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January-February 2026

# Counties Testify to Several Interim Committees

Donnell Preskey | NDACo Government/Public Relations Specialist

North Dakota lawmakers continue to work even in non-legislative years. During the interim they tackle studies assigned through legislative action. NDACo monitors numerous interim committees and has been tapped several times this year to testify on various topics.

## INTERIM TAX REFORM AND RELIEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE

NDACo has testified twice before the interim tax committee which is tasked primarily with studying property tax reform and relief. While this seems broad, the committee so far has dialed in on the implementation of the primary residence credit (PRC) including bringing mobile homes on the same application timeline and the PRC success rate. The Tax Department reports that 145,264 North Dakotan's applied for the \$1600 PRC in 2025 and about one third of the applicants or 50,000 homeowners will owe zero taxes after the credit. The homestead and disabled veteran credits were also expanded during the last session so the total number of North Dakotan's paying zero property taxes will be even greater.

The committee has requested information from NDACo on tools counties use to inform citizens of property tax and budget information. NDACo highlighted the transparency portals used by two counties along with the information shared on county



Burleigh County Major Trent Wangen, Assistant Jail Administrator of the Burleigh/Morton Detention Center, testifies before the Interim Government Finance Committee.

websites along with the property tax portal that serves as one location linking property tax information for all but seven counties.

Several legislators on the interim committee indicated a desire to dive into revamping the property tax statement. NDACo has encouraged using a subcommittee to develop a proposal with input from county auditors and

programmers. For example, lawmakers have pushed to have color pie charts on the tax statement for the past several sessions, but this change would come at an increased cost to counties to print thousands of tax statements in color. "It's important to balance the desire of what lawmakers would like to see on the tax statement with what is attainable to put on the tax statement without increasing

programming and printing costs." said NDACo Government Affairs Specialist Donnell Preskey. "Instead of making changes every session to the property tax statement, it's important to be thoughtful and deliberate to make sure changes meet the needs of citizens and the desire to provide information in the most transparent way."

## COMMITTEE ASSIGNED JAIL RELATED STUDIES

During the last legislative session, lawmakers were made abundantly aware of the ripple effects of how the overcrowding situation at the state prison system was impacting local jails. The Interim Government Finance Committee is assigned to study the impacts of deferred admission and prioritization of inmates sentenced to NDDOCR. County facilities are holding 346 state sentenced inmates due

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# Commissioners Slide into Town for 2nd Annual Summit

Jeff Eslinger | County News Editor

As is often the case in North Dakota, winter's first transportation nightmare of the year started out with rain, then freezing rain, then snow, making it almost impossible to get around statewide. Fortunately, a number of Commissioners made it into Bismarck the night before it got really bad and were able to take advantage



of good content and camaraderie at the 2nd Annual Commissioners Summit, held at the Radisson Hotel December 9. The ND County Commissioners Association especially appreciates the sponsorships provided by RDO and Bank Forward.

DHHS Director Pat Traynor was the first presenter, outlining our state's plan for the Rural Health Transformation funding.

State Tax Commissioner Brian Kroshus and NDACo Research Analyst Linda Svihovec spoke next, with a refresher on the implications of HB1176, the major piece of legislation to come out of last year's Legislative Session. While the tax relief package has seen as many as 50,000 North Dakotans expected to have no property tax burden whatsoever in 2026, counties are expecting serious challenges

to meet the 3% cap the law imposed on their budgets.

MaryJo Anderson, ND Public Employees Retirement System Defined Benefit Programs Manager, provided an overview of legislation affecting county benefit plans, particularly affecting public safety employees and elected officials.

Following lunch Mountrail County Highway Engineer Jana Hennessy and Mountrail County Commissioner Joan Hollekim presented their county's in-house CDL training program, which they say has benefited the county and the community greatly, with virtually no downside.

Burleigh County Commissioner Wayne Munson and Home Rule Charter

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**County Quick Facts**

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First called..... **1892**

Most recent called..... **2023**

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 (Article XIX Women's Suffrage)

Called for budget issues ..... **7**





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## Board Member PROFILE



**HOWDY LAWLAR**  
**McKenzie County Commissioner**  
**Region 1**

**What is your favorite thing about being a commissioner?** I like to help people. I feel like our county should be like one big happy family. I have to give credit to my dad. He told me I should run if I think I can make a difference.

**Tell us about your family.** I've been married for 17 years and have a married daughter who will be giving us our first grandchild this summer. At home, we have two boys, 12 and 14.

**What else are you involved in?** Plenty: 4-H board, Ag Expo board, auctioneering – especially fundraisers, and the American Angus Association board.

**What are you watching?** Mostly sports, especially college football.

**What are you listening to?** Country music. I prefer old school up to the 90s.

**What are you reading?** No surprise, I read a lot of farm and livestock magazines.

**What do people probably not know about you?** I am an auctioneer, and I think people assume I'm more brash than I am. I'm really kind of a softy.

**Do you have a favorite quote/philosophy of life?** The last thing my grandmother said to me was, "Be kind to Everyone." Those were her last words on this earth.



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### NRG Technology Services Staff

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Donnell Preskey..... Government/Public Relations Specialist  
Linda Svihovec..... Research Analyst  
Michelle Tabbert..... Administrative Officer  
Angie Wentland ..... Controller



## FROM the COUNTIES

### 2026 Here We Come!

I hope everyone has had a great holiday and a happy New Year! I am excited about what 2026 is going to bring!

A new year always comes with change and the counties will hopefully see some good results with the property tax relief and what comes out of the Special Session of the Legislature. It will be interesting to hear from counties on how the caps are affecting each of us through out the year. Hopefully we can get some good feedback on what is working, or what is not working. Knowing that this might be some trying times for some counties; this is important so we can make necessary changes next session.

For those of us that are up for election this year in 2026, this is always a scary and exciting time to see how the primary and general elections shake out in each county. I wish the best of luck to all the incumbents and to the new candidates running for office.



Chad Kaiser | NDACo President  
Stutsman County Sheriff

I would like to thank Jeff Eslinger (who has been after me to get this column done!) and Kathy Kottenbrock for all their work and dedication to NDACo. All the counties have benefited from their hard work and professionalism. Good luck to both of you in your new endeavors!



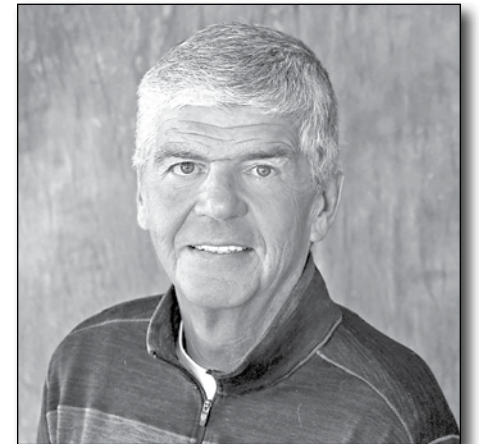
NORTH DAKOTA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

## FROM the COMMISSIONERS

### Happy New Year from Stark County!

I hope all of you had a great MERRY CHRISTMAS! and find all going well for you. Even though the calendar might not show it, things are hopping at your County Association. We hosted the "County Commissioner Summit" on December 9<sup>th</sup> in Bismarck. Although Mother Nature tried throwing us a weather curveball which didn't allow some of you to attend, we had very good attendance and the topics covered were awesome. I learned a lot and hope those of you who were able to make it did as well. We would appreciate any feedback you have to make sure these summits are timely and beneficial to you.

Property tax statements across the state rolled out in December. These statements for many of your homeowners are their first exposure to the property tax relief provided by the North Dakota Legislature last spring under HB 1176. The feedback in my county has been very positive. Governor Armstrong in his press conference on this topic highlighted over 30,000 homeowners in North Dakota will pay zero in property taxes in 2025. In Stark County for example, some of our smaller communities had over 70 percent of homeowners pay no property tax. I would be interested in hearing feedback from you on



Neal Messer | NDCCA President  
Stark County Commissioner

how this property tax relief benefited your county. I am proud of the work Aaron, Donnell, Linda and the rest of our County Commission Association team played in bringing this bill across the finish line. Property tax relief is an ongoing discussion, and we will work hard to ensure counties are represented in all future legislation on this topic.

On a personal note, and without being overly optimistic, I look forward to putting winter behind me. I'm too old to enjoy slipping and falling on my butt. So, raise a glass with me to not only celebrate the New Year but to the oncoming longer days and smaller snowbanks!

## FROM the ASSOCIATION

### Happy New Year!

I hope everyone was able to ring in the new year with friends and family. Although the sun still comes up the same way it always has on January 1, I think the new year is a nice symbolic time of renewal. Maybe it is that resolution to get in better shape, spend more time with the grandkids or learn how to play guitar.

While resolutions may come and go, it is still important to aspire to do something new, as we only have so much time in life. As the saying goes, "Even the richest person can't buy more time."

This year will bring some new changes starting January 21<sup>st</sup> when the Legislature comes to town for a Special Session. The primary reason for this Special Session is to appropriate \$199 million dollars of federal money to transform rural health care. How that money will end up being spent will not



Aaron Birst | NDACo Executive Director

be totally known until the Legislature speaks, but North Dakota counties have and will continue to play a critical role in health care.

Whether it is county social services providing elder care, local public health providing vaccinations or county jails

providing health care to inmates (which federal law denies Medicare/Medicaid benefits pre-conviction) counties are on the front line of health care. The Governor's Office and the Legislature must recognize the efforts counties are providing in the health care space and make funding available if we want to truly transform health care delivery for the better.

As an aside I will take this opportunity to mention NDACo will be seeing some new developments as a couple of long-time employees have announced their retirement plans in 2026. I personally want to thank Jeff Eslinger and Kathy Kottenbrock for their dedication and service to NDACo and all the counties. You will be missed, but we are excited for your next chapters.



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Jeff Eslinger, Editor

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## Mark Your Calendar For The 2026 HR Collaborative Conference

The HR Collaborative Conference is back in Bismarck in 2026! The HR Collaborative is a program that aims to strengthen human resource management within local governmental entities by providing relevant and affordable training and resources. And the upcoming conference is a great in-person training opportunity for HR professionals in North Dakota government.

