



Sustainability Input Forums

Input received in Minot, ND

PREPARED FOR



Environmental
Quality

DATE

December 2023



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

North Dakotans of all backgrounds were invited to come together to share innovative ideas, knowledge, and perceptions related to reducing greenhouse gas emissions during the state's Sustainability Input Forums held from October 31 through November 8, 2023, in eight locations around the state. In addition, more than 100 people shared their thoughts via an online survey through December 5, 2023.

Input received through this process will assist North Dakota in forming the basis for sustainability planning and actions in 2024 and for years to come. Information gathered will be used to inform the state's participation in U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) program. North Dakota's Sustainability Input Forums are supported with a CPRG planning grant.

This report summarizes input received through conversations held in-person and online during three sessions in Minot. Subsequent input received through the online comment form are italicized and attributed to this report based on ZIP codes indicated.

CONTEXT

The North Dakota Sustainability Input Forums were open public meetings that were organized to be conversational and informal. The role of the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality (NDDEQ) was to host and to listen, with the assistance of an independent facilitator.

NDDEQ's goals for the forums were two-fold: 1) hear what North Dakotans are thinking and doing related to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and 2) fuel conversation and connection between diverse stakeholders. To this end, conversations were held in a circle and lightly facilitated around a handful of core questions, as outlined in the following sections. Each session generated at least two hours of interaction, with comments provided by participants in the form of verbal feedback, comment cards, and online polls and chats.

Hosts for the Minot forums were Ann Fritz, NDDEQ, Presenter; Allison Ahcan, ERM, Facilitator; Isabella Binger, ERM, Online Facilitator.

Attendees of these sessions, including online participants, offered an array of backgrounds. Individuals attending had experience within the public service, agricultural organizations, cattle organizations, and community sustainability. Additional attendees included interested community members with no formal associations, but affinity for Minot, the state, and quality of life. The first session of the day had no participants, so hosts took advantage of the opportunity to record the introductory presentation for future uses. A total of 21 Minot-area residents provided input.

1. CONVERSATION SUMMARIES

The overall tone of Minot’s two conversations was productive and passionate, as many individuals were wary about how the state plans to implement Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) funding. There was specific interest within each of the groups specifically related to actions in Minot, and how the city exemplifies what local measures could be supported through additional funding and support. Additional interests included harsher restrictions on polluters and making sure that responsibility in reducing greenhouse gas emissions was a statewide effort as opposed to the responsibility of specific groups. Many individuals were excited by the idea of CPRG and how it could propel innovation and economic opportunity; a common suggestion was to utilize the various universities as research hubs.

1.1 BENEFITS

Question: What BENEFITS do you see for North Dakotans as greenhouse gas emissions are reduced?

Participants commented on local, state, federal, and global benefits related to greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Specifically, they were quick to point out that decreases in emissions can not only result in quality-of-life improvements in North Dakota, but the entire Midwest as well. Other common conversation topics included less dependence on fossil fuels, introduction of new industries to the state, and increases in innovation resulting in federal funding.

Comments:

- Federal funding and support
- Less produced water and oil spills
- Better soil with land management changes (better yields)
- More equitable quality of life
- Maintain wild spaces in North Dakota and preserving badlands/prairies
- Decrease cost to combat effects of climate change
- Making all citizens of North Dakota responsible
- Better air quality
- Bringing more workers to North Dakota
- More regular growing seasons
- Less health issues
- Global stability
- Save our natural land from oil developments
- New economies around renewable energy
- Clean water
- Less dependence on oil and gas companies
- Innovation in industry
- *New job creation using clean technology*
- *Decrease in dependence on foreign oil*

1.2 DOWNSIDES

Question: What DOWNSIDES do you see for North Dakotans as greenhouse gas emissions are reduced?

This portion of the conversation heavily focused on economic challenges. Within both online and in-person conversations, there was an emphasis on how oil tax revenue will decrease if the state

moves away from fossil fuels resulting loss of workforce and how political backlash may occur due to change. Additional comments included concern about how productivity will change if more restrictions are put in place.

