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School of Natural Resource Sciences

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School of Natural Resource Sciences
May 13, 2002
Cornhusker Hotel, Lincoln
John C. Owens
NU Vice President and Harlan Vice Chancellor, IANR

Good afternoon.

Thank you for asking me to be with you today; I welcome this opportunity to talk with you, to hear what you're thinking, and to participate with you in an exchange of ideas.

I've been asked to make some prepared-remarks "this afternoon, and when those are ended I welcome your ideas, your questions, and your comments. I look forward to more-discussions" with you at other times, as well. I do have open-hours "Friday afternoons, and encourage faculty and staff to stop by to visit, to share an idea, to ask a question, or to just visit. Sometimes duties call-me-away", as they will for the next few Fridays, but I try to be available as many Friday afternoons as possible for drop-in visitors. I hope you'll be among them. As a big believer in the land grant university, with our mission of teaching, research, and extension-education, I also am a big believer "that it takes all of us", working together, to fulfill that mission.

I look forward, as I know you all do, to completion of Phase 1 "of the new

natural resources building. Dale Vanderholm tells me the construction start date is March 2003 with the completion date April 2004. Some initial site work, ~~street and parking relocation~~, etc., is likely this summer. We're looking forward to having as many as possible of the School's ~~faculty members~~, except for those principally in CSD and those with ~~relatively small~~ appointments, in the school together in that new building. Won't it be terrific to be able to walk down the hall, rather than between buildings, to talk with each other? As you all know, we expect to build the facility in three phases, and I applaud ~~everyone~~ who worked so hard to bring us to this point in Phase I. This is a wonderful achievement.

Phase II is ~~a goal~~ we continue to work toward. In the current state economy, state funding for a new building appears a long way off. Nebraska has no representative on the ~~appropriations committees~~ in Congress, which is important, but because that is not the case, we will continue to work through the avenues open to us to ~~pursue funding~~ for Phase II. For a little historical perspective, it's my understanding the Marvel Baker Building was completed in 1968 and the new Animal Sciences addition in 1988. I've no doubt ~~a number~~ of people were working hard in the years inbetween to complete that long-running project!

I'm told that an animal-husbandry-building ~~committee~~ was appointed in 1960 and recommended construction of ~~three units~~ in close proximity to Loeffel Meat

Lab, which was constructed in 1953. They recommended that ~~all four units~~ be connected by ~~arcades~~.

Eight years later Marvel Baker Hall was constructed as Phase I of the proposal; it included ~~parts of the needs~~ outlined by the committee. Phase II was to be constructed within 10 years. They thought. And they hoped! In 1967 the then-College of Agriculture projected Phase II ~~to be~~ funded in 1975, with the building completed in 1977. By 1977 the university's construction ~~schedule~~ was behind, and the UNL Capital ~~Construction request~~ identified Animal Science II for construction in 1979-80. As I said, Animal Sciences was completed in 1988 – 20 years after the Marvel Baker building. Things worth doing always take some time.

I want to thank each of you here today for ~~the vital work~~ you are doing for the your students School, the Institute, the university, and Nebraska. We look to you to provide Nebraska with a scientific ~~basis~~ for the development of sound land and water use policies and practices. It's you who add to the knowledge ~~base~~ for enhancing environmental quality and ensuring the sustainability of natural resource systems. It's you who create classroom and extension-education programs focused on integrating resource needs with the carrying ~~capacity~~ of natural ~~resource~~ systems. It's your research that provides Nebraskans and others with ways to reduce soil erosion and improve water quality by developing improved management practices.

That's tremendous and important work, to discover and to teach, in the classroom and through extension-education, the most effective and efficient ways "both to use and to conserve our natural resources for the preservation, health, safety, and enjoyment of current-and-future generations. Sharing that knowledge so that decision makers, producers, and citizens can make informed-choices" is vital. I look forward, as I know all of you do, to seeing the School "continue" this much-needed "work" as it grows and flourishes in the years ahead.

Your vision is a lofty one, and I quote: "*The School of Natural Resource Sciences will become an international leader in natural resource and ecosystem-sciences" by fostering an integrated systems approach to teaching, research, scholarly service, outreach, and lifelong learning. The School will (1) advance understanding of "complex" relationships and interactions within and among natural and managed ecosystems, (2) provide leadership for outstanding academic and outreach "programs" in natural resources and environmental sciences, (3) encourage "stewardship" of natural resources through strategies that are ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially responsible, and (4) foster collaboration within and among "disciplines and with private and governmental organizations."*

What "better-place" for that than Nebraska, with our vast array of natural resources? What better people to do that than you? I do believe that, working

together, we can achieve that vision. It will not occur without-some-bumps along the way. But if that is truly your vision, and if you are truly committed to it, the administration of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources is committed to you, and to working with you, step-by-step, to achieve these goals.