Mark your calendar for April 22-23, 2026 to learn how your team can benefit from the tools and resources provided by the HR Collaborative! This conference features general sessions and various breakouts for all attendees. The theme for 2026 is Engage 360°.

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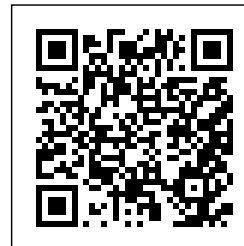
Did you know that HR Collaborative membership is **FREE** to you and your employees? HR Collaborative members will receive information about upcoming HR Collaborative news and events. It only takes a few minutes to sign up. **Scan the QR code on this page to join today!**

### History of the HR Collaborative

Formed in 2008 through an Otto Bremer Foundation Grant and in partnership with the NDACo, NDLC, NDSBA, NDRPA, and NDIRF, the HR Collaborative is a program that aims to strengthen human resource management within local governmental entities by providing relevant and affordable training and resources. The NDIRF has led the HR Collaborative program since January 2023.

**SCAN HERE!**

Use your phone's camera to scan the QR code to sign up for your **FREE** membership to the HR Collaborative!



#### **HR Consultant**

*The HR Collaborative's consultant role exists to support you and your employees, helping guide you in the right direction when HR questions arise. Please note that this role does not provide legal advice. You can submit a question to the HR Consultant at [HRCollaborative@ndirf.com](mailto:HRCollaborative@ndirf.com).*

# Another Tech Shortage on the Horizon

Amber Schriock | Service Manager, NRG Tech Services

Data Center is a buzz word that you hear more often. This is a physical location that houses computer systems which process, store, and deliver large amounts of digital data (websites, emails, streaming services, online transactions, the list goes on). When you hear the term “cloud storage,” this is it. Data must be stored and processed in an electronic system. The cloud is a reference to someone else’s system, outside of your own.

North Dakota has been working to position itself on the leading edge of power generation for data centers. We currently have 23 data centers across the state. Applied Digital, a Dallas-based company that operates multiple data centers in

North Dakota, is building a data center in Harwood, ND, and will be powered by Cass County Electric Cooperative. NextEra Entergy Resources and Basin Electric recently signed an agreement to research a natural gas-fueled generation facility. The hope is to generate jobs and increase revenue for the state.

Along with power, data centers need the physical electronic infrastructure to process all that data:

- Networking equipment: switches, firewalls, and routers that connect all the devices inside and outside the data centers.
- Hard drives for storage.

- Climate control, disaster recovery systems, security protocols and access controls.
- Servers, which perform computations tasks, host applications, and store data.

One of the resources that the servers require a lot of is RAM. Random Access Memory, for those of us that don’t memorize every acronym, is a high-speed storage solution that acts as a temporary type of memory, allowing applications and games to read and write data almost instantly. Server RAM is crucial because it temporarily stores data that is actively being processed. This RAM is specific to servers as it is designed for extended

lifecycles and continuous use. It must also be ECC (error-correcting code), which means it can detect and correct data corruption and is optimized for Dual In-line Memory Modules (DIMMs), which provide electrical signal stability above what a consumer RAM chip can sustain.

All that technical information means that data centers need a LOT of RAM, making it a hot commodity in today’s market. The effect on the average consumer purchasing a desktop may be low, but gaming and high-end computational computers, as well as businesses that utilize servers, will likely see prices increase and product availability decrease.

# NDIT Set to Finish Statewide Interoperable Radio Network by 2027

NORTH DAKOTA – North Dakota Information Technology (NDIT) is proud to announce that the Statewide Interoperable Radio Network (SIRN) project is on track for completion in 2027.

This milestone means police officers, firefighters, EMS, and other first responders across the state will soon benefit from a unified, encrypted, and reliable radio communication network—empowering them with secure, instant connectivity no matter where emergencies strike.

## Prioritizing Public Safety With Reliability & Reach

For years, North Dakota’s first responders have relied on aging radios and systems that have, at times, limited their ability to communicate during critical moments. SIRN (pronounced “siren”)—made possible through \$120 million in legislative funding and comprehensive statewide planning—is modernizing public safety communications by creating a shared radio network that spans the entire state. Once fully deployed, the network will support more than 900 departments and include 140 tower sites operating on the robust 800 MHz frequency.

“This project represents a historic leap forward for public safety in North Dakota,” said Craig Felchle, NDIT Chief Technology Officer. “By upgrading to a secure, interoperable system, we’re ensuring that first responders can talk to one another instantly and reliably—whether they’re across town or across the state. Our progress toward the finish line shows our commitment to delivering modern, life-saving technology that supports our communities.”

The phased rollout began with a handful of counties and continues to expand steadily. Every tower site is designed with hardened infrastructure and backup power to maintain operations during natural disasters, ensuring dependable communication even in extreme conditions.

## Building a Network From Firsthand Experience

Jared Lemieux, SIRN Administrator and former sergeant for the Burleigh County Sheriff’s Department, reflects on his firsthand experience using the network: “Having used SIRN on the ground, I can say this system makes a real difference. The clarity, speed, and security of the communications allow

first responders to coordinate quickly and efficiently, which is critical when lives are on the line. It’s reassuring to know that soon, every emergency responder across North Dakota will have access to this lifesaving technology.”

SIRN’s adoption of APCO Project 25 (P25) standards and trunked radio technology—essentially providing a shared technical language and enabling automatic channel assignments—ensures interoperability not only within agencies but also between local, state, and federal partners.

Initial guidance and training are being provided to support a smooth transition for all entities, including rural and volunteer departments. Lt. Michael Hanel of the Dickinson Police Department is also seeing firsthand how the transition is making an impact.

“We were eager to be early adopters of SIRN within the city and county, and we have been thoroughly impressed with the system since going live,” Hanel said. “It allows for seamless communication between different emergency service disciplines, ensuing clear and concise connections during multi-jurisdictional events. Responders have reported crystal-clear communication in areas that very


high frequency (VHF) systems lacked.”

These firsthand accounts underscore the transformative impact of SIRN, but the story doesn’t end there. As more communities come online, the benefits of unified, reliable communication are becoming increasingly evident across the state.

“As we move toward the completion of SIRN, we’re not just building a network—we’re strengthening the foundation of public safety in every North Dakota community,” said Corey Mock, Chief Information Officer for the State of North Dakota. “Public safety is one of Governor Kelly Armstrong’s key priorities, and this project reflects what’s possible when technology, teamwork, and vision come together for the greater good. We’re proud of the progress made and excited for the future we’re creating, one where every responder has the tools they need to protect and serve with confidence.”

## About North Dakota Information Technology (NDIT)

NDIT delivers the full range of IT services to state entities, playing a central role in cybersecurity, data governance, and digital transformation across North Dakota. Learn more at NDIT.ND.gov.



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## GIS Program Celebrates GIS Day at the Library

Every year, the third Wednesday of November is “GIS Day,” a day reserved for GIS professionals to share and celebrate the work they do day in and day out. This year, NDACo GIS Coordinator Kaitlyn Bakken teamed up with the Bismarck Veterans Memorial Public Library’s Teen Headquarters to share a little bit about counties, NDACo, and most exciting, the work that she has completed by the GIS Program.

Kaitlyn’s presentation was well received by a handful of middle school boys. To drive the excitement about GIS home, Kaitlyn planned an activity for those who attended to compare census data in different countries and the resources available. It’s exciting to be able to report that GIS and counties captivated young minds; a remarkable anecdote that was repeated often was, “That was cool!”

Kaitlyn is hopeful that her GIS Day celebrations will continue to grow in attendance and inspire future generations of GIS professionals to come. Next year’s GIS Day celebration is already in the infant stages of planning, but you will be the first to know how we’re going to celebrate on November 18, 2026!

# gisday



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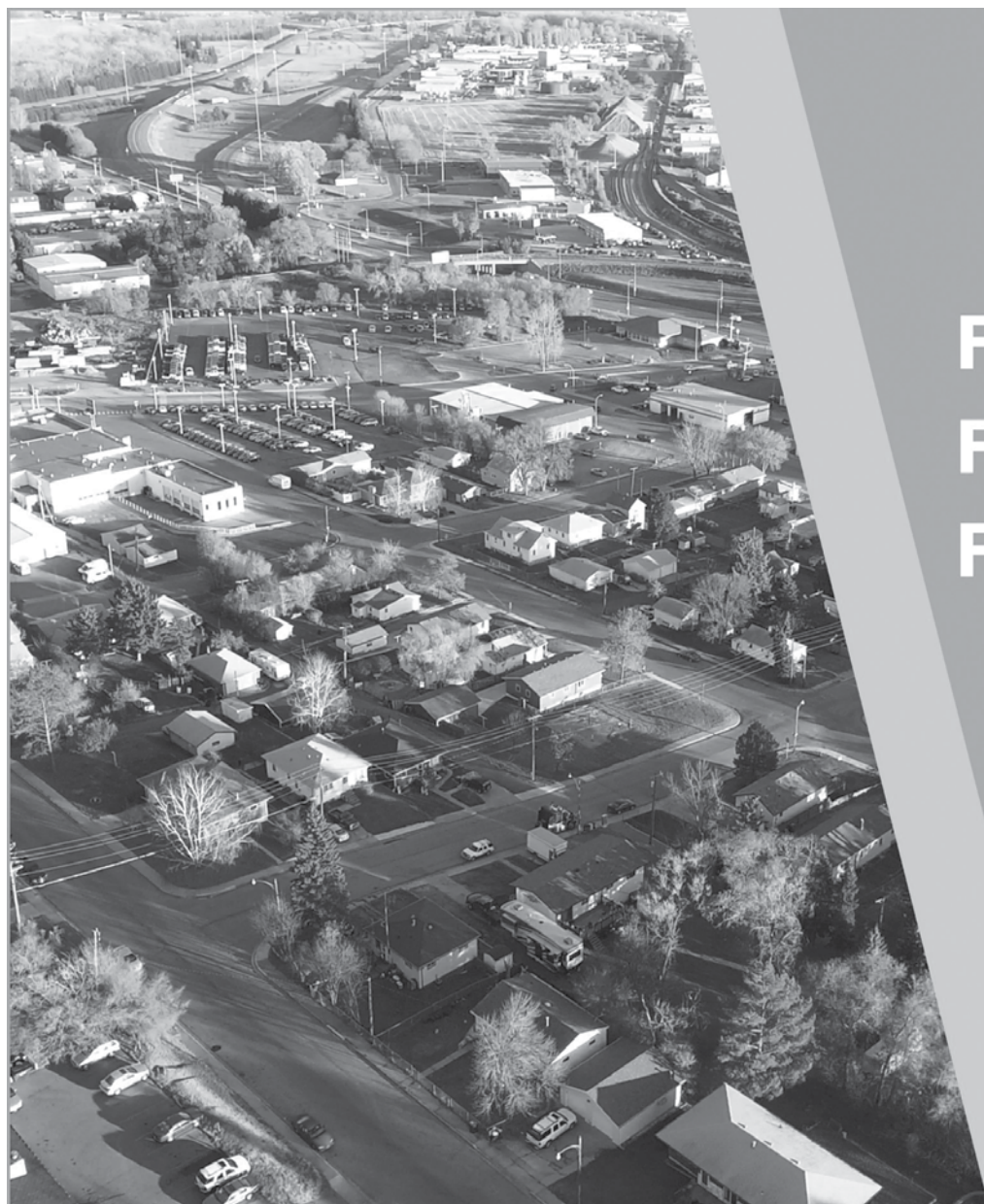


