UPPER BIG BLUE NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP 2026-0009)

GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY STUDY

Examining the effect of fertilizer application practice on nitrate movement and leading in the Lower Loup, Central Platte and Upper Big Blue NRDs

Contents

1. **INTRODUCTION**
   This Request for Proposal (RFP) is issued by the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District, CONTRACTOR; to solicit proposals for award of a Not to Exceed, Fixed Price Subcontract for all labor personnel, transportation, and related expenses necessary to collect soil samples to study the effects of fertilizer application practices on nitrate movement and leaching (OFFEROR) as defined in the Scope of Work for the CONTRACTOR.

2. **EXAMINATION OF REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL DOCUMENTS AND EXPLANATION TO OFFEROR**
   Should the OFFEROR find discrepancies in, or omissions from the RFP, or should the intent or meaning appear unclear or ambiguous, or should any other questions arise relative to the RFP, the OFFEROR shall notify CONTRACTOR by February 13, 2026 via e-mail to tjulesgard@upperbigblue.org. The OFFEROR making such a request solely will be responsible for its timely receipt by the CONTRACTOR. Replies to such notices will be addressed within 48 hours of receipt by the CONTRACTOR. If the request(s) require changes to the original RFP, then an amendment to the RFP will be issued to all prospective OFFERORs and shared via https://www.upperbigblue.org/bids . As reviewed by the CONTRACTOR, if a request(s) is deemed significant, the CONTRACTOR at their discretion may extend the closing date of the RFP.

3. **EXHIBITS INCLUDED IN RFP 2026-0009**
   Exhibit A – Schedule of Events
   Exhibit B – Scope of Work

4. **AMENDMENTS TO REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL**
   If this RFP is amended, all terms and conditions that are not modified remain unchanged. The term "RFP" includes all exhibits and amendments provided by the CONTRACTOR as part of this RFP.

5. **PREPARATION COST**
   The preparation of the proposal shall be by, and at the expense of, the OFFEROR.

6. **PRICE CONDITIONS**
   The quoted price must include all costs to the CONTRACTOR for all supervision, labor, miscellaneous hand tools and supplies, PPE as required to complete the sampling safety and transportation, and any other miscellaneous costs for full and complete performance of the work as set forth herein.

   Pricing will be guaranteed for 90 days from submission of proposal. All pricing information requested in this RFP must be provided. Costing/Pricing by details must be broken down by labor, materials, etc. CONTRACTOR reserves the right to require the OFFEROR to furnish an accounting breakdown of all contract prices.

7. **EQUIPMENT PROVIDED BY THE DISTRICT**
   CONTRACTOR will provide equipment and materials to collect the in-season, in-field samples including a modified gas-powered post-driver, samples tubes for 8-foot samples, sample collection and storage material, sample bags. CONTRACTOR will also supply the bromide and bentonite chips.

8. EQUIPMENT PROVIDED BY CONTRACTOR OR THEIR SUBCONTRACTOR

The OFFEROR will provide the equipment needed to do the out-of-season deep samples. These samples will need to be to a depth of forty-feet (40) or to the water table whichever is the shallowest.

9. QA\QC AND SAMPLE TESTING

CONTRACTOR will provide one (1) staff person to ensure quality assurance and control is consistent for all samples collected and will be responsible for the transportation and testing of all samples.

10. PAYMENT TERMS

CONTRACTOR payment terms are net 30 days upon receipt of invoice, subject to approval by the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District Board of Directors.

11. RIGHT OF ACCEPTANCE

CONTRACTOR reserves the right to:

- Accept or reject any proposal in whole or in part.
- Reject all proposals, with or without, notice or reason.
- Enter into discussions or negotiations with OFFEROR prior to award. Negotiations do not constitute an acceptance of the proposal, nor rejection of the proposal, nor a counteroffer by the CONTRACTOR.
- Abandon the work or have the work performed in such a manner as CONTRACTOR may elect, if no proposal is accepted.

12. PROPOSAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

While the CONTRACTOR intends to engage in the purchase of services, this event shall not guarantee that the participating OFFEROR will be awarded a Contract.

Any award resulting from this request will be made to the OFFEROR whose proposal provides the best value to CONTRACTOR. The best value determination will be at the sole discretion of CONTRACTOR and could result in an award to someone other than the lowest price proposal. Any resulting purchase award will be set forth in writing between the CONTRACTOR and the successful OFFEROR at some date after the close of the request. CONTRACTOR reserves the option to cancel this RFP process at a time and/or to elect not to engage in a Contract.

The OFFEROR must provide all data required to be considered an acceptable to the CONTRACTOR. All data must be executed completely, correctly, and accurately by the OFFEROR. Should the OFFEROR not complete all forms and documents, the OFFEROR will be deemed non-responsive.

This RFP will be evaluated based on the following criteria. OFFEROR are reminded the Contract will be awarded for best value with technical ability having the highest weighted percentage.

Criteria	Weighted Percentage (%)
Technical Ability (Experience, Project Plan, Schedule)	60%
Cost	40%
Total	**100%**

13. SUBMITTAL OF PROPOSAL

OFFEROR's proposal must be submitted with:

- Past project experience,
- Project Team, including Project Lead
- Detailed project plan,
- Schedule,
- Detailed cost estimate: Please break down pricing for supervision, labor, tools, supplies (which are not supplied by CONTRACTOR), transportation, and any other miscellaneous costs for full and complete performance of the work as set forth herein.
- Listing of Subcontractors, if applicable.
- Specific documentation requested by CONTRACTOR must be submitted within the time specified and unless otherwise specified by CONTRACTOR, at no expense to CONTRACTOR. See item #15
- Proposals should be submitted by **March 6, 2026,** via hand delivery, USPS, or E-mail to:

Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District
Attn: Terry Julesgard
319 East 25th Street
York, NE 68467

Or

tjulesgard@upperbigblue.org

14. AWARD OF CONTRACT

CONTRACTOR contemplates award of a Contract in accordance with the requirements and conditions set forth or incorporated by reference in this RFP.

Proposals for other than the total work defined may be rejected. The Award may not be made to any OFFEROR who has not responded to all instructions and representations indicated in the RFP.

CONTRACTOR may reject any or all proposals if such action is in the best interest of CONTRACTOR and their PARTNERS and/or waive informalities and minor irregularities in offers received.

CONTRACTOR and their PARTNERS may evaluate proposals and the CONTRACTOR award a Contract without discussions with OFFEROR. Therefore, each initial proposal should contain the OFFEROR's best terms.

CONTRACTOR reserves the right to conduct discussions, if later determined to be necessary by CONTRACTOR's Contract Administrator and Project Lead.

The OFFEROR agrees, if the proposal is accepted within the number of days allowed, to furnish all items upon which prices are offered, at the set price opposite each item, at the designated point(s) within the time specified in the schedule.

15. NOTICE TO SUCCESSFUL CONTRACTOR – U.S. Citizenship & W-9 Verification

CONTRACTOR will require any successful OFFEROR to supply a W-9, and verification of U.S. Citizenship and certificate of liability insurance if applicable.

16. NOTICE OF UNSUCCESSFUL OFFEROR

The OFFEROR will be informed whether the proposal was successful using a method deemed adequate by the CONTRACTOR.

