Group meets in Gothenburg to learn about Platte River Basin, work on funding sources.

Taxing everything from pop to irrigators was on the table for the Nebraska Water Funding Task Force Friday.

The 34-member group, formed by the Nebraska Legislature, met Thursday and Friday at the Monsanto Learning Center.

Lawmakers, members of the Natural Resources Commission and people appointed from cities, power districts and the agricultural sector comprise the task force.

Members have until December to figure out how to meet long-term water sustainability and increased water-use productivity by identifying and prioritizing projects that meet these goals.

Another objective is coming up with a list of sources and possibilities to fund programs, projects and activities.

Facilitator Patti Banks said the public will expect that everyone who benefits from water should contribute to the cost but not necessarily in the same percentages.

“So stay as open minded as possible,” Banks said

Some of the ideas suggested included using part of the sales tax, bonding and loans, taxing

lottery and cigarette sales, putting an excise tax on projects produced by water that leave the state and on water users.

How much to tax the biggest users of water in the state—irrigators—came up several times.

Ground and surface irrigation account for 93% of the water used in Nebraska.

Ag producer Roric Paulman, task force co-chair, said awareness about the state's water resources, needs and how to sustain them is needed.

Getting people to understand the need for a sustainable water plan would help "get skin in the game for everyone," Paulman said.

Soliciting contributions from companies like Coca-Cola, that want to make a green impact, was also mentioned as a possibility.

Sen. Mark Christensen of Imperial said conservation has caused water shortage issues, starting with the building of dams, and methods such as no-till farming.

"We're doing a good job of holding water on land when it used to run off," he said.

Christensen also suggested taxing pop and water so "you get something off of everyone."

"Ag will be taxed because they can't pass it on and industry will leave if they're taxed," he said about the fairness of his idea.

Sen. Ken Schilz of Ogallala cautioned against taxing inputs because it could be detrimental to the economy.

“Price is tied to commodities,” he said.

Schilz also pointed out differences between ground and surface water, noting that if groundwater users were taxed, the assumption might be that water will be there when needed.

Chandler Mazour, Monsanto Learning Center manager, wondered if a charge should be placed on water.

“Globally it’s a basic right,” Mazour said.

Also at Friday’s session, Lyndon Vogt, general manager of the Central Platte Resources District, talked about Platte River Basin projects near Gothenburg.

The task force will meet again Thursday and Friday in LaVista.

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