

## *Sandhills Task Force*

*"Where People and Land Are One"*

**P.O. Box 1686**

**Kearney, NE 68848**

**June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009**

### **Next Task Force Meeting:**

#### **June 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sandhills Task Force Meeting.**

For the first time in many years our quarterly board meeting will be held at a different location than Stub's in Thedford. Board members will meet at the Calamus Outfitters northwest of Burwell or northeast of Taylor at 1:00 on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. A field trip to some area ranches and project sites will conclude with a meal and fellowship at the lodge. Bill Vodehnal will give a presentation on his work with prairie grouse at 7 p.m. following our evening meal. Our board meeting will begin the morning of the fourth at 9:30 following breakfast and should conclude around 3:00 Pm on the 3<sup>rd</sup>.



#### **Agenda Items:**

9:30 Meeting called to order  
Introductions  
Approval of minutes  
Financial report (Mack)  
Project Coordinator update (VanWinkle)  
Report of the Executive Committee  
Sand County Foundation (Van Winkle &Cox)  
11:00 Conference call (Ranchers Stewardship Alliance and Ranchers Running Water Coalition)  
12:00 Lunch  
1:00 Calamus Outfitters (Bruce Switzer)  
1:30 Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition (Jim Carr)  
NACO Board Vacancy Position Filled  
2:45 Adjourn

### **New Board Member to be considered for vacancy.**

Our NACO board vacancy has been open since the retirement of Jim Shoenberg. Sheridan County commissioner Jack Anderson has expressed an interest and will be in attendance at our June meeting. Jack is chairman of the board of Sheridan County commissioners and lives at Lakeside. The STF board will need to vote on this issue.

### **Montana Rancher Stewardship Alliance and Running Water Ranching Coalition Updates.**

During the summer of 2007 in cooperation with TNC, the Task Force board helped host a rancher group and tour with ranchers from the Malta Montana area. They have since hired a staff person and formed a non-profit.

Board member A.B. Cox and project coordinator Jim Van Winkle met with Sioux and Dawes County ranchers in 2005 at Harrison Nebraska in an effort to help them form a group with similar goals as the STF. A conference call is planned during our Burwell board meeting in an effort for our board to assess their impact and learn more about successes and challenges faced by both.

### **Sandhills Task Force being asked to support the Aldo Leopold Foundation Award.**

Aldo Leopold Foundation representative Craig Utter requested time at the February board meeting to ask the Task Force to help fund future Leopold Awards. The award is given annually to a ranching operation that demonstrates good land stewardship and involvement in education and their community. The Board agreed to fund \$3,000 with a pledge to consider an additional \$2,000 if needed. Jim will update the board on Craig's progress with additional funding.



### **Niobrara River Russian Olive Project in Sheridan County.**

Kyle Graham and Jim Van Winkle have met with landowners along a ten mile stretch of the Niobrara concerning an invasion of Russian Olive trees. The Task Force sought approval from the Nebraska Environmental Trust to spend grant funds on this project and were given the authority for mechanical removal limited to 100 feet from the high banks of the channel. Many partners are on board for this very significant project.

### **Jim Van Winkle returning to duty following an airplane accident.**

On March 4<sup>th</sup> Jim along with a passenger from McCook crashed following take off from Jim's ranch. Brian Jones was writing a book on the Sandhills and Jim had conducted an interview at his home discussing grassland issues and the work of the Sandhills Task Force. Jim's Supercub was destroyed and while both men walked away, Jim received serious injuries. Jim was life-flighted to Omaha's Creighton hospital with brain injuries being the number one concern. A fractured leg, broken bone in an arm, 2<sup>nd</sup> degree fuel burns, neck and rib bruising, several joints damaged and many cuts and bruises has made recovery slow. Mr. Jones had his ribs injured and was treated and released at the Valentine hospital. Jim took leave without pay from March 4<sup>th</sup> until April 15<sup>th</sup> and is now back working ½ time for STF.

### **Partnership with Agren, Inc. is nearing its end.**

A grant submitted by Agren, Inc and cosponsored by the Task Force is nearing its completion. We expect to complete the agreement by mid summer. The existing agreement allows for 50% reimbursement for salary and other costs we incur for projects related to grazing systems within the Sandhills. Over the length of the grant, the Task Force will receive \$21,920.

### **The Executive Committee of the Task Force will present its second report at the June meeting.**

At the November 2008 board meeting, it was approved by the Board to establish an executive committee made up of the officers. The first meeting of the executive board was held February 13<sup>th</sup> in Thedford. At this meeting, subjects addressed included: modifications of the bylaws to include this committee, identifying the role of the committee, and addressing current topics the committee believes are within its role. The committee will meet on June 2<sup>nd</sup> prior to the full STF meeting. The results will be presented to the Board.

### **Wetland projects underway.**

Several wetland projects across the Sandhills that were held up by permitting issues until weather issues blocked construction are now approved. Supplies are on site at some and a contractor is expected to be working near the site of our June board meeting.

### **VFD Award Program.**

During our February STF board meeting the board unanimously adopted an award program that would help rural VFD's assist landowners with using fire as a tool on their private lands to control invasive red cedar. Gene and Jim drafted the necessary award information and it was mailed to VFD fire chiefs across the Sandhills. As of this date, only two award requests have been processed. Many planned burns were not completed as a result of late storms or excessive wind.