I was asked to talk a little bit about the budget today, and I'm glad to do so – I have been talking about the budget a great deal lately, at APC committee hearings, with our constituents, with members of the Institute and the university communities. I am looking forward to times when the budget is not such an all-consuming topic in my conversations, and we can focus again on other things! That will be a good-day for us all.

If you'll remember, a year ago at this time we were looking at one of the best budgets the university had received in some time. Then life happened. The state's revenues started coming in below the revenues forecast upon which the state budget was built. The governor called the Legislature to Lincoln for a special session in October. Not knowing what the outcome of that special session would be, the chancellor asked all UNL units to prepare budget-cutting scenarios of 5 percent. The university finally was asked to cut 2.5 percent, and following that October special-session the Institute lost \$1,464,060 from our budget, plus the Legislature

cut the vet student contract program by \$46,460, for a total cut of \$1,510,520 – not quite a 2.5 percent cut for us.

In the legislative session that ended in April, the university was assessed another 1 percent cut – as you'll remember from reading the newspapers and listening to radio and television, the governor asked for a 3 percent cut to the university budget, but the Legislature put the cut at 1 percent, and overrode the governor's vetoes of both the budget and revenue bills to keep it there.

That 1 percent cut sent us back to look at the Institute again – to ask ourselves how can we preserve and even possibly strengthen programs in this time of budget cutting? Are there areas that could work more together to the betterment of the state? We think that may be possible with an integration of the Conservation and Survey Division and the School of Natural Resource Sciences, and, as you know, I have proposed that. I understand this was discussed when the School was formed; the need to elevate the natural resources in IANR and the current economic circumstances seem to make it a good time to explore this further. I've asked our deans, as well as the Dean of Arts and Sciences, along with Kyle Hoagland and Mark Kuzila, ^{TO WORK WITH THE FACULTY + STAFF} to take leadership in this, and I've communicated with Ted Elliott, who told me he could see many good things flow from it, and he is sorry he can't be at the table now to be part of the discussions. I've asked Dr. Charles Laughlin to

work with all of you as this discussion progresses. *I THINK DR. LAUGHLIN WILL CALL EVERYONE TOGETHER SOON,*

For the Institute the 1 percent budget cut assessed the university means we must carve another \$404,449 from our budget. That means that in less than a year IANR has had to reduce our permanent budget close to \$1.9 million dollars. As you know, that is both difficult and painful.

When we made the budget cut necessitated by the October special session, we did a much more across-the-board reduction. As part of its 5 percent budget-cutting scenario, the School met its responsibility by identifying a position to not be refilled. So did many other departments and units.

An across-the-board cut shares the pain, but it also weakens every program. When we were told we must cut another \$404,449, the Institute's administrative team went back to those 5 percent cut scenarios Chancellor Perlman originally had requested from each unit. As we worked through them it became painfully clear that we cannot continue to bleed all programs the same, or we will weaken the Institute beyond its capacity to provide the quality asked of our faculty and staff. Doing that would not be to the advantage of the Institute, the university, our constituents, or the state of Nebraska. So we made the hard decision to look for vertical cuts where reasonable alternatives were available. This was per a recommendation of the IANR Budget Reduction Task Force, which was appointed

following the October special session. We looked for vertical cuts to preserve other Institute programs from further weakening. That led to the difficult recommendation to close the Panhandle Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, a vertical cut that accounts for a little over half of the \$404,449 the Institute must cut. In addition, we have recommended as cuts a .55 FTE staff position in International Programs, which we hope successful grant and contract funding will make possible continuing the position; two vacant FTE faculty positions, one in agricultural economics and one in agricultural journalism in Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication; and one vacant FTE Nebraska Forest Service staff secretary III position.

There is not one cut on our list that was easy to make, or that any of us feel good about. Each of the cuts made in this current round of budget cuts, as well as in the round following the October special session, diminishes the work our faculty and staff can do now and in the future for Nebraska. Unfortunately, the circumstances in which we and the state of Nebraska find ourselves necessitate our making difficult choices which we think will do the least overall, long-term damage to IANR programs, the university, and Nebraska.

