



West Twin Lake

Activity Report of The Sandhills Task Force

January 1 through December 31, 2003

This report is a summary of 28 projects completed or ongoing by the Sandhills Task Force (STF). The majority (18) are conservation projects directly affecting the natural resources of the Sandhills. Total acres enhanced by these projects are 41,986 acres (37,914 acres of upland grasses, 1,325 acres of riparian habitat, 14.75 miles of streams and rivers, and 2,747 acres wetlands and wet meadows). An additional 13 projects are in the pre-agreement stage of planning. One project is associated with research and monitoring. The Task Force supported five programs associated with providing education and information to the public, primarily the ranching community.

The Task Force successes began with a 1996 grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust. Their contribution allowed the Task Force to provide leverage and financial assurance needed to ensure land use practices benefited both ranching and wildlife. Cooperative agreements with other agencies and organizations have brought funding for conservation. Appendixes A and B report the financial activity of the Sandhills Task Force in 2003.



May Board meeting, evaluating completed projects to help identify the role the Task Force can serve in resource conservation.

Board of Directors

Board of Directors (16 total) include:

A.B. Cox	Rancher	Mullen
Al Steuter	The Nature Conservancy, Rancher	Ainsworth
Barb Cooksley	Rancher	Anselmo
Byron Eatinger	Rancher	Thedford
Craig Utter	Rancher	Ainsworth
Dana Larsen	Natural Resources Conservation Service	North Platte
Dean Funk	Rancher, Holt County Commissioner	Atkinson
Gene Mack	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Kearney
Gene Lehnert	North Central R, C & D	Bassett
Melody Benjamin	Nebraska Cattlemen, Rancher	Lakeside
Mick Knott	Rancher	Hyannis
Mike Kelly	Rancher	Sutherland
Richard Lackaff	Rancher	Bassett
Rob Ravenscroft	Rancher	Valentine
Ron Dobbins	Rancher, Chairman Upper Loup NRD	Tryon
Ted LaGrange	Nebraska Game & Parks Commission	Lincoln

The Board of Directors took the opportunity to review our existing bylaws to determine if they were current to the needs of the organization. Changes were recommended. They included increasing the number of directors from 15 to 16. The additional director would serve from outside of the Task Force area. This would add the perspective of people who do not live in the Sandhills but have an interest in the

area and involvement in the organization. Rob Ravenscroft resigned his position as an “NC-designated” ranching board member and was approved to hold the “member at large” position.

Craig Utter resigned from his position as the “Nebraska Cattlemen employee” position. The Board, in turn, approved his placement in the “NC-designated” board member vacated by Rob. Melody Benjamin was selected and approved to fill the “Nebraska Cattlemen employee” vacancy. Melody is currently a part-time employee for Nebraska Cattlemen and ranches near Lakeside. Dana Larsen, the state range conservationist for Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) filled the vacancy left by Kim Stine. A copy of our by-laws are available on our website: sandhillstaskforce.org.

Rob Ravenscroft was also selected by Governor Johanns to serve on the Nebraska Environmental Trust Board. He serves as one of the three board members representing the Lincoln area. Rob also remains a member of the steering committee of the Nebraska Partnership for All-Bird Conservation. The organization is a multi-organization alliance that promotes a coordinated, science-based, landscape approach to voluntary land stewardship to conserve, improve, and expand habitat for all bird species.

Jim Van Winkle continues to work for the Sandhills Task Force, through a cooperative agreement with Nebraska Cattlemen. Funding for the position from grant #00-126 of the Nebraska Environmental Trust ended this fall. Jim has been instrumental in building working partnerships with government agencies, as well as, providing a greater level of trust between ranchers and the Task Force. Jim is representing the Task Force on the Fire Learning Network. It is a project initiated by the Nature Conservancy to incorporate fire and fire control into landscapes throughout the nation. Jim has represented the Task Force and the Sandhills at two national meetings.

Mike Kelly and Craig Utter traveled to Washington D.C. to represent ranching and the Sandhills Task Force. The program they participated in was the “Walk A Mile In My Boots” program sponsored by National Cattlemen’s Beef Association and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. They were the first two ranchers to participate in the program and spent two days with the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Financial Activities

An audit of the organization’s 2002 financial activity was completed in May by Hellman, Main, Coslor and Pathol., P.C. of Kearney. The report stated *“In our opinion, the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Sandhills Task Force as of December 31, 2002 and 2001 and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the year then ended in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.”*

In 2003, the Task Force spent \$187,027.04 for conservation work. Much of that funding came from grants or cooperative agreements with Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET), Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and Ducks Unlimited. Our checking account is held with Tri County Bank in Stuart, Nebraska. Short-term certificates of deposits (\$750,000 total) were purchased from Purdum State Bank in Purdum, Commercial Bank of Bassett, United Nebraska Bank in Broken Bow, and Pinnacle Bank in O’Neill. It is the Board’s policy to bank within the Sandhills.

The FWS granted \$30,000 to the STF for conservation projects. This money is part of the Service’s “Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.” The NGPC provided funding either directly to the landowner or through a \$25,000 (2003 allocation) cooperative agreement with the Task Force.

