we take that as seriously as anyone can. That's priority number one in what we do. District expends a lot of time and effort through our FERC management staff to work on wave run-up studies. We spend millions of dollars making sure that this dam and this project are here for the next 100 years. That's our goal. Our goal is to make sure that this gem of Nebraska is here for the long term for the people that we serve. So as part of that history, we've learned a lot. It's a big lake. It's got a lot of power behind it. And so as we've evolved over time, those, those-- some of those FERC rules and you always seem to say that regulatory bodies have purpose, but they've been a good stake in the ground for us to say hey, here's a-- some good ways to practice, making sure that your, your facilities are here for the long

Transcript Prepared by Clerk of the Legislature Transcribers Office  
STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

term. So that FERC boundary is part of saying hey, we need this as part of our, our project to make sure that the public safety, the operation of this facility is, is viable for the long term and so FERC prioritize-- helps us prioritize that. Public safety, of course, number one. That, that dam is important. Its, its integrity is, is paramount to what we do and the Endangered Species Act is a big part of what we're required to do and making sure that any impacts that have occurred because of the project are, are mitigated and taken care of. And then public recreation, that's right up there on the list, and all of the other, other ancillary benefits that occur because of the project are part of what makes the project viable for the long term. Senator Hughes understands the benefits to groundwater recharge as much as anyone, just another ancillary benefit that the project maintains. So with that FERC piece, the ability of Central to work with its partners-- and I'll-- we'll hit that master plan drum one more time-- that was a collaborative effort, so we all sat down and it-- you know, doing what we do well is important to Central and, and to Game and Parks. Rather than Central trying to come and, and recreate a wheel, our partners at Game and Parks are the professionals and providing that sort of service and I think that is the right way to go about things using good, old Nebraska common sense. And so that master plan laid out and that cooperative setup with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife a way forward. And so Central views this entire thing as being the grease. We are the grease to all of these ideas moving forward and I, I have told my staff I think our biggest contribution to this is to figure out how to say yes. What is it that you want to do? And there are things that we cannot do. It does not make sense to build a casino right next to the, the shore when there's a, a, a dam safety plan that says gee, if some catastrophe occurs upstream, upstream, I'm going to flood the casino to the third floor. That is the purpose of having a FERC boundary and the ability to, to operate and maintain your facility safely. And so working with Game and Parks and, and all of the people around the lake to find ways to achieve these things-- there's some things we can't do and things we shouldn't do, but wherever we can't or shouldn't, let's ask what if? What else could I do? Where else can we do it? How else could we do it? Once again, grease, I think, is what our, our theme is for being a part of this, of this process. I don't have much other to state other than that. There was a question yesterday and I didn't have my maps prepared there. This is a, a FERC map and all of these materials are available on our website. The land and shoreline management plan is the agreement that Central has developed with FERC and Fish and Wildlife as far as so here's, here's what you can do along this, the

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

strip along the edges, making sure that you're taking care of your obligations. Welcome to have one or like I said, all of this information is on our website.

**HILGERS:** Do you have sufficient copies for the, for the committee?

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** I believe I do.

**HILGERS:** Excellent, thank you. And by, by the way, I appreciate-- you know, I think it's very easy to say no and it's sometimes hard to be able to find ways to say yes, so I appreciate you saying that, that you're going to be here to help us figure out ways to get to yes, so thank you very much for that. Are there questions? Senator Bostelman.

**BOSTELMAN:** Thank you. The FERC regulatory is because of the hydro dam.

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** That's correct. It's a power dam, correct.

**BOSTELMAN:** How much of the power generated is-- do you actually-- how much-- let's see if I can ask the question the right way.

\_\_\_\_\_: Thank you.

**BOSTELMAN:** Your capacity is what?

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** The power plant at Kingsley is-- has a 50 megawatt capacity.

**BOSTELMAN:** And of that 50 megawatts, how much of that are you actually generating?

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** Sometimes zero, sometimes 50 megawatts. The events of February 2020--

**BOSTELMAN:** I understand completely, I understand completely.

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** Yeah, the, the, the power plant operates as part of the Southwest Power Pool and generates electricity at, at the best times for the people of the state that we serve.

**BOSTELMAN:** We'll have a conversation about that.

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** If it's any consolation, it's contracted 100 percent with NPPD, so they make that decision.