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# Vision Zero Program Expands Statewide Capacity

Molly Schoen | Northwest Region Vision Zero Coordinator, Ward County

North Dakota’s Vision Zero program continues to grow, strengthening its ability to support counties, schools, and communities in preventing traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries. Over the past year, the program has expanded from four to six Regional Outreach Coordinators, marking a significant step forward in statewide traffic safety efforts. A fifth coordinator was added in summer 2024, followed by the addition of a sixth coordinator in summer 2025. The coordinator positions are funded through the North Dakota Department of Transportation. Together with Vision Zero Director Ryan Gellner, the expanded team reflects a continued commitment to local engagement and prevention-focused strategies.

When Vision Zero operated with four coordinators, each coordinator covered a large portion of the state and served numerous counties, up to 16. While the program maintained a strong presence, the broad scope of coverage often limited the amount of time that could be dedicated to individual communities. Coordinators were frequently balancing extensive travel with increasing demand for education, outreach, and community partnerships.

With six coordinators now serving the Northwest, Southwest, Northeast, Southeast, East Central, and West



North Dakota’s Vision Zero Outreach team (L to R): Ryan Gellner, Program Director; Joe Carlblom, Stutsman County; Molly Schoen, Ward County; Kaitlin Atkinson, Grand Forks County; Leah Kelm, Cass County; Theresa Thom, Burleigh County; Kelly Gillen, Stark County.

regions, coverage across North Dakota is more balanced and sustainable. Each coordinator is responsible for fewer counties, allowing for deeper relationships with county officials, schools, law enforcement, and local organizations. This shift has enhanced Vision Zero’s ability to be a consistent and accessible resource at the local level, rather than a program seen only during periodic visits.

One of the most notable benefits of expanded staffing has been the growth of the Vision Zero school program.

Because each coordinator now covers a smaller region, they are able to spend more time in schools, working directly with students, educators, and administrators. This has allowed Vision Zero to move beyond one-time presentations and toward more meaningful engagement that reinforces safe driving behaviors throughout the school year. Increased capacity has also made it possible to bring interactive educational tools into classrooms and school events, helping students better understand the real-world consequences

of impaired, distracted, and unsafe driving.

Counties have also seen positive impacts from the program’s expansion. Regional Outreach Coordinators serve as points of contact for county leaders, community groups, and local partners seeking traffic safety education or support. With more coordinators available statewide, counties benefit from improved responsiveness, greater flexibility in scheduling events, and increased opportunities for collaboration. This has strengthened partnerships at the local level and enhanced the overall reach of Vision Zero messaging.

As Vision Zero continues to evolve, the addition of two coordinators represents more than increased staffing—it reflects a strategic investment in prevention through education, partnerships, and community presence. By reducing the number of counties each coordinator serves, North Dakota is building a stronger foundation for long-term traffic safety efforts and reinforcing the shared goal of eliminating fatalities and serious injuries on the state’s roadways.

Counties interested in partnering with Vision Zero or hosting programming are encouraged to connect with their regional coordinator to learn more about available resources and opportunities, at [visionzero.nd.gov/contact](http://visionzero.nd.gov/contact).

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## North Dakota Vision Zero Receives National Award for Teen Driver Safety

## Impact Teen Drivers



STATEWIDE, N.D. – Impact Teen Drivers, a national nonprofit that provides evidence-based education to help prevent vehicle crashes among teens, has honored Ryan Gellner with its National Community Champion Award.

Gellner, North Dakota's Vision Zero Outreach Program director, received the award during the organization's 2025 biennial luncheon on Thursday, Dec. 18. The award recognizes individuals who demonstrate leadership in advancing roadway safety through evidence-based strategies and community engagement.

"Ryan's leadership reflects what this national award is intended to recognize," said Kelly Browning, executive director of Impact Teen Drivers. "He understands that preventing serious injuries and fatalities requires proven education strategies, strong partnerships and shared roadway responsibility."

Gellner said the award reflects the collective efforts of Vision Zero's regional outreach coordinators across North Dakota.

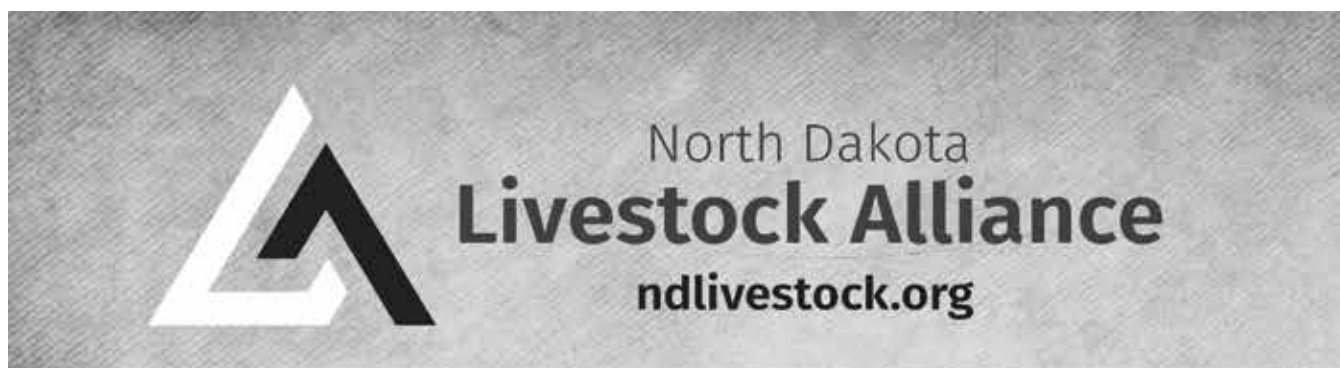
"This recognition belongs to the entire team," Gellner said. "Every conversation, school visit and partnership helps prevent tragedies on North Dakota roads. I am proud to work alongside people who are committed to putting evidence into action."

The Vision Zero outreach coordinators play a vital role in reducing traffic crashes across the state. Their ongoing efforts include:

- **Educational integration:** Implementing Impact Teen Drivers curricula in schools statewide to address reckless and distracted driving.
- **Student advocacy:** Expanding Vision Zero Schools, a peer-to-peer program that empowers students to become traffic safety advocates in their schools and communities.
- **Community outreach:** Serving as liaisons between the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT), law enforcement and Vision Zero partners to tailor safety messaging for rural and urban areas.
- **Direct engagement:** Delivering traffic safety presentations, staffing community booths and coordinating demonstrations to encourage shared responsibility among drivers and passengers.

Through collaboration with the NDDOT Highway Safety Division, the outreach coordinators help advance Vision Zero statewide.

For more information on the Vision Zero Outreach Program or to find your local coordinator, visit [VisionZero.ND.gov](http://VisionZero.ND.gov).



**The North Dakota Livestock Alliance is a non-profit organization led by farmers and ranchers focused on transparency with North Dakota's Counties about:**

- The economic and community benefits to welcoming livestock operations to your county
- What to expect when a livestock operation is proposed in your community
- State and local livestock zoning procedures
- Modern livestock management, barn design and environmental stewardship



**Contact us or invite NDLA to your next County Commission meeting at [ndlivestock.org](http://ndlivestock.org) or 701-712-1488 Follow us on Facebook @LivestockND**



## NDLTAP Provides Bridge Training to Local Agencies

Tom Jirik | Communications Coordinator/Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute

Local agencies across North Dakota are ensuring that bridges are safe and in service longer thanks to training provided by UGPTI's ND Local Technical Assistance Program.

Currently, counties and cities in North Dakota own 2,954 bridges that are longer than 20 feet. Of those, 3.7% are closed and another 23.3% are load restricted, resulting in costs and delays for farmers, energy producers, and other road users. NDLTAP helps local agencies learn how to properly inspect, maintain, and repair bridges to assure safety and maximize their service life and safety.

Training sessions involve site visits to various bridges to help attendees understand bridge inspection reports that identify problem areas and maintenance needs, said NDLTAP Director Bryon Fuchs. Some of those maintenance items may look challenging to local agencies. However, NDLTAP offers solutions and technical advice on how to maintain those structures with their existing personnel.

"I am very thankful for all the continuing education trainings NDLTAP has offered over the years," said Ramsey County Highway Superintendent Jason



Kraft. "The NDLTAP staff will give you 100% support and share countless resources on the website, NDLTAP truly has been a wonderful resource."

The ND Legislature has recognized that the agriculture and oil industries drive North Dakota's economy and that those industries depend on a reliable transportation infrastructure. "Going

back to the oil boom in the late 2000s, additional monies have been provided to local agencies at all levels through legislation," Fuchs said. "Permanent and one-time funding had been provided during each session, and finding ways to help local agencies with their infrastructure needs continues to be a hot topic."

While local agencies appreciate the funding, Fuchs said, "not every bridge can be replaced immediately and not every bridge is on a well-traveled road or a road that is accessible year-round. Bridges that see low levels of traffic rank low on the priority list for replacement primarily due to the cost of replacement."