Projects

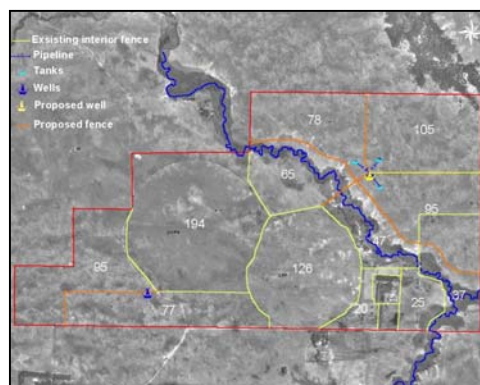
In 2003, the Sandhills Task Force was involved in the initiation or completion of 18 conservation projects in the Sandhills. These 18 represent only those, which have signed wildlife agreements between the Task Force and the landowner. Each of the agreements outlines a conservation strategy that meets the needs of the landowner while providing conservation and wildlife habitat. The lengths of the agreements are for 10 years. The amount cost-shared by the Task Force and its partners is based on the amount of benefit for wildlife and the natural resources. Projects that predominately benefit ranching, with limited benefit for wildlife received a lesser amount of cost share. Likewise, projects that greatly benefited wildlife with marginal benefit to the landowner were provided a larger amount of cost share. FWS and NGPC serve the role of assuring compliance with the agreements. Listed below are only those, which have signed agreements. Thirteen pending potential projects, which represent a significant amount of staff time, are not included.

In all instances, landowners, who requested assistance from the Sandhills Task Force, initiated projects. No agreements were entered into unless the landowner/cooperator shared the same resource concerns and agreed that the management plan developed for their specific landscape was best for their operation and the land. For this reason, compliance with the cooperative agreement has been 100 percent.

The approval of STF funding for projects is done through an established procedure. A standing committee of four board members is responsible for approving each project. That committee includes the three board members affiliated with NRCS, NGPC, and FWS. The fourth member is the rancher board member who lives the closest to the specific project being considered. If any one of the four members has a concern about the project or the funding level, the project is presented at the next board meeting for approval or denial. This process ensures that each project is reviewed for its biological and social merits without reducing the rancher role in decision-making. The process greatly reduces the amount of time the board spends on approving conservation projects.

Bartmann Plum Creek Project

Purpose: To improve the grasslands and riparian habitat along a mile of Plum Creek in Brown County. 15,600 feet of fence, a well, 1000 feet of pipeline and a tank will be installed to manage the stream habitat separate from the uplands. The well and tank will reduce livestock use of the stream. Grazing length will be decreased and the amount of rest to the grasses will be increased. Two miles of stream, 140 acres of riparian area, and 840 acres of grassland were involved.



Funding:

STF	\$4,967.00	Fencing, tank pipeline, and well
Landowner	\$9,935.00	Fencing, tank pipeline, and well
NGPC	\$4,967.00	Fencing, tank pipeline, and well
Total	\$19,869.00	

Accomplishments: The project was completed during 2003 with final inspection and payment made in December. A total of \$9,934 was paid by the STF. This included NGPC's share, which is reimbursed through a cooperative agreement with the agency.

Beginning Rancher Program

The Board continues to have a strong interest in helping young ranchers get started in the business. This past summer, a special one day meeting was organized which included TNC staff, UNL and Sustainable Agriculture staff, Senator Jones, and Board members to discuss what steps can be taken to start a beginning Rancher program or project. The Nature Conservancy stepped forward and offered to take the lead in finding a suitable piece of property.

Buchfinck Riparian Project

Purpose: The 7,091 acre project will change grazing practices for the benefit of ranching, native grassland and riparian habitat along the North Fork of the Dismal River. Season-long grazing will be replaced with a rotational grazing system that incorporates longer rest, increases plant vigor and diversity and provides residual cover for wildlife. By fencing the river from upland pastures, additional water sources are necessary. 540 acres of the project have been identified as riparian habitat.

Funding:

STF	\$9,087.25	Fencing, tanks, wells
NRCS	\$10,428.75	Fencing, tanks, wells
Landowner	\$8,172.00	Fencing, tanks, wells
NGPC	\$5,000.00	Fencing, tanks, wells
Total	<u>\$32,688.00</u>	

Accomplishments: Pipeline and tanks were completed. Fences are staked out but will be constructed in late fall 2003 and 2004. Only \$4,316.64 has been cost shared from the STF to date.

Buell Riparian Project

Purpose: The landowner's primary objectives are to improve native vegetation and enhance wildlife habitat on 2,855 acres in Loup County. Cross fencing, pipeline, and tanks were installed. A grazing plan will use short-duration grazing. Improvements on each side of the Calamus River will allow for high intensity-short duration grazing; enhancing native vegetation and wildlife. All pastures will be grazed twice during the growing season with the first rotation receiving 50% use and the second rotational grazing between 35 and 50 percent of available forage. Pastures will be grazed once during the dormant season. Pastures adjacent to the river will be managed with a strong consideration for plant diversity and wildlife habitat. The riparian areas will be grazed every other year at a lighter stocking rate. 85 acres of riparian habitat along 1.5 miles of stream will be affected.

Funding:

Landowner	\$4,050.75	Fencing, tanks, and pipeline
STF	\$5,952.25	Fencing, tanks, and pipeline
NGPC	\$5,000.00	Fencing, tanks, and pipeline
Total	<u>\$15,003.00</u>	

Accomplishments: The project was completed in the spring of 2003. Full payment of \$10,592.25 was made. NGPC's share was reimbursed through a cooperative agreement.



Education and Outreach

Numerous projects were funded in association with education and outreach. Display booths were set up at the Cherry County fair, at a range tour at Gudmundsen Research facility, and at the Sandhills Cattlemen Annual Convention. A total of \$4,516.67 was granted to sponsor the 4-H Sandhills Academy, two scholarships for UNL Grazing Livestock Systems majors, tuition for one cooperator to attend the Nebraska Ranch Practicum at Gudmundsen, Sandhill Discovery Conference in Ainsworth, and the annual Society of Range Management Youth Range Camp at Chadron.

The Task Force hosted a one-day wildlife class from Valentine High School on a field trip. Students were shown conservation projects at various locations in the Sandhills.

Several formal presentations about our organization and activities were completed. They included a presentation at the multi-state private lands workshop in Kearney, the annual Nebraska Association of Conservation Districts in Kearney, Nebraska Cattlemen’s meeting in Alliance, and Sandhills Discovery in Ainsworth.

