

February 1, 2021

To: Natural Resources Committee

Re: Water Quality in Nebraska

Dear Senators:

We are contacting the Natural Resources Committee to address the need for excellent water policy in Nebraska. We must strive to keep high standards of quality for our drinking water and all naturally occurring water sources. That includes protection from all forms of contamination including herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, and solid waste runoff. Two years ago, the League of Women Voters of Nebraska and several other Nebraska organizations asked Senator Hughes and the Natural Resources Committee to complete a water study to determine if something could be done to address gaps in our water regulations to prevent these types of contamination events.

At the forefront, one dire example actively polluting soil and water, poisoning people, animals, and killing vital pollinators: AltEn Ethanol, located in Mead, Nebraska. The plant processes unwanted pesticide-coated agricultural seeds, such as corn, into ethanol. Some of the byproduct is then distributed to farm fields as "soil conditioner" or left exposed at the plant where experts and researchers report dangerously high levels of neonicotinoids, a type of insecticide.

Please see the following article as reference:

- 1.) [Omaha World Herald: Mead Residents say ethanol plant is spreading 'poison' and making them sick](#)

We need strict water safety regulations to be able to immediately halt or close risky operations like this ethanol plant. As an example, Mead's water flows downstream to Ashland directly threatening a new wellhead protection program being implemented. As Saunders County is experiencing, the NRD agrees this is a serious situation, but does not have jurisdiction to stop it. NDEE can issue citations and levy fines but has no real authority to enforce action against polluters and has been slow to react. I have attached the League's report for your reference.

The ability to help Saunders County lies with the Natural Resources committee. The LWVNE supports a Legislative Task Force for further study on the management of both point source and non-point source contamination to both surface and groundwater (which have an interrelationship) sources to assure that Nebraska's current regulations are appropriate and adequate to protect water quality. The task force should include both agricultural and municipal representatives and consider specifically nutrients such as nitrates, as well as herbicides, pesticides, human and veterinary pharmaceuticals, hormones, and particulate pollutants including mercury. Changes in concentrated agricultural practices and confinement operations, tillage of grasslands, urban landscape management, roadway runoff, and proliferation of pharmaceutical use have increased contaminants in our surface water. Many Nebraska waterways are designated as having unsafe levels of mercury for fish consumption.

As Nebraska senators you represent constituents not only in your home county but especially any vulnerable citizens, such as in Saunders County. We all look to you for leadership on this issue.

Please let us know how you intend to proceed,

Janelle Stevenson and Megan Lyons, Natural Resources Co-directors, LWVNE  
Linda Duckworth and Dianne Bystrom, Co-Presidents, LWVNE