

All,

Two bills have been introduced in the Nebraska Legislature that are aimed squarely at the Niobrara, both with the potential to do great harm to conservation efforts.

The first is LB 666 (The Devil's Bill), which would gut the Niobrara Council, stripping away all of its authority and making it exclusively an advisory group. The Council would no longer be able to approve anything in the corridor, including zoning, and it would not be allowed to hold conservation easements or purchase land. It would also require that the Council's lone conservation representative has to live in the area, which is less of a concern but that position was intended to get some representation to all Nebraskans who care about the river. It also cuts state funding for the council by half to \$25,000, and its possible federal funds would be pulled since the Council would have no authority to do anything. In other words, it would be the death of the Council and local control. This bill is serious as it was introduced by Senator Langemeier, the new chair of Natural Resources, and Senator Fisher from Valentine.

The other bill is LB 438, which would prohibit granting of instream flow rights in fully or over-appropriated basins. In other words, it would kill Game and Parks application for an instream flow. It was introduced by Senator Fisher.

I would not wait to attack these bills through letters/calls/emails to newspapers, your senators, the Governor, etc. When the hearings happen, a strong showing there will also be important. Every so often, bills are introduced to test the strength and commitment of conservationists in Nebraska. We haven't seen one for a while, but this is a test we cannot fail.

Dave Sands