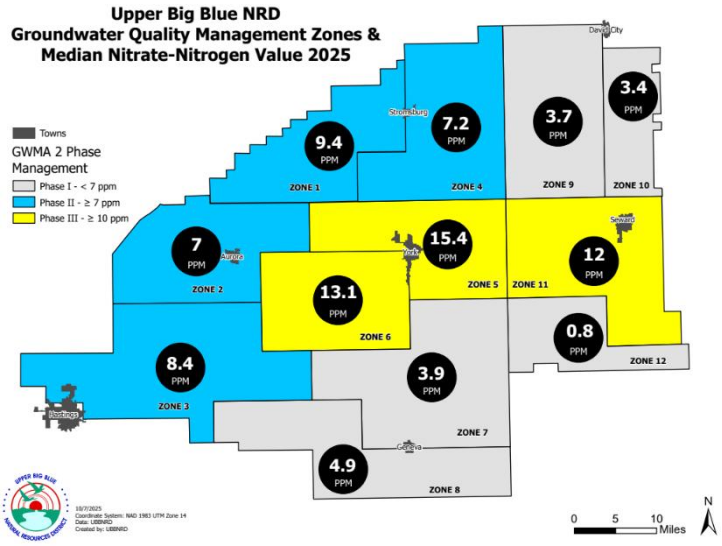
Appendix A
SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

RFP 2024-0001

Event	**Date**
Opening Date	January 23, 2026
Omissions and/or Questions	February 13, 2026
Closing Date	March 6, 2026
Evaluation Period	March 6-11, 2026
Anticipated Subcontract Award	March 19, 2026
Project Completion	December 31, 2028

Appendix B
BACKGROUND & SCOPE OF WORK

Project Background & Objectives



The Co-sponsors are actively managing groundwater quality to reduce the amount of nitrate entering the groundwater system. Specifically, the Co-sponsors are developing educational programs and considering adopting rules that would prohibit over application of fertilizer and encourage timing the application of fertilizer closer to when crops need additional nitrogen to support growth and improve yields. The Co-sponsors need to determine the loss of nitrogen leaching from different fertilizer application practices including traditional fall fertilizer application, side-dress fertilizer application, and fall manure application. The Co-sponsors want to look at the different application methods and timing to help producers be more efficient with applying nutrients when the crop needs it. The focus of this study is to estimate the amount of nitrogen lost to leaching in selected areas of the LLNRD, CPNRD and UBBNRD. The Project is based on 4 Study Areas, each with 9 fields with 3 fertilizer application replications with 3 coring locations per field. Specific study area objectives are listed below: 1. Co-sponsors staff will coordinate the collection of soil nitrate samples. Summary of approach: At a minimum of three locations for each of the different land use practices being evaluated; traditional fall fertilizer application, side-dress fertilizer application, manure application. Co-sponsors/contractor will collect and send soil samples to a local agricultural testing laboratory for analysis. Quality assurance procedures will include the collection of a minimum of 10 percent duplicate environmental samples. USGS staff will help Co-sponsors determine the best locations for sampling. 2. Determine the total mass of nitrate leaving the root zone for land use practice. Summary of approach: Changes in the total mass of nitrogen will be calculated from soil samples collected at specified sampling periods described in the Approach section below. Statistical comparisons of N losses from traditional fall fertilizer applications, side-dress fertilizer applications, manure application will be completed which can be used to evaluate differences between the application practices. Other statistical approaches will be examined throughout the study. A key component of this project is demonstrating and communicating the results to local producers and stakeholders. USGS staff will meet regularly with the Co-sponsors staff and Board members throughout the study to discuss initial results and findings. This proposed study will focus on determining the loss of nitrogen leaching from different soil types and fertilizer application practices including traditional fall fertilizer application, side-dress fertilizer application, fall manure application or other in the LLNRD, CPNRD, and UBBNRD. Soil samples will be collected at a minimum of three fields for each fertilizer application practice by Co-sponsors/contractor's staff. This Groundwater Sustainability Study has the following four objectives:

Objective 1. Identify locations in the Phase II and III areas of the district which met the criteria listed in the Project Background and Objectives.

Objective 2. Secure agreement with cooperators and identify how the data will be shared.

Objective 3. Develop a nitrate mobility model for each practice and soil type.

Objective 4. Develop education program based on the information collected for uses in district Nitrogen Training classes.