Elliot Grazing Project

Project: The project will improve grassland management (through grazing) on 1,956 acres in Cherry County. The landowner's primary objectives are: to improve native vegetation; reduce over-utilization of wetland areas; encourage warm-season grasses; provide residual vegetation for spring nesting; and encourage wildlife production and use of the pastures. Cross fencing and additional wells and tanks were installed to better manage livestock grazing. A grazing plan was developed by NRCS to provide residual cover for wildlife and promote plant vigor. Habitat enhanced included 1,942 acres of grassland and 14 acres of wetland.

Funding:

NRCS	\$13,852.00	Tanks and pipeline
Landowner	\$8,798.00	Fencing, tanks and pipeline
STF	\$7,597.00	Fencing and tank
NGPC	\$4,000.00	Fencing
Total	<u>\$34,247.00</u>	

Accomplishments: The project was completed in 2003. The property was inspected and dramatic improvements in the grassland were noted. The Sandhills Task Force reimbursed a total of \$11,597.00 to the cooperator. NGPC’s share was paid by the STF through a cooperative agreement with the agency.

Fleecs Birdwood Creek Project

Purpose: The cooperator installed various fencing and livestock watering improvements to enhance the production of upland plant species, reduce the duration of use and increase the rest period between grazing applications. Adjacent meadows and associated wetlands within the Birdwood riparian area will be managed for the benefit of wildlife and native plants. In addition to longer rest periods on the entire ranch, an added benefit of the new fencing will result in the creation of a 59-acre wildlife area that will be grazed lightly for short periods of time. The grazing of this unit will be conducted so as to leave excellent fall and winter cover and forage for wildlife. Other stretches of the Birdwood riparian will have livestock

excluded during much of the year. Management on these 1,920 acres will benefit approximately 460 acres of wet meadows and the adjacent uplands and help sustain up to 100 acres of permanent and seasonal shallow water wetlands. Four miles of riparian area will be positively affected.

Funding:

STF	\$5,901.00	16,000 ft of fencing, tanks, well, and pipeline
Landowner	\$6,480.00	16,000 ft of fencing, tanks, well, and pipeline
NGPC	\$500.00	16,000 ft of fencing
Total	<u>\$12,881.00</u>	

Accomplishments: Pipeline and tanks were completed. Some of the fencing was completed with the balance to be done in 2004. The riparian area is already being managed for wildlife.

Finney Project

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to provide adequate water for the cowherd to facilitate livestock rotation, providing rest to 7,679 acres of grassland community in Thomas County. Currently, limited livestock water is causing the landowner to split his herd into smaller groups and keep them in pastures for long periods of time. The result is overgrazing of some species and increase in less desirable plants. The project will improve native vegetation, encourage warm season grasses, provide residual vegetation for spring nesting; and enhance wildlife production and use of the pastures. Following completion of this project, herds will be combined from five to one through the growing season with the exception of first-calf heifers; heifers will be separated from the main herd during breeding season and then rejoin the main herd. A grazing plan will be implemented to provide residual cover for wildlife and promote plant vigor. 90,000 feet of pipeline will be installed.

Funding:

STF	\$12,000.00	Pipeline and well
Landowner	\$26,661.00	Pipeline, well, tank, and 7,600 ft of fence
NRCS/NRD	\$82,894.00	Pipeline, well, tank, and 7,600 ft of fence
NGPC	\$3,000.00	Pipeline
Total	<u>\$124,555.00</u>	

Accomplishments: The pipeline was installed in late fall of 2003. Fencing will be installed in 2004. NRCS inspected the project in December. The Task Force made payment of \$15,000. NGPC’s share was reimbursed through a cooperative agreement.

Friskopp Project

Purpose: This agreement involves the management of 480 acres of grasslands, wetlands, and sub-irrigated meadows. The cooperator, and their partners, designed a management plan that will benefit native grasslands, wetlands, and the ranching operation. The addition of watering sources and cross fencing will enable the cooperator to adopt a grazing and haying management plan that will preserve and enhance the present range conditions. The plan involves grazing, combined with adequate rest periods, to maintain and promote a diverse range of grasses and forbs in each pasture. Moderate grazing coupled with long rests will maintain the upland nesting cover for a variety of grassland birds. The meadow management will encourage native warm season plant growth by means of seeding (about 40 acres) and haying/grazing rotations. The wetland management plan includes restoring cattail-choked wetlands to seasonally hydrated wetlands that are available to migratory and nesting waterfowl. 150 acres of wetlands exist on the property.

Funding:

STF	\$5,000.00	Fencing, tanks, well, and pipeline
NRCS	\$11,281.70	Fencing, tanks, well, and pipeline
Landowner	\$3,565.70	Fencing, tanks, well, and pipeline
NGPC	\$1,500.00	Seeding
Total	<u>\$21,347.40</u>	

Accomplishments: The STF paid an additional \$2,000 to hire a contractor to remove the dense stand of cattail on several wetlands on the property. Fencing, wells and pipeline construction is planned for 2004.

Grassland Bird Study

Purpose: The study was initiated in response to the Task Force’s concern about what affect short duration grazing systems vs. other grazing systems is having on wildlife. Grassland birds are recognized as a group of wildlife, which is very mobile and can quickly move to preferred habitats. The study will measure the diversity and abundance of birds associated with three different grazing systems: short duration (less than 15 days), mid-duration (30 to 45 days), and season-long grazing.