NDLTAP's basic bridge training course, which was offered this year in Mountrail County, ensures that the local agencies' staff know the terminology for various bridge components. Each bridge over 20 feet long is required to be inspected by the ND Department of Transportation (NDDOT) at least every 2-years, or sooner depending on the condition of the bridge, with an inspection report detailing the condition of that bridge. Each component is rated good, fair, or poor based on a visual inspection to give the local agency responsible for the bridge an idea of its overall condition.

"You want a bridge to stay in the good or fair range as long as possible, preferably always in or near the good range," Fuchs said. "Consequently, NDLTAP helps local agencies identify preservation and maintenance activities and techniques that need to be completed based on the bridge type. Those activities keep those bridges in better condition for a much longer time, reducing annual capital improvement costs across that agency."

With age, extreme weather, and use, eventually every bridge will need some type of repair or rehabilitation. Repair and

rehab strategies are determined by bridge type. Timber bridges can often be repaired or rehabbed by local agencies while steel or concrete bridges may require hiring an outside contractor.


"At some point, repair or rehabilitation is no longer cost effective or the load carrying capacity of that bridge can't be maintained," Fuchs said. "Often this creates a real challenge for local agencies because many of these bridges are on low-volume roads but provide a vital link for local industries and travelers. We work with those agencies to help them understand the available alternatives, which may be better options than doing a major repair or rehab. In many cases, those options allow the local agency to do the work." A couple alternatives that are considered may be replacing that bridge with multiple pipes or a low water crossing.

NDLTAP's advanced bridge class, offered this year in Richland County, provides more detail on repairing certain bridges. Topics covered are intended for repairs that local agencies can do with their own workforce. Fuchs noted that repairs and possible rehabilitation strategies can affect the load carrying capacity, positively and negatively, depending on the bridge type and the repair/rehabilitation needed for that structure.

During site visits in the advanced class, attendees review inspection reports that indicate certain bridge components are damaged and require repair or replacement, or if some form of minor to major bridge rehabilitation is needed.

"We not only help the local agency identify what components need to be replaced or repaired, but what other factors they should be considering," Fuchs said. "During one site visit, we helped Walsh County understand the importance of examining some timber piling that had water standing adjacent to the abutment. Those timber piles turned out to be rotted and in need of repair. After the timber piles were repaired, embankment material and riprap were placed adjacent to the abutment and piles to keep water from pooling next to the timber abutment and piles, protecting them from future rot."

NDLTAP also instructs local agencies on how to communicate with NDDOT regarding its bridges since that agency is responsible for bridge inspections. NDDOT also reviews the load-carrying capacity of state bridges that are 20 feet or longer. All repaired or rehabilitated bridges require another inspection to be completed prior to traffic opening and determine if the load carrying capacity is adequate or if they should be posted at a lower capacity.




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## Become an Expert in Playground Safety

Submitted by NDRPA to NDACo

The North Dakota Recreation & Park Association (NDRPA) is holding its 24th annual Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) Course March 17-19, 2026, in Bismarck.

Participants will learn about the latest developments in playground safety through classroom instruction during this two-day course. Individuals interested in becoming a certified playground safety inspector may take the optional exam on the third day.

Sponsorships from the North Dakota Parks and Recreation Department and the North Dakota Insurance Reserve Fund (NDIRF) make this first-class course, hosted by the Bismarck Parks and Recreation District, possible.

### Scholarships Available

Limited scholarships are available to NDIRF and NDRPA members who

register for both the course and the exam. The scholarship (\$435 value) will cover the cost of course registration. Members receiving a scholarship pay only \$125 for the exam fee.

The scholarship is limited to three people per agency and distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. If an agency submits more than three scholarship requests, additional requests will be placed on a waiting list to be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis after Jan. 30, 2026.

### Register Today

The final registration deadline for the course is Feb. 6. The course schedule and registration details are available at [www.ndrpa.com](http://www.ndrpa.com).

For more information, contact NDRPA at 701-355-4458 or [ndrpaoffice@gmail.com](mailto:ndrpaoffice@gmail.com).



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## Institute of Local Government Upcoming Webinars

The Institute of Local Government has been providing quality education services since 1995. ILG has continuously grown to meet the changing needs of local government official, and now offers a large selection of topics for non-government participants as well.

To REGISTER, go to [www.ndaco.org/ilg](http://www.ndaco.org/ilg).

### January 14, 2026

*CEG Monthly Safety Moment: Worst Case Scenario – Active Shooter*

### February 04, 2026

*CEG Monthly Safety Moment: Worst Case Scenario – Bomb Threats*

### February 04, 2026

*Got 15?! Office of State Tax Commissioner Monthly Webinar-FEBRUARY*

### February 17, 2026

*Did You Know the Year in the Life of an Assessor is a lot of Work?!*

### February 25, 2026

*Sexual Harassment in County Government: Legal Standards, Responsibilities and Prevention*

### March 04, 2026

*CEG Monthly Safety Moment: Worst Case Scenario – Floods*

### March 11, 2026

*Got 15?! Office of State Tax Commissioner Monthly Webinar - MARCH*

## Apply Now: 2026-2027 NDACo Scholarships



Since 1998, NDACo has been granting scholarships to children and grandchildren (ages 17-22) of county officials and employees who are undergraduates attending an accredited college or technical school in North Dakota.

Thanks to the generous contributions of county donors, we are now able to grant SIX scholarships of \$2,000 each.

Online application form at [www.ndaco.org/scholarship](http://www.ndaco.org/scholarship).

Deadline: May 22, 2026.



A program of the Institute of Local Government



## Help Decide Our State's Next "I Voted" Sticker

The North Dakota Secretary of State's "I Voted" More Than Just a Sticker contest is down to five finalists—and now it's time for North Dakotans to help decide the winning design!

Go to <https://sos.nd.gov/stickervote> from January 5–23 to choose your favorite sticker. The winning design will be announced in March 2026 and will debut at the polls during the 2026 Primary Election on June 9.

From kindergarteners to grandparents, 478 entries from 72 communities were submitted—a true reflection of creativity and civic pride across our state. When someone wears an "I Voted" sticker to work, the grocery store, or to pick up their kids, they're inspiring others. It's a 2-inch declaration that says, "I matter, my voice counts, and I'm part of something bigger than myself." Cast your vote today to help choose the next design that will carry that message forward.



## ND Sheriffs Host Dakota Territory Sheriffs Conference

Donnell Preskey | NDACo Government/Public Relations Specialist

More than 100 law enforcement members attended the Dakota Territory Sheriffs Conference in Fargo in November. The conference was hosted by the North Dakota Sheriffs & Deputies Association (NDSDA) and is a joint conference held every other year with Sheriffs from North and South Dakota.

This conference was the largest one yet for NDSDA with strong attendance by law enforcement and business partners. Workshops included ethics, building

accountability and trust, developing employees, panel of administrators sharing perspectives on retention and recruitment tools and an extensive case study of the 2023 Fargo ambush on officers and investigation with one of the officers involved in the tragic event, Zach Robinson, sharing his story.

When this group gets together, some of the most valuable takeaways are from the networking opportunities and conversations that happen during the course of the conference.



ND Sheriffs & Deputies Association (NDSDA) elected a new executive board. Board members are elected to fill two-year terms. President: Walsh County Sheriff Ron Jurgens, Vice President: Morton County Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier, Secretary/Treasurer: Golden Valley County Sheriff Dey Muckle, Past President: Traill County Sheriff Steve Hunt.





Conference Exhibits Pay Off

Jeff Eslinger | County News Editor

“Do you think it will be worth it for us?” New exhibitors ask me this question all the time. My answer is always the same. “If what you provide is a useful product or service to counties, there is no better place to show it off than our conference.”

Two stories stood out to me at our Annual Conference this past October. The first started shortly after closing a sale of a road groomer in Eddy County. Bob Bockes of Road Groom Manufacturing called me to tell me he had just sold a groomer there, and Commissioner Glenda Collier suggested he would do well at our conference. He signed up for a Large Equipment exhibit. At the end of the conference, I stopped by to see how he liked our event. He told me he not only got some good exposure but actually closed sales. We exceeded his expectations!

Sometime in the middle of the summer, I got a call from Matthew Krzoska asking about the conference. He didn’t receive any of our marketing materials and knew nothing about our conference. He simply wanted to tell me about Yondr and find out how to tell counties about his product. To be honest, Yondr sounded a bit “out of the blue” if you’ll pardon my pun (please

don’t – it’ll only encourage me). What they sell is a way to disable cellphones during court sessions. I’d never heard of such a thing, but having recently been interviewed for jury duty, I can attest that not everyone obeys the instructions to silence their phones. Not even jurors.

Long story short, where we had agreed that Yondr would do well just to get some good leads to follow up on, in fact, Matthew was able to close some sales during and immediately after the conference. Again, we exceeded expectations – even mine! You can read more about Yondr’s service at <https://www.newsdakota.com/2025/12/11/yondr-improves-privacy-during-court-proceedings>.

Why write an article about this? To remind us all that the exhibitors who come to our conference really do offer something of value to counties, saving us time or money or helping solve problems. These are just two of the new companies from a record-breaking year of valuable exhibitors. Remember to thank your vendors who attend our conference and take a cue from Glenda – suggest to the ones who don’t to call the Association and get signed up for the next Annual Conference.



Conferees looking over the Road Groomer.

YONDR IMPROVES PRIVACY DURING COURTROOM PROCEEDINGS

Posted By: Steve Urness: December 11, 2025 @ 6:01 am News

TWEET SHARE LINKEDIN EMAIL




VALLEY CITY, N.D. (NewsDakota.com) – In a move to improve security, privacy, and attentiveness during court proceedings, several courts across North Dakota have partnered with Yondr to create phone-free buildings. The innovative solution to courtroom privacy concerns is receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback from judges, courtroom staff, and visitors alike.

NewsDakota news story about Yondr’s first ND customer – Barnes County.

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Ross honored by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators

## Coroner Kriste Ross Receives ABMDI President's Award

Cass County Coroner Kriste Ross has been recognized nationally as the recipient of the 2025 President's Award from the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI).

The President's Award is a prestigious honor presented annually by the ABMDI president to an individual who has made significant contributions to the organization and the field of medicolegal death investigation.

Ross began her involvement with ABMDI in 2017 and has since demonstrated an exceptional level of dedication, leadership and professionalism. Over the years, she has served on the organization's board in multiple capacities, including treasurer, secretary and chair of outreach and retention. Her consistent integrity and strong work ethic have left a lasting mark on the organization and her peers.

