

# **Sandhills Task Force**

*"Where People and Land Are One"*

**P.O. Box 1686**

**Kearney, NE 68848**

**September, 2004**

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## **Next Task Force Meeting:**

The next Task Force meeting is on October 13 at Stub's Restaurant in Thedford. The meeting begins at 9:30 a.m.

### Agenda Items:

- 9:30 Meeting called to order
- Introductions
- Approval of minutes
- Financial report (Gene Mack)
- Updates:
  - Effroymsen Committees
  - NRCS agreement
  - Horse Creek Fen
  - Foundation Partnership
  - Fire Learning Network
  - Partnership workshop
- Approval of grant applications
  - Department of Environmental Quality
  - Nebraska Environmental Trust
  - State Wildlife Grant
- 12:30 Lunch
  - Waterfowl research request for \$20,000
  - Project Coordinator update
  - Middle Niobrara NRD funding request
  - Nebraska Branch of HRM
  - Society of Range Management
- 3:30 Adjourn

## **\$34,000 received for projects.**

Nebraska Game and Parks provided \$20,000 and the Fish and Wildlife Service provided \$14,000 to the STF for 2005 conservation projects.

## **STF enters into agreement with NGPC to develop Fire Learning Network Video**

To help facilitate the development and payment of the Fire Learning Network fire video, the Task Force has entered into a small, short-term cooperative agreement with NGPC. The STF is doing the administrative portion of the project and has agreed to make payment for NGPC's portion of the project. The NGPC will reimburse us for their portion.

## **STF submits first invoice to NRCS for technical assistance work**

Last week Jim and I put together the first invoice for work that Jim is doing that benefits NRCS' program delivery. The cooperative agreement is for NRCS to pay ½ the costs of STF's work associated with producers in the Sandhills. NRCS' portion was nearly \$7,000. The projects included three in Middle Niobrara NRD, seven in Upper Elkhorn NRD, and seven in Upper Loup NRD.

## **New webserver for Task Force's web page**

I have had several months of difficulty publishing updates to our Task Force web page. In August, I switched providers to a new business in Kearney. The yearly rate dropped from about \$385 to \$150 with unlimited space.

## **Two NET grants submitted on behalf of STF**

In early September, a number of granting organizations request grant applications for the following year's funding consideration. This fall, I completed four applications and assisted on two other ones. Unfortunately, the applications had to be in before the STF board had a chance to discuss them and decide which ones they would like to be involved in. I submitted those four I with the understanding that any of the four could be withdrawn, if the Board opposed the application. All four of them will be discussed at the next Board meeting.

## **\$100,000 grant submitted to Department of Environmental Quality**

During the summer, Mike Kelly and I invited the Department of Environmental Quality to inspect a channelized portion of Birdwood Creek that exists on Mike's property. They encouraged the STF to submit a grant application which pays 60 percent of the cost to restore that portion of the stream and to enhance portions on neighboring lands. I submitted a grant to them by early September and have been notified the grant would be funded if their 2005 funds from EPA are received.

## **STF applies for a \$50,000 State Wildlife Grant**

NGPC notified me that once again federal funding is available to do conservation projects through NGPC. They requested the STF put in for another grant. Our previous grant was the first project completed under this new grant program. I submitted an application that focused on improving grasslands. The grant would be a 50:50 cost share between federal and non-federal dollars.

## **STF receives \$39,100 from Private Stewardship Grant Program**

On behalf of the STF, Kyle submitted a grant last year for funding stream and grassland projects at about six locations throughout the Sandhills. We received word that only those projects affecting stream and wetland were funded.

## **Discussion page set up on internet**

One update or improvement that has been made in the web page is the creation of a discussion section. It allows partners to post information about specific projects. Project updates can be added by anyone so

every partner can be kept informed. It is in the trial phase right now. Our concern is to make certain the information is available to the appropriate people without making it available to the general public. I am looking to the Board for direction on how they would like to see this evolve.

### **Pocket bird guides purchased**

The STF purchased about 200 pocket bird guides from Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory. The guide identifies the grassland birds and fits handily in one's shirt pocket. Kyle had a few of guides that he set out at the Gudmundsen Tour display. They were snatched up quickly, causing us to conclude that there is a lot of interest within the ranching community. We will make them available at future booths. Cost was \$150.

### **Researchers seeking assistance from STF for duck nesting study in the Sandhills**

In January, the Board received a presentation from Ducks Unlimited and NGPC about growing interest to develop a research project to determine duck production in the Sandhills. Studies done on Sandhill refuges have shown low nest success rates. However, the number of ducks produced in the Sandhills each year suggests the nest success on private ground must be higher.

The pilot study being proposed includes placing radios on 50 mallard hens and documenting their activity and brood success. The research is targeted for the Atkinson-Stuart area. Estimated cost of the first year is \$60,000. The partners currently assisting with this project includes the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (\$25,000), Ducks Unlimited (\$12,000), and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (\$3,000). At the October board meeting, DU, NGPC and UNL plans to make a formal request for \$20,000 from STF.

### **Major dam on Middle Loup being reconsidered**

Bob Broweleit, Sandhills RC&D Coordinator, shared with the Halsey range camp a new effort to resurrect plans to construct a dam across the Middle Loup River four miles east of Seneca road. The project was originally proposed 40 years ago. It would be about 87 feet deep if constructed. Barb Cooksley thought our Board should be aware of this.

### **STF concept expanding to western Nebraska?**

In September, Mary Harding requested I join her for an informal meeting of ranchers in the Harrison area. The ranchers are concerned about future changes that threaten their landscape. They were interested in how the STF was formed and operated. I gave them an overview of our history and organization. Mary encouraged them to submit an application to NET requesting funds to help them become organized. I assisted them in writing a grant application.

### **Middle Niobrara NRD seeking assistance to maintain automated weather station.**

The Middle Niobrara NRD and Upper Loup NRD have partnered on installing an automated, multipurpose weather station located south of Merritt Reservoir.

Yearly maintenance cost is approximately \$1500 per year. Any partner in the project can get an account and password to retrieve information from not only this weather station, but all weather stations online. One of the main reasons for installing the government-approved station was so FSA/NRCS can provide more accurate information for drought reports, drought payments, etc which will benefit landowners in Cherry County. The NRDs plan to get the daily and weekly information out by means of radio and newspaper so that the local ranchers/farmers can utilize the precipitation, ET, humidity, temps, soil temp etc. The station collects 12 different measurements. Recordings are taken every 10 seconds and averaged hourly and daily.

Federal funds could not be used to purchase or maintain the station. Funding for the station came from a University grant. The cost was approximately \$8,500.

### **Summer water projects...**

**Figure 1 Plum Creek Project in Brown County**



**Figure 2 Prill Project in Garfield County**



### **Society for Range Management request funding**

SRM is once again asking the STF to fund the top campers awards for 2004. The amount should be about \$600. Kirby Fox thanks STF for Grazing Livestock Systems scholarship.

Kirby from Bassett wrote us a thank you letter. He is the son of Tony and Corkie Fox.

*Aene D. Mack*