The sad truth is, cutting budgets means making choices we'd rather not make – and we don't get to say "we'll pass on that" because we don't like them. Cutting

budgets means choosing what we think is the least "bad choice" from an array of bad choices, knowing we are disappointing, even angering, people we value and respect. Now, with state revenues for March below forecasts, and with early indicators pointing to lower-than-expected April revenues, as well, the state's budget situation remains highly uncertain. We do not appear to be out of the woods yet, and the words "special session" still float in some circles as a possibility later this year. We hope that won't happen, but believe me, we will be keeping a close eye on those state-revenue-figures, and we will remain frugal and guarded in our expenditures as the best way to buffer our programs should the state decide another cut is necessary.

That doesn't mean everything is bleak, of course, and we must keep our perspective. Better times will come. Good work is moving forward in the Institute and the university. The School of Natural Resource Sciences has received approval for a Wildlife Population Ecologist position for which you'll be recruiting. Excellent research and effective extension-education is ongoing, and we are sending well-prepared graduates out into the world to make a difference in it. Many of you know that I have a special interest in establishing a Federal Fish and Wildlife Co-op Research Unit at the University of Nebraska in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. This morning, I

spoke with Appropriations Committee staff members in Washington D.C., and was told that the Nebraska Co-op Unit is "in-the-mix," and while the Committee is awaiting a final appropriations "number" from its leadership, the Nebraska unit is "farther-along" than it ever has been. While we "cannot" declare total success today, I am "optimistic" that the next federal budget will finally see "the-establishment" of the Nebraska unit.

THE SCHOOLS' ~~graduates~~ graduates – well, actually the students "who-first" must be undergraduates "before" they can become graduates – are "another-topic" I'd like to discuss with you today.

I cannot emphasize "too-strongly" that students are absolutely vital to the success of the Institute, and I consider it everybody's job – *everybody's*, whether we teach or not – "to recruit" students to the School of Natural Resource Sciences, the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, and, for that matter, the College of Human Resources and Family Sciences.

Majors within the School of Natural Resource Sciences, like the College of ^{SOME OTHERS IN} Agricultural ~~Sciences and Natural Resources~~, have seen undergraduate enrollments "decline." Between fall 2000 and fall 2001, "undergraduate-students" pursuing majors in the bachelor of science in natural resources dropped 15 percent – 29 students.

This cannot continue, for several reasons.

First, we provide a high-quality education that prepares students well for exciting, productive, needed careers. Teaching, along with research and extension education, is a vital role of all land-grant universities. Learning is an adventure, and you all have, in my opinion, wonderfully adventurous academic areas for students to explore in your undergraduate majors of Environmental Soil Science, Environmental Studies (Natural Resources), Fisheries and Wildlife, Natural Resource and Environmental Economics, Rangeland Ecosystems, and Water Science.

We need to get the word out so young people – and their parents, and their friends – understand the exciting, fulfilling careers natural resources can offer them, along with our “farm gate to restaurant plate” opportunities in agriculture. We need to make them aware of the exciting career paths to which School of Natural Resource Sciences majors can lead. We need to share the excitement we feel for the adventures that careers in our academic disciplines provide. We need to make clear the value we place on working with our students as they seek their dreams, and as they not only learn how to make their livings, but as they also learn how to live their lives.

Two, we can no more expect one or two people with the designation of “college recruiter” to handle all the recruiting needs and duties of our colleges than we can expect one or two scientists to handle all the natural resources research –

needs of Nebraska.

Three – and this is very critical – we *absolutely cannot close our eyes* to the fact that legislative bodies, university administrators, and our own colleagues pay a “great deal of attention” to college enrollment figures. These opinion leaders often “make judgments” about programs – and the funding for them – based on declining or “increasing enrollment in the college” to which those programs are attached. At all times it is “good” to have strong enrollment numbers. This is “especially important” in times that budgets are tight. That's a reality we “all” must face. Here in the Institute, research, teaching, and extension education are “interrelated and interwoven”. The success of each builds on – and reflects on – the others.

Fourth, the areas you and the other parts of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and the College of Human Resources and Family Sciences “represent” – natural resources, food, from start to finish, human resources – these areas “all” need leaders. They need people coming into the field who “care” about them and are seeking solutions to their concerns. They need people with the skills, and “training necessary” to work through all the situations, changes, and challenges life is going to present to them. They need “what” we provide students to have in the Institute “to help” prepare them for that.