During the past year as secretary, Ross has taken on the crucial responsibility of recording and maintaining documentation for nearly every organizational meeting. Her meticulous recordkeeping has helped ABMDI navigate a period of transition

and growth, ensuring that members remain grounded in the organization's mission and history while charting a clear path forward.

In addition to her professional excellence, Ross is celebrated for the spirit of camaraderie and compassion she brings to every meeting—whether virtual or in person. Colleagues describe her as a source of positivity, humor and support who strengthens the ABMDI community through her kindness and lightheartedness.

"Kriste brings a spirit of camaraderie, caring and lightheartedness that brings us all together and makes us laugh exactly when we need it," said ABMDI President Jackie Ulven in the award announcement. "Thank you, Kriste, for your friendship, support and continued commitment to ABMDI and for the care that you show to us all."

Ross' recognition reflects not only her national impact through ABMDI but also her ongoing dedication to serving the residents of Cass County with professionalism and compassion in her role as coroner.

## 2nd Annual Commissioners Summit

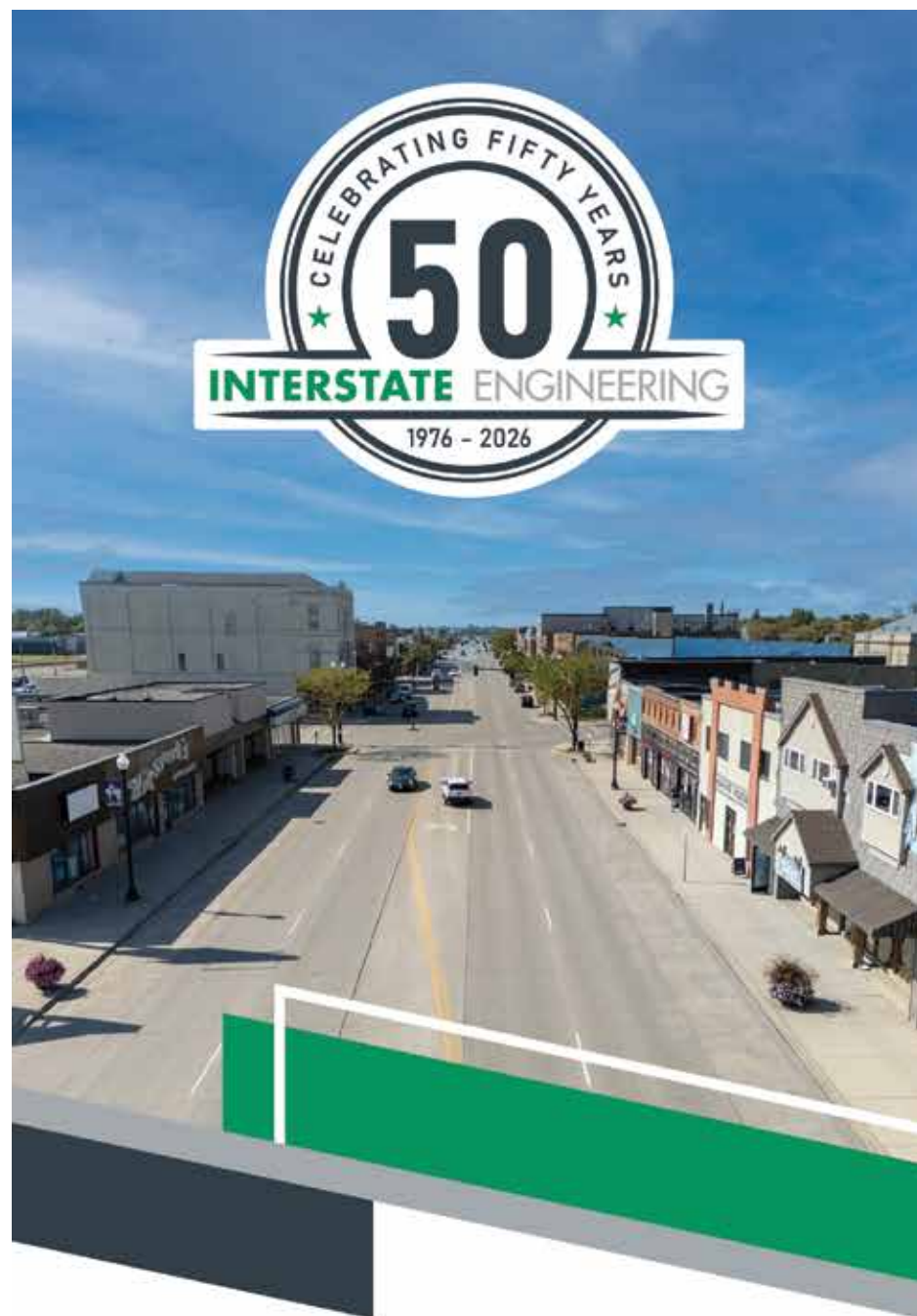
Continued from page 1

Commission Citizen Member Dustin Gawrylow then led a discussion on the pros and cons of Home Rule. Burleigh County has a Home Rule Charter in place and is considering expanding the use of those tools.

ND Insurance Reserve Fund (NDRF) CEO Keith Pic then outlined some of the challenges facing NDRF, including what he called "thermonuclear verdicts," defined as court settlements that exceed \$100 million. These kinds of settlements are on the rise nationwide and will likely begin impacting North Dakota in the coming years.

The final discussion was a "Hot Topics Roundtable" dealing mostly with energy development and affordable housing challenges, which often go hand in hand. Panelists were Richland County Commissioner Nathan Berseth, ND Petroleum Council Vice President and General Counsel Brady Pelton, ND Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives General Counsel Zac Smith and Greater ND Chamber CEO Arik Spencer.

A legislative panel discussion was canceled due to the icy roads making it impossible for several of the speakers to attend, which allowed attendees to get a head start on expected further bad weather and roads.



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## Purchasing Pulse

### Procurement Tools of the Trade: Service Contracts

Sherry Neas | Office of Management and Budget, State Procurement Office

Procurement professionals have a toolbox full of different solicitation methods. Like any professional, it is important to use the right tool for the job.

**REQUEST FOR BID:** This is a solicitation involving a detailed specification or scope of work describing the work to be done. Vendors respond with a price for performing the work, and evaluation is made to the lowest bidder.

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL:** This is a solicitation involving a scope of work describing what needs to be done or a solution that is needed. The solicitation describes what information vendors need to provide in response, such as their strategy for accomplishing the work, description of their team, experience and qualifications of team members, and a price. Evaluation is based upon the quality of the proposal and cost, usually using a 100-point scale. For example, 40% quality of the proposal, 20% experience and qualifications and 40% cost.

“Services” means the furnishing of labor, time or effort by a contractor, not involving the delivery of a specific end product other than reports that are merely incidental to the required performance [ref. N.D.C.C. § 54-44.4-01(5)]. There are six basic classes of contractual services:

- **Professional Services** require the individual rendering the service to exercise professional judgment. That individual’s special knowledge, education, skills, qualifications and experience are of primary importance, such as accountants, physicians, and consultants. Competitive requests for proposals or multi-step solicitations are normally used.
- **Support Services** are nonprofessional services functions where the process is more important than any product (e.g. janitorial, security and trash removal). Specifications can usually be written to allow competitive bidding.
- **Personal Services** are unique, technical or infrequent functions usually performed by an independent contractor (e.g. translation, editing). Competitive bidding can normally be used.
- **Client Services** are services contracted by a jurisdiction on behalf of clients (e.g. vocational

rehabilitation, counseling). Client services are more likely to involve not-for-profit contractors than other services. Competitive proposals or multi-step solicitations are normally used.

- **Management Services** are managerial/ministerial functions performed by an independent contractor assuming governance of the service delivery, property and sometimes personnel of a government function (not privatization). An example is management of a state facility. Competitive proposals or multi-step solicitations are normally used.
- **Information-Technology (IT) Services** are those services to furnish and operate high technology installations to perform complex programs. An example would be the implementation and management of an information management system. Competitive proposals or multi-step solicitations are normally used.

A specification for services is commonly called the “scope of work” or “statement of work.” Writing the statement of work is one of the most important steps in preparing a solicitation for services - and the most difficult. Prospective service providers will use the statement of work to prepare a technical proposal and cost proposal. The agency will use the statement of work to evaluate those bids or proposals, select a service provider, and ensure the service provider completes all the required work in a satisfactory manner. Here is a sample Statement of Work format:

- **Background Information:** Help the service providers understand the mission of your agency or institution, explain the specific project for which services are being sought, and any additional explanations or historical information.
- **Definitions:** Clearly establish what is meant by all special terms and phrases.
- **State-Furnished Property/Services:** List any resources the state will provide.
- **Contractor-Furnished Property:** State what is needed (function, type, quality, etc.), and allow the vendor to describe what it will furnish to meet that need. Avoid dictating requirements that may

add unnecessary costs to the contract.

- **Description of Specific, Results-Oriented Tasks:** List all the essential tasks necessary to achieve the desired results or accomplish the stated mission. Be specific and as comprehensive as possible.
- **Quality Assurance:** Describe the standards that will be used to measure the quality and quantity of work performed (e.g. progress points for partial payments, how work will be evaluated, corrective measures for unsatisfactory work or progress).
- **Experience and Qualification Requirements:** Describe any licenses, credentials, expertise or experience required of the firm and individuals doing the work.

- **Directives:** List directives that influence the contract (e.g. federal or state laws and regulations, OSHA directives, rules concerning grants, required licenses or registration). Reference directives that are too lengthy to include in the solicitation.

- **Deliverables:** List every deliverable to be accomplished, even items that seem insignificant. Do not assume that the contractor will give more than is requested.

- **Technical Exhibits:** Include additional information too lengthy to describe in the text.

If you have questions regarding service contracts, please contact the State Procurement Office at [infospo@nd.gov](mailto:infospo@nd.gov).

## Garrison Diversion Matching Recreation Grant Program Awarded \$282,138

CARRINGTON, ND - The Garrison Diversion Conservancy District’s (Garrison Diversion) Recreation Committee recently met and awarded matching recreation grants to 12 projects, totaling \$282,138.