Comments:

- Financially damaging to the current mode of operation for the coal and gas industry (local and state revenue)
- Impact to gas sales tax revenue as vehicles move to electric
- Reduction in personal travel independence as Electric Vehicles (EVs) don't have the ability to travel long distances yet
- Controversial
- Increased expenses and regulations that cost money or decrease productivity
- Contributor calling out the other to place blame
- Educating the public
- People may move away to find opportunities
- Change is difficult
- Coal/oil towns will struggle
- Political backlash
- *Individuals will need job trainings for new industries*
- *Loss of jobs*
- *Limits or changes to farming practices*
- *Visual pollution from wind turbines and their short lifespan requires regular maintenance*

1.3 EXISTING EFFORTS

Question: What ALREADY is being done in North Dakota to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? Who is doing it?

Both in-person and online participants shared specific examples as to what is already being done in North Dakota to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, many of which were located directly in Minot. Residents were proud of the community programs and efforts such as 1000 Trees for Minot, local prairie restorations, Minot Pollinator Project, local recycling programs, and individual investments in renewable technologies. This conversation focused heavily on the local area, as many individuals voiced that state investments are usually focused on Bismarck and Fargo.

Comments:

- Increased use of cover crops/ no-till farming
- Family farms/local food production
- Prairie restorations in Minot (Ramstad, Minot Air Force Base (MAFB))
- 1000 Trees for Minot
- Carbon capture in oil/gas
- EV implementation
- Waste management
- Oil well flaring regulations
- Renewable regenerative fuels
- Rotational grazing systems
- Minot Pollinator Project
- Minot Recycling
- Commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030
- City compost bins
- Minot bike lanes
- Kiss the Ground Movie screening

- Project at Minot State University (MSU) for prairie restoration
- Research center in Mandan
- Net metering
- Carol Davis at Turtle Mountain Water Keepers
- Keller Paving solar panels on buildings
- There are state programs for energy efficiency upgrades (Rural Economic Area Partnership Program (REAP) and Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LI-HEAP))
- New solar installation for research within agriculture in ND
- New local food hub potentially coming to Minot
- Standing Rock standing against Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL)
- *Wind and solar farm developments*
- *Geothermal heating*
- *Small-scale efforts to store CO2 underground*
- *Investment into new technologies*

1.4 POTENTIAL STATE INCENTIVES/SUPPORT

Question: In what ways would you want to see the state INCENTIVIZE, SUPPORT or just generally HELP with greenhouse gas reductions?

Participants strongly emphasized that individuals would like to see harsher restrictions and enforcements to keep polluters accountable to regulations. Other topics included support for local initiatives from the state and utilizing institutions for climate research. They also requested that information and resources should be easily accessible to constituents and that barriers to receive state funding/incentives should be eased.

Comments:

- Engage with individuals, organizations, and industries
- Address issues at the local level
- Support municipal compost efforts
- Actively restore prairie
- Tougher enforcement of flaring
- Cap open frack wells
- Partner funding to electrify local bus and municipal fleets
- Create an energy efficiency county position
- Partner funding to install solar on municipal/ public entity buildings
- Increase use of regenerative fuels
- Create a knowledge base of carbon sequestration
- Utilize North Dakota State University (NDSU) and other institutions for research, especially on quantifying carbon sequestration
- Audubon Dakota, Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Delta Waterfront, North Dakota Natural Resource Trust all have created programs to help incentivize conservation practices for agricultural interests
- Utilize federal money in local communities
- Promote no-till/low-till farming and education about sustainable farming practices
- Transparency around funding and campaign contributions
- Offer education/info about energy efficiency
- Use research-based decisions for best environmental outcomes
- Invest in renewable energy
- Keep oil companies accountable using more enforcement
- Offer state grant for churches/nonprofits for solar on roofs and energy efficiency
- Transparency in reporting of emissions from the coal plants and industry
- Incentivize solar and wind including heat pumps for homes

- Direct education from climate scientists research at universities
- Job trainings
- Food waste reduction programs
- Increase accessibility to information (multiple languages, online and in-person resources, etc.)
- Policy changes at the local and state levels
- Greener building codes
- *Create a dedicated Sustainability division housed within the NDDEQ*
- *Tax incentives for EVs and hybrid vehicles*
- *Utilization of CO2 capturing bricks in North Dakota*
- *Graphyte (Breakthrough Energy Ventures carbon-laden plant matter blocks)*
- *Change farm subsidy laws*
- *Tax incentives for recycling*

1.5 OTHER

Question: Is there anything else you want us to know on this topic?