Scope of Work

This proposed study will focus on determining the loss of nitrogen leaching from different soil types and fertilizer application practices including traditional fall fertilizer application, side-dress fertilizer application, fall manure application or other in the LLNRD, CPNRD, and UBBNRD. Soil samples will be collected at a minimum of three fields for each fertilizer application practice by Co-sponsors/contractor's staff. A minimum of three soil cores will be taken for each field and collection will be timed to assess changes in soil nitrogen at the crop growth stages including: 1) 30-foot sample immediately after harvest, before any fall application of fertilizer of any type; collected around October. 2) 30-foot sample pre-planting. 3) 8-foot sample planting at pre-emergence. 4) 8-foot sample V5 to V6 corn is about 16 inches tall. 5) 8-foot sample V8 corn is about 24inches tall. 6) 8-foot sample at pollination/silk R1. 7) 30-foot sample immediately after harvest, before any fall application of fertilizer of any type. 8) A 30-foot sample after fall application of fertilizer if applicable collected around October. Soil samples collected pre-planting (1) and after harvest (7 and 8) will be collected to a depth of 30-ft with a soil coring rig. To prevent crop damage, soil samples collected within the growing season (2 through 6) will preclude the use of a soil coring rig. A gas-powered/handheld soil sampler will be used to collect samples to a depth of 8-ft to fully characterize the nitrogen within and below the crop root zone. Both 8-foot and 30-foot core samples will be divided into increments of the first 8 ft will be 1-foot samples and below that 2-foot samples. The soil sampling will be repeated for 3 growing seasons to assess differences in precipitation patterns on nitrate movement. They will be sent to a local agricultural testing laboratory for analysis. Soil samples will be analyzed for the S-5 test, which include nutrients, selected cations, organic matter (Ward Laboratories, 2023) and ammonium (NH_4^+) for the 0 to 1 ft and 1 to 2 ft samples. Deeper samples (past 2 ft below land surface) will be analyzed for nitrate (NO_3) and ammonium (NH_4^+) only. Although the primary focus of this project is on soil sampling and subsequent statistical comparisons, other sources of information will be critical in fully assessing and understanding the results. Bromide which is commonly used as a conservative tracer will be applied to one coring location per field per year to allow for estimation of time of travel for nitrate and shall be sampled and analyzed alone within normal sampling timelines. The nitrate concentration of irrigation water applied through the growing season will be sampled annually for nitrate by the Co-sponsor's staff. Precipitation will be measured at or near each field with a tipping bucket rain gage. Ideally, each rain gage could measure the total precipitation and irrigation water applied to each field being sampled. In cases where a rain gage cannot be used to measure local precipitation and applied irrigation water, flow meter readings will be used to estimate the amount of groundwater applied. Soil moisture sensors will be installed at selected fields to examine soil moisture changes in response to evapotranspiration, determine depth of the root zone, and identify wetting fronts from local precipitation and irrigation within the upper 3 ft of the soil. Soil moisture sensors will be particularly beneficial for tracking water movement following intense summer storm events or conversely when prolonged dry periods restrict the downward movement of nitrogen during the growing season. Additional equipment including soil moisture sensors

(Campbell Scientific, 2025), tipping bucket rain gage, dataloggers, and cellular modem will be purchased for real-time monitoring.

1. Kickoff project and gather data
    a. Conduct a kickoff meeting with the project partners.
    b. Conduct a meeting with the cooperator.
    c. Gather pertinent data and information on each field.
2. Develop three sites in each of the nine fields
    a. Establish three sites in each field mark and GPS location.
    b. Collect the initial samples at each site.
3. Project meetings and management
    a. Conduct collaborative meetings among the study partners and contractors throughout the project.

Schedule

	2026				2027				2028			
Activity	**Jan-Mar**	**Apr-Jun**	**Jul-Sept**	**Oct-Dec**	**Jan-Mar**	**Apr-Jun**	**Jul-Sept**	**Oct-Dec**	**Jan-Mar**	**Apr-Jun**	**Jul-Sept**	**Oct-Dec**
Soil Sampling	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**		**X**	**X**	**X**		**X**	**X**	**X**