“Garrison Diversion’s Matching Recreation Grant Program is an immeasurable benefit for participating communities,” says committee Chairman Bruce Klein. “We are always happy to help out with so many deserving recreation projects.”

The following counties received Matching Recreation Grant funds in the fall of 2025:

- Barnes County –\$15,404 to Valley City Parks & Recreation for the Chautauqua Park project; \$6,250 to the City of Rogers for the Rogers Park playground project
- Benson County – \$40,175 for the City of Maddock to assist with service upgrades at the Maddock Campground
- Cass County - \$17,000 to the Argusville Park Board to purchase playground equipment
- Foster County - \$9,720 to the Foster County Fair Board to purchase bleachers for the fairgrounds
- Grand Forks County - \$50,000 to the Grand Forks Park District for the Ryan Lake Trails and outdoor classroom
- LaMoure County - \$12,515 to the LaMoure Park District for the completion of the Sunset Park Swim Center’s final phase
- McLean County - \$13,830 to the Riverdale Parks & Recreation to make improvements at the Lakeside Park Tennis Courts
- Ransom County - \$32,742 to the Lisbon Park District to make improvements to the Sandager Park Baseball field
- Ward County - \$25,729 to the Rice Lake Recreation District/Ward County Parks for the Rice Lake pickleball courts; \$50,000 to the Minot Park District to develop the South Hill Complex inclusive playground; \$8,773 to the Ward County Parks for park improvements at Old Settlers, Eastside Estates and No Man’s Land disc golf

The spring deadline, March 1, is the next chance to apply for grant funds.

For additional information regarding the Matching Recreation Grant Program, please visit [www.garrisondiversion.org](http://www.garrisondiversion.org), or contact Garrison Diversion at 701.652.3194.



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## NDSU to Collaborate With Anova Biosciences to Test for Disease Resiliency in Small Ruminants

*Researchers will incorporate Anova's Promogen immunity testing into the Dakota Sire Testing Program.*

North Dakota State University researchers are working to identify a tool that producers can use to identify sheep or goats that are genetically more resilient to disease.

Rachel Gibbs, NDSU Extension ruminant systems management specialist at NDSU's Hettinger Research Extension Center, is exploring the potential of immune scoring to quantify individual immunocompetence and assess the heritability of disease resiliency in sheep and goats using Promogen.

Promogen is an immune scoring test developed by Anova Biosciences. This immune system evaluator is designed to forecast an animal's immune system capacity to fight off disease or illness by scoring animals based on the presence of defensins, or immune biomarkers found in saliva and other mucosal fluids.

Although Promogen was initially developed and commercialized to assess immune status in beef and dairy cattle, scientists at Anova believe it has the potential to predict immunocompetence in other species as well. With this in mind, Anova plans to collaborate with NDSU's Hettinger Research and Extension Center to evaluate and optimize Promogen immune scoring in sheep and goats.

With producer support, Gibbs will integrate Promogen into the Dakota Sire Testing Programs, which are ram and buck tests focused on advancing genetic progress through technology-assisted, performance-based selection. To do this, saliva samples will be collected from animals consigned to performance tests and sent to Anova Biosciences for analysis and optimization of Promogen for sheep and goats. Participating producers will receive individual immune scores for each animal they consign.

"I am really excited about the potential impact that Promogen could have on enhancing our understanding of disease resiliency and the subsequent impact on sheep and goat production," says Gibbs.

Gibbs' academic career has been focused on identifying biomarkers for stress resistance in ruminant livestock and developing

strategies to minimize the impact of stress on production systems. She believes that by optimizing immunocompetence testing, producers will have the opportunity to begin incorporating immunity into genetic selection decisions to advance flock and herd health and improve overall productivity.

Bill Julien, CEO of Anova and the developer of Promogen technology, welcomed the opportunity to collaborate with Gibbs.

"We believe Dr. Gibbs' work is cutting-edge science and sorely needed to address the needs of modern ruminant agriculture management," says Julien.

There are about 64,000 head of sheep in North Dakota and 9,000 head of goats. Both sheep and goat industries are active in the state and lead national research efforts.

Testing will begin in December 2025 and involves rams from four breeds that have been consigned to the 2025-2026 Dakota Ram Test.

In 2026, this collaboration will be expanded to study the impact sire immunocompetence has on feeder lamb health and performance. This collaboration was made possible through the Columbia Sheep Breeders Association and Dakota Sire Testing Program consignors.

Gibbs urges anyone interested to submit their livestock to the Dakota Sire Testing Program.

For additional information about the research or how to get involved, contact Gibbs at 701-567-4323 or Julien at 402-677-2083.



HREC staff collect saliva samples for Promogen scoring and optimization. (NDSU photo)



A ram has his daily feed intake tracked, as it is an important metric to calculate individual ram feed efficiency, or the amount of feed needed to gain one pound of body weight. (NDSU photo)

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Editor's Note: BRIEFS are collected from newspapers throughout the state over the past two months. Counties with news items to include in future issues are encouraged to submit them to [jeff.eslinger@ndaco.org](mailto:jeff.eslinger@ndaco.org). In a decisive meeting on December 16, the **McKenzie** County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to deny the Cattle Creek Solar Project, prioritizing a ground swell of local opposition over the developer's last-minute appeal for more time. The decision effectively halts the proposed \$280-million, 150-megawatt photovoltaic project, which was slated to encompass 853 acres in the Patent Gate area. Before the vote, Eric Wedesky, Senior Project Developer for IBV Energy Partners, presented a formal request to "table" the decision until March 2026. Wedesky argued that the additional months would allow the company to further engage with neighbors, negotiate compensation packages, and fund an escrow account for third-party engineering reviews. "We believe projects like Cattle Creek, if given some additional time, can be part of the next wave of American greatness," Wedesky told the board, invoking historical themes of industrial innovation and the phrase "Make America Great Again" to frame renewable energy as a compliment to the region's natural gas industry. Despite IBV's technical compliance, the commissioners remained unmoved by the request for an extension. During the board's discussion, commissioners acknowledged that while IBV had worked diligently to "check

the boxes" regarding ordinances and environmental studies, the project failed to win the most critical factor: public consent. "What we're ultimately dealing with here is that we have a pretty tremendous public outcry and a unified opinion saying that we don't want this project here," Commissioner Joel Brown stated, describing the level of community resistance as "unprecedented" during his tenure. The board emphasized that their role as elected officials was to honor the will of their constituents, even if a project meets technical specifications on paper.

– *McKenzie County Farmer*

The **Williams** County Board of Commissioners has approved matching funds for two cities seeking a North Dakota Department of Commerce grant. At the Nov. 4 meeting, Williams County Community Engagement Coordinator Lindsey Harriman presented the Rural Catalyst Grant, which is designed to support quality of life improvement and economic development projects for rural North Dakota communities. After sharing a pre-application with cities in the county, she received two responses: from the cities of Grenora and Tioga. While Grenora aims to build a skate park for children, Harriman said that Tioga wants to rebuild a turf softball field that was lost when the Tioga Community Center was constructed. Harriman said that the county's finance committee recommended the one-to-one match for up to \$150,000 for Grenora and up to \$400,000 for Tioga.

As noted at the November meeting, funds from the county's extended sales tax would be used for the match.

– *Williston Herald*

After **Grand Forks** County commissioners at an earlier meeting unanimously voted not to support a tax incentive for the proposed Brookstone Apartments project, three commissioners changed their votes on Tuesday enough to move the tax incentive agreement forward. Commission Chair Kimberly Hagen and Commissioners Bob Rost and Cynthia Pic voted in favor of the PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) agreement for Brookstone Apartments, switching from their previous no votes given during the Nov. 18 commission meeting. Commissioners Mark Rustad and Terry Bjerke once again voted against the agreement. The Grand Forks School Board approved the incentive during its Nov. 24 meeting. The incentive was given final approval by the Grand Forks City Council, contingent on the commission's vote.

– *Grand Forks Herald*

The **Divide** County Commission will hold a special public meeting Jan. 8, 2026, on a proposed home rule charter it hopes to adopt later that year. The commissioners on December 18 discussed with County Attorney Seymour Jordan the requirements for putting the charter on the ballot for next year. According to the North Dakota Association of Counties' website, a home rule charter gives the county the authority – with voter approval – to change elected offices to appointments, as well as

to combine some offices and alter their duties. Home rule charters have currently been adopted by 16 counties in North Dakota, including neighboring Williams County. After discussing the details of a home rule charter in a previous meeting, commissioners asked Jordan to confirm whether they needed to pass a resolution to put the charter on the ballot. "It doesn't need to be on the ballot, which surprises me," Jordan said. "There is nothing stopping you guys from making a resolution to put it on the ballot, to give the citizens some input, but that is not legally required." Commission Chairman Rodney Johnson proposed going ahead with putting the charter on the ballot to prevent misunderstandings with county residents. "I just don't want them to be filing a petition to take away the home rule charter because they feel like we are doing something behind their back," Johnson said. The major concern for commissioners is that residents would not have the full information as to the purpose of a home rule charter. Commissioners and Jordan said home rule charters essentially give the public more control to decide the structure and powers of the county government. They said the charter alone wouldn't add any power to the county. "The home rule charter does not do anything to speak of, because anything you want to do, you still have to put forward to the citizens," Jordan said. "I understand; I would never want the citizens to feel like we are doing something without their permission."

– *The Journal*



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## North Dakota Attorney General's Opinions

These and all other Opinions issued by the ND Attorney General's Office can be seen at: <https://attorneygeneral.nd.gov/opinions-search/>.

### WHETHER BURLEIGH COUNTY COMMISSION PROVIDED NOTICE A SPECIAL MEETING

**Opinion #:** 2025-O-24  
**Date Issued:** December 12, 2025  
**Issued To:** Burleigh County Commission

**Request:** 1. Whether the Burleigh County Commission provided notice of its January 13, 2023, special meeting in substantial compliance with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-20.

2. Whether the Burleigh County Commission kept adequate minutes of its January 13, 2023, special meeting in substantial compliance with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-21(2).

3. Whether the Burleigh County Commission considered only topics that were included in its notice of its January 13, 2023, special meeting in substantial compliance with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-20(6).

