

South Dakota Governor's Habitat Work Group

Status Report as of February 2016

Advancing Habitat Efforts Across South Dakota :: A combination of eight meetings and conference calls culminated with a final report and recommendations in September 2014. Status updates and accomplishments can be found within this document.

1. **Recommendation:** Facilitate greater collaboration among conservation partners to better utilize available resources for improving habitat management.

Status Update: A working group made up of conservation partners was formed in May 2015 to further discuss the layout and development of the habitat-central website. Five meetings took place over the course of the summer 2015.

Current Status: Completed.

- The Habitat Pays website launched on October 2, 2015.
- To date, there have been over 11,000 page views with over 2,600 active users spending about 3 minutes on the site.
- Maintenance and management efforts will be ongoing throughout 2016.

2. **Recommendation:** Establish a long-term, dedicated South Dakota Habitat Conservation Fund and appropriate \$1 million dollars in one-time funds to bolster private fundraising efforts.

Status Update: Governor Daugaard appointed a 20 member Board of Directors to govern the South Dakota Habitat Conservation Fund.

Current Status: Governor Dauugard announced a \$1 million dollar challenge grant to be matched 1:1 with funds raised for the Fund at the first meeting on August 26, 2015. Small and large grant programs were finalized by the Board and the application period for those grants was October 1 - November 30, 2015. Grant applications were reviewed and recommended to the board on December 10, 2015. The board approved awards of \$147,960 for 8 small grant projects and \$460,000 for 4 large grant projects. Grant agreements are currently underway with distribution to be made by the end of February 2016.

3. **Recommendation:** Develop and implement the South Dakota Conservation Certification Program.

Status Update: In the fall of 2014, a request for one full time employee and base funding for FY2016 was submitted by the South Dakota Department of Agriculture to initiate the South Dakota Conservation Certification Program. Funding for the program may be pursued in future fiscal years when favorable state budgetary conditions return.

Current Status: Ongoing

4. **Recommendation:** Create a “Habitat Pays” education and awareness campaign.

Status Update: Habitat Pays is a joint effort between the South Dakota Departments of Game, Fish and Parks and Agriculture to connect farmers and ranchers to the appropriate habitat resources and help them implement wildlife habitat where it makes the most sense.

Current Status: Completed.

- The Habitat Pays education and awareness campaign launched on October 2, 2015.
- An evaluation meeting of the public relations and digital marketing strategies to date is set for February 11, 2016.

5. **Recommendation:** Revisit the current practices pertaining to mowing public rights-of-way.

Status Update: The South Dakota Department of Transportation Commission held a public input session on November 20, 2014, to discuss current roadside mowing regulations. The Commission continues to review this topic and will determine whether new administrative rules are necessary to bring forward for public testimony.

Current Status: In January, the Departments of Game, Fish and Parks, Agriculture, and Transportation met to discuss roadside projects and opportunities to include wildlife friendly plantings. Of particular importance, road renovation projects were discussed and how reclamation efforts could include grass and flower mixtures that will meet construction objectives while providing quality wildlife habitat. Also discussed was the utilization of warm-season grasses which mature at later dates. Using warm-season grasses would provide both habitat and a source of livestock forage with quality if harvested later in the summer. The departments are continuing discussions and determining planting mixtures for up-coming road construction projects.

6. **Recommendation:** Petition the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Risk Management Agency (USDA-RMA) to include all South Dakota counties as eligible for crop insurance coverage on winter wheat.

Status Update: The South Dakota Department of Agriculture submitted a letter to USDA-RMA in support of the winter wheat insurance recommendation on January 30, 2015. This letter accompanied materials also submitted by South Dakota Wheat, Inc. and South Dakota State University. In late July 2015, USDA-RMA announced that all South Dakota counties will be eligible for crop insurance coverage for the 2016 crop.

Current Status: Completed.

7. **Recommendation:** Encourage South Dakota School and Public Lands to include a land management plan as a condition for securing a lease.

Status Update: The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks began discussions during the winter of 2014 with School and Public Lands on the implementation of this management plan.

Current Status: Ongoing

8. **Recommendation:** Support Congressional efforts to raise the federal Duck Stamp from \$15 to \$25.

Status Update: Legislation passed and signed by the President.

Current Status: Completed.