

Sandhills Task Force

"Where People and Land Are One"

P.O. Box 1686

Kearney, NE 68848

November, 2008

Next Task Force Meeting:

The next Task Force meeting is on Thursday, November 20th 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)

Approving R, C&D vacancy on board

Easement review and approval

Addressing NET easement requirements

Beginning Rancher Mentoring Update

12:00 Lunch

Project Coordinator update (VanWinkle)

Sandhills Weed Management Update

Funding prescribed cedar burns

3:30 Adjourn

Appraisals completed on easement along the Niobrara River

Acting on direction of the Board, Jim Van Winkle drafted and negotiated an easement with a landowner who owns property on a small stream that drains into the Niobrara. The terms of the easement are in line with those cited in earlier easements. With this particular easement the emphasis was on preventing development of the property because of its scenic value along the Niobrara River. The easement also restricted fish stocking in the stream to native fish found in the drainage and trout approved by Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. The stream currently has an established, reproducing population of trout and we would like to make sure that population is not lost due to indiscriminate fish stocking. The owner would retain all rights associated with normal ranching operations.

A certified appraisal was completed and the offer was made to the owner. The owner is agreeable to the appraisal price so the next step was to obtain the approval from Nebraska Environmental Trust to use their grant money for the acquisition.

I met with the Trust to discuss the details of the easement. Word was received from the Trust in

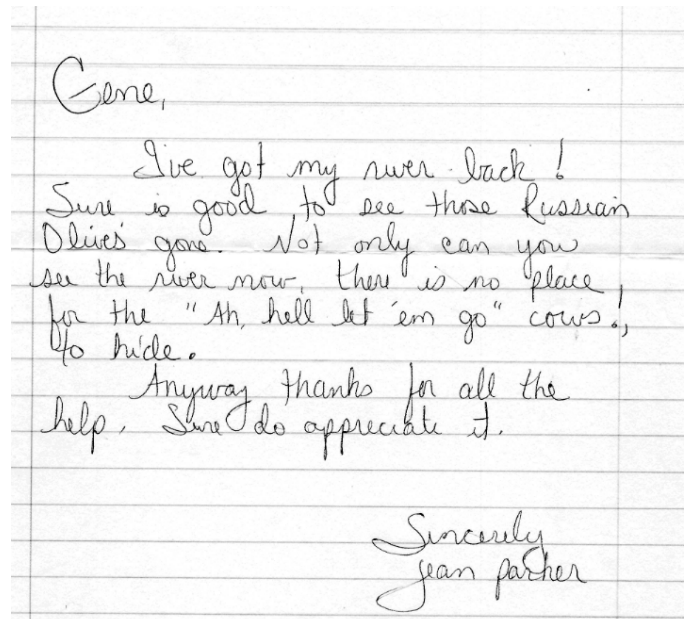
early November that they were agreeable to us using the grant money for this acquisition.

At our November meeting, the Board will need to decide if they would like to pursue the easement at the price it was appraised and with the existing terms of the easement. The appraisal value of the easement is about 25 percent of the total value of the property.

Sandhills Task Force helps fund several tree clearing projects.

During the summer and fall, the Task Force has helped fund tree removal at several locations throughout the Sandhills. The funding for the tree removal has come from the Private Stewardship Grant received from the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Although most of the work has been on eastern red cedar removal, we paid for the removal of Russian olive encroachment along a strip of the Niobrara River. Below is the note of thanks received I received with the invoice. It made me feel good and I wanted to share it with the Board.



Aerial pictures of a stretch of river with Russian olive trees before and after are shown on the backside.

Nebraska Environmental Trust is agreeable to providing 10% of the easement amount for future defense of the easement—with conditions attached.

During my discussions with NET about funding the purchase of the easement described above, the Trust stated they would be willing to provide money for the easement defense fund equal to 10 percent of

the value of the easement; plus the cost of the appraisal if we would meet several conditions required for easement acquisition in recent grants.

Those conditions include a Memorandum of Contract and a reservation of deed statement to be included in the easement document. Both of these items would be recorded with the easement.

Both Jim and I had concerns with the language in the Memorandum of Contract and the reservation of deed statement. We have initiated discussion with the Trust on this matter but as of this time no decision has been made by the Trust if they will consider our recommendations of changes.



Regardless of the Trust's decision, The Task Force Board will need to decide if they are agreeable to this additional language or not. If we decide against it, it would mean an added cost of about \$27,000 to the Task Force.

Nation-wide financial problems affecting STF financial planning.

At the beginning of the financial problems associated with the banking industry, I contacted Tri-County Bank to find out if the Task Force funds were at risk. We currently have some of our assets there insured by Kansas Bankers Surety Company. I was informed at that time that our funds were not at jeopardy but Tri-County would be switching to another surety company in December. That information was distributed to the Board in early October.

Since then, I have been informed by Tri-County Bank that no companies are going to insure the funds after the end of the year. In addition, the FDIC increased their insurance to \$250,000. Tri-County recommended that we transfer our excess above \$250,000 to another bank.

The Board will need to act on deciding how they would like to distribute those funds.

Task Force supports sending Beginning Rancher family to "Ranching for Profit" workshop.

At the April board meeting the Board discussed the importance of mentoring the Beginning Ranch family toward financial success. A new mentoring group was assigned to assist them with this matter. Acting on the mentoring group's advice, the couple attended a "Ranching for Profit" workshop in Pierre. The workshop was a week long. The family picked of the food, lodging, travel, babysitting, and deposit cost. The Task Force paid the remaining balance for the workshop.

Task Force working closely with Corps of Engineers to resolve permit requirements

Obtaining a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers appears to be getting harder. The problem appears to be associated with new protocols, procedures and personnel. Kyle and Jim have had Corps staff from their Omaha office out to show them both stream erosion problems and the structure designs used by the Task Force to fix the problem.

Progress is being made, but it appears to be going at a slow pace. For this reason, we are behind our expectations of completing stream projects this fall.

Task Force sells its "Total Station" survey equipment.

In 2000, the Task Force purchased a Total Station for \$12,000 to loan to the Thedford NRCS office to help them be more efficient with surveying. The Thedford Office was able to obtain a newer, more sophisticated version and returned ours. At the advice of a survey company in Lincoln, we had the equipment refurbished and put it up for sale. The refurbishing cost us about \$950 and the best offer we got was \$2500. It was sold to a company in Kearney.

Plant Workshop held this summer was a success.

The plant workshop organized by Kyle and funded by the Task Force was a success with more than 30 participants at each of the three one-day workshops. The main subject was plant identification and their value to ranching. Other topics included carbon sequestering, ecotourism on ranches, and conservation programs available to ranchers.

Easements are being monitored

Since our April meeting, an easement monitoring form has been developed and three of the four easements we hold have been visited and an evaluation has been filled out.



Aene D. Mack