**Conclusions:** 1. The Burleigh County Commission did not provide notice of its January 13, 2023, special meeting in substantial compliance with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-20 because it failed to notify the official newspaper of the special meeting

2. The Commission did not keep adequate minutes of its January 13, 2023, special meeting in substantial compliance with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-21(2) because it failed to include the time the meeting was adjourned.

3. The Commission considered only topics that were included in the notice of its January 13, 2023, special meeting in substantial compliance with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-20(6).

### WHETHER RETIREMENT AND INVESTMENT OFFICE (RIO) FAILED TO PROVIDE A RECORD

**Opinion #:** 2025-O-23  
**DATE ISSUED:** December 5, 2025  
**ISSUED TO:** Retirement and Investment Office

Masaki Ova, a reporter for the Jamestown Sun, requested an opinion from this office under asking whether the Retirement and Investment Office (RIO) violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by failing to provide a record.

**Facts Presented:** On November 18, 2024, Mr. Ova requested the video of the State Investment Board (SIB)'s February 23, 2024, meeting. Sarah Mudder, RIO's Communications and Outreach Director, responded to Mr. Ova's request the same day. Ms. Mudder stated "the recording is no longer available" and provided a

link to the February 23, 2024, meeting minutes. Mr. Ova responded asking why the recording was no longer available. Ms. Mudder promptly responded explaining RIO's record retention schedule only requires retention of SIB's meeting recordings for six months.

**Analysis:** Except as otherwise specifically provided by law, all records of a public entity are public records, open and accessible for inspection during reasonable office hours. The requested record was deleted in accordance with RIO record keeping policy and was, therefore, not in the possession of RIO. It is my opinion RIO properly responded to this request for records.

### WHETHER RETIREMENT AND INVESTMENT OFFICE VIOLATED OPEN RECORDS LAWS

**Opinion #:** 2025-O-22  
**Date Issued:** December 5, 2025  
**Issued To:** Retirement and Investment Office

**Requests:** 1. Whether the Retirement and Investment Office violated the open records laws by denying a request for records containing certain investment manager specific information provided to the Retirement and Investment Office as confidential under N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18.4.

2. Whether the Retirement and Investment Office violated the open records law by failing to provide a breakdown of its investments by country.

**Conclusions:** 1. The Retirement and Investment Office did not violate the open records law by denying a request for records containing certain investment manager specific information provided to the Retirement and Investment Office as confidential financial information under N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18.4.

2. The Retirement and Investment Office did not violate the open records law when it did not provide a breakdown of investments by country as the Retirement and Investment Office is not obligated under N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 to create records that do not exist.

### WHETHER WEST FARGO POLICE DEPARTMENT'S ESTIMATE OF CHARGES THEY CLAIM WAS NECESSARY

**Opinion #:** 2025-O-16  
**Date issued:** December 2, 2025  
**Issued to:** West Fargo Police Department

**Request:** Whether the West Fargo Police Department's estimate of charges

they claim is necessary to respond to a records request complies with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18.

**Conclusions:** The West Fargo Police Department properly calculated its cost estimate using fees authorized by N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 and therefore did not violate the open records law.

### WHETHER CASS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE VIOLATED AN ANONYMOUS RECORDS REQUEST

**Opinion #:** 2025-O-15  
**Date issued:** December 2, 2025  
**Issued to:** Cass County Sheriff's Office

**Request:** Whether the Cass County Sheriff's Office violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by inquiring into Mr. Longlet's identity as the individual behind an anonymous records request, during a separate internal investigation into potential policy violations.

**Conclusions:** The Cass County Sheriff's Office did not violate N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 because any questions regarding Mr. Longlet's identity arose during a separate internal investigation and were not related to the open records request process.

### WHETHER NORTH DAKOTA INSURANCE RESERVE FUND VIOLATED REQUEST FOR D RECORDS

**Opinion #:** 2025-O-21  
**Date issued:** December 5, 2025  
**Issued to:** North Dakota Insurance Reserve Fund

**Requests:** Whether the North Dakota Insurance Reserve Fund violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by refusing to provide requested records.

**Conclusions:** The North Dakota Insurance Reserve Fund violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by refusing to provide requested records. The records requested were neither confidential under N.D.C.C. § 26.1-23.1-06 nor created for the purpose of litigation and therefore should have been released to the requester.

**Opinion #:** 2025-O-20  
**Date issued:** December 5, 2025  
**Issued to:** Ward County Sheriff's Department

**Request:** Whether the Ward County Sheriff's Department violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by denying a request for records.

**Conclusion:** The Ward County Sheriff's Department violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by denying a request for records without redacting the records to protect the safety of victims and witnesses.

### WHETHER BURLEIGH COUNTY COMMISSION MEETINGS WITHOUT PUBLIC NOTICE

**Opinion #:** 2025-O-19  
**Date issued:** December 5, 2025  
**Issued to:** Burleigh County Commission

**Request:** Whether the Burleigh County Commission held "meetings" through various means without providing public notice in substantial compliance with N.D.C.C. § 44-04-20.

**Conclusion:** The Commission did not hold meetings through various means in violation of North Dakota's open meetings law. The individual conversations occurred before the newly elected commissioners officially took office, so they were not members of the governing body for purposes of forming a quorum. Only less than a quorum of sitting commissioners participated in the conversations, and the discussions were not relayed among a quorum of commissioners.

### WHETHER CITY OF PARSHALL VIOLATED LAW BY REQUIRING PAYMENT PROVIDING RECORDS

**Opinion #:** 2025-O-17  
**Date issued:** December 5, 2025  
**Issued to:** City of Parshall

**Requests:** 1. Whether the City of Parshall violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by charging unreasonable fees and requiring payment prior to providing records in response to a request for records.

2. Whether the City of Parshall violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by not providing a denial or reason for not providing records that may contain confidential or exempt information in response to a request for records.

3. Whether the City of Parshall violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by not providing the legal authority for the denial of records in response to a request for records.

**Conclusions:** 1. The City of Parshall did not violate N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by charging a reasonable fee and requiring payment prior to providing records in response to a request for records.

2. The City of Parshall violated N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 by refusing to provide records because they may contain confidential information in response to a request for records when those records were able to be redacted.

3. The City of Parshall did not violate N.D.C.C. § 44-04-18 because it provided the requested records.



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## North Dakota County Employees Can Save on Student Loan Debt Through NACo Edge and Savi

*Editor's Note: Savi joined NACo at a booth at the 2025 NDACo Annual Conference and provided this article at our request.*



Student loan repayment is becoming increasingly complex for public sector employees. With repayment programs changing and default rates rising nationwide, many borrowers are unsure how to manage their student loan debt or determine whether they qualify for loan forgiveness.

Through NACo Edge, the National Association of Counties' trusted partner program, North Dakota counties can now offer employees access to Savi, a student loan repayment and forgiveness benefit designed specifically for public servants.

### STUDENT LOAN DEBT IN NORTH DAKOTA

North Dakota is home to nearly 90,000 student loan borrowers, carrying approximately \$3.6 billion in outstanding student loan debt. Many of these borrowers work in public service roles, including county government, and may qualify for

valuable federal forgiveness programs such as Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF). However, eligibility rules, paperwork requirements, and changing policies often prevent borrowers from accessing the relief they have earned.

### SAVI SOLUTION

In today's challenging economic climate, financial security feels increasingly out of reach for many professionals, especially those burdened by student loan debt. For county employees, this burden can significantly impact their ability to save for retirement and build a stable future. Fortunately, nearly all county employees qualify for valuable loan forgiveness programs like Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), but navigating these systems can be daunting.

Savi simplifies the process of maximizing savings through federal and state forgiveness programs.

Offering tiered service levels, including a free option and deeply discounted comprehensive support for county employees, Savi provides crucial clarity and assistance in a landscape of ever-changing student loan policies.

Savi has already identified over \$5 billion in projected loan forgiveness for its users, with an average yearly savings of \$2,244 in student loan payments. This translates to tangible relief for individuals and families. Moreover, while only 2.3% of processed PSLF applications have been accepted since November 2020<sup>1</sup>, Savi's streamlined forms and expert debt navigators boast an impressive 99% application acceptance rate.

### CALL TO ACTION:

- **For County Leaders:** To enhance your employee benefits package and foster financial well-being, contact John Nelson, Business

Development Representative at Savi, at [johnnelson@bysavi.com](mailto:johnnelson@bysavi.com).

- **For County Employees:** To access this valuable benefit, please reach out to your organization's Department Head or Human Resources office.

### ABOUT SAVI

Savi is a Washington, D.C.-based social impact technology company dedicated to helping public servants and borrowers navigate student loan repayment and forgiveness. Founded by long-time student loan experts and advocates, Savi is a public benefit corporation that partners with employers, membership organizations, and financial institutions to deliver student loan support as an employee benefit.

Since 2017, Savi has helped borrowers identify more than \$5 billion in student loan savings across partnerships with over 10,000 employers and membership organizations nationwide.

1. Hanson, Melanie. "Student Loan Forgiveness Statistics" *EducationData.org*, August 28, 2024, <https://educationdata.org/student-loan-forgiveness-statistics>

## Interim Committees

From page 1

to lack of bed space at the state level. Of the 19 county and regional jail facilities, all but three contract with the state and twelve of them contract with federal agencies. The Burleigh-Morton County Jail will also have a 120-bed pod available to lease to NDDOCR beginning in 2026. According to a recent jail study, the average inmate population at the local level has been on a steady increase over the past few years, climbing from 1312 in 2022 to 1735 in November 2025. Two facilities, Grand Forks County and Cass County jails, have recently opened expansions. Three other facilities, Lake Region, Walsh County and Richland County have indicated they need new facilities due to the condition and age of existing facilities.

The Interim Judiciary Committee is also studying truth-in-sentencing and at their most recent meeting heard from the Attorney General's Office along with Cass County Sheriff Jesse Jahner, Burleigh County Assistant State's Attorney Dennis Ingold and Mandan Police Chief Jason Ziegler. Those individuals described how current sentencing practices are not

transparent, that in most cases, inmates are serving a small fraction of their sentences, even on violent offenses. Bills to require truth-in-sentencing, requiring mandatory minimums for violent offenders, have failed in the past two legislative sessions.

