

# Sandhills Task Force

"Where People and Land Are One"

P.O. Box 1686

Kearney, NE 68848

January, 2007

## Next Task Force Meeting:

The next Task Force meeting is on January 24th 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)

Approval of Ben Bailey to Board

New TNC Director

Project Coordinator update

12:00 Lunch

Long-billed curlews in the Sandhills

Approval of BNSF agreement

Approval of FWS agreement

Requesting continuation of NET grant

Updates:

Conflict of interest concerns

The Grazing Manager software (Agren, Inc.)

## Board will act on replacing Nebraska Cattlemen board member

Last summer Craig Utter resigned from the Board when he moved to Idaho. As stated in the bylaws, the position he held is reserved for a Nebraska Cattlemen member. The Cattlemen has recommended Ben Bailey to fill that position. Ben is a manager at the Rex Ranch and lives on their ranch located south of Lakeside.

## Burlington Northern Sante-Fe working with STF to mitigate American Burying Beetle habitat.

The BNSF railroad is planning to expand the number of tracks at several locations throughout Nebraska. Three of those sites are located in the Sandhills and will affect habitat of the endangered species—American Burying Beetle.

A cooperative agreement has been drafted for the Board's consideration. Under the agreement, BNSF would provide approximately \$32,000 to the STF to use to restore or improve wet meadow habitat used by the beetle. A main component of the agreement is the work will only be done on a voluntary basis with willing landowners. The total amount of land involved is approximately 36 acres.

At the January Board meeting, the proposal will be presented to the Board.

## Office of Special Council gives Jim Van Winkle an opinion of being County Commissioner.

Last fall a small group within the Sandhills expressed concern that Jim Van Winkle may be violating the Hatch Act. They contended that his work with the

STF and running for a partisan office was a violation. Jim contacted the Office of Special Council and provided them with information needed to make a determination. The STF and NC were also contacted for additional information.

In their response letter to Jim, they wrote: "Thus, we have determined that you are not covered by the Hatch Act because neither the Task Force nor the Cattlemen is a state or local agency, and neither organization receives federal funding pursuant to statutes that deem recipient organizations state or local agencies for purposes of the Hatch Act. Therefore, the Act does not prohibit you from running for Cherry County Commissioner."

## State Nongame Bird Program Manager to speak to Board.

Joel Jorgensen, the new Nongame Bird Manager for Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has requested time to discuss potential research on long-billed curlews in the Sandhills.

The curlew is an annual visitor to the Sandhills and depends on the grasslands for nesting. It is one grassland species that is showing serious declines throughout its range. Its breeding habitat is open, grassland of shorter height. The Sandhills is on its easternmost portion of its breeding range, which extends west to the Pacific Coast. It winters in southern coastal states and Mexico.

Little is known about its abundance and distribution in the Sandhills. Steve Dinsmore (Iowa State University), Larkin Powell (UNL), and Jorgenson are putting together a research project to gather key information (abundance, vital rates, etc) about the curlew here in Nebraska.

Joel wishes to provide information to the STF and ask for support and any voluntary help, such as landowner contacts, general advice, etc. No monetary support is being asked for at this time.

## New director of the Nature Conservancy will meet with STF Board.

The newly appointed director of the Nature Conservancy, Mace Hack, has contacted me and asked to meet with the STF to introduce himself and to become acquainted with our organization and its board members. Mace is very much interested in continuing a good working relationship between our two organizations.

## FWS plans to do a Partnership Workshop in the Sandhills again.

In 2005, the Fish and Wildlife Service conducted a week-long course on building partnerships. The training was for FWS employees who work directly with landowners, conservation groups, and other government agencies. The STF was the example used and the training was a success.

The FWS would like to repeat that same training again this next June. They are asking the STF to once again agree to host the training. By hosting the training, the STF would receive \$2500 to cover all costs associated with the training. That would include room rental, refreshments, and meals for the instructors.

### Dirt work projects completed in late summer

Late summer often means dirt work. Several several projects were completed in the Sandhills. Photos of the results are shown below.

**Birdwood Creek:** The Birdwood project involved recreating the meander which was removed when a portion of the stream was ditched decades ago. The combination of a water control structure and the meander raised the streambed so the groundwater is closer to the surface of the valley. Five ponds adjacent to the stream were also created or enhanced.

Funding used by the STF came from the Department of Environmental Quality.



5-foot tube with weir inlet structure installed on Birdwood Creek.



Portion of meander reconstructed on Birdwood Creek.

**Sedlacek Project:** The project included stopping the downcutting of a portion of Sand Draw Creek in Brown County. It included the construction of a four-foot diameter tube with a weir structure on the inlet. Funding for the project included NET and NGPC funding.



Sedlacek project on Sand Draw Creek

**Lee Project:** Three ponds were created or enhanced on an intermittent stream north of Brownlee. A weir tube was installed on the two new ponds. Dike work was done on the third pond. STF funding came from a Private Lands Stewardship grant and NGPC.



One of three ponds created or enhanced at the Lee Ranch north of Brownlee.

**Pass Creek Project:** Two water control structure/ponds were constructed on Pass Creek south of Brownlee. The stream was downcutting along most of its short drainage into the Middle Loup. The property is owned by the Nebraska Board of Education. STF funding came from NET.



One of two ponds being constructed on Pass Creek

*Aene D. Meek*