

Sandhills Task Force

"Where People and Land Are One"

P.O. Box 1686
Kearney, NE 68848

May, 2006

Next Task Force Meeting:

The next Task Force meeting is on May 17th 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)
Project Coordinator update
Keller easement
Noxious weed grant
Moon Lake project
Horse Creek Ranch Open House
Nebraska Natural Legacy Plan meeting

Updates:

Approving easement guidelines

12:00 Lunch

The Grazing Manager software (Rob)
Assisting local groups to become organized
Replacing Craig Utter
Funding Sandhills Academy

3:30 Adjourn

Ranch. To date, plans include an afternoon program followed by an evening meal. Jim L. is putting together an invitation list. Included as guests is a group of Montana Ranchers who are interested in doing the same type of projects the Task Force is involved in.

Mentoring group holds quarterly meeting with Beginning Ranchers

The STF mentoring group of Al Steuter, A.B. Cox and Mick Knott met with the Daniels at their quarterly meeting. The focus of the winter meeting is financial planning. The EQIP for the ranch has been approved.

Keller Conservation Easement Purchased

On April 21, we finally closed on the conservation easement with Shane and Karen Keller. The easement price paid was totally based on its appraised value. Jim worked extensively with the Kellers and Nebraska State Bank out of Oshkosh to make the sale possible. Byron, Jim and I were present to witness the transaction. The vice-president and loan officer from the bank were there, as well.

The easement assures that the 1500 acres will remain as native grassland for future private ranching. An exciting part of the purchase is that it helped a young

Craig Utter resigns from STF Board

In early March, I received an email from Craig stating that he wished to take a sabbatical from involvement in Nebraska Cattlemen, as well as from the STF. At the end of April, Craig notified me that he had taken a job with US Forest Service as a wildland forest fire fighter for the summer. He will be stationed out of Warren, Idaho. He does not plan on returning to the ranch.

Craig wished that I pass on this message: "I do want to say that I feel I have been privileged to sit on a board with such amazing people. Being a part of the STF has been one of the biggest sources of pride in my life since moving to Nebraska and I will miss it more than I can ever express. I wish I had the opportunity to be there in person, but I am leaving in the morning and have to be in McCall and ready to work by the 1st."

The news came as a shock to me. The Board has valued his leadership and genuine concern for private ranching and the Sandhills. He will be missed.

Jim Van Winkle runs for County Commissioner

After much deliberation and coaxing from citizens of Cherry County, Jim filed for Cherry County Commissioner. Before filing, Jim obtained the approval of Nebraska Cattlemen and had talked to various members of the STF board.

I personally believe that if Jim is elected, it will bring added value to his position as Projects Coordinator..

Horse Creek Ranch open house being planned.

Jim Van Winkle and Jim Luchsinger have been working on organizing an open house at the Horse Creek



Back row, L to R: Gene Mack, Gilbert Larson, Karen Keller, Shane Keller, Byron Eatinger, Elizabeth Ayres, Theodore (Ted) Weber.
Kneeling: Susie Beel, Jim Van Winkle, and Jim Levick.

family get started in ranching. Their love of the land and strong stewardship brings extra value to the easement.

Don McCabe, Nebraska Farmer is anxious to do an exclusive article about the project. Jim has been working with the Kellers and Don. An interview is at the ranch is scheduled for the middle of May.

Moon Lake rancher notifies STF that he wants out of a Wildlife Extension Agreement

In early April, Jim V. and I were feeling really good about the completion of three water control structures, which were checking the downcutting of the Calamus in a valley. We had discussed the project with the neighbors and had their support. The structures were

installed about a week before the last heavy snowfall. The snowmelt created shallow wetlands just as planned.

The project took a turn for the worse when the landowner decided (within one week of completion) that he wanted to modify one structure so it would hold more water. The downstream neighbor immediately notified me and I contacted the owner and got his word he would remove the modification the following morning. By the next morning he had re-thought his decision and called and notified me that he was going to cancel the agreement and reimburse the STF for their expense. He asked me to send him a bill. I did so immediately. The following day the modified structure washed out while the other two remained intact. To date, I have not received payment for the three structures.

