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Sandhills Task Force

"Where People and Land are One"

P.O. Box 1686

Kearney, Nebraska 68848

January, 2002

Next Task Force Meeting:

The next Task Force meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 13th at Stubs Restaurant in Thedford. The meeting will begin at 9:30 am.

Negotiations and appraisal of fen property nears an end.

The month of January has been full of real estate activity associated with the fen property. A brief summary of activity is given below. In late December, an appraiser from Valentine finished a contract with TNC to appraise the fen property. We had asked TNC to modify their original contract to include the West Twin property.

The arrangement with Coble and Sons, Inc (owner of West Twin) was to purchase an easement on West Twin that included the right to restore the water elevation to 3414 feet. This would add about three feet of water to the current level. The appraiser estimates that about 68 acres of dryland will be converted to wetland. In mid-January, the appraisal was received by TNC. To move the process forward quickly, we notified Cobles and Huffmans that the appraisals were completed. Since the Task Force had agreed to sell the property at appraised value, I provided them with those figures when I called them to make an appointment to discuss the costs.

At the Task Force meeting, the Board needs to review and act on the appraisal figures. We had agreed to sell the property to adjacent landowners at appraised value, but the Board still has the right to ask for a different appraisal if they do not believe this one is correct.

Storage permit needed to restore West Twin Lake

The Sandhills Task Force, in conjunction with Coble and Sons, Inc will need to apply for a storage permit. We will be requesting to hold water at the 3414 foot level. NRCS was asked to provide us with an engineering design to accompany the permit application. We will also need to get an application for the Wetland Reserve Program to assist in restoration costs.

Application for NET grant being considered

Jim continues to work with landowners to do projects. We looked at some of the preliminary costs and we could easily spend \$100-\$150,000 this coming year. Three or four years of this activity could change us to an organization with great ideas but no money to leverage partnerships with. At that point, we would be back to the old way of doing business: agreeing to do something if we get funding next year.

In addition, as our funds decline, we will not be able to do future acquisitions, restorations, and resale type projects. Jim and I have talked to NET people about our options for submitting a grant application in September. Discussion at the Board meeting should give direction on which direction the Task Force should go.

Final Sandhills wildfire monitoring project report completed.

Kim Stine provided a copy of the final report. Copies of the report are being sent to Board members with this newsletter.

STF annual report was sent to NET Board members.

In 2001, our organization affected over 40,000 acres of land in the Sandhills. To help share our success story, a copy of the [annual report](#) was sent to every NET board member. Additional copies were also provided to Holt County Commissioners to help Dean explain the role and actions of the Task Force. A version of the report will be added to the website with the next few days.

CPA firm contracted to do STF audit.

A second bid for an audit was solicited from an accounting firm in Kearney. The firm, Hellman Mai Coslor & Kathol, provided a bid of \$895 to complete an audit and submit our 990 tax form to the IRS. I contacted Byron and Mike for their recommendations. We agreed that since this bid was about \$1000 less than the price submitted by the Grand Island firm, we would go with them. Completion date will be prior to May 15. I have been talking directly with Errol Coslor who handles all their non-profit organization accounts.

IRS 1099's sent to eleven landowners.

In conjunction with getting an audit, I asked Errol if the STF needed to provide 1099 forms to all the landowners we provided funding to in 2001. After researching, it still remained unclear if they were necessary. His recommendation was to send them and let each landowner make a determination on how they apply to their IRS filing.

Meeting to plan bird study

Larkin Powell and his new graduate student met with Jim and I at a Sandhill rancher's place to discuss the bird study and its logistics. Tom was very supportive of the study. The research project hopes to get other ranchers in eastern Cherry County to allow the student and his summer assistant to do surveys.

TNC applying for Fire Learning Network funding.

The Nature Conservancy in Nebraska has an opportunity to receive funding to put together a two-year Fire Learning Network. They are in the process of applying for the grant. The grant monies became available as a response to the large wildfires and loss of private property, especially where open space lands surround homes. The intent of the Network is to bring people from various interests together to develop a landscape level approach to fire (both wild and prescribed). It is designed to foster leveraged collaboration in hazardous fuel treatment, protection of communities, biodiversity conservation, fire management planning, and ecosystem restoration at the landscape level.

Over 190 first round applications were submitted this last year. Sandhills and Niobrara River made the top 50 list. The second round application will select the 25 areas that will be funded. To help score better, TNC is enclosing letters of commitment by various parties who are willing to help in developing this learning network. The STF commitment would be providing rancher and STF input on what the plan should look like. This is expected to be a couple of one-day meetings during the year. A letter was sent to Al stating our willingness to participate.

Nebraska Community Foundation vs STF checking account?

In 2001, I wrote \$156,000 worth of checks. Our checking account accumulated \$1266 (2.5% rate). If the same transactions would have occurred through Nebraska Community Foundation, we would be about \$5400 poorer. NCF, however, would have done our audit and 990 tax form. Our audit and tax form is expected to cost \$900. Total difference is \$4600 gain for STF.

NRCS - Ogallala declines STF contribution

I was notified by Jeff Nichols from the NRCS Ogallala office that their state office was purchasing a computer and GIS equipment which they had request from the STF. That obligation was removed from our books.

Wildlife Extension Agreement signed to help control down cutting on Gordon Creek in Cherry County.



Jim was successful at putting together an agreement with the McMurtrey family to install two water control structures on their portion of the Gordon Creek. Currently, there exists two culverts for crossing the meadow. Each culvert passes normal flows but during high flows, the excess floods across the meadow. We have designed a structure to add to the upstream side of the culverts that will raise the stream bed about 3 feet but still pass the same amount of water through the culvert. McMurtrey's are providing about 1/3 the cost. The picture shows the stream and valley. The raised stream elevation is expected to help subirrigate the meadow.