### LAWMAKERS RETURN FOR SPECIAL SESSION

Governor Kelly Armstrong has indicated he will call lawmakers back for a special legislative session January 21, 2026. The special session will focus primarily on allocating \$199 million in federal funds for North Dakota's Rural Health Transformation Program. The funds are being distributed to states as part of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. Award decisions to the states are expected by December 31. North Dakota expects to receive approximately \$100 million baseline funding per year for the next five years. The state must obligate all funds by the end of the federal fiscal year in which the funds are awarded and must show progress on application initiatives to qualify for future Workload Funding.

The state's application centers on four strategic initiatives: strengthening and stabilizing rural health workforce; making North Dakota healthy again with preventative care and healthy eating; bringing high-quality health care closer to home; and connecting technology, data and providers for a stronger North Dakota. North Dakota Health and Human Services will award state funding focusing on these areas through direct contracts, grants, requests for information (RFI) and requests for proposal (RFP). Anticipated release of subaward opportunities is January 2026 and will be released on a rolling basis. Given the time needed to issue grant details, review applications and execute contracts, the state will have about nine months to spend the first year's funding allotment. Unspent funds will be returned. Counties are encouraged to look at projects that are ready to implement and sustainable.



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## Multi-Agency Exercise

Approximately 50 emergency responders and actors participated in an exercise designed to test multi-agency response capabilities, including communications, operational coordination, and command structure under realistic conditions.

The exercise began at 11:00 AM today with a simulated head-on collision at the intersection of Highway 83 and 102nd Avenue Southeast, resulting in more than 10 injuries. Sterling Rural Fire Department was first on scene and requested mutual aid. Patients were transported to Sanford Medical Center Bismarck and Linton Regional Medical Center.

“Exercises like this are always a great opportunity for responders to test their knowledge and develop skills”, said Mary Senger, Emergency Manager for Burleigh and Emmons Counties.

### Participating Agencies

- Sanford AirMed
- Sanford Medical Center Bismarck
- Linton Regional Medical Center
- Emmons County Ambulance
- Metro Area Ambulance Service
- Burleigh County Sheriff's Office
- Emmons County Sheriff's Office
- Sterling Rural Fire Department
- Burleigh County Emergency Management
- Emmons County Emergency Management
- Central Dakota Communications Center
- ND Department of Emergency Services
- Volunteer Actors



## State Water Commission Launches Operation Safe Flow to Improve Safety at Low-Head Dams

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota State Water Commission (SWC) has approved Operation Safe Flow, a new initiative led by the Department of Water Resources (DWR) to improve public safety at low-head dams and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities across the state.

Low-head dam safety has been a SWC priority since 2019, when a statewide inventory and risk-ranking process identified 112 low-head dams, including 53 with elevated risk to human safety. While the Commission provides free warning signs and offers up to 75% cost-share for mitigation projects, local progress has been slower than desired and tragic incidents have continued to occur, most recently at Fort Ransom Dam in 2024.

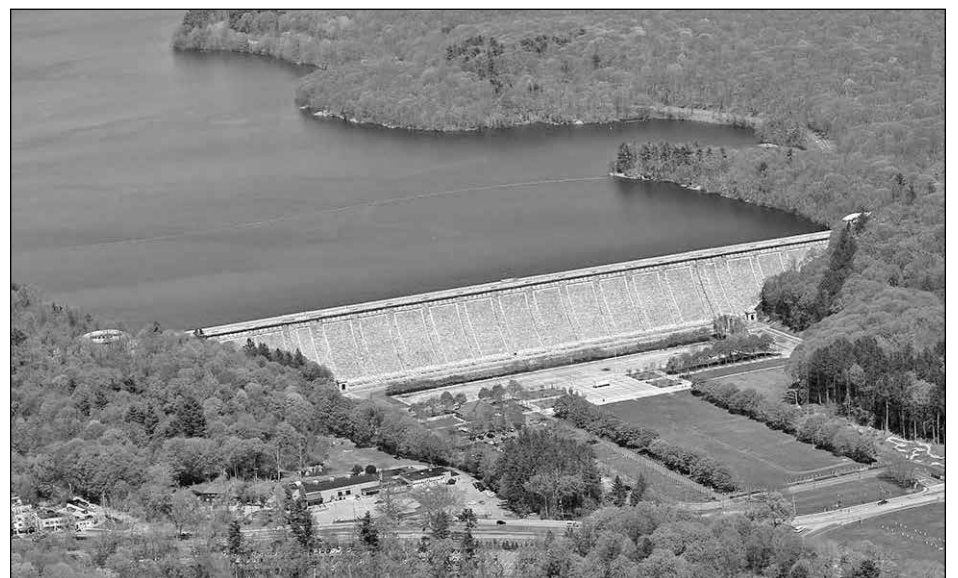
Operation Safe Flow is designed to reduce barriers faced by dam owners by developing clear, least-cost options for mitigating hazardous roller effects. Under the initiative, DWR will partner with a single engineering firm to prepare

30 percent preconstruction designs at no cost to local sponsors for six selected dams with higher risk ratings in terms of public safety. The designs will focus on feasible options such as dam removal or modification.

The six dams selected for the initial phase of Operation Safe Flow are:

- Arvilla Dam, Grand Forks County
- Fort Ransom Dam, Ransom County
- Grafton Railroad Dam, Walsh County
- Grafton Water Supply Dam, Walsh County
- Minto Dam, Walsh County
- Soldiers Home Dam, Ransom County

Following development of these alternatives, dam owners will be able to evaluate whether to advance projects using DWR construction services, proceed under the State Water Commission's existing cost-share program, or take no further action.



Fort Ransom Dam in Ransom County.

To begin this effort, DWR is soliciting submissions to a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) from engineering firms interested in providing professional services for Operation Safe Flow. The selected firm will complete preliminary designs and preconstruction services for

hazard mitigation at the six identified dams.

RFQ submittals are due by 4:00 PM CST on Thursday, January 8, 2026.

For more information, please visit [dwr.nd.gov](http://dwr.nd.gov).





## ND's NACo Board Rep Dick Speaks at Western Governors Conference

The Western Governors Conference invited Cavalier County Commissioner Stanley Dick to be on a panel to communicate issues of agriculture and the effects of the Farm Bill at their 2025 Winter Meeting. The National Association of Counties recommended Dick, who is North Dakota's representative on the national board, to represent a farmers perspective on the pros and cons of the recently extended Farm Bill.

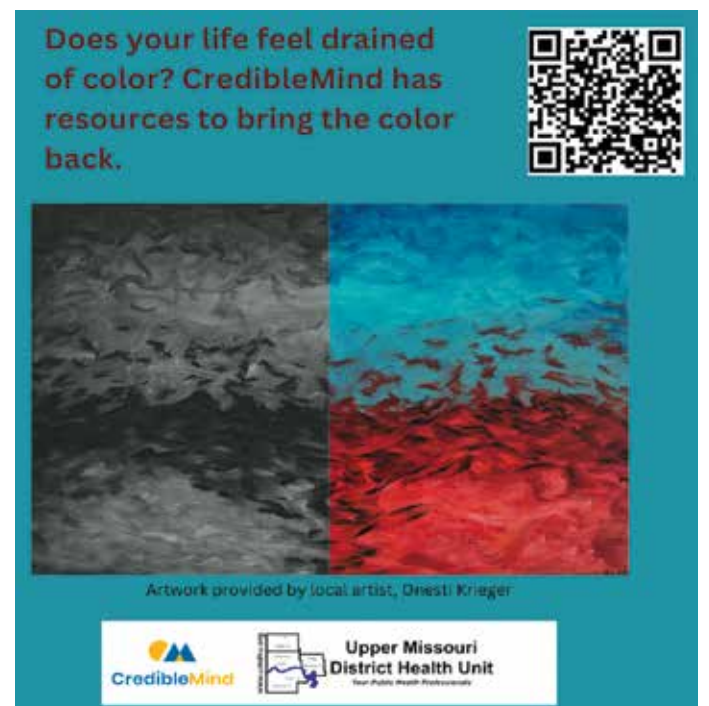
"When I was asked originally, the government was just in the beginning stages of the Federal government shutdown, so I had to pivot quickly to the signing of the extension of the bill," said Dick, "I thought it went well and hopefully helped lawmakers in the Western half of our nation see and hear what currently is taking place in agriculture."

## Upper Missouri District Health Unit Wins Mental Wellbeing Award

Upper Missouri District Health Unit is a 2025 Credible Mind Mental Wellbeing Awards recipient for the category of Empowering Action Through Communication. The submission was part of a campaign developed with Odney Advertising.

CredibleMind is an innovative, digitally integrated solutions platform that treats the whole person, tailoring the path to better behavioral health and wellbeing. The award, Communication that Inspires, recognizes creative, impactful messaging to engage communities. Upper Missouri District Health Unit is recognized for their unique intersection of art and public health.

To break through traditional barriers in their rural and frontier region, they partnered with local artist Onesti Krieger to create an advertising campaign centered on her abstract artwork inspired by



seasonal depression. This human-centric approach, distributed through trusted local venues like veterinary offices and libraries, achieved a 150% increase in new users on their platform.

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# 2026 COUNTY CALENDAR

## January

- 14-16 \_\_\_\_\_ NACo Presidents & Executive Directors Meeting,  
Washington DC
- 19 \_\_\_\_\_ Martin Luther King Jr Day
- 21 \_\_\_\_\_ Tentative – Special Session
- 21-23 \_\_\_\_\_ ND State’s Attorneys Association Winter Conference,  
Bismarck Holiday Inn
- 27-29 \_\_\_\_\_ Energy Progress & Innovation Conference (EPIC),  
Bismarck Event Center
- 28-30 \_\_\_\_\_ ND County Roads Conference, Grand Forks Alerus Center

## February

- 12 \_\_\_\_\_ NDIRF Board Meeting, NDIRF Building, Bismarck
- 16 \_\_\_\_\_ President’s Day
- 21-24 \_\_\_\_\_ NACo Legislative Conference, Washington DC
- 23-26 \_\_\_\_\_ ND Safety Council Safety + Health Conference,  
Bismarck Event Center & Virtual Track

## March

- 10-11 \_\_\_\_\_ ND Transportation Conference, Bismarck Event Center
- 8 \_\_\_\_\_ Daylight Saving Starts
- 20 \_\_\_\_\_ First Day of Spring
- 31 \_\_\_\_\_ Last Work Day for Jeff Esslinger



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