



# Garrison Diversion 2019 Legislative Session Recap

North Dakota's 66th Legislative Assembly wrapped up the 2019 session after approving a \$4.8 billion general fund budget, which includes support for infrastructure projects across the state. Garrison Diversion Conservancy District (Garrison Diversion) representatives made frequent visits to the State Capitol from January through late April in support of a variety of water infrastructure projects.

"The legislative session feels like a marathon at times because there is so much to do in a short period of time. The legislature put a lot of focus on infrastructure this session, which is very appreciated. Garrison Diversion is particularly thankful to Sen. Rich Wardner, Rep. Chet Pollert, Rep. Jim Schmidt, and Sen. Gary Lee, who are strong advocates for the Red River Valley Water Supply Project," says Merri Mooridian, Garrison Diversion administrative officer and deputy program manager of RRVWSP Administration. "We're grateful to all of North Dakota's lawmakers and the State Water Commission for their ongoing support."

Here is a recap of the legislation that impacted Garrison Diversion initiatives.

### SB 2020 - State Water Commission Budget

Gov. Doug Burgum signed Senate Bill 2020 (SB 2020), the 2019-2021 State Water Commission (SWC) budget, with a \$30 million grant for the Red River Valley Water Supply Project (RRVWSP) and a cost-share requirement of 75 percent state and 25 percent local. Representatives of Garrison Diversion and the co-sponsor of the RRVWSP, Lake Agassiz Water Authority (LAWA), devoted a great deal of time talking to legislators throughout the session about the financial needs of the RRVWSP to underline the importance of affordability to the project's end users.

"We very much appreciate the legislators who supported the Red River Valley Water Supply Project. North Dakota's vulnerability to drought is an ongoing concern, and this project will provide an emergency water supply to roughly half the state," says Ken Vein, LAWA vice chairman.

Garrison Diversion and LAWA originally requested \$50 million and a 90 percent state and 10 percent local cost share from the SWC budget.

"We are currently adjusting the project's work plan for the next two years to accommodate a budget that is lower than we requested. However, we remain grateful the legislature supports the creation of a drought mitigation plan to serve half of North Dakota's population," says Duane DeKrey, Garrison Diversion general manager. "We are also working on maintaining affordability for the 35 communities and rural water systems that signed up for the development phase of the project. We are going to do everything we can to keep the project affordable for the smaller communities and water systems."

SB 2020 also includes \$13 million in carryover grant funds from the 2017-2019 budget for the RRVWSP.

### SB 2015 - Office of Management & Budget

Senate Bill 2015 (SB 2015) passed with the inclusion of an amendment that allowed the RRVWSP to become eligible for the Bank of North Dakota's existing Infrastructure Revolving Loan Fund program, which has a maximum borrowing term of 30 years and an interest rate of 2 percent. Prior to SB 2015's passage, Garrison Diversion and LAWA were hoping two other bills would pass that included loans with 40-year, 2 percent interest.

"With the Red River Valley Water Supply Project now being eligible for Infrastructure Revolving Loan Funding, it is a relief. However, we will need to get creative to fund this project for the long term in a way that keeps it affordable for all the project's users, especially the smaller water systems and communities," explains Mooridian.

### SB 2358 - Amendments to North Dakota Century Code

Senate Bill 2358 (SB 2358) includes amendments to the North Dakota Century Code related to the RRVWSP's contract terms. Prior to the passage of SB 2358, municipal water supply contracts were limited to 30-year periods by state law. Since the RRVWSP is a multi-generational project that may need a financing package that extends beyond three decades, Garrison Diversion and LAWA supported the flexibility to extend contracts beyond 30 years to ensure payments are affordable.

"The Red River Valley Water Supply Project is projected to cost \$1.16 billion. This emergency water supply will benefit generations to come, so it makes sense that we should spread out the cost to future beneficiaries of the project to ensure affordability for







HB 1020 includes \$200,000 from the general fund for the Oakes Irrigation Research Site (OIRS). Garrison Diversion partners with North Dakota State University Extension Service to support the OIRS.

# RED RIVER VALLEY WATER SUPPLY PROJECT



Thirty-five communities and rural water systems are committed to the development phase of the project. Upon its completion, nearly 50 percent of North Dakota's population will benefit from the Red River Valley Water Supply Project.

everyone,” says Dr. Tim Mahoney, LAWA chairman and Fargo mayor.

SB 2358 also eliminated voter approval requirements previously included in section 40-33-16 of the Century Code. LAWA and Garrison Diversion are pleased with this decision because it was expected to cause confusion when it comes time to bond for project funding.

## SB 2295 - Oakes Test Area

Over the past several months, Garrison Diversion has been working with the Dickey-Sargent Irrigation District (DSID) to facilitate a title transfer of the Oakes Test Area, a Bureau of Reclamation property associated with the DSID. Sen. Dotzenrod of Wyndmere introduced SB 2295, a bill related to permitting an irrigation district to assess lands requiring drainage as a result of irrigation works.

“We are grateful Sen. Dotzenrod supported this effort through his legislation. Thanks to the passage of the bill, the Dickey-Sargent Irrigation District will be able to operate efficiently once it takes ownership of the Oakes Test Area,” says DeKrey.

The DSID and Garrison Diversion are hoping to complete the title transfer of the Oakes Test Area within the next two years.

## HB 1020 - Oakes Irrigation Research Site

House Bill 1020 (HB 1020) includes \$200,000 from the general fund for the Oakes Irrigation Research Site (OIRS). “We thank Sen. Terry Wanzek of Jamestown for his support for HB 1020. The Oakes Irrigation Research Site provides important information that benefits North Dakota producers across the state,” says Mooridian.

Garrison Diversion partners with North Dakota State University Extension Service to support the OIRS, where the Extension Service tests varieties of plants under different growing scenarios. These studies provide producers with information for more efficient crop production and best management practices, which leads to the successful planning and operation of irrigated agriculture throughout North Dakota.

## Successful Legislative Session

“We received all-around support from Democrats and Republicans in the House and Senate,” says DeKrey. “We’re especially thankful for the legislature’s recognition that Garrison Diversion’s projects and initiatives are important to the future of North Dakota.”