This is “what” we do in land grant universities. Each of us has a responsibility

in telling the IANR story, in making clear the importance and the excitement of what we do. I think that's a large part of recruiting – sharing the excitement of the work we do, and sharing our firm belief that our work is important to the present and to the future. You're in fields where there is no doubt about that. In our research we must be unbiased, but in sharing the story of the value of the work we do – the work you do, each one of you – we need to let the excitement, the challenge, and the commitment shine through.

I challenge each person in this room to have a ready, 30 - 60 second sentence answer to the question, "Why did you go into the work you do?" And then I urge you to have a 30 second follow-up that says, "And I stay in this work because...." Talk about the importance. Talk about the value. Talk about the careers students coming into your field can pursue, the opportunities open to them, the excitement and satisfaction that comes to those who do work in these areas. Talk about how this College, although part of a big university, has a family feel that's built on a tradition of working with, knowing, mentoring, and caring about students.

When you go to meetings and visit schools, take handouts. Handouts about the School of Natural Resource Sciences, handouts about the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. I'm sure CASNR would furnish you with copies of their newsletter that provides a glimpse into the atmosphere and

excitement of the college and campus, as well as other handouts, to couple with ~~"your information about your own majors."~~ Maybe a meeting you attend wasn't ~~"intended to be a recruiting meeting, but that doesn't mean there aren't"~~ parents there who have children looking for colleges and careers! Leaving something behind that has a phone number or Web site address can ~~"prompt further contact."~~ It's not hard to do; we're just not always used to doing it. After a couple of times, it starts to be automatic.

I think of Mike Meyer, our water science major who was part of CASNR's informational radio campaign this year, who was almost ~~"lyrical"~~ when he talked about why he studied ~~"what he studies."~~ What ~~"a tribute to the work you do."~~

Then, of course, because it is so important that we continually recruit students, it is equally important that we ~~"constantly work"~~ to develop these industry ~~AND AGENCY~~ relationships and opportunities that allow our students to pursue successful careers ~~"once they graduate."~~ This, too, is an ~~"important part"~~ of what we do.

I'm going to close my remarks today with ~~"the measures of success"~~ for the School of Natural Resource Sciences that were included in the proposal for the school that was submitted to the Academic Planning Committee Feb. 28, 1997, and I quote:

"The success of the School will be determined by the degree to which its

academic programs prepare students to enhance and promote sustainable use of natural resources in Nebraska, the Great Plains, and other regions of ~~the nation~~, ~~and the world~~. It will depend on "how" the School serves the needs of rural and urban communities in addressing environmental issues and the degree to which it "will promote" increased understanding among all citizens of Nebraska, the region, and the nation in dealing with various environmental issues. Another measure of success will be the degree to which interdisciplinary academic programs are developed at both the undergraduate and graduate level. The School will encourage more "team taught" courses. Each major will have a formal "outcome/assessment-evaluation" that will address the success of the academic programs.

"The School will be successful if it truly helps to bring together appropriate units from UNL campuses to conduct interdisciplinary research, teaching, and outreach programs in a "more-effective-manner" than has been done before. The School will be successful if it can recruit, retain, and maintain a faculty and staff that can successfully compete for extramural funds by developing areas of emphasis that "achieve" national and international prominence. Fully coordinated, and compatible "outreach-material" that is consistent across agencies and organizations, public and private, will provide the clientele a "reliable-source" of

information on environmental issues. Partnerships[\]across[\]state-and-federal agencies and public and private entities will be[\]evidence-of-success."

"Increased flexibility to address programmatic issues and allow the faculty/staff more internal mobility will contribute to the School's success. It will be successful if the School achieves a coordinated program that becomes[\]the-focal-point[\]for building a Natural Resources Building Complex. The School will be successful[\]if[\]the faculty and staff who work in the School, and its alumni are proud of it."

I know there are[\]difficulties[\]you face in the School, and let me add, we all face them together. Some are the[\]difficulties[\]of a new venture, some the difficulties of circumstance. As the late comedian Gilda Radner used to say, "It's always something." I hope, however, that as you[\]heard[\]that list of assessing success for the School it caused you to say to yourself, "you know, sometimes we get so busy shoveling the trenches that we forget to look back and see how far we've come." I hope[\]collectively[\]you'll recognize what you've achieved as a School, and know ~~THAT~~ others recognize it, too. I know reviewing a list like that also often prompts me to ~~say:~~ "Ah – there's[\]an area[\] we could strengthen. That's something we could do."

I have[\]faith[\] in what you're doing and in what, working together, we[\]all[\] can do. Thank you for[\]asking-me[\] to be here with you today. I look forward now to hearing your ideas and comments. ###