

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

May, 2002

Next Task Force Meeting:

The next Task Force meeting is scheduled for Friday, June 21 at Stubs Restaurant in Thedford. The meeting will begin at 9:30 a.m..

Task Force receives \$87,500 grant from Nebraska Environmental Trust.

On April 3, 2002, the Environmental Trust granted our third and final year installment of the Sandhills Grassland Program grant. The money was allocated to five different categories: \$12,500 for cross fencing; \$10,000 for livestock watering systems; \$12,500 for water control structures; \$4,000 for education and outreach; and \$48,500 for salary and expenses.

Quarterly report submitted to NET

Each quarter of the year, a financial and activity report is submitted to the Trust. Our last report, showed that the \$17,426 requested from the Trust was matched with \$87,179 of outside money and services. That is close to a four to one match ratio. Much better than many granting organizations ask for.

Independent audit completed

Hellman, Main, Coslor and Kathol, P.C. of Kearney completed an audit of our books. I was excited to have it done and more excited to see what my "report card" would be. Copies of their report were sent to all Board members and to the Environmental Trust. The report stated *In our opinion, the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Sandhills Task Force as of December 31, 2001 and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the year then ended in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.*

Update on the endangered status of the Blowout Penstemon

Dr. Jim Stubbendick (UNL) requested some time at the June Board meeting to discuss the current status of the federally endangered plant.

Dr. Stubbendick has been involved in the restoration of the plant in the Sandhills and has made great strides toward meeting the requirements to have the plant reclassified to threatened and eventually hopes to have it delisted.

Sale of fen property final

On April 2, the fen property was sold and a conservation easement was purchased on West Twin Lake in western Cherry County. The easement has been recorded and all the paperwork completed. The Nature Conservancy is settling outstanding accounts and is expected to deliver a check in the near future. It is our hope that some type of ceremonial event can occur at the Board meeting to note the occasion. Al was going to

check on getting a new reporter from the World Herald to be at our meeting.

Bird study progressing

Shortly after our last Board meeting, Jim Van Winkle went to work arranging ranches for study areas. Jim was able to get at least twelve different ranches for surveys. The researchers are convinced that none of this would have been possible without the work and character of Jim.

Dr. Larkin Powell wrote me an email that stated: "*The landowners have been very helpful in describing their systems and suggesting pastures that would fit into our design. Lastly, I really appreciate the work that Jim Van Winkle did to secure the sites, show Matt around to a couple ranches, and find the housing for the workers. We simply wouldn't have been able to do this project on private ranches without Jim's help.*"

Dr. Larkin Powell's research crew began their field work in early May. Matt Proett is the graduate student, with two assistants helping him—Shona Lawson and Jace Milliken. They are renting a cabin on Bill Heelan's ranch, near Valentine. Larkin says the crew is grateful to have the opportunity to live on a ranch.

Until the later part of May, the researchers are working with landowners to find suitable pastures and setting up transect lines. Then the bird study will begin. Nesting has just begun, and the crew has already found a few nests (lark sparrow and upland sandpiper).

Nebraska All-Bird Alliance may be forming

The national interest in protecting native birds is swelling at an incredible rate. That growing interest has caused Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to take the lead in forming an all-bird alliance in Nebraska. A formation meeting was held on May 8th. About 80 people attended. I was invited to give a brief presentation to the group about the Task Force and the type of work we are doing.

One of the presentations listed various funding sources that exist or are becoming available in the near future. Federal funding, nationwide, will jump from \$192 million in fiscal year 2001 to \$451 million in 2003. The vast majority of that is for working with private landowners.

The Task Force was listed as one of the potential partners in this alliance. The Board needs to discuss this and decide how they wish to be involved.

New Farm Bill may have a great impact on the Sandhills?

The 2002 Farm Bill was recently signed. On Friday of this week, NRCS will have a meeting in Lincoln to discuss the legislation. NRCS will be forming committees to work on various portions of the Farm Bill. One thing is for certain, there will be an impact from the new bill.

Some programs that could directly affect the Sandhills include:

- CRP acres will increase by almost three million acres.
- Wetland Reserve Program funding will increase to \$1.5 billion
- Grassland Reserve Program is a new program targeting two million acres of grassland easements
- Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program will increase funding from \$62 million to \$985 million
- Environmental Quality Incentive Program will reach a funding level of \$1.3 billion
- Conservation Security Program is a new program to provide stewardship payments. It will have \$2 billion for funding.

All these funding levels are at the national level. But, I am certain Nebraska and the Sandhills will see a significant share. Between this funding and those identified in the previous article, there appears to be more money than we are used to dealing with! The Task Force could be intensely involved and may have to think on a bigger scale.

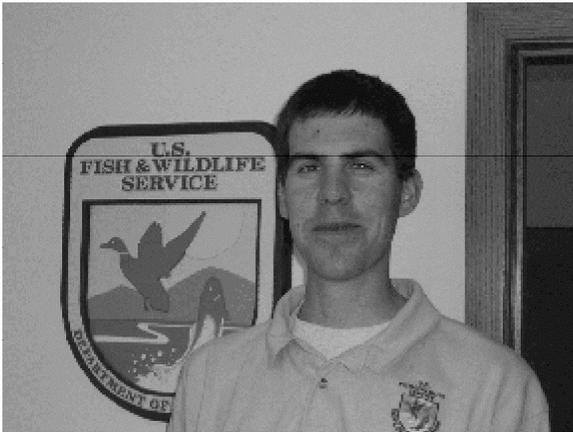
Kim Stine accepts new position

Kim Stine was selected for the Northern Plains Regional Grazing Lands Coordinator Position. The Northern Plains Regional Office is located in Lincoln. She will remain an NRCS employee but will be coordinating grassland management over seven states.

I wrote a letter to Steve Chick asking if Kim would be resigning from the Task Force and if so, who was his recommendation for that position.

2002 Nebraska Grazing Conference to be held August 12 and 13

The conference will be held at the Holiday Inn in Kearney, Nebraska. The event is sponsored or endorsed by many businesses, organizations and agencies. It is expected to provide new ideas and options for all ranchers, farmers, wildlife managers, and advisers who want to make grazing a profitable enterprise while benefiting the environment.



Kyle Graham hired by FWS for the Sandhills

A new Fish and Wildlife Service employee was hired to work with landowners in the Sandhills. Kyle just recently completed his B.S. degree in Fish and Wildlife Management from Montana State University. The Sandhills is all new to him but he has a strong desire to work with landowners to help them enhance the grasslands. He will be stationed in the Sandhills Habitat Office in Kearney.