

**Next Task Force Meeting:**

The next Task Force meeting is on Thursday, February 19<sup>th</sup> 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 (Mack)

Update on easement acquisition

Aldo Leopold Foundation (Utter)

Sandhill Ecology Research (Wedlin)

Long-billed curlew Research (Jorgenson)

12:00 Lunch

Report of the Executive Committee

Project Coordinator update (VanWinkle)

Funding school field trip

2:45 Adjourn

**Conservation easement purchased on Deer Creek in Sheridan County**

On December 22, Byron, Jim Van Winkle, and myself met with the Kirk family at Sandhill Title Company to purchase a conservation easement on Deer Creek. The stream flows through steep terrain containing pines, cedars and open grass areas. The easement includes the lower stretch where it empties into the Niobrara River.

Prior to the purchase, the property and easement were appraised by Radant Appraisal Service. The easement was appraised at \$220,000 and was purchased at that price. On the day of closing, an easement documentation report was also signed and notarized. This document describes in detail the condition of the property at the time of purchasing the easement. Sandhills Title Company, acting on our behalf, recorded the necessary documents with the Register of Deeds in Sheridan County.

The Task Force purchased the easement but is seeking reimbursement from the Nebraska Environmental Trust. One of the conditions of obtaining the funds was obtaining a title insurance policy. We are in the process of getting that finalized and do not foresee any problems.

The purchase of the easement met the goals of the Task Force. It protects a unique piece of property from future development, but allows the

continued use of the land for ranching operations. The uniqueness of this property is its scenic beauty and it contains one of the very few self-sustaining trout fishery in the state. In addition, the purchase was initiated by the landowner who wanted to make sure this property remain in its pristine condition for his children and future generations.

**Sandhills Task Force being asked to support the Aldo Leopold Foundation Award**

Aldo Leopold Foundation representative Craig Utter has requested time at the February board meeting to ask the Task Force to help fund future Leopold Awards. The award is given annually to a ranching operation that demonstrates good land stewardship and involvement in education and their community. Since its conception, three years ago, the \$10,000 award and all its associated costs has been paid by the Foundation.

The Foundation now hopes to expand this program into other states and is asking various organizations within Nebraska to contribute funds to make the Nebraska award self-supporting.

The amount Craig will be asking the Board to consider is \$2000.

As a side note, Craig is a past board member of the STF and is now the regional coordinator for this award, covering four states: Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, and Nebraska.

**Beginning Rancher mentoring group to meet after board meeting**

Our regular board meeting is scheduled to end early to accommodate a meeting of the mentoring committee.

**Guests expected at February board meeting.**

Jim Van Winkle informed me that a couple of individuals associated with the Conata Basin Project in South Dakota plan to attend our board meeting. A group of landowners and conservation groups are interested in forming an organization similar ours and want the opportunity to observe and interact with rancher board members.

Conata Basin is located in the Badlands and is the home of the recently re-introduced black-footed ferret.

**An update on the Long-billed Curlew study and future funding to be discussed**

Joel Jorgenson has contacted me, requesting the opportunity to present to the Board an update of the research that is being done on curlews in the western portion of the Sandhills.

Along with the update, the research group is hoping to be able to purchase four satellite transmitters that will be placed on curlews. The

transmitters will allow hourly documentation of where the bird is: allowing the researchers to better identify what type of habitat they prefer at different stages of nesting, brood rearing, and migration. The cost of each transmitter is about \$2500. They are requesting the Task Force purchase one of the four.

### **The Executive Committee of the Task Force will present its first report at the February meeting.**

At the last board meeting, it was approved by the Board to establish an executive committee made up of the officers. The first meeting of the executive board will be held February 13 in Thedford. At this meeting, subjects to be addressed include: modifications of the bylaws to include this committee, identifying the role of the committee, and addressing current topics the committee believes are within its role. The results will be presented to the Board.

### **Request to help fund school field trip**

As you can tell from this newsletter, there appears to be a growing number of requests for money from the Task Force.

A recent request came from Maxwell's 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade who are planning a 2-day field trip to Halsey to learn about forests and the Sandhills. The trip will take place in mid-May and have about 50 attendees. The cost is \$50 per person.

### **Wetland project completed last fall.**

Last year, the Task Force was contacted to see if we would assist with the repair of the dam that was originally constructed in 1972. The dam had washed out. We worked with the landowner to design it with a different type of water control



structure which will allow for manipulating the water level to improve the type of wetland vegetation in the pond.

Our portion of the cost was slightly over \$13,000.

*Gene D. Mack*

### **Partnership with Agren, Inc. is nearing its end**

A grant submitted by Agren, Inc and co-sponsored by the Task Force is nearing its completion. We expect to complete the agreement by mid summer. The existing agreement allows for 50% reimbursement for salary and other costs we incur for projects related to grazing systems within the Sandhills. Over the length of the grant, the Task Force will receive \$21,920.

### **Nebraska Game and Parks contributes \$20,000 toward Task Force work in the Sandhills**

In January, the Task Force received its annual contribution from NGPC for work in the Sandhills. The money is used primarily to pay costs for fencing, livestock watering, and wetland restoration. A portion of the money, however, can be used to offset salary expenses.

In the past, we have not used the funds for salary and have relied on other sources to pay salary and overhead costs.

### **Task Force organization featured in NET's annual report**

The Nebraska Environmental Trust's 2008 annual report was recently released and contained a one-page article featuring the work of the Task Force. The title of the article is "Sharing the Experience and Education". It focuses on the work we have done to promote education among youth, as well as beginning and established ranchers. The last statement of the article states: "The STF has received over \$1.4 million for their projects over the past 12 years."

At the last board meeting, a group picture was taken of the Board. I thought I would share that with you.



Standing from l to r: Eric Hansen, Mick Knott, Ben Bailey, Byron Eathing, Dana Larsen, Mike Kelly, Barb Cooksley, AB Cox. Kneeling: Gene Mack, Joel Klammer, Rob Ravenscroft, Ted LaGrange, and Jim Van Winkle. Absent are: Melody Benjamin, Jim Luchsinger, and Richard Lackaff.