

Audubon | GREAT PLAINS

Preparing for the Nebraska Legislative Session

What to Expect and How to Engage

Thursday, November 12 | 7:00 – 8:00 pm

Audubon Great Plains

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 12 | 7:00 – 8:00 PM

Webinar Agenda

7:00 – 7:07	Welcome, Introductions & About Audubon	Kristal
7:07 – 7:12	Webinar Goals & Audience Poll	Traci
7:12 – 7:22	Nebraska Policy & Political Landscape Overview	Katie
7:22 – 7:32	Legislature Preview & Top Issues to Watch	Katie
7:32 – 7:45	Audubon's Policy Priorities & Effective Engagement	Traci
7:45 – 8:00	Audience Q&A, Resources & Closing	Traci

Welcome & Introductions

1. **Welcome to the first Audubon Great Plains Policy webinar!**

2. **Introduce yourself in the chat**
   - *Name and where you are located*

3. **Introduce speakers**



Kristal Stoner

Vice President – Audubon Great Plains



Traci Bruckner

Senior Manager, Policy – Audubon Great Plains



Katie Zulkoski

Lobbyist, Zulkoski Weber

About Audubon & Why We're Here

Our mission: Audubon protects birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow – work that dates back more than 120 years.

A hemispheric conservation approach: 500+ chapters, 55 centers and sanctuaries, and conservation work in 11 countries along birds' migratory flyways.

Audubon Great Plains: Serving Nebraska and the Dakotas, including Rowe Sanctuary and Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center.

Our priorities: Healthy grasslands and working lands, a flowing Platte River, and connecting people to nature.

Why we're here today: Decisions at the Capitol shape land, water, and wildlife. This session sets a two-year budget, and engaged, informed voices make a difference.

Key Takeaways

By the end of this webinar, you will:

1. Understand the **policy environment** heading into the new legislative session.
2. Be familiar with the **legislative timeline**, potential **leadership and committee changes** and their implications.
3. Identify major **policy issues** and emerging topics likely to receive legislative attention.
4. Know where to find **reliable information** and **track bills** throughout the session.
5. Gain practical tips for **building relationships** with senators, legislative staff, and other key stakeholders.
6. Better understand **opportunities to provide input** through meetings, advocacy efforts, and committee hearings.
7. Leave with **actionable steps** to stay informed and engaged throughout the legislative session.

Our Goal Today

Our goal today is not to predict every outcome of the session, but to help you understand the landscape, identify where key decisions will be made, and provide practical tools to engage effectively throughout the legislative process.



AUDIENCE POLL

Poll: Your Advocacy Experience

How would you describe your experience engaging with the Nebraska Legislature?

A. This is my first legislative session

B. I’ve followed legislative issues but haven’t engaged directly

C. I’ve contacted policymakers or testified before

D. I’m regularly involved in advocacy efforts

Policy & Political Landscape

1

Key Trends Shaping the Upcoming Session

- *New Senators*
- *Budget Session – Create and pass the 2027-2029 budget in the face of a $1 billion shortfall*
- *Previous funding sweeps – will that threat continue?*

2

Economic, Budgetary & Political Factors Influencing Lawmakers

- *$208 million shortfall this biennium, and an additional $864 million shortfall for 2027-2029*
- *Partisan makeup of a non-partisan body has changed*
- *Troubling farm economy – property taxes*

3

Major Developments Since the Last Legislative Session

- *Growing budget deficit*
- *Pending lawsuit regarding funding sweeps from NET*
- *Election results*

Legislative Timeline – 110th Legislature

January 6	January 21	January 19	Late February	June 4
1	2	3	4	5
Legislature convenes on Wednesday, January 6	*Bill introduction deadline – January 21* *They have 10 days to introduce bills. Governor can have a bill introduced at any time*	*Committee hearings begin – January 19*	*Priority bill designations – late February*	*Target adjournment – June 4, 2027*

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS | FY2027–29 biennial budget

Jan. 15
Governor's budget proposal due

February – March
Appropriations agency hearings; preliminary budget released

Late February
Forecasting Board updates revenue forecast

April 27
Committee budget due on the floor; final April revenue forecast

May 14
Budget must pass; Governor has 5 days to sign or veto. FY starts July 1

Membership, Leadership & Committees

New and Returning Senators

15
new senators

34
returning senators

What their arrival means for the policy environment

- **New committee leaders:** New chairs could shift which bills move.
- **A steep learning curve:** 14 brand new senators (1 previously served) will need trusted information.
- **A chance to connect early:** Now is the time to build new relationships.