Funding:

STF	\$45,000.00	Graduate student salary, travel, and lodging
NGPC	\$18,000.00	Graduate student salary, travel, and lodging
Sampson Range and Pasture Management Endowment	\$10,000.00	Graduate student salary, travel, and lodging
UNL & other grants	\$31,681.00	Graduate student salary, travel, and lodging
Total	<u>\$104,681.00</u>	

Accomplishment: The research crew finished the second of the three-year study. The results showed a significance difference between years. Most of that can be attributed to the severe drought of 2002. A preliminary report of the 2003 data was provided to the STF. It has been posted on our website sandhilltaskforce.org. To date, the STF has paid \$41,643.69 to the University of Nebraska Office of Research. That includes NGPC’s portion (provided to the STF through a cooperative agreement).

Henderson Land and Livestock

Purpose: This agreement involves the management of 4613 acres of grasslands, wetlands, and sub-irrigated meadows. Addition livestock watering sources and cross fencing will enable the cooperater to adopt a grazing and haying management plan that will preserve and enhance the present range conditions. It will shift grazing from long-term to short-term grazing with long rests to enhance grassland diversity and vigor, and establish upland nesting cover for grassland birds. Each pasture will be grazed one time through during the growing season. Grazing will be deferred on half of one wetland unit during the growing season. Dormant grazing will leave at least six inches of grassland vegetation. Haying and grazing rotation will encourage native warm season plant growth. The wetland management plan includes restoring cattail-choked wetlands to seasonally hydrated wetlands that are available to migratory and nesting waterfowl.

Funding:

Landowner	\$27,630.00	Pipeline, tanks and windbreak
NGPC	\$5,000.00	Pipeline

STF	\$12,000.00	Pipeline and fence
NRCS (EQIP)	\$67,918.00	Pipeline, tanks and windbreak
Total	<u>\$112,548.00</u>	

Accomplishments: A wildlife agreement was signed in December, 2003.

McMurtrey Gordon Creek Project

Purpose: The project will reduce stream erosion on a portion of Gordon Creek, flowing across a large subirrigated meadow. Currently, the channel has degraded 5 to 7 feet downward and 10 to 15 feet wide. The landowner's primary objectives are to improve the hydrology of the Gordon Creek subirrigated meadows, which will increase hay production and increase wildlife habitat adjacent to this free flowing Sandhill stream. Historically, the channel was shallower, with floodwaters flowing across the meadow.

Attempts to increase hay production decades earlier caused owners to straighten bends in the stream. Water control structures will be constructed to allow the passage of about 80 percent of the peak spring flows. The balance will be allowed to flood across the meadow and flow through the old stream channel. During high flows, numerous shallow, temporary wetlands will be flooded. The project should enhance habitat for several species of native fish known to inhabit Gordon Creek. This is expected to be the first phase of a long-term ranch improvement/wildlife enhancement plan envisioned by the landowners. Total enhanced area includes 380 acres of wetland and sub-irrigated meadow habitat, 960 acres of upland grassland, and 3 miles of stream.



Funding:

Landowner	\$5,500.00	Weir structures
NGPC	\$5,000.00	Weir structures
STF*	\$5,000.00	Weir structures
Total	<u>\$15,500.00</u>	

Accomplishments: In the fall of 2002, two water control structures were installed on the property. There was difficulty with installation because the project called for adding on to existing culverts. The additional 3 feet of water above the structures caused erosion to wash out the culverts. The soil around the structures was re-packed and is currently holding. Its influence of the water table in the valley can be seen. In early 2003, Inlaw Construction was hired to install sheet piling along the face of the dike to control erosion. The added installation problems increased STF's costs from \$10,000 to \$29,980.50.

Mulligan Grassland Project

Purpose: A planned grazing system is being developed to shift from season-long to a shorter duration, rotational system on 3,911 acres containing 800 acres of wetlands. Initially, grazing will be limited to 50 percent or less total use based on NRCS recommendations. Grazing through the life of the agreement will slowly increase but will not exceed the 60 percent utilization level recommended by NRCS. A small wetland area will be fenced and managed specifically for wildlife. Soil will be removed from scattered

wetlands to provide open water in areas choked with cattail. Soil removal is not part of the identified funding, but is allowed by the landowner at the other partners' expense.

Funding:

Landowner	\$9,092.40	Fences, pipeline, tanks, and wells
NGPC	\$5,000.00	Fences, pipeline, tanks, and wells
STF	\$22,277.20	Fences, pipeline, tanks, and wells
Total	<u>\$36,369.60</u>	

Accomplishments: Purchase of fencing materials and construction of wells and pipelines were completed in 2002. In 2003 some of the fences were constructed with planned grazing occurring on those areas completed. The rest of the project is expected to be completed in 2004. The cooperators has not asked for any reimbursements at this time. The Task Force contracted for the removal of sediment in two seasonal wetlands to create more semi-permanent habitat (photo on right). \$1,000 was paid for that work.



Polk Blue Creek Project

Purpose: The overall goal of this project is to enhance wetland habitat for migratory birds and other fish and wildlife species along Blue Creek in Garden County, Nebraska. This will be accomplished by removing silt and sediment deposits from within wetlands and constructing two small dikes, which will impound water off-channel in backwater areas along the Creek. The project will enhance the functions and values to both wetlands and uplands within the project area for migratory waterbirds including waterfowl and shorebirds, and other wildlife species native to the area. In addition to the wetland project, the wildlife cooperator has entered into USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The total EQIP contract amount is \$56,750.00. Practices being applied through the contract include wetland enhancement, livestock wells, livestock tanks, pipeline, and fencing. The cooperator has agreed to an NRCS planned grazing system, which specifies 50% or less utilization of plant growth. Approximately two miles of riparian habitat will be enhanced.

