

**Next Task Force Meeting:**

The next Task Force meeting is on December 6th 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 (Mack)
  - Money Market
  - Project Coordinator update (VanWinkle)
  
  - Herbst Construction mitigation project (Graham)
  - Hauser / BNSF Railroad project (Hood)
  
- 12:00 Lunch
  - Update on curlew study proposal
  - Reiser appraisal and update (Graham)
  - Update on Schick Lake Project (Mack)
  - Review of Birdwood Project by NET (Mack)
  - Recognition of Gene Lehnert (Mack)
  
- 3:30 Adjourn

**Sandhills Task Force moves funds into a Money Market account.**

The Task Force has numerous wildlife extension agreements that have funds committed toward landowner projects. It is for this reason and the delay between payment and reimbursement from grantors that we have kept a large amount of money in our checking account. At the last board meeting, the decision was made to have a portion of our funds moved over into a money market account. An account for \$100,000 was set up at Tri County Bank in Stuart—where we have our checking account. The new account will yield a 4.2% interest rate but restricts check writing to three transactions per month. This arrangement allows us to get an additional 3.7% on the money but will still make the money accessible if needed.

**Jim VanWinkle helps select the 2007 Leopold Conservation Award.**

Jim joined three other individuals to judge the 2007 nominations for the Leopold Award. This year's winner is the Christen family from Steinauer. The award includes \$10,000 and a sculptured crystal.

**STF asked to assist in resolving an EPA violation on the Loup River.**

A bridge construction company committed an EPA violation while doing work on a bridge near Burwell. During their litigation with EPA on the matter, the company sought assistance from the Fish and Wildlife Service to find ways they could mitigate for the damages. The FWS contacted the Task Force to see if the Task Force would be willing to receive the fine and use the money to do projects along the Loup River that would mitigate the damage. EPA was agreeable to this resolution.

EPA assessed the damages or fine at \$20,000. At our board meeting the Board will review a written agreement between the contractor and the Task Force to decide if we want to be involved. If so, are the terms of the agreement acceptable?

The core of the agreement is for the contractor to provide the Task Force with \$20,000 which the Task Force can use for stream and riparian restoration along that portion of the Loup River. Cedar clearing is one restoration project that would qualify.

**Task Force being asked by Railroad to help mitigate for loss of wetlands.**

The Task Force has been contacted by Burlington Northern Sante Fe Railroad to help them finalize a mitigation project they are involved in within the Sandhills. The Railroad is adding a third rail which will impact or destroy wetland acres. The Corps of Engineers has ordered them to replace the wetland acres. The Railroad has been working with a landowner who has an altered wetland who would be willing to restore the wetland and place it under a permanent conservation easement—as required by the Corps.

The Task Force recently entered into a separate agreement with the Railroad to mitigate some wet meadow. They would like to do another agreement with us to resolve their wetland issue.

The difference with this agreement would be the Railroad would provide the Task Force with the funds to restore the wetland and to purchase a permanent easement. The Task Force would become the holder of the easement. Restoration design and preliminary costs estimates have been completed by NRCS.

The Railroad has agreed to provide the Task Force with overhead costs if we should choose to partner on the project.

At the board meeting, members will need to decide if they wish to be involved in the project and if the terms of the conservation easement are compatible with the goal of the Task Force and its approved easement guidelines.

### **The STF completes two water projects this fall.**

Two projects were completed this fall that involved the installation of five different water control structures—but only on two different ownerships.

The first one was done on Ken and Donna Marlatt's property—southwest of Wood Lake. One of the sites had a washed out water control structure that had been in place for decades. Age and tree roots caused it to finally fail. The Task Force agreed to rebuild the structure using our weir tube design. Because the pond was constructed as part of a water right to irrigate the hay meadow, a second smaller structure was installed to allow the Marlatts to regulate water flow to the meadow.

A second pond was created further upstream of the first where head-cutting was occurring. That structure consisted of a 4-foot pipe with a weir on the inlet end of the pipe. The pond backed up onto the adjoining property so a written consent letter was obtained from the neighbor.



Jim installing boards in the AgriDrain water control structure. This structure allows the landowner to divert water into adjoining hay meadow.

The second project site was on a ranch owned by Bob Price north of the Calamus River. Two structures were installed at two separate sites, creating wetlands and stopping the down cutting. Bob was pleased with the project which stimulated his adjoining neighbors to inquire about doing



One of two structures being installed on Gracie Creek Ranch (Price's property).

something similar on their property.

### **Jim attended a conservation easement conference in Denver.**

In October Jim attended the "National Land Conservation Conference" sponsored by the Land Trust Alliance. In excess of 2,000 participants spent several days attending workshops (140) and seminars (37) with experts from across the nation. Conservation easements and their application were the focus of the conference. Jim will give the board additional information during his regular meeting update.

### **Curlew survey in the Sandhills.**

The University of Nebraska, in cooperation with Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, is advertising for a graduate student to conduct long-billed curlew surveys in the Sandhills.

I am expecting Joel Jorgensen to attend our board meeting to give us an update on this project. So far, I have not been able to contact him for a confirmation.

The focus of the survey is to get some type of estimate of the current population and what are some of the habitat needs of the bird while they are nesting and raising young in the Sandhills.

### **Task Force joins NET in reviewing the Birdwood Creek Project.**

This fall, Nebraska Environmental Trust contacted Mike Kelly to do a site inspection of the Birdwood Creek project. Mike had been successful in receiving NET funds to match the Department of Environmental Quality funds the Task Force had received to recreate the meander in a straightened portion of the stream.



Portion of Birdwood Creek enhanced by the new meander and water control structure.

Mike invited me and Jim Luchsinger to attend the inspection, along with Lisa Beethe from NET and Sherry Vinton, NET Board member. The tour gave Mike, Jim and I an opportunity to explain the project, how we resolved water problems, and the conservation easement that exists between the Nature Conservancy and the Kellys.

*Lene D. Mack*