- Both in-person and online participants expressed the idea that more individuals should be involved in this conversation.
- Better outreach to individuals instead of organizations/industries at large,
- Educational sessions for interested parties, and
- Demonstrations to show how ideas from the Sustainability Plan should be implemented.
- Establish a Green Step program like Minnesota
- More environmental education
- Dakota Legacy Initiative
- Renewable energy/sustainability work training
- Incentivize prairie land restoration
- Increase regulations and enforcement on polluters
- Put solar on roofs, schools, city buildings
- Invest in train system upgrades
- Make the connection easier for people to apply and receive grants
- Connect with more individuals throughout the CPRG process
- *Enforce clean water laws on farms*
- *Include all age groups within this conversation*
- *Emphasize local improvements rather than statewide improvements*
- *Reduce political alignments in the oil and gas industry*

2. DISCUSSION OF EXAMPLE GHG REDUCTION STRATEGIES

To bring the conversation to a more tactical level, a series of greenhouse gas emissions reductions examples were displayed on posters during each session for participants' reactions. It was noted that these examples were not proposals, just examples of strategies that have been implemented in other communities.

In-person participants were given red and blue sticker-dots to place next to any example on which they had an opinion. Blue was used to indicate support of an example for use in North Dakota; red indicated that they did not support the example for North Dakota. Participants were also given post-it notes to add additional examples, suggestions or comments/questions.

Online participants received a link via the chat in Zoom to a Microsoft form with the same list of examples. They were given the option to click "support", "not support" or "skip" the question. They also were able to elaborate on their responses.

All participants were cautioned that this process was meant to gauge general support or opposition to the various examples, that they were not voting.

The following "word cloud" graphic depicts how often (larger letters = more dots) that examples were selected, and to what degree they were supported (blue) or not supported (red).

SUMMARY OF REACTIONS



Note: The larger the type, the more often a strategy received a dot during this activity in Minot.

Blue type = support. Red type = do not support.

In addition to placing red or blue dots on sample greenhouse gas emission reduction strategies posters, participants were invited to discuss the options and compare reactions to the sample strategies.

Strategy	Verbatim Comments
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go big on things that are already there on solutions that support family farms and support small towns. There is a tendency to look for new solutions and concepts. G • I hope we invest where we got our start, with agriculture. And get into different corners of the state that don't often get much attention. • Mycology is science involving mushrooms, which has the ability to break down carbons into neutral, non-toxic molecules.
Financing Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think financing programs are very important. Our state gives away millions of dollars to other industries and renewables should be included in that.
Carbon Capture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'd give a blue dot if carbon was stored at a a source's facility, not if it's moved across somebody else's land • It basically creates another problem that needs to be addressed, rather than just addressing the issue head-on. • People are not in favor of a CO2 pipeline, because of the risks from a release in a low-lying area.
Energy Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants of low interest loans for energy efficiency and renewable energy installations.
Walking and Biking Paths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From a road-building perspective, when paths are built with roads it adds cost, requires easements, and there are additional safety issues with crossings. Is this where you're going to get your biggest return in the context of greenhouse gas emissions?
Conservation Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are conservation practices universally understood?
Low/No Carbon Fuels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I remember in the late nineties, when ethanol was hailed as a replacement for gasoline. That it's green and good for everybody. But now we know ethanol produces just as much of our CO2 emissions as gasoline. It's an example of how we need to address the issues head-on.
Anaerobic Digesters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We don't have large animal feeding facilities that would justify building a digester.