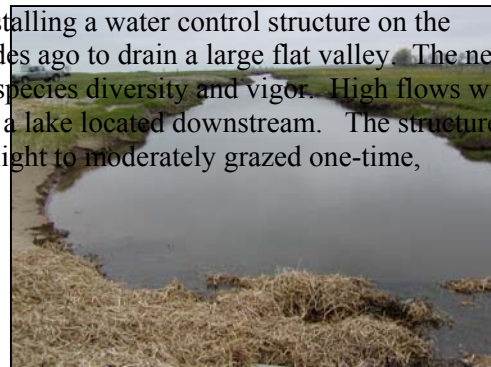
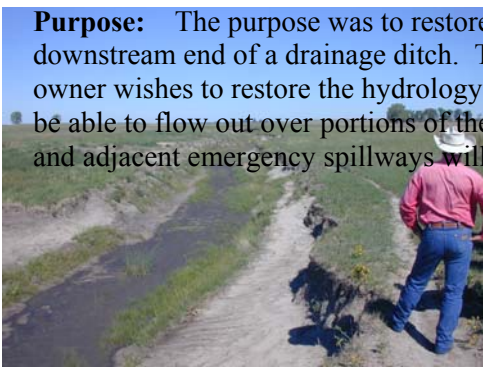
Funding:

STF	\$7,500.00	Dirt work and water control structure
Landowner	\$2,500.00	Dirt work and water control structure
NRCS	\$10,000.00	Dirt work and water control structure
NGPC	\$2,500.00	Dirt work and water control structure
Total	<u>\$25,000.00</u>	

Accomplishments: The project was completed during 2003 with final inspection and payment made in October. A total of \$7,500 was paid by the STF.

Prill Wet Meadow Project

Purpose: The purpose was to restore local hydrology by installing a water control structure on the downstream end of a drainage ditch. The ditch was dug decades ago to drain a large flat valley. The new owner wishes to restore the hydrology and improve the plant species diversity and vigor. High flows will be able to flow out over portions of the valley before entering a lake located downstream. The structure and adjacent emergency spillways will be fenced and will be light to moderately grazed one-time,



annually to provide residual cover for fall / winter wildlife use and spring nesting cover for wildlife. Approximately 120 acres of wet meadow will be enhanced. Photo above, on the left is prior to installation of a water control structure. Photo on the right, shows the same site after installation.

Funding:

Landowner	\$3,250.00	Fence and installation
NGPC	\$2,014.00	Structure material
STF	\$2,014.40	Structure material
Total	<u>\$7,278.40</u>	

Accomplishments: The structure was installed in early December of 2002. The landowner installed the fence surrounding the structure in the spring of 2003. By mid-summer, upland birds were using the taller grasses within the wildlife area.

Prill Water Crossing Project

Purpose: The project is an extension of the first Prill project described above. This one is located further up the drainage ditch and came about after the owner realized the benefits of the first project. Like the first, this project is designed to restore hydrology to the meadows and wetlands. The low relief in the meadow will not allow a cost-effective water control structure so a Texas crossing will be constructed in the ditch. The crossing will back up about 2.5 feet of water and allow the floodwaters to flow over the top of the concrete structure. It is the first of its kind that the STF will install. Its application in other areas would include areas where natural emergency overflows are not possible. Completion of this project will raise the water table, allow flow during high water events, and will enhance the production of nearby lowland meadows and adjacent uplands. About .75 miles stream/ditch and 45 acres of wet meadow will be directly affected.

Funding:

STF	\$3,656.40	Fence and concrete
Landowner	\$3,700.00	Dirt work and construction
NGPC	\$464.40	Fence
Total	<u>\$7,820.80</u>	

Accomplishments: All the necessary permits have been attained. Construction is planned for early next spring.

Sandhills Task Force Website

Purpose: One of the goals of the Task Force is to increase people’s awareness of the Sandhills resources and of the Task Force itself. In 2001, a website was established. It contains information about the organization, its goals, principles, new briefs, and information about various projects the Task Force has funded. Each year, we spend about \$400 to maintain our site on a server. The address is <http://sandhillstaskforce.org>.

Schaeffer Grazing Project

Purpose: This project will help create the infrastructure necessary to implement a rotational grazing program on the project area; to encourage warm-season grasses; to provide residual vegetation for spring nesting; and to enhance wildlife production and use of the 3,311 acres. Currently the landowner is trying to implement a rotational grazing system, but the lack of a sufficient and dependable water supply prevents him from doing so. Cross-fencing and the placement of alternative watering sources are necessary for the landowner to reduce grazing pressure on the pastures and apply a high-density, short

duration grazing plan for all pastures. NRCS is working with the landowner to create a grazing system that will benefit both ranching and wildlife.

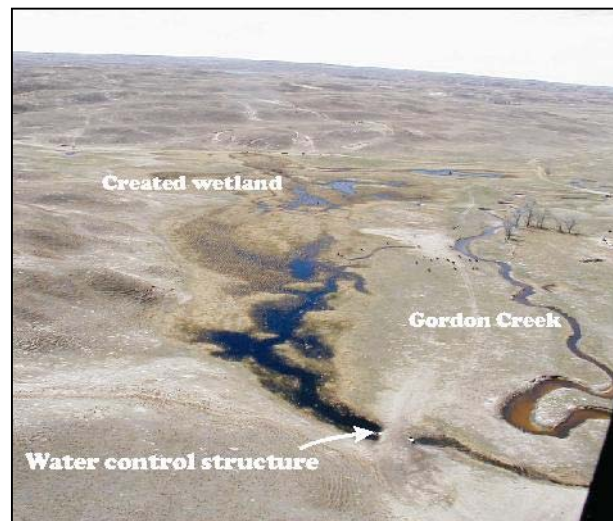
Funding:

Landowner	\$14,041.00	Well, pipeline, pump, fencing and tanks
NRCS	\$25,315.00	Well, pipeline, and tanks
STF	\$8,000.00	Well, pipeline, and tanks
NGPC	\$8,000.00	Well, pipeline, and tanks
Upper Loup NRD	\$2,649.00	Fencing
Total	<u>\$58,005.00</u>	

Accomplishments: Construction began in 2002. Two tanks remain to be installed. Payment of \$6,820 was made to the landowner.

