

Next Task Force Meeting:

The next Task Force meeting is on April 15th 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)
Project Coordinator update (VanWinkle)

Hauser / BNSF Railroad project
Easement monitoring
Reiser Easement Appraisal Decision
Schick Lake Easement Appraisal Decision

12:00 Lunch

Introduction of Curlew researcher
Funding prescribed cedar burns
Future of FWS Board Member
Beginning Rancher Mentoring Program

3:30 Adjourn

Appraisals completed on two conservation easements being considered by the STF.

One of the main topics of discussion at the Board meeting will be approving or declining offers to purchase two conservation easements. One is located in Cherry County. The other is in McPherson County. The Task Force has spent quite a bit of time this last year working with the owners to develop the easement language and discussing plans of restoration. Both properties involve restoring wetlands and ensuring the wetlands remain in perpetuity. The appraisal for one property has been received and the other is expected next week.

Task Force hosting grassroots partnership tour with the Nature Conservancy

With the approval of the Board at its November meeting, a committee has been working to arrange an informative two-day tour within the Sandhills. The attendees are Nature Conservancy staff and board members from California and Colorado. Their goal is to try to assist their respective regions in developing grassroots organizations that help bring conservation projects to private lands.

It is their hope that the approach used by the Sandhills Task Force might be something they can mimic in their regions. The tour will include

looking at Sandhills projects that both the Task Force and TNC shared involvement in. That will include meeting a Beginning Rancher family near Mullen.

Curlew study to begin this spring.

A cooperative effort between UNL and Iowa State University will begin this spring to estimate Nebraska's population of Long-billed Curlews. It will also help gain a better understanding of breeding and chick survival. Most of the research will take place on Crescent Lake NWR, but will include areas in northwestern Sandhills and the Panhandle.

Board approves changes in its bylaws.

In early March, after a 30-day notice to the members, a ballot was sent to each board member asking for their vote on changes in Article II of the bylaws. The results were unanimous to change the bylaws to allow the R,C & D representative to be recommended by any R, C & D that covers a portion of the Sandhills. The current language states that the recommendation comes from North Central R, C & D.

Task Force is recommended for \$312,000 grant



Nebraska Environmental Trust notified the Task Force that they were successful in the first round of selection for funding. Final determination will be done in early April.

The terms of the grant include:

- \$87,864 for construction materials
- \$58,576 for construction
- \$3,750 for education and outreach
- \$36,600 for fencing
- \$33,840 for livestock watering system
- \$91,310 for technical assistance

The money is for a 3-year period and will be used to continue to do projects similar to those done by the Task Force in the past.

Mentoring of Beginning Ranchers to be discussed

The current members of the Task Force's mentoring group has asked for open discussion at our April board meeting to discuss the process in the past and to set direction on how mentoring should be done in the future. One item of discussion is getting new perspectives (members) in the group. Another idea may be using education funding to bring in speakers or consultants who could benefit younger ranchers.

Al, who leads the group, has invited the Daniels to participate in the discussion.

Sandhills Task Force receives \$25,000 to offset stream project.

At the November, 2007 board meeting the Board agreed to accept \$25,000 from Herbst Construction as part of a mitigation requirement placed on the contractor for activities it did in a Sandhill stream. The Board was informed that if the STF was not willing to accept the money, EPA would add it their national fund.

By accepting the money, conservation work will be done on privately owned lands in the Sandhills.

STF receives a \$44,520 grant to help with cedar removal.

A grant proposal submitted by the STF in 2007 was awarded this February. Its purpose is to help remove eastern redcedar on privately owned property. The Task Force is trying to target the money toward ranch operations that are including cedar removal as part of a whole-ranch management plan. Funding is from a Private Stewardship Grant provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Task Force being asked by Railroad to help mitigate for loss of wetlands.

Work with Burlington Northern Sante Fe Railway about having the Task Force assist in wetland enhancement and holding an easement has stalled. A letter sent by the Task Force in November expressing our interest in assisting with the wetland project and further discussing the easement has not been responded to.

Task Force closes its 2004 grant with Nebraska Environmental Trust.

The last of a \$297,000 grant received from the Nebraska Environmental Trust was spent by the Task Force. This is the end of a grant that has helped us put in miles of cross-fences, dozens of livestock watering systems, and numerous water control structures. All done on privately owned property that would not have happened without the help of the Trust.



Fish and Wildlife staff restructuring may have impact on STF.

Early in the year, the Fish and Wildlife Service began discussion on changing the location of their Private Lands person. Kyle, who currently works in the Kearney office, will move to Valentine. This will put him closer to the people and land he works with.

The second part of the discussion is the fate of the position I currently hold on the STF board as the FWS representative. It remains unclear what that future will be. The next board meeting would be good opportunity for the Board to formulate its ideas and wishes so they can be conveyed to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Developing protocol for easement monitoring to be discussed

With an increasing involvement of the STF with conservation easements, now is the time to establish a protocol on how easements will be monitored in the future. Items to discuss include: How often should they be visited? Should a standard form be developed? The topic is timely because the STF is on the verge of acquiring three easements within the next year.

You saw it dry...Here it is wet!

In the last newsletter, I talked about the Marlatt project but did not include a picture of the pond because it was bone dry—not much to look at. One day this spring, Jim went to the Marlatts to look at the structure and found hundreds of ducks enjoying the fruits of our labor. While there, Jim took a few photos. Below are a couple.



What is not visible in this photo is a second water control structure located where the vehicles are parked. The foreground structure serves as an emergency overflow structure. The second structure controls normal flows and allows the owners to divert some of the runoff onto a large meadow.



Meadow receiving the diverted runoff water.

Lene D. Mack