3. WAYS TO ENGAGE

Sustainability Input Forums and the corresponding online survey were the first in a series of engagement opportunities led by North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality in support of long-term sustainability planning and North Dakota's collective greenhouse gas emissions reductions work.

Video recordings, reports, notices of future engagement opportunities, and additional methods to provide feedback may be found at the NDDEQ website: <https://deq.nd.gov/sustainability/>

For additional information, contact Jennifer Skjod, NDDEQ Public Information Officer, via email at jskjod@nd.gov

Thank you to those who shared their passions and wisdom as part of this conversation.

APPENDIX - EXAMPLE STRATEGIES

The following examples were provided as examples of greenhouse gas emission reduction strategies being implemented in U.S. communities. These examples were provided by ERM to generate discussion and reaction during North Dakota Sustainability Input Forums. Please note that these were not provided as proposals, nor were participants asked to rank or vote on them.

Energy Implementation and Development

- **Renewable Energy** - Incentives for installing renewable energy and energy storage systems on commercial properties
- **Energy Efficiency** - Incentives for installing end-use energy efficiency measures in commercial and residential buildings
- **Financing Programs** - Establish a financing program (e.g., grants or low-interest loans) for energy efficiency and renewable energy installations in new and existing buildings
- **Electric Vehicles and Charging** - Incentives to increase the share of electric vehicles (e.g., leasing and purchasing), and to expand electric vehicle charging infrastructure
- **Carbon Capture** - Programs to support or incentivize carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS) at industrial and energy facilities
- **Industrial Efficiency** - Programs to support or incentivize implementation of energy efficiency measures in industry, including energy audits, strategic energy management, equipment upgrades, and waste heat utilization
- **Low/No Carbon Fuels** - Programs to support or incentivize greenhouse gas emission reductions in industrial energy use and industrial processes, including use of low/no carbon fuels, electrification, renewable energy, and process improvements
- **Low-Carbon Materials** - Programs to develop, expand, and support markets for low-embodied carbon materials and products, such as cement and steel
- **Renewables Permitting** - Streamline permitting for renewable energy projects
- **Waste Stream Reduction** - Increase the efficiency or effectiveness of waste reduction, reuse, recycling, or composting programs. Reducing the amount of materials entering landfills.
- **Wastewater Facility Efficiency** - Incentives for installing renewable energy and energy efficiency measures at wastewater treatment facilities
- **Reducing Landfill Emissions** - Incentives to reduce methane emissions from landfills and wastewater treatment facilities, including through collection for use

Agriculture

- **Anerobic Digesters** - Incentives to promote anaerobic digesters to capture methane and generate renewable energy or produce renewable fuel
- **Alternative Fuels Equipment** - Incentive programs to fund agricultural equipment technologies that use alternative fuels
- **Fertilizer Application Practices** - Incentives for technologies and techniques that reduce nitrous oxide emissions from fertilizer application such as precision agriculture practices
- **Using Natural Fertilizers** – Reinforcing soil health with the life cycle of the animal

- **Conservation Practices** - Implement programs that support best practices in agricultural conservation to help protect soil health, including cover crops, no-till, other runoff reduction techniques
- **Economic Development** - Programs for local and regional economic development partners to establish food- and agriculture-based economic development strategies, such as community-based food co-ops

Community, Public Service and Government

- **Solar Energy** - Increase access and funding for solar panels on your home or businesses in your community
- **Energy Efficiency** - Funding for increasing energy efficiency in your home or businesses in your community, including proper insulation
- **Electric Vehicles and Charging** - Increasing electric vehicle charging stations in your community
- **Sustainable Building Materials** - Utilizing sustainable building materials for your local buildings
- **Public Transportation** - Increasing the availability and access to public transportation in your community
- **Walking and Biking Paths** - Additional walking and biking paths in your community
- **Energy Storage** - Funding for battery technology to store solar energy at commercial businesses
- **Waste Reduction and Elimination Strategies** - Providing residential recycling and composting service
- **Freight Efficiency** - Increasing efficiency in freight movement.