

Meeting #1  
Governor's Large Conference Room - February 28, 2014

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## **Work Group Members**

Pam Roberts (Chair)  
Barry Dunn  
Tim Kessler  
Mary Duvall  
Jason Frerichs (*joined via telephone*)  
John Cooper  
Steve Halverson  
Jan Nicolay  
Jeff Zimprich (*Jeff Vander Wilt, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, in his stead*)  
Doug Deiter  
Jeff Vonk  
Lucas Lentsch  
Nathan Sanderson

## **guests**

Tony Leif  
Angela Ehlers  
David Nomsen  
Larry Nelson  
Trudy Wastweet  
Tom Kirschenmann

## **Welcome & Introductions**

Chair Roberts provided opening remarks and ground rules. Meetings open to the public, but are not open to public comment and the Work Group will not take public testimony. Comments and suggestions from the public continue and can be submitted through the Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) website. Individuals can provide recommendations and suggestions at [pheasanthabitat@state.sd.us](mailto:pheasanthabitat@state.sd.us).

## **Governor's Goals for the Working Group**

Nathan Sanderson provided a general overview of the expectations and goals of the Work Group. Sanderson reiterated to the Work Group that the Governors' focus is pheasant habitat. Ultimately, the Work Group will develop recommendations to the Governor that focus on practical solutions for maintaining and improving pheasant habitat. Ideas and solutions generated by the Work Group will be provided in a final report for the Governor.

Jeff Vonk - Important that at the end of the process there is a specific list of opportunities to present to the public such as new programs, incentives, or other approaches.

Nathan Sanderson - The Work Group will need to solidify ideas that make the most sense which can move the bar for pheasant habitat.

John Cooper - Asked the question how does the Work Group continue to communicate with the public? How do we report back to the public on discussions and progress made from on-going meetings?

Nathan Sanderson - Continually update the public through the GFP website. Governor's Pheasant Habitat Summit is listed on front page and all applicable information will be posted.

***Action Item: Chair Roberts suggested a news release after the first meeting to notify the public of meeting held, structure, and discussion topics.***

### **Proposed Timeline for Work Group**

Chair Roberts provided the Work Group an outline of the tentative approach to complete the Work Group's tasks. The Work Group plans to meet approximately every month with the second meeting to take place during the first two weeks of April. The final report is due late summer. Current approach is to hold half day meetings, but will make adjustments accordingly based on agenda.

***Action Item: Work Group members are to send Nathan Sanderson open dates during the first two weeks of April (March 31-April 11).***

### **Pheasant Habitat Summit Recap & Current Situation**

Tony Leif presented a summary of the Summit held in Huron. Around 400 people attended. Approximately 1,000 people joined via webcast; average listening time of just over an hour (indicating high interest). Input from the public has been collected through the Summit break-out sessions, a follow-up survey to Summit registrants, and comments submitted via emails, phone calls, and letters.

Barry Dunn suggested to the Work Group that two events occurred over the last year which has escalated many discussions on habitat changes in South Dakota. The first was the article released by researchers from South Dakota State University (Wright and Wimberly) describing landscape changes and the loss of grassland acres. This article received criticism from many agriculture entities and resulted in other evaluations and reports such as released by Farm Bureau. The second event was the release of the 2013 pheasant brood report by GFP. Results from this survey opened the eyes to many people of the changes taking place and inspired them to take notice.

Barry Dunn provided a handout which entailed three figures from a new research project conducted at SDSU on grassland loss. This project used a different approach than Wimberly and Wright and used data from 2006-2012. Results show about 1.84 million acres changed from

grassland to agriculture production land. Results are not yet published, but will go through a peer review process and published in 2014. The consensus from Work Group was that even though this information has not yet been published, it will be a useful tool and insightful piece of information for their discussions.

John Cooper - A common question asked is how much of grassland acres that have broken are Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres versus other grassland types. Approximately 700,000-750,000 acres of CRP lost since its peak enrollment.

Jeff Vander Wilt - Once these new research findings are published, it will be a useful piece of information to be used by NRCS to focus farm bill programs.

Work Group members were provided a booklet which included all the suggestions collected from the Summit break-out sessions, responses from the Summit follow-up survey, suggestions on pheasant habitat improvements gathered from the public, and copies of the Powerpoint presentations given by Tony Leif and Barry Dunn at the Summit. A copy of the South Dakota Pheasant Management Plan was distributed and copies of the Pheasant Book were made available for members who had not yet received one.

### **Discussion of Conservation Title in Farm Bill**

Jeff Vander Wilt provided handouts and discussed various conservation programs of the recently passed federal Farm Bill.

- CRP will be scaled down to a cap of 24 million acres by 2018
- Easement Programs have been consolidated into one program
- Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) has been consolidated into Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) with 5% set aside for wildlife.
- New Honeybee Initiative has been established which presents some potential from the standpoint of pheasant brood habitat. Honeybee Initiative allocated \$750,000 for PPR, with the SD allocation to be determined.
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program presents unique opportunities where partners can pool resources on focus efforts/projects
- Prairie Pothole Region Initiative = \$35M which includes funding for a targeted delivery of EQIP, a Waterbank sign-up, wetland determinations, carbon credits for avoided conversion, and agricultural wetland mitigation banking.

Jeff Vander Wilt commented that SD should fare well with the new farm bill and conservation programs available because of the many focused efforts towards the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR).

