

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, NE 68848**

January, 2004

Next Task Force Meeting:

The next Task Force meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 21 at Stubs Restaurant in Thedford. The meeting will begin at 9:30 a.m.

Agenda Items:

9:30 Meeting called to order
Introductions
Approval of minutes
Financial report (Gene Mack)

Washington Trip (Mike Kelly & Craig Utter)
Effroymsen Report (Rob Ravenscroft)
Philanthropy Partnership (Al Steuter)
Natural Legacy Project (Kristal Stoner)

12:30 Lunch
Ducks Unlimited Research (Scott Stevens)
Tech. Serv. Provider Contract (Dana Larsen)
Beginning Rancher Report (Jim Luchsinger)
Health care change for Jim (Gene Mack)
NRCS request for printer (Kevin Hood)

3:30 Adjourn

Effroymsen Fellowship Workshop.

The Effroymsen committee has finished their task of developing a landscape plan for the Sandhills. Their last meeting was held in November in Iowa. On Wednesday of this week, the group will meet to finalize a presentation they plan to give to the Board at our January meeting.

Beginning Rancher Program moving forward.

Jim Luchsinger has requested a few minutes to get feedback from the Board on how it wishes to handle TNC's proposal for the beginning Rancher program. The current lease on their Horse Creek Fen ranch is up in May. Before any action is made on renewing the lease or finding a new tenant, Jim would like a few ranching members from the Board to assist him in

evaluating the suitability of this ranch for a beginning rancher. He is looking for willing board members to tour the ranch and make an assessment and recommendations. Jim has two questions. Is the property and the combination of hayland and grassland adequate to support a young ranch family? And, are there additional facilities or items, which are needed to make the program work? You can contact Jim at 402-376-3621.

STF receives favorable scoring on NET grant.

On January 9 the Grants Committee of the Nebraska Environmental Trust has finalized its preliminary recommendations for 2004 grants. The committee recommended to fully fund our application for all three years. The application ranked fourth out of a list of about 85 scored applications. The committee's recommendations will be presented to the entire NET board in late January. The public will then be given until April to comment on the board's recommendation before final action is taken. The grant focused primarily on stream and wetland restoration work.

Kelly and Utter return from Washington trip.

Mike and Craig took a trip to Washington DC to spend a couple of days with the Director of Fish and Wildlife Service and other agency people to share ranching interests with FWS interests. Craig also had an opportunity to meet with Congressman Osborne. They plan to give us a recap of their adventure at the January meeting.

Agencies respond to letter seeking funds.

At our last Task Force meeting, the decision was made to send letters to agencies requesting support to cover the costs of Jim's salary. The response was mixed. The Nature Conservancy stated that they could not support annual funding but did make an offer that is discussed in more detail in another part of this newsletter.

NGPC responded that at this time, they couldn't help because of their own financial difficulties. The FWS has not responded, and I am uncertain if they will.

The request made to NRCS was hand-delivered at a personal meeting between Steve Chick and STF Board members. Byron, Rob, Jim and Dana met with Steve and got a very positive response. Steve believes that the work being done by Jim and the STF would qualify for reimbursement under their Technical Service Provider program. That program allows up to 50% reimbursement for work done by a conservation group on work related to Farm Bill programs.

Dana, Al, Jim and I met at a second meeting to draft up a contract to be presented to NRCS for consideration. Copies of the draft will be available at the Board meeting.

Developing a Philanthropy Partnership between the Task Force and the Nature Conservancy.

Vince Shay provided a unique response to our request for staff support. Vince proposed the idea of both organizations joining together to raise money to build an endowment in the range of \$2-4 million. TNC believes there are people in the Sandhills that would be willing to help the STF reach its goal and vision for the Sandhills. If this proposal was agreeable with the STF, TNC would provide staff to assist our organization in the fundraising effort.

To help get a little more shape to this idea, Al has arranged a teleconference for Wednesday, January 14 between a sample of board members and TNC staff. Those

participating from the Board include Byron, Al, A.B., Rob, Dean, and myself. Hopefully, the teleconference will form a proposal to be presented at the January Board meeting.

NGPC seeking input on Natural Legacy Project.

Game and Parks is developing a statewide, landscape conservation plan called the Natural Legacy Project. The plan will be comprehensive, non-regulatory and providing voluntary incentives to promote conservation of all of Nebraska's biodiversity. This is in response to congressional funding they have received in past years.

Kristal Stoner, from their Lincoln office, has requested time on the agenda to inform the Board about the project, to gather input, and to seek our participation at an upcoming scoping meeting.



Figure 1 Twin-tube water control structure on Wolfenden.

West Twin and Wolfenden water projects completed.

Just as the last leaves were getting ready to fall, In-law Construction completed water control structures on West Twin Lake (Coble's property/STF easement) and at the Wolfenden ranch on Gordon Creek. Both projects were completed without a hitch. Jim and I had an opportunity to give an informal tour of both projects to Byron, Kevin Hood, Heather Johnson (FWS, Washington DC) and Kyle Graham. The Wolfenden project will be one of three sites used next year to

promote partnerships between landowners and conservation agencies.

Ducks Unlimited considering research on duck nest success on private ranches.

Scott Stevens (Research Biologist with Ducks Unlimited out of Bismarck) has requested time on the agenda to discuss a potential research project that they are planning. The project would determine duck nesting success on Sandhill grassland. Currently, the only research that has been done has been on refuge lands, which is no representative of nesting success throughout the Sandhills. This research could compliment the bird study that is currently being done.

NGPC provides an additional \$25,000 to STF.

In December, Nebraska Game and Parks made their third and final payment of \$25,000 to the STF. This is part of the three-year cooperative agreement the STF and NGPC signed. This brings the total contribution to \$75,000. In June, the FWS provided \$30,000 to the Task Force.

Theford NRCS requests funds for large printer.

Kevin Hood is requesting funds for a large map plotter. He already has a contribution from the NRD and is hoping we will help out. It is on the agenda.