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**BOSTELMAN:** I understand. So on the water fluctuation, I guess my question is we're talking about a lot of fluctuation. That-- is that because of the hydrology, the hydro dams, or it's because of irrigation?

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** It is all water demands. It is not power demands. We, we base our, our power generation on availability. That's the best part about hydropower. I can turn it on during the day, turn it off at night, and still regulate the water flow so that I can deliver irrigation water, recharge-- whatever, whatever the need is. Some of that water in Lake McConaughy is environmental account water. That's also part of our FERC licenses to give them an allotment of water to deliver to the river or for that FERC requirement.

**BOSTELMAN:** OK, because I'm trying to understand your fluctuation water levels. Part of it obviously is what's coming in, but the other part of it is if we have significant fluctuations, what, what drives that fluctuation?

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** So it is all a formula of the inflows and Lake Mead right now is a great, great example. You know, they just don't have enough inflows. And what's happened in this last year at our, at our-- in our operations is there's been a, a lack of inflows and we've switched gears. We can switch gears midstream. So if you have a lot of water, you don't want to waste it, right, you don't want the dam to fail and not make electricity with it. So when the lake is full, we'll, we'll make electricity. When the water level goes down, we will back off on electrical generation and, and turn into a demand-- water demand type operation, so that way I'm always trying to keep the lake at-- as full as I can, optimally, but still deliver my, my obligations for, for water. In the 2000s, it was year after year after year of very low inflows and very hot, dry temperatures and the result was a lake that got down to right below 3,200 elevation and 65 feet lower than normal.

**BOSTELMAN:** Right and part of it is, is understandable. What I hear-- a lot of what we're saying here is FERC rules, right?

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** Right.

**BOSTELMAN:** And do we need FERC to be a part of the equation or not, that's kind of where my questions are-- my understanding of how FERC relates into this. You know, do we need that hydro? Do we not? You know, does it-- is that impeding what's trying to be done here or not?

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

And so I, I was just trying to get a better grasp as to where that water demand was from, how hydro played into it, how FERC played into it. I understand FERC and SPP very well, so just trying to understand a little bit better.

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** Yeah, exactly.

**BOSTELMAN:** Of the whole--

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** Right.

**BOSTELMAN:** --how, how, how the whole-- you know, how the-- how, how it functions, how the water flow functions, what the demands are and how you meet those demands.

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** Right.

**BOSTELMAN:** And how-- and obviously then that comes into what you can do or can't do with FERC, so-- I hope I explained that well, but I appreciate your comments--

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** Yeah.

**BOSTELMAN:** -- and for your being here, so that helps me a lot.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Bostelman. Senator Gragert.

**GRAGERT:** I want to just clarify something I thought I heard in the video. When this dam was built, was it built for mainly-- the main purpose or is there a main purpose, but wasn't it built for irrigation?

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** The, the dream of the folks down in south-central Nebraska were to be able to capture some of those flood flows in the spring to provide a reliable irrigation supply in the, in the summer seasons.

**GRAGERT:** So there's the-- what is the primary purpose of this dam today then, generation?

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** No, it's still, it is still a key. One of the major keys of this project is the water and it has evolved, right? Recreation was not a thing in the 1940s. People went to work, went home, went back to work. You know, recreation is a, a new advent, so does that, does that nullify its, its use, its beneficial use? No. We



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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

can, we can add that in. Hydro was added because of some smart people that said this is going to be important to, to the-- another prosperity peace for, for our state. So, you know, the water-- without the water and the, and the irrigation, the, the power wouldn't have been built, so that irrigation/hydro piece was, was one of the first parts of it. There was hydro in 1941 down in the-- further east from here. Kingsley wasn't added until 1984 just to utilize the, the resource even further. So back to the, the question about if we deleted Kingsley, does that change FERC? No. Those, those facilities down there also rely on, on this water for their hydro generation.

**GRAGERT:** I guess I'm, I'm-- one more quick question just for me, I guess, but so you're not, you're not going to hold back water for recreation when it's needed for irrigation?

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** We-- yeah, we have, we have irrigation water rights. Our, our farmers throughout the valley have water rights held for them in that reservoir and yeah, we have an obligation to provide them irrigation water. Now, in the worst times of the 2000s, those irrigators chose to take an allocation to help maintain some of that water, maybe for future years, but it did provide some level of support to the, to the lake level here at McConaughy.

