

Disclaimer: *The following news briefs were prepared for the Sandhills Task Force Board members prior to Board meetings to provide them with an update of projects or actions. It contains the comments of the Secretary and do not necessarily reflect or imply the opinion or position of the Board.*

Sandhills Task Force

"Where People and Land are One"

P.O. Box 1686

Kearney, Nebraska 68848

December, 2002

Next Task Force Meeting:

The next Task Force meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 15 at Stubs Restaurant in Thedford. The meeting will begin at 9:30 a.m..

Board Meeting Has Full Agenda In January

As you can see from the agenda and the items in this newsletter, the STF Board has a pretty full agenda. They include opportunities to extend ourselves into new areas and a growing number of requests for funding. All are good projects. They just need discerning on where our funds and limited staff should be spent. To date, the Board has not been specific on identifying priorities that we should focus on. The time of saying yes to everything may be coming to an end. This subject was discussed during Jim's performance review. It was suggested that the Board may want to set aside a future meeting to discuss this issue.

Annual Employee Review Completed

As requested at our last STF meeting, a committee of three: Al Steuter, Barb Cooksley and myself met with Jim Van Winkle to review his past performance and discuss the coming year. Jim passed with exemplary performance.

Dana Larsen Recommended to the Board

A letter was received from Steve Chick requesting the Board approve Dana Larsen as the NRCS member on the Sandhills Task Force. She has recently filled the State Range Conservationist position vacated by Kim Stine. Dana is a graduate of Utah State University, and has had rangeland management positions in Idaho and Nebraska. Her most recent positions were as Quality Assurance Resource Specialist, and Range Management Specialist (at Thedford).

Time to Elect Officers

Our bylaws require us to have an annual election of officers and renewal of board members. The bylaws state *"Each director shall serve one-year term but may be re-elected to an unlimited number of terms. At each annual meeting, the Board of Directors shall nominate and elect all the directors in accordance with Article II, Section A."* To stay true to our bylaws, I believe we need to conduct this formality.

Building a Land Trust for the Future

Craig Utter and Greg Reuhle recently attended a Land Trust Conference sponsored by National Cattlemen's Beef Association. Craig has agreed to give the Board an update on that meeting and how it might affect the STF.

Changes in the Sandhills Bird Study

Larkin Powell informed me that a new student has been selected to replace Mat Proett when he resigned his graduate position at the end of last summer. Her name is Silka Finkbeiner. Her background includes growing up in ranch country in South Dakota. I have asked Larkin and Silka to join us at the next board meeting to bring the board up to date. Unfortunately, our meeting is during the first week of spring semester and it is uncertain if Larkin will be able to make it.

TNC Requests STF Become a Supporting Partner in "Keeping Our Trust"

Vince Shay recently requested the Task Force agree to becoming a sponsoring partner in an effort to save the Environmental Trust funding for conservation projects. Vince is leading an effort to find five core groups who will provide \$5000 each toward hiring a lobbyist to help protect future funding of the Trust. Their plan is to have each of those five groups find one supporting partner that will also contribute \$5000 and work closely with the corresponding core partner to keep the lobbyist informed. Along with the \$5000, Vince is asking for one member of the STF to work closely with him on helping to make sure STF input is provided.

Request For Funding Fire Video

The FLN is looking for the STF to join three additional partners to each commit \$5,000 each to produce a fire video. Any remaining funds will be made available to help introduce the video to schools and rural districts. Our involvement would give us a part in scripting and final editing of the video content. The long-term goal is to make controlled fire available as a tool for landowners to deal with invasive plants and for better trained and equipped VFD's.

Request to STF on Sandhill Fire Study

Tom Bragg of UNO is developing a proposal to conduct a sandhill fire study. His grant application for funding is due in January and he is requesting support from the STF. The study is a minimum of 5 years and will answer questions about fire effects and possible benefits for grazing lands in the Sandhills. The proposal includes grazing applications as well as forest property as study sites. At the moment, Tom is not asking for anything specific. But, that may change by the time STF meets in January.

Request for STF to Contribute to the Grazing Livestock Systems Program

I received a letter from Martin Massengale asking for us to consider contributing again to the tuition scholarship efforts of the newly developed Grazing Livestock Systems program. Last year we contributed \$1000. The funds were split between two students.

TNC Requesting STF Involvement in Developing Strategic Planning

The Nature Conservancy is preparing to begin strategic planning for the Sandhills. They have a national support program where professionals meet with local TNC and partners to develop a plan for specific regions. The Sandhills is one of those regions. The process involves TNC and their partners coming together to develop a plan that addresses specific goals. TNC is asking that two or three members of the Task Force serve on that group. The first meeting will be held in North Platte. The following two meetings will occur over the next 18 months and will be located in places outside Nebraska. Each meeting will be a 3 to 3.5 day workshop.

STF Makes First Cut as Recipient of \$30,000 Grant

Kyle Graham and I worked together to submit a grant application on behalf of the STF. Recently, the Sandhills Task has been notified that they have been identified to receive \$30,000 from the NGPC's State Wildlife Grant Program. The grant program is federally funded through the Fish and Wildlife Service. All awards have to receive final approval from the FWS. That is expected to occur in March.

STF Recipient of TNC's Innovation Award

In October, the Nature Conservancy at their national convention, recognized the Sandhills Task Force for their work on the Jumbo Fen Project. Competition for the award was at the national level. We were unable to have someone present to accept the award, however. So, Vince Shay accepted it on our behalf. A formal presentation will be given to the Board at some future date.

Gene Asked to Join NCBA/FWS Project

Myra Hyde with National Cattlemen's Beef Association has been working with the Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a program that will have cattlemen and biologist experience each others profession. The goal is to improve each group's understanding of why they do what they do. Eight cattlemen and eight FWS employees will meet at the NCBA annual convention to develop this program. My involvement with the Task Force has earned me an invitation to be one of the eight

Accountant Solicited for STF Audit and Taxes

I have contacted the same accounting firm that did our audit last year for a bid to do a review of our books and submit the necessary tax forms. As of date, I have not received a bid from them.

Task Force Makes an Impression at NET Rally

A rally was held in November, in Lincoln to increase legislators awareness of the benefits NET provide to the State. The rally included a steak feed and social hour. Recipients of past grants were asked to help where they could. I was impressed with the willingness of people I asked to help. For the Task Force, Rob and Jan Ravenscroft, Mike Kelly, Cynthia and Marcie Kelly, Bill and Tracey Vodehnal, Jim Van Winkle, my wife Cindy and I helped with serving and cleaning up afterwards. I made sweatshirts with STF logos on for each of the helpers. A display was also set up right behind the podium. There were a lot of comments and questions about the STF. Thanks to all who helped.

Mike Kelly: Recipient of 2002 Environmental Stewardship Award

Mike was one of eight cattlemen receiving national recognition from NCBA for his land stewardship. A really nice video was produced highlighting the eight. I hope we can show that over lunch.