Swanson Wetland Project

Purpose: Five small water control structures will be installed within Gordon Creek valley to improve groundwater and surface water hydrology and to control flooding and erosion. The structures will be placed on seasonal feeder streams or overflows. Historically, the channel meandered across the meadow accessing the flood plain during high flows. At high flows the proposed water structure will divert excess water to historic meanders and ultimately into the adjacent shallow water wetland areas. The project has the potential to affect 920 acres of wet meadows containing numerous small temporary wetlands.



Funding:

STF	\$14,000.00	Materials and construction
Landowners	\$8,000.00	Construction
NGPC	\$10,000.00	Materials and construction
Total	<u>\$32,000.00</u>	

Accomplishments: Four of the five structures were installed in the late fall of 2002. Final payment of \$10,465.25 was made in early 2003. NGPC paid their share separately. The feasibility of the fifth structure is being evaluated and may not be installed. A high school wildlife class from Valentine was provided a tour of this project and other conservation projects last spring.

Vinton LTD Project

Purpose: A planned grazing system will be developed on 4,487 acres for the benefit of improving native grassland. A grazing plan will be implemented to provide residual cover for wildlife and promote plant vigor. Management on these acres will benefit ten acres of seasonal wetlands and permanent wetlands and 4,477 acres of associated upland habitat.

Funding:

STF	\$3,371.06	Fencing and tank
Landowners	\$3,630.38	Fencing and tank
NGPC	\$3,371.06	Fencing and tank
Total	<u>\$10,372.50</u>	

Accomplishments: Approximately two miles of fence and one tank has been installed. Completion was expected in 2003 but drought conditions slowed down fencing.

West Twin Lake Restoration

Purpose: In negotiating the sale of the Pullman Valley portion of the property, Glen Coble and Sons, Inc. agreed to sell a restoration and conservation easement on West Twin Lake, located approximately one-half mile east of Pullman Valley. The value of that easement was \$33,000. The landowner also agreed to hold the water level at the historic level using their existing water control structure for two years while the Task Force obtains a permit.



Currently the lake is surrounded by a drainage ditch, which removes enough surface water to allow about half of the lakebed to be hayed. The newly acquired easement allowed the Sandhills Task Force to construct and maintain a water control structure that will restore approximately 113 acres of lake to its near historic level.

Funding:

NRCS	\$24,000.00	75% cost share and engineering design
STF	\$33,000.00	Purchase of conservation easement
STF	\$6,000.00	25% cost share on water control structure
Total	<u>\$63,000.00</u>	

Accomplishments: The landowner held the water level in the lake at a higher than required elevation during the summer of 2003. In the fall, lake elevation was dropped to allow for the installation of the water control structure (photo above). The structure was installed under the Wetland Reserve Program with NRCS paying 75 percent of the restoration cost. Payment for the project was completed this fall. By December, lake elevations were back to historic levels. Total cost of the structure was \$23,678. STF portion was \$5,919.52.

Wolfenden Gordon Creek Project

Purpose: The purpose of the project is to replace worn, under-designed, high maintenance water control structures with two new ones designed to handle high flows without the removal of boards. The dam had washed out in the spring of 2003 (photo on right). The two structures will be identical 5-foot diameter by 80-foot corrugated metal pipes with a modified weir plate on the inlet (See exhibit B). The structures will hold (still pool) pond elevation at a depth of four feet. During high flows, the twin tubes will pass more water than existing tubes did. An



emergency overflow will be formed from the natural lay of the land to divert excessive floodwaters away from the structures and across grassed uplands. The overflow water is expected to return to the stream approximately 1/4 mile below the structure. Habitats created or enhanced include 4.5 acres of shallow wetland, 1.5 miles of stream, and 40 acres of sub-irrigated wet meadow. An additional 120 acres of wet meadow below the structure is flooded each fall, which provides habitat for migrating waterfowl.

Funding:

Landowner	\$16,400.00	Dirt work involved in construction
STF	\$14,000.00	Two water control structures
Total	<u>\$30,400.00</u>	

Accomplishments: The project was constructed in late summer (photo on left). Water levels behind the structure were filled to minimal levels and extra stream flows (associated with a water right) were diverted onto a large meadow for irrigation purposes. The land irrigated contains numerous temporary and seasonal wetlands that were filled. STF portion of the final cost was \$14,663.64.



Purchase of Equipment

Purchase date	Item	Purchase Price	On loan to:	City, State
25-Sep-98	Laptop Computer Model: Dell TS30H SN: 8390246BY47441A	\$3,657.54	Kevin Hood, Natural Resources Conservation Service	Thedford, NE
12-Oct-00	Total Station Model: Sokkia SET4110 SN: 026438	\$12,008.43	Don Earl, Natural Resources Conservation Service	Thedford, NE
15-Dec-00	Printer Model:HP G55 Deskjet SN: SG#07EGGQT	\$529.99	Jim Van Winkle, Nebraska Cattlemen	Wood Lake, NE
18-Dec-00	Laptop Computer Model:Dell Inspiron Model 3800-220-4815 SN: 060322865	\$2,502.15	Transferred from Jim Van Winkle on 6/15/03 to Gene Mack U.S. Fish and Wildlife Serv.	Kearney, NE
7-May-01	Digital Camera (LOST) Model:Olympus D-460 Zoom SN: 106687323	\$422.94	Jim Van Winkle, Nebraska Cattlemen (Lost on a field tour)	Wood Lake, NE
5-Nov-01	Garmin Map 76 w/WAAS, PC Cable /cigarette lighter adaptor, MapSource CD, and GA27C Antenna	\$917.66	Jan Joseph, Natural Resources Conservation Service	Valentine, NE
6/5/2003	Dell Inspiron 5100 w/ Office Professional SN: CN-09U806-12961- 356-4395	\$1800.00	Jim Van Winkle Nebraska Cattlemen	Wood Lake, NE
8/11/2003	Digital Camera Olympus D 560 SN: 269C50999	\$363.20	Jim Van Winkle, Nebraska Cattlemen	Wood Lake, NE