**GRAGERT:** Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator. Thank you, Senator Gragert. Senator McDonnell.

**McDONNELL:** Thank you for being here and thanks for yesterday, too, your presentation. And can you kind of go through your map here? I just-- the questions I have is the b management classification, the c management classification, just kind of go through that?

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** Yeah, so they sat down and tried to delineate what you can do or not do and some of these locations. And you know what? I'll hand this out too. This will probably answer a lot of your questions. Nice little color chart that says hey, this is the types of uses that can occur within that, that area, so maybe that will help answer your question. So each one of those classification areas is basically a part of a matrix that says, you know, in resource protection areas, you know, we're going to try to protect the resources, simply as it says. So that means that, you know, that's where you would put some of these areas for public recreation managed by others-- areas that are set aside for the endangered species for nesting.

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

**McDONNELL:** Thank you. This answers it. Thank you.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator McDonnell. Any other questions? Senator Flood.

**FLOOD:** Real quick with Colorado and Wyoming having water issues, looking at the North and the South Platte River basins, do you have any concerns long term about the viability of your lake here with water resource actions taken in those states that are not governed by Nebraska?

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** We have never stopped, since our infancy, working on the upstream water resources. We constantly are looking at making sure that, you know, compacts, compliance-- even within our own state, there's a, a renewed collaboration, I think, since 2004 and LB962 of even within the state NRDs and, and surface water districts working together to try to make the water supply sustainable long term.

**FLOOD:** Do you have confidence in the states of Wyoming and Colorado to do their part to maintain the, the water flows?

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** I think they will do everything in their power to maintain their minimal compliance to whatever obligations they think they have.

**FLOOD:** Right. You should be a lawyer. Well, I, I want to reiterate what I think Speaker Hilgers said and that was that you said today that you need to-- that Central Public Power and Irrigation needs to find a way to get to yes and I think that goes a long way in making this successful, so thank you.

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** Thank you, Senator.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Flood. Senator Clements.

**CLEMENTS:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Brundage and you mentioned the 65-foot drop in elevation. I was curious as to what usual fluctuation there is in the-- like, from year to year, season to season.

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** Yeah. You know, it can, it can drop in some years. 2019 was an anomaly. I think it actually kept going up through most of the summer. That was a very unique year. You know, it's not uncommon to see a five to ten-foot drop. And the expectation is that you would refill that then during the winter, during the winter. If inflows

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

don't show up, then, yeah, you have to make a, you have to make a new plan, so every year we're making a plan and making a new plan.

**CLEMENTS:** And how far down are we right now?

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** We're about 57, 58 percent of capacity currently, which sounds to me like that's a-- down a long way. There's a million-acre feet of water still in that reservoir, so it's still the biggest lake in the, in the state.

**CLEMENTS:** In feet of elevation, can you say that?

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** Uh, feet of elevation-- I'm going to look for Nate [PHONETIC] and he's going to give me the answer.

\_\_\_\_\_ : It's probably down about 20 feet.

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** 20 feet?

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

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** Yep.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Senator Clements. Seeing no other questions, thank you very much for your testimony--

**DEVIN BRUNDAGE:** Thank you very much.

**HILGERS:** --Mr. Brundage. Last-- is this the last testifier taking us into noon? OK. Wonderful.

**LANE ANDERSON:** I wasn't going to speak, but I have some stats for you, things I wanted to share with you.

**HILGERS:** Wonderful.

**LANE ANDERSON:** Corey and I did come down and testify in Lincoln, so we met a lot of you when we did that. So my name is Lane Anderson, L-a-n-e, Anderson, A-n-d-e-r-s-o-n. I am a Keith County Commissioner. I live at Lake McConaughy. I live under a leasehold of Central. I serve on the LMLI Board, which is the Lake Mac leasees association that represents-- Central has four, four packs of land around the lake that lease to individuals to put a home on. So I wanted to give you our county evaluation for Senator Flood. It was just released. It is \$1,918,229,953 and it is up roughly 10 percent, I believe. And our mill levy is .259277 and that is last year's. But I am a charter