Easement guidelines established by the Sandhills Task Force

At the last meeting, the Board approved the establishment of easement guidelines. These guidelines would serve the Task Force and also help the public understand where our organization stood on easement acquisition. The guidelines are posted on our website.

Task Force joined with Agren, Inc to submit a Conservation Innovation grant application.

Several board members (Mike, A.B., Rob, and I) along with Jim V. and Al Steuter and others met with Stan Buman from Agren, Inc. to talk about the potential use of The Grazing Manager software within the Sandhills. Through the course of discussion, we encouraged Agren, Inc. to submit a grant application to NRCS' Conservation Innovation Grant. The grant identifies the Sandhills Task Force as a cosponsor of the grant. We, however, informed Agren that we did not have the authority to approve the concept or grant application. That would be a decision of the Board at the May meeting.

The overall goal of the project is to improve rangeland health and sustain profitable ranching by implementing and evaluating the use of *The Grazing Manager* software and supporting long-term use of sound grazing systems. It would be especially useful with planning for drought conditions.

If funded, the project would involve a combination of computer software, in-field training, rancher discussion groups, ranch visits, and one-on-one technical assistance.

The grant is being submitted for \$150,000. The target is enrolling 24 ranches that would use the software and develop a mentoring-support group. It is a 50:50 match grant with \$75,000 coming from ranchers and the Sandhills Task Force. Half of the \$75,000 would be in-kind match, which includes ranchers' time in participating in the program. The other \$37,500 would come from ranch tuition costs and STF. The STF would contribute \$375 toward each ranch participating (total of \$9000). An additional \$19,500 of Jim's salary would meet STF's cash match. The portion of the grant that would be paid to STF for their assistance would be \$29,000. Every dollar of Jim's salary spent on helping ranchers involved in this project would be matched with one grant dollar. It would reduce STF's salary expense by 50 percent.

Invasive weed control grant being proposed.

Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition is in the process of writing a grant to see if they can get some of the invasive species grant money that is available now. They plan on targeting leafy spurge in the Upper Loup NRD extending over to Loup, Garfield and into Custer counties. The money may also be available for cedar control. The Coalition contacted Jim V. asking if the STF would be willing to provide matching funds. Their request was made in the middle of March and we have not received any additional information since.

Mary Harding is asking for STF assistance with forming grassroots organizations.

At our September 2005 board meeting, Mary asked the board if they would support a NET grant that would help other local groups organize similar to what the STF did. The extent of our involvement was to have board members meet with local groups and explain how the STF was formed and the lessons learned. That grant was approved and Mary is making plans to begin helping groups. She asked me recently if the STF would be willing to administer the financial portion of the grant. I told her I would be willing to do that but needed the concurrence of the Board.

Request received to provide funds for Sandhills Academy.

In late February, I received a written request asking the STF to help fund the June 13-16 Sandhills Academy Camp. They are asking our group to fund \$2,500 for partial tuition for 20 participants. The description used in their advertising follows.

"Feel the freedom and experience Sandhills Academy! Let this premiere natural resources and leadership camp help you explore the best of Nebraska's Good Life. Two days and one nights of this awesome experience are dedicated to exploring Cherry County and Ranches in Blaine County in the heart of the Sandhills. On this road trip, you'll discover wide-open spaces, unique traditions and incredible natural landscapes. Tube the Middle Loup River and camp at the Merritt Reservoir with a visit to Snake Falls. Visit the Gudmundsen Sandhills Laboratory, Bowring Historical Ranch, Bestol Ranch, and Cox Feeders. A trip to Diamond Lazy J Ranch (Sandhills Spirit of the West) with a chuck wagon dinner, horse-drawn wagon tour and fiddles around the campfire. And take part in the Sandhills Olympics on the beach at Merritt Reservoir. As they say.. Nebraska the good LIFE!!!!!"

Current CD rates

Our current CDs and their respective rates are:

Date	Bank	Amount	Rate
10/28/05	Tri County	\$350,000	4.1 %
11/16/05	Commercial	\$100,000	4.5 %
1/16/06	Purdum State	\$ 24,900	3.87 %
3/21/06	Pinnacle	\$100,000	3.36 %
2/25/06	TierOne	\$100,000	3.45 %

