



WESTERN DAKOTA ENERGY ASSOCIATION

January 9, 2026

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Dear Members of the State Board of Agricultural Research and Education,

On behalf of the Western Dakota Energy Association (WDEA), I write in strong support of the North Dakota Agricultural Weather Network's (NDAWN) request for increased state funding, including the addition of a full-time equivalent position to support operation and maintenance of its statewide weather station network.

WDEA partnered with NDAWN to develop Wise Roads (Weather Information System to Effectively Reduce Oilfield Delays and Disruptions) in western North Dakota. This system provides county road managers with localized, real-time weather data to make more precise decisions regarding gravel road restrictions. Before Wise Roads, counties often imposed broad, countywide restrictions after rain events, even when impacts were limited. These decisions disrupted oil and gas activity, farm and ranch operations, restricted commerce, and caused unnecessary economic losses.

Wise Roads now allows counties to keep unaffected roads open while protecting infrastructure where conditions warrant restrictions. Although initially developed to address transportation challenges related to energy development, the system delivers clear benefits to agriculture, rural businesses, and local governments.

NDAWN's ability to deliver these benefits depends on the reliability of its weather stations and data systems. This FTE position will play a critical role in maintaining stations, calibrating sensors, ensuring data quality, supporting online platforms, and responding to emergency repairs, often in remote and challenging conditions. This work supports Wise Roads as well as agricultural research, extension, and producer decision-making statewide.

Equally important, this FTE would be essential for drought monitoring and analysis. Ground-based weather and soil data from NDAWN stations are key inputs to the U.S. Drought Monitor and directly affect producer eligibility for federal disaster assistance, livestock forage programs, crop insurance adjustments, and conservation flexibility. Accurate data analysis ensures North Dakota's drought conditions are represented fairly, protecting producers and the broader agricultural economy.

With federal grant funding for this position nearing expiration, stable state support through SBARE is necessary to preserve this expertise and protect prior public investments. While WDEA contributes modest funding toward Wise Roads stations, it cannot replace the core funding needed to sustain a statewide network.

We respectfully urge SBARE to prioritize NDAWN's funding request as a high-value investment in agriculture, infrastructure, and rural resilience.

Sincerely,

Alison Ritter
Executive Director

SBARE
State Board of Agricultural Research and Education

Received for SBARE via online submission 1/9/2026 - Allison Ritter