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

member of the Lake Mac Advisory Committee too, so I was involved in the master plan with Ken and a lot of people traveled to Lincoln, worked. But, but I wanted to make a couple comments on cooperation with Central. I've lived here all my life. I've been a cabin owner at McConaughy for 20 years and a Keith County citizen all my life, but our, our relationship with Central, with the new management at Central, I feel has turned 180. We have a lot of trouble as a cabin owner to getting our word out and that has changed and I would also say that with Game and Parks with Colby managing now and Jim and Tim. The previous management, we, we had a lot of problems and we're really looking forward to new management at Game and Parks. We're excited. And I just wanted to say those few comments and answer anything you guys-- I wasn't planning on speaking. I would have dressed a little more appropriate, but I'm about freezing, so-- but I, I thank you. I really want to thank you guys for coming. I enjoyed visiting with you last night and it means a lot to our county because we're all passionate about Keith County and it really means a lot for you to come and listen to us and help us. I would like to see-- you know, there's a lot of things that govern Lake McConaughy on this water issue. Last year, we had approximately 115, 120 percent snowpack in the Wyoming mountains where this water that comes into McConaughy, so we were expecting water. We never received any water last year. If you look at our inflows last year with the percent of snow that was in those mountains, we, we didn't get squat. In fact, Central predicted Lake-- two years ago that we would be a full pool for two years. And you see the situation we're in right now and nothing against Devin or anything, but, you know, we, we hear this water in this lake was built for farmers. I'm a farmer, Paxton, Nebraska. You know, I, I understand what goes on here, but, you know, power has come into play too. And I like the questions that were asked by the senator there, you know, to Devin about that. You know, I believe that if we're going to invest in Lake McConaughy and do all of these things that we're going to do, we're going to almost need a minimum pool. I mean, to drain that thing-- I own a cabin out there. You know, I pay a lot of leasehold to Central to have water in front of me, but, you know, when it's taken for power and farming and whatever, it was built for farming, so, you know, we've always had to swallow that, that issue. We've been sold. It's farming water. You go to Holdrege, Nebraska, the groundwater-- we have build a water pool and Holdrege, Nebraska, that is massive. There's water there. There's irrigation wells there, so to get into this, you know, this is a-- more than a five-minute discussion. It's always going to be a discussion, but as being a county commissioner for Keith County, I think we need to look at some of those issues with

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

Central before, you know, we, we jump into the investments that we're going to make. And that's just the heart, that's my opinion, but it's just something we need to consider also.

**HILGERS:** Thank you, Commissioner Anderson. Are there questions? Seeing none, well, I, I would ask what I've asked many people before. What, what's-- you've been here your whole life. What, what are the one or two things that you would like to see the committee try to do?

**LANE ANDERSON:** Well, I always, always think back, Senator-- I spent my senior sneak day at Lake McConaughy, passed the high school 50 years ago. So, you know, I said to a lot of meetings on the lake advisory committee and stuff, but, you know, in that master plan, before we did all the things we were going to do, we were going to build campgrounds, nice campgrounds, you know, with power and whatever, and that is a big issue right now. We need to make room for these people to come. We have a lot of land out there. I get into these meetings with Game and Parks. Spring Park is one example. I was on the thunderboat committee. We ran thunderboats on McConaughy. We had 35,000 people in Spring Park. It was a big deal, big deal and we have let that-- you know, we need to push some of the people west and develop some of those areas with really nice camping areas. That will pull some of that traffic to the west too. But I've been beating a drum that-- nobody's listening to me and so you let me open that drum, so--

**HILGERS:** Well, we're-- we are listening. Any other questions? Seeing none--

**LANE ANDERSON:** Thanks for coming.

**HILGERS:** --thanks, Commissioner.

**LANE ANDERSON:** You're welcome.

**HILGERS:** Any other testifiers? Well, before we close our hearing, I do want to have a brief note of thanks for the hospitality last night: the Schilzes, Game and Parks, Central, the other, the other individual commissioners who came out. It's really been incredible, the last 48 hours. I think I speak for the whole committee thanking not just the last two days, but really all the work that has led up to this moment. I think one of the things that, that certainly hits me is, is the unity of purpose and all the collaboration that really has primed us for this moment and I think the committee's taking a lot of really

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STAR WARS Committee August 20, 2021  
Rough Draft

great ideas and input today. And I will tell you, we are working hard to be prepared for next legislative session to try to do something that's meaningful, but under control. I think that was some-- one point that someone made here. So we're very grateful, very thankful for all of the-- for all the work you've done. And I will say a last thanks to the library for hosting this. It's really, I think, a physical manifestation, I think, of the progress and momentum that this community has and we're looking forward to doing our part to help, to help provide some more energy. So with that, our committee hearing is closed and you all have a great day. Thank you.