***Action Item: NRCS to present state budget/allocations and detailed update for all conservation programs, and details of honeybee initiative and grassland retention projects at the April meeting. (45 minutes)***

***Action Item: Include NRCS handout of farm bill conservation program breakdown with meeting notes on website.***

***Action Item: NRCS to provide the schedule of CRP contract expirations for both SD and nationally, especially in light of the scale back plan on CRP of 24M acres by 2018.***

### **Presentation of Ideas, Recommendations, and Suggestions Collected**

Jeff Vonk described the 3 separate lists of suggestions gathered and included in the Work Group member's booklet: 1) break-out sessions, 2) follow-up survey, and 3) comments received from phone calls, emails, letters, etc.

Barry Dunn suggested there seems to be several themes of misunderstandings and aspects of pheasant management that would be important to provide information to better educate and inform the public. Predators and pheasant stocking are two examples.

Jeff Vonk suggested the importance of smaller working groups be formed between meetings to focus on specific topics.

John Cooper provided conceptual approach of breaking down suggestions into topics such as Private and Public Lands, then further define by specific items and approaches such as Farm Bill programs under private land.

The Work Group agreed on a strategic approach to address non-habitat items by identifying the individual themes, provide information and explanations, and include as part of the final report.

***Action Item: Nathan Sanderson, GFP, SDDA will go over entire list of suggestions and provide more concise break-downs for the April meeting. The concise break-downs will be provided to the Work Group 2 weeks prior to meeting.***

***Action Item: Jeff Vonk will have GFP come up with a non-habitat related items to share with the Work Group at the April meeting.***

### **Facilitated Discussion**

Chair Roberts asked each member to provide any suggestions on category breakdowns, other topics to be added or open for consideration, and agenda items for the April meeting.

Jeff Vander Wilt

- Soil health should be considered as it is a top priority for NRCS in SD.

Steve Halverson

- Provide priority points to farmers enrolling less than 25%-35%, or a level to be determined, of farm acres into any farm program. This approach would allow everyone

who desires to enroll acres the opportunity to do so. Any eligible acres over the predetermined amount could be enrolled in a program, but would not receive the priority points.

- Public lands need rejuvenation and to do that work will require resources.
- Recommends approaching large agriculture and chemical companies for funds to work on public lands.

Barry Dunn

- Investment in precision agriculture is an actionable approach that will benefit soil, water, and wildlife.
- Important to demonstrate the benefits and costs of marginal acres.
- Recommend to develop an approach to improve the overall conservation ethic which goes well into the future - stewardship ethic.
- Misconception items (ex. predator control and pheasant stocking) need to be addressed within the final report and should be endorsed by the Work Group.
- Going to take unique approach to create long-term financing.

Lucas Lentsch

- Use white paper approach on items such as disease.
- Important to communicate to the public on all items related to pheasants, even with the focus on habitat.
- Does the Work Group invite agricultural organizations to present items of concerns similar to inviting conservation organizations?

Jan Nicolay

- Concern where the state is going long-term.
- Group needs to make sure that we do not miss recommendations and suggestions from all NGO's and other entities.
- We cannot be too reliant on Farm Bill programs and is important that we look at long-term solutions to address habitat and conservation through constant funding source(s).
- Need to assure we contact FWS and determine funding available for SD.

Tim Kessler

- Primary objective should be to provide landowners a product which is tangible and usable.
- Important that the SD heritage considered.
- Conservation plan for roadside ditches.

Doug Deiter

- Find a way to utilize old farmsteads to provide nesting cover and winter habitat.

- Find a way to keep young kids hunting; important consideration when establishing new laws.
- Need to work on relationships between GFP and landowners (thistle management on GPAs used as an example).

Mary Duvall

- Precision habitat is appealing and needs to make sense economically.
- Change culture between landowners and sportsmen with a more positive outlook/attitude.
- Recommends GFP organize a celebration of the 100th anniversary pheasant hunting season.

John Cooper

- Find a way to bring together sporting retailers and agriculture businesses to pool resources and generate some type funding/grant process to help fund future habitat work. Would be a similar concept as NAWCA or a trust fund.

Jeff Vonk

- Need to think about final report, its format, and what it will include.
- Need to start setting goals. Identify specific objectives and strategies to achieve them.
- CRP is one mechanism, but need to identify others.
- Likes overall strategy of using Public and Private lands and form subgroups to work on these.

Nathan Sanderson

- Looking ahead at the final report format. Examples: public education, advocacy, outreach component, private land, public land, federal components, and funding. Include components which address the non-habitat issues.

## **Discussion on Research Required for Next Meeting**

### **Agenda Items for April Meeting**

- Pheasants Forever to present programs implemented in other states (45 minutes)
- NRCS to provide a detailed state budget/allocation for Farm Bill conservation programs and schedule of CRP expirations (45 minutes)
- GFP to provide non-habitat topics to Work Group
- Concise list of categories from Nathan Sanderson, GFP, SDDA and establishment of workgroups
- White paper approach on SDSU project discussing habitat loss
- FWS funding availability for SD (45 minutes)

### **Agenda Items for May Meeting**

- Department of Revenue to discuss and address tax questions/issues

### **Final Remarks**

Chair Roberts reminded members the importance of providing Nathan Sanderson open dates for the April meeting. To simplify travel, the April meeting will begin at 10am and conclude at 3pm including a working lunch.