

# **One Hundred Ninth Legislature - First Session - 2025**

## **Introducer's Statement of Intent**

### **LB317**

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**Chairperson: Senator Tom Brandt**

**Committee: Natural Resources**

**Date of Hearing: February 13, 2025**

The following constitutes the reasons for this bill and the purposes which are sought to be accomplished thereby:

The bill is introduced at the request of the Governor.

Sections 1 through 6 include language to merge the Department of Natural Resources into the Department of Environment and Energy. The combined agency is renamed the Department of Water, Energy, and Environment effective July 1, 2025. The Director of Environment and Energy shall be renamed the Director of Water, Energy, and Environment. The Director of Water, Energy, and Environment will administer the Department of Water, Energy, and Environment, the position currently held by the Director of the Department of Environment and Energy. The Director of Natural Resources shall be renamed the Chief Water Officer and retain the authorities previously prescribed for the administration of duties of the Department of Natural Resources. Transfers all statutory powers and duties, responsibilities and obligations, contracts, employees, and assets of the Department of Natural Resources to the Department of Water, Energy, and Environment.

Sections 7 through 14, 16, 17, 19 through 28, 31 through 56, 59 through 241, 243 through 247, 253 through 296, 300 through 308, 310 through 323, 325, 327 through 329, and 331 through 389 includes harmonizing sections solely due to the change in agency and director names.

Section 15 removes a provision related to the elimination of the water and planning review process.

Section 18 amends section related to agreements entered for the purpose of allocating funds pursuant to the Water Sustainability Fund. The term of such agreements for the payment of such funds shall not exceed ten years. (2-1511(2)).

Sections 29 and 30 remove a provision related to the proposed repeal of 2-3277 and 2-3278 (Long Range Implementation Plans and individual project plans).

Sections 57 and 58 transfer duties related to locating State Game Refuge Boundaries and adopting and promulgating rules and regulations for such boundaries to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. (37-707 to 37-708.01).

Section 242 removes a provision related to the elimination of sections related to the Nebraska Conservation Corporation Act.

Section 248 renames the Director Natural Resources as the Chief Water Officer of the Department of Water, Energy, and Environment, removes professional engineer qualification for such position, and creates the Division of Water within the Department of Water, Energy, and Environment. Inserts language that the Chief Water Officer shall be appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Legislature and shall report directly to the Director of Water, Energy, and Environment.

Sections 249 through 252 transfer powers, authorities, jurisdiction of the Department of Natural Resources to the Department of Water, Energy, and Environment and includes harmonizing sections due to the change in agency and director names.

Sections 297 through 299 removes a provision related to the repeal of the Low-Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Act. Includes harmonizing sections due to the change in agency and director names.

Sections 309 removes a provision related to the repeal of the Low-Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Act.

Section 324 provides exemptions from the State Personnel System for assistant directors and deputies of the agency. (81-1316(1)(cc)).

Section 326 amends method of appointment of the Director of Water, Energy, and Environment. (81-1503(7)).

Section 330 changes sunset date for the Litter Reduction and Recycling Act.

Section 390 provides for an operative date of July 1, 2025.

Section 391 repeals original sections.

Section 392 repeals:

Sections related to the Nebraska Soil Survey Fund (2-1596, 2-1597, 2-1598)

Sections related to the Water Planning and Review process (2-15,100, 2-15,101, 2-15,103, 2-15,105, 2-15,106)

Sections related to Long Range Implementation Plans and individual project plans (P2-3277, 2-3278)

Sections related to the Conservation Corporation Act (2-4201 through 2-4246)

Sections related to annual reports by board of directors of irrigation districts (46-199)

The Low-Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Act (71-3508.02; 81-1578 through 81-15,116)

Sections related to the previous merger of the State Energy Office and the Department of Environmental Quality and certain duties and functions of the Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Environment and Energy. (81-15,54 through 81-15,259; 81-15,293 through 81-15,298)

Section 393 adds an emergency clause.

**Principal Introducer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Senator Tom Brandt**