APPENDIX A

Sandhills Task Force Checking Account Activity

Tri County Bank, Stuart, Nebraska

January 1, 2003 through December 31, 2003

Transactions (Page 1 of 3)	Date	Expense	Deposit
Village of Nenzel (Education & Outreach)	13-Jan-03	\$936.67	
University of Nebraska Foundation (Scholarships)	17-Jan-03	\$1,000.00	
Cooperative Extension/Univ. Nebr. (Scholarship)	27-Jan-03	\$600.00	
Inlaw Construction, Inc	27-Jan-03	\$150.00	
The Nature Conservancy Action Fund (Outreach)	27-Jan-03	\$5,000.00	
Homer and Darla Buell	31-Jan-03	\$9,543.75	
North Central Development Center (Education)	31-Jan-03	\$500.00	
Postmaster – Kearney	31-Jan-03	\$37.00	
Secretary of State	31-Jan-03	\$20.00	
Secretary of State	31-Jan-03	\$10.00	
Nebraska Cattlemen (Staff and overhead)	10-Feb-03	\$4,821.45	
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Jan-03		\$371.78
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Jan-03		\$756.16
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Jan-03		\$756.16
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Jan-03		\$756.16
United Nebraska Bank (CD - interest)	28-Jan-03		\$748.60
The Tri County Bank (Interest)	28-Jan-03		\$166.19
Purdum State Bank (CD - interest)	18-Feb-03		\$756.16
Commercial Bank - Bassett (CD - interest)	24-Feb-03		\$693.15
GD Media Group (Web server)	13-Feb-03	\$15.00	
Nebraska Environmental Trust (Grant payment)	11-Feb-03		\$4,563.45
Pinnacle Bank - O'Neill (CD - interest)	24-Feb-03		\$308.52
Pinnacle Bank - O'Neill (CD - interest)	25-Feb-03		\$462.77
The Tri County Bank (Interest)	28-Feb-03		\$95.86
Inlaw Construction, Inc	13-Mar-03	\$443.00	
Fleecs Ranch	14-Mar-03	\$3,701.00	
Nebraska Cattlemen (Staff and overhead)	24-Mar-03	\$4,687.39	
Nebraska Cattlemen (Staff and overhead)	21-Apr-03	\$4,844.06	
Pinnacle Bank, O'Neill (CD - interest)	25-Mar-03		\$93.90
Pinnacle Bank, O'Neill (CD - interest)	25-Mar-03		\$140.84
The Tri County Bank (Interest)	31-Mar-03		\$93.85
Nebraska Cattlemen (Staff and overhead)	18-Feb-03	\$5,003.21	
Swanson Ranch	25-Apr-03		\$3,628.00
University of Nebraska, WCREC (Education)	04-Apr-03	\$125.00	
Inlaw Construction, Inc	04-Apr-03	\$6,392.50	
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Apr-03		\$363.70
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Apr-03		\$739.73
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Apr-03		\$739.73
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Apr-03		\$739.73
United Nebraska Bank (CD - interest)	28-Apr-03		\$732.45
The Tri County Bank (Interest)	30-Apr-03		\$82.73
Samuel H. Prill	12-May-03		
Commercial Bank - Bassett (CD - interest)	21-May-03		\$670.55
Purdum State Bank (CD - interest)	19-May-03		\$731.51
Homer and Darla Buell	21-May-03	\$1,408.50	
Nebraska Environmental Trust (Grant payment)	20-May-03		\$25,401.47
Pinnacle Bank, O'Neill (CD - interest)	23-May-03		\$135.70

