

# *Sandhills Task Force*

*"Where People and Land Are One"*

**P.O. Box 1686  
Kearney, NE 68848**

**June, 2007**

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## **Next Task Force Meeting:**

The next Task Force meeting is on June 27th 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)  
New NET Director  
Project Coordinator update

12:00 Lunch

Support for Long-billed curlew study in the Sandhills  
Approval of Schick Lake Project  
Executive Session

3:30 Adjourn

## **Board accepts Ben Bailey as new Nebraska Cattlemen board member.**

At the January meeting, the Board approved Nebraska Cattlemen's recommendation of appointing Ben Bailey to serve on the Board. Ben ranches for the Rex Ranch and is located on the Eldred Unit south of Lakeside.

## **Nebraska Cattlemen is looking for nominations.**

Nebraska Cattlemen is seeking ranch nominations for the 2007 Sand County Foundation Leopold Conservation Award. The intent of the award is to recognize the natural resource conservation efforts of landowners in Nebraska. The winner of the award receives \$10,000. The second and third place winners are automatically added to the next year's competition. Applications need to be submitted to Nebraska Cattlemen by June 29. Contact Mike Fitzgerald at 402-475-2333 for more information.

The NC is asking the Task Force to help spread the award. It is obvious to me that there are a lot of good candidates throughout the Sandhills.

## **STF receives \$44,520.00 grant from USFWS.**

The Task Force was notified that it will receive a grant for \$44,520 to help remove volunteer red cedar in Blaine, Hooker, Loup and Thomas counties.

Kyle Graham from the Fish and Wildlife Service assisted the Task Force in writing the grant application. The money will be targeted toward projects that have cedar removal as part of an overall grazing plan.

The money came from the Private Stewardship Grant program which provides money to landowners and organizations who do projects that help keep rare species from becoming threatened or endangered.

## **STF is being asked to support a long-billed curlew study in the Sandhills.**

At the January Board meeting, Joel Jorgenson from Nebraska Game and Parks gave the Board background information about the long-billed curlew and the significant contribution the Sandhills gives to the bird's population in the western hemisphere. Joel is now asking the Board to provide a letter of support to be attached to a grant application being submitted. This matter will be presented to the Board at its next meeting.

## **New director of the Nebraska Environmental Trust will attend the June Board Meeting.**

Mark Brohman, the new executive director of Nebraska Environmental Trust has accepted our invitation to attend the June Board meeting. It will be an opportunity for the Board to meet Mark and for Mark to become acquainted with the Task Force and the work it does in the Sandhills.

## **The STF agrees to host a FWS Partnership Workshop in the Sandhills.**

The Task Force continues to be recognized by ranching groups and conservation organizations as a grassroots approach to resource conservation. Last summer we hosted a group of Montana ranchers who were interested in developing a group similar in Montana. In mid-June the Task Force will be hosting a class of Fish and Wildlife Service employees who work with private landowners.

One special guest to the workshop is the Director of Rangeland Conservation for California Cattlemen.

The training will focus on building partnerships with private landowners. The group will tour three ranches that have done projects with the Sandhills Task Force to hear their perception of how the Task Force has worked for them.

On Wednesday night (June 20) the group and Sandhills Task Force board members are invited to a steak cookout at Byron's. Please let me know if you can make it so we are certain to have a steak on the grill for you.

### **Jim gives a presentation at the Nebraska Cattlemen Earth Day Event.**

On April 22, the Nebraska Cattlemen held a Media and Field Day to celebrate Earth Day. The event was held at the Wilson Ranch—winner of the 2006 Sand County Foundation Leopold Conservation Award. Jim Van Winkle was one of the speakers. Jim focused on conservation opportunities for ranchers and the role of the Sandhills Task Force. His presentation was well received.

### **Mallard study in Sandhills submitted for publication.**

A research article entitled "Mallard Nesting in the Sandhills of Nebraska" was submitted to the Prairie Naturalist journal for publication. The study, coordinated by Ducks Unlimited, received funding from the Task Force during the last two years. When the article will be published is unknown at this time.

The study found low survival of mallard nests and high survival of hens. The interesting finding in the study was the abnormally high percentage of hens that were first-time nesters versus older experienced hens. It was speculated that the inexperience of the young nesters attributed to the low nest success rate.

### **A new cooperative agreement signed with Nebraska Cattlemen.**

The Task Force and Nebraska Cattlemen signed a new cooperative agreement between the organizations. NC will provide a staff person (Jim Van Winkle) and STF will pay all costs associated with his employment. The objective of this agreement is to have Jim work with Sandhill landowners to improve natural resources and public relations by providing technical assistance, funding and coordination. Jim has been filling that role since January, 2001.

### **STF signs a memorandum of Agreement with Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway.**

In January, the STF signed an agreement with Burlington Northern which will provide \$32,316 to the Task Force. The funding is in response to mitigating for habitat that will be lost by the expansion of railroad tracks through the Sandhills. The Task Force has agreed to use this money to replace the habitat affected by the construction with similar habitat in other parts of the Sandhills.

This money is expected to be used to help a landowner improve water levels in a wetland.

### **STF contributed \$1000 toward two scholarships for Grazing Livestock Systems students.**

Like the five past years, the Task Force has again contributed \$1000 toward two \$500-scholarships for students majoring in Grazing Livestock Systems at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

### **Public accountants reviewing STF financial records.**

Our financial records for 2006 have been submitted to Hellman, Main, Coslor, and Kathol for their review. The accounting firm will also submit our IRS tax forms. The review is expected to be completed by the end of June.

### **STF represented at Sandhills Cattle Association**

Jim Van Winkle managed a STF display booth at the Sandhills Cattle Association annual convention. The booth gave Jim an opportunity to explain what the Task Force is all about and to discuss possible projects landowners could get advice and financial assistance on.

It is interesting to note that the past two SCA presidents have worked with the Task Force to do projects on their ranches.