Potential Leadership & Committee Chair Changes

- *New Speaker of the Legislature – likely Senator Ibach*
- *New Appropriations Committee Chair – likely Senator Strommen*
- *New Revenue Committee Chair – likely Senator Jacobsen*
- *New Natural Resources Committee Chair – likely Senator DeKay*
- *New Agriculture Committee Chair – likely Senator Storm*

Committee Structure & Implications

- *Key Committees*
  - *Appropriations*
  - *Revenue*
  - *Natural Resources*
  - *Agriculture (sometimes)*
- *How legislation advances*

Top Issues to Watch This Session

High-priority conservation-related issues

1

State Budget

Why it matters: $1 billion budget shortfall will be the central issue, and proposals to cut spending and/or generate revenue could impact conservation issues.

2

Conservation Funding – Nebraska Environmental Trust and Nebraska Conservation Wildlife Fund

Why it matters: Court order froze transfers; $1 billion budget shortfall means NET and NCWF funding likely to be targeted again.

3

Data Centers

Why it matters: Nebraska needs to decide how we will contend with data centers. This issue will be considered this year so it will be a live issue.

Monitor early: New bills, the Governor's budget, committee referrals and hearing dates. The first weeks set the agenda for the whole session.

Audubon Great Plains' Top Policy Priorities

1	**Defense of State Conservation Funding**	Support the Trust's funding and continued existence, ensuring adherence to its original intended goals, as well as the Nebraska Wildlife Conservation Fund
2	**Renewable Energy**	Promote policies that advances renewable energy development with proper siting.
3	**Conservation Easements Protection**	Ensure easements are recognized for protecting individual property rights and conserving valuable wildlife habitat.
4	**Natural Climate Solutions**	Advance policies that use native grasslands, wetlands, and other natural systems for carbon sequestration and natural infrastructure.
5	**Platte River**	While we always monitor for any state level legislation relating to the Platte River, majority of our work related to the Platte River is not a state legislative issue.

Effective Legislative Engagement

1

Staying informed throughout the session

- *Follow the Nebraska Legislature website.*
- *Watch committee hearings and floor debate.*
- *Sign up for Audubon Great Plains action alerts!*

2

Building relationships with senators and staff

- *Invite your Senator into the field.*
- *Attend local legislative events.*
- *Acknowledge and thank them!*

3

Effective advocacy and communication practices

- *If you are a constituent, say so!*
- *Tell your own story.*
- *Make a clear ask.*
- *Stick to what you know.*

4

Engaging in committee hearings and legislative debate

- *Every bill receives a public hearing!*
- *Testify in person or submit written comments.*
- *Track hearing dates/legislation on the website.*

Poll: Your Engagement Priorities

Which engagement strategies or activities most interest you?

A. Sign up for Audubon's Action Alerts and information!

B. Contacting my senator and building a relationship with his/her office!

C. Attending local legislative events!

D. Attending a legislative hearing and providing testimony/submitting written comments!

E. All of the above!



Q&A & CLOSING

Audience Q&A

Reminders, Resources & Next Steps

Scan the QR code to sign up for e-news and Policy News.

1

Key Reminders

- *Session convenes **Wednesday, January 6.***
- *Bill introduction closes after the **first 10 legislative days.***
- ***2027 is a budget year,** and every dollar is up for debate.*
- *Your **own senator** is your most powerful audience.*

2

Resources

- ***NebraskaLegislature.gov** for bill search, hearing schedules and Find Your Senator.*
- ***Unicameral Update** (update.legislature.ne.gov) for weekly session news.*
- ***Nebraska Public Media** for live video of hearings and floor debate.*
- ***Audubon Great Plains** action alerts and policy updates.*
- *https://act.audubon.org/a/subscribe-audubon-great-plains-news*

3

Next Steps to Stay Engaged

- ***Sign up** for Audubon Great Plains action alerts.*
- ***Look up your senator** and send a short introduction before January.*
- ***Invite your senator and their staff** to local events in this district or plan a bird outing next spring.*



Thank You

Traci Bruckner

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