

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, Nebraska 68848

January, 2000

Next Meeting: February 1st

Our next Task Force meeting is: February 1, 2000 at Stubbs Restaurant in Thedford. Meeting will start at 9:30 am.

STF Accomplishment Report Completed

One condition of our Nebraska Environmental Trust grant is that I provide them with a report of STF activities. I think this is also a great opportunity to assess what has been done and provide that information to Board of Directors. I added a permanent binding to make it more formal and had some extra copies made as an informative handout is the opportunity arises.

Position Description for STF Employee Being Finalized

The Job Description Committee met on December 9 to review a draft put together by Gus. The consensus of the group was that the task consisted of three parts: 1) position description; 2) the skills and knowledge we are looking for in an individual; 3) annual performance expectations. I expect this to be a main topic of the February meeting.

At the meeting, there was some talk about how difficult it might be finding someone who would be interested and have the qualifications. Since that meeting, I have had two people (one living by Mullen, the other by O'Neill) contact me out of the blue; looking for a wildlife-type job in the Sandhills.

Future Easements For Sandhills Task Force ?

The time is approaching that the Task Force will need to decide on what happens to the Fen property. The conditions of the grant identified the fens had to be restored, the Task Force had to receive a tax-exempt status from IRS, a conservation easement had to be placed on the property, and the property had to be resold to private ranching.

The original time schedule would have us selling the property in about one year. We got about a one-year delay in collecting baseline information and starting restoration. Thus, delaying the sale for an additional year seems reasonable. Discussion should begin on what the conservation easement will say, who will hold it, and what type of time-table we are looking at. There has been interest in buying the property by the two ranchers presently leasing the ranch.

Governor Tour of Sandhills??

I was contacted by Nebraska Environmental Trust. They informed me that one of their Board members was putting together a tour of the Sandhills with the Governor. NET wanted a briefing document of projects the Sandhills Task Force have been involved in, especially those using NET money. That info was sent to them but I have no idea when and if such a tour will happen.



Task Force Makes First Payment on Thedford Burn

The first year's payment to NRCS for collecting data on the Thedford burn was made. The picture shows the burn site in late June. From the looks of things, it looks like the fire didn't have much effect...BUT, it will be nice to have the numbers to prove it.

IRS vs. Application for Tax Exempt Status

We are at the final stage of applying for Tax Exempt status. I have ordered the check for \$500 from our account. When it is received and Byron signs the application, it will be off to the IRS. John Detisch, our attorney who has worked very hard on this project also informed me that because of the unusualness of our organization, I should expect the IRS to want to ask me a few questions and to look at our books.

HRM Video being distributed

The holistic management video that the Task Force funded is now being distributed. Comments on the video, so far have been very positive. The Nebraska Branch of HRM is distributing promotional copies to organizations and people who have an influence on land management at the landscape level. Individual copies are being sold for \$14.00. This pretty much covers the cost of producing copies and mailing.

Cow Creek Project Completed

Cow Creek Project is formally completed and a final report is being drafted by our office to submit to Nebraska Environmental Trust.

Sandhills Perceptions Study Being Redesigned

The study that has been in the making for nearly two years has been discarded and another is currently being finished. The project was continually plagued with problems: ranging from conflict with major advisor, loss of University funds, dissolving of the Geography Department, and the survey being too long in nature. Recently, Game and Parks pulled their portion of the funding and has given it to the State Museum. Amy Richert has made arrangements with the State Museum to do a similar survey (only shorter in length). Apparently, the Museum is also interesting in knowing the perception of people who live in the Sandhills. After talking with Byron, I have contacted Dr. Amedeo and terminated our contract with him and have diverted the funds to the Museum. To date, no contract has been signed.

Jumbo Valley Fen Project

On January 3, Al Steuter, Doug Whisenhunt and I met with NRCS engineers and Kevin Hood to discuss restoration plans for Pullman Valley. Our plan is to install two water control structures like the ones in Jumbo Valley and one weir. Some lateral ditches would also be filled. It was agreed that no final decision(s) will be made until the elevation survey is complete. Two conditions need to be met: 1) the water control structures cannot raise surface water to a point where it floods Paul Coble's property and 2) restoration plans have to be discussed with Paul Coble before we begin construction.

Jumbo Valley Fen Restoration				
	Date Started	Units	Cost per unit	Cost

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Water control structure (Date completed: January 22, 1999)				
Earthfill	10/15/98	300 yd ³	\$4.50	\$1,350.00
Excavation	10/15/98	150 yd ³	\$3.50	\$525.00
36-inch CMP	10/15/98	60 In ft	\$157.99	\$9,479.40
36-inch mod. CMP	6/1/99	one	\$2,087.67	\$2,087.67
Subtotal				\$13,442.07
Water control structure (Date completed: January 22, 1999)				
Earthfill	10/15/98	440 yd ³	\$4.50	\$1,980.00
Excavation	10/15/98	160 yd ³	\$3.50	\$560.00
36-inch CMP	10/15/98	60 In ft	\$157.99	\$9,479.40
36-inch mod. CMP	6/1/99	one	\$2,087.67	\$2,087.67
Subtotal				\$14,107.07
Water control structure (Date completed: August 6, 1999)				
Earthfill	10/15/98	370 yd ³	\$4.50	\$1,665.00
Excavation	10/15/98	140 yd ³	\$3.50	\$490.00
48-inch CMP	10/15/98	66 In ft	\$217.16	\$14,332.56
48-inch mod. CMP	6/1/99	one	\$2,087.67	\$2,087.67
Subtotal				\$18,575.23
Installing tie-downs on all three structures				\$5,900.00
Total				\$52,024.37
Portion paid by NRCS (Wetlands Reserve Program)				\$40,493.28
Portion paid by NGPC				\$11,531.09

On a side note

Will Meeks, who used to work for me, called from North Dakota. He and his wife Cindy are first time parents to a baby girl. He also informed me that he is trying to develop a landowner-based cooperative program in North Dakota. He hopes to use the Sandhills Task Force as his model. I am reminded of the meeting we had in Hyannis when we talked about Will leaving. Someone on the Task Force made the comment that if we get the opportunity to educate a FWS employee and they leave...they may take the idea with them. Very prophetic!