Transactions (Page 2 of 3)	Date	Expense	Deposit
Pinnacle Bank, O'Neill (CD - interest)	23-May-03		\$203.56
The Tri County Bank (Interest)	30-May-03		\$89.36
Nebraska Cattlemen (Staff and overhead)	10-Jun-03	\$4,869.25	
Steve Vinton	19-Jun-03	\$1,200.00	
Hellman, Main, Coslor, Kathol, P.C.	19-Jun-03	\$825.00	
Nebraska Cattlemen (Staff and overhead)	26-Jun-03	\$4,934.34	
Nebraska Game & Parks Commission	10-Jun-03		\$9,000.00
The Tri County Bank (Interest)	30-Jun-03		\$83.63
4-H Youth Development	15-Jul-03	\$1,500.00	
Nebraska Cattlemen (Staff and overhead)	15-Jul-03	\$4,871.52	
Gene D. Mack (Laptop computer)	15-Jul-03	\$2,071.00	
Bill Elliott	28-Jul-03	\$1,200.00	
Ace Irrigation (Water control structures)	28-Jul-03	\$1,205.20	
Rob Ravenscroft (Travel expenses)	11-Aug-03	\$258.39	
Nebraska Game & Parks Commission	10-Jul-03		\$25,000.00
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Jul-03		\$367.74
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Jul-03		\$747.95
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Jul-03		\$747.95
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Jul-03		\$747.95
United Nebraska Bank (CD - interest)	29-Jul-03		\$740.47
The Tri County Bank (Interest)	31-Jul-03		\$87.85
Judd Van Winkle (Sediment removal)	26-Aug-03	\$1,000.00	
Nebraska Cattlemen (Staff and overhead)	26-Aug-03	\$4,811.82	
Purdum State Bank (CD - interest)	18-Aug-03		\$756.16
Commercial Bank - Bassett (CD - interest)	27-Aug-03		\$693.15
Nebraska Environmental Trust (Grant payment)	15-Aug-03		\$19,519.17
Bill Elliott	27-Aug-03	\$1,651.23	
Nebraska Sec. Soc. Range Management (Education)	19-Sep-03	\$416.67	
North Central Development Center (Education)	29-Sep-03	\$500.00	
Nebraska Cattlemen (Staff and overhead)	29-Sep-03	\$5,300.47	
Sandhills Cattle Association (Education)	29-Sep-03	\$200.00	
Pinnacle Bank - O'Neill (CD - interest)	25-Aug-03		\$204.67
Pinnacle Bank - O'Neill (CD - interest)	25-Aug-03		\$307.00
The Tri County Bank (Interest)	29-Aug-03		\$89.56
The Tri County Bank (Interest)	30-Sep-03		\$101.56
Nebraska Cattlemen (Staff and overhead)	15-Oct-03	\$5,237.63	
Greg Polk	15-Oct-03	\$7,500.00	
UNL - Office of Research Management (Research)	15-Oct-03	\$20,759.13	
A.S.P. Enterprises, Inc (Erosion material)	15-Oct-03	\$127.00	
Eakes Office Supply	16-Oct-03	\$13.83	
Inlaw Construction, Inc	21-Oct-03	\$14,663.64	
Philomene Kime	30-Oct-03	\$362.34	
Inlaw Construction, Inc	04-Nov-03	\$18,759.84	
Stadium Sports (Promotional caps and t-shirts)	04-Nov-03	\$605.28	
Ivan Schneidereit (Cattail control)	04-Nov-03	\$2,000.00	
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Oct-03		\$371.78
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Oct-03		\$756.16
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Oct-03		\$756.16
The Tri County Bank (CD - interest)	28-Oct-03		\$756.16
United Nebraska Bank (CD - interest)	29-Oct-03		\$748.60
The Tri County Bank (Interest)	31-Oct-03		\$88.80
Dean Heiden	10-Nov-03	\$369.00	
Lloyd L. Buchfinck & Sons	10-Nov-03	\$4,316.64	

Transactions (Page 3 of 3)	Date	Expense	Deposit
GD Media Group (Web server)	18-Nov-03	\$384.45	
Nebraska Cattlemen (Staff and overhead)	24-Nov-03	\$4,953.04	
Mike Kelly (Travel expenses)	05-Dec-03	\$1,166.16	
Buffalo Head Ranch	05-Dec-03	\$3,569.05	
Purdum State Bank (CD - interest)	17-Nov-03		\$756.16
Pinnacle Bank - O'Neill (CD - interest)	25-Nov-03		\$204.67
Pinnacle Bank - O'Neill (CD - interest)	25-Nov-03		\$307.00
Nebraska Environmental Trust (Grant payment)	26-Nov-03		\$8,366.50
The Tri County Bank (Interest)	28-Nov-03		\$57.80
Dick & Judy Bartmann	09-Dec-03	\$9,934.00	
Nebraska Cattlemen (Staff and overhead)	24-Dec-03	\$4,752.59	
Fleecs Ranch	30-Dec-03	\$1,500.00	
Nebraska Game & Parks Commission	08-Dec-03		\$25,000.00
USDA - FSA (WRP reimbursement)	11-Dec-03		\$17,758.58
The Tri County Bank (Interest)	31-Dec-03		\$73.90
Total financial transactions occurring in 2003		\$187,027.04	\$160,904.47

Appendix B

**SANDHILLS TASK FORCE
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION**

31-Dec-03

ASSETS

Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 980,926.36
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NET ASSETS

Unrestricted	948,863.33
Permanently restricted	<u>32,063.03</u>

TOTAL NET ASSETS	<u><u>\$ 980,926.36</u></u>
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STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

Period of January 1, 2002 to December 31, 2002

UNRESTRICTED NET ASSETS

Income

Interest from CD (Commercial Bank - Bassett)	2,742.47
Interest from CD (Pinnacle Bank - O'Neill)	2,368.63
Interest from CD (Purdum State Bank - Purdum)	2,999.99
Interest from CD (Tri County Bank - Stuart)	10,475.00
Interest from checking account (Tri County Bank - Stuart)	1,111.09

INCREASE IN UNRESTRICTED NET ASSETS	<u><u>\$ 19,697.18</u></u>
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Expenses

Administrative Costs	(69.80)
Educational Grants	(1,536.28)
Scott Abstract	(85.00)
UNL Office of Research	(7,081.16)
Secretary of State	<u>(10.00)</u>

DECREASE IN UNRESTRICTED NET ASSETS	<u><u>\$ (8,782.24)</u></u>
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PERMANENTLY RESTRICTED NET ASSETS

Nebraska Environment Trust	53,287.14
Nebraska Game & Parks Commission	50,000.00
Nebraska Game & Parks Commission (Bird Study)	9,000.00
US Fish and Wildlife Service (reimbursement pending)	29,842.15

Restrictions satisfied by NET agreement:	
Nebraska Cattlemen (Salary and operating expenses)	(42,397.72)
Education and Outreach	(2,051.67)
Conservation projects	(8,837.75)
Restrictions satisfied by FWS agreement:	
Conservation Projects	(29,842.15)
Restrictions satisfied by NGPC agreement:	
Grassland Bird Survey	(9,000.00)
Conservation Projects	(15,528.47)
Restrictions satisfied by DU agreement:	
Conservation projects	(2,408.50)
INCREASE IN PERMANENTLY RESTRICTED NET ASSETS	<u>\$ 32,063.03</u>
INCREASE IN ASSETS	\$ 42,977.97
NET ASSETS AT BEGINNING OF YEAR	<u>\$ 937,948.39</u>
NET ASSETS AT END OF YEAR	<u><u>\$ 980,926.36</u></u>