

Meeting #2  
Governor's Large Conference Room - April 7, 2014

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### **Work Group Members**

Pam Roberts (Chair)  
Barry Dunn  
Tim Kessler  
Representative Mary Duvall (*joined via phone*)  
Senator Jason Frerichs  
John Cooper  
Steve Halverson  
Jan Nicolay  
Jeff Zimprich  
Doug Deiter  
Secretary Jeff Vonk  
Secretary Lucas Lentsch  
Nathan Sanderson

### **guests**

Tony Leif  
David Nomsen  
Tom Kirschenmann  
Kurt Forman  
Bill Smith  
Matt Morlock

### **Welcome & Introductions**

Chair Roberts opened the meeting with announcements and introductions of the PHWG members.

Nathan Sanderson discussed the importance of presenting and discussing information items and beginning to focus on ideas/resolutions to accomplish the task of the PHWG.

### **FARM BILL PROGRAMS SUMMARY**

Jeff Zimprich presented a summary of conservation programs in the Farm Bill. Zimprich pointed out that a key to the new Farm Bill is the development and participation of partnerships.

[View the slide show: 2014 Farm Bill - NRCS](#)

There was a discussion on the Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP) and the possibility of using this program to develop a state-specific approach for taking wildlife habitat to a higher level. If that approach is explored, a proposal would go through the state technical committee and a final decision rendered by the State Conservationist.

Steve Halverson asked the question whether current CSP contracts will have the opportunity to re-enroll. Zimprich acknowledged re-enrollment would be allowed with the need to add further management/conservation enhancements. It was also pointed out that final rules need to be completed on the CStP program.

John Cooper asked State Conservationist Zimprich if the Prairie Pothole Region (PPR) is going to be designated as a Critical Conservation Area. A final decision on national Critical Conservation Areas will be made soon by USDA Secretary of Agriculture. Jeff Vonk asked the question on whether the Governor or another ranking state official should write a letter to the Secretary of Agriculture and recommend the PPR as a Critical Conservation Area.

***Action Item: The PHWG recommends that the Governor send a letter to the Secretary of Agriculture in support of designating the PPR as Critical Conservation Area.***

#### **u.s. fish and wildlife service program summary**

Kurt Forman, USFWS Private Lands State Coordinator provided the PHWG a summary of available habitat programs offered by the Service. Kurt noted the Service manages 147,000 acres of Waterfowl Production Areas in South Dakota that are open to public hunting. The focus of Kurt's discussion provided details of the Service's programs offered private landowners.

Primary components work on wetland and grassland habitats for duck production. Two main tools:

1. Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program - extension contracts over a 10 year period (\$2.3M in 2013)
2. Voluntary Conservation Easements (Wetland and Grassland). Interest remains strong as 675 landowners are on a waiting list and last year approximately 90 landowners were provided easement offers/contracts due to funding limitations and associated costs. Last year the Service had approximately \$21M available for this program.

Easements are primarily found East River as tied to duck stamp funds. All easements are voluntary and perpetual.

[View the slide show: FWS Habitat Programs Summary](#)

#### **SDSU WHITE PAPER ON LAND USE CONSERVATION**

Dean Barry Dunn provided the PHWG a report of a project conducted at South Dakota State University titled "Estimated South Dakota Land Use: Change from 2006-2012." As described by

Dean Dunn, the main difference between this paper and others is the fact that it includes an associated error term (Confidence Intervals) with the data.

### [Estimated South Dakota Land Use: Change from 2006-2012](#)

#### **habitat programs operating in other states**

David Nomsen, Vice President of Governmental Affairs for Pheasants Forever, provided example habitat programs from across the country specific to wildlife and pheasant habitat. Examples included program components and funding sources.

#### [View the slide show: State Habitat Programs](#)

Tim Kessler asked whether or not landowners know that Farm Bill biologists (FBBs) exist. Steve Halverson responded that word spreads fast when they are available and what assistance they offer. Much of the conservation practices implemented are a result of FBB involvement.

Jeff Vonk asked Nomsen to describe to the PHWG one or two ideas from other states that are not being used in SD that could translate into results. Nomsen answered that a dedicated funding source would be beneficial and needed to offer a suite of alternatives and incentives. Programs that would benefit water quality and soil health could present great opportunities through long-term investments.

Lucas Lentsch noted that an approach of “farming the best and leaving the rest” would have higher value through the development of a model that would allow producers to use as a tool to help make land management decisions. Doug Dieter suggested finding a way to square off small, odd areas and find the resources (funds and manpower) to plant such areas. Dieter also suggested developing a program for tiled water to be set aside for wildlife habitat.

Jan Nicolay commented on concerns about the apparent lack of understanding between agricultural practices and the connection to conservation. Dean Dunn acknowledged that a certain level exists about all land management and how certain actions result in various environmental conditions.

Tim Kessler commented that some people want pheasants and conservation on the land, however more assistance and funding needs to be provided to help get folks where they want to be. David Nomsen explained in Nebraska habitat tours are conducted each for landowners to see habitat work.

Steve Halverson noted that each farm has opportunities to develop habitat and the importance to allow those landowners to identify those acres and enroll them in available conservation programs.

Senator Jason Frerichs stated weed problems are still an issue and the need to address them based on plantings. Senator Frerichs also presented the concept of utilizing FFA/4-H kids to assist with habitat development in squaring off small wetlands.

## **conservation reserve program (CRP)**

Jeff Zimprich briefly discussed statistics around the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and provided the group a handout.

[View the document: 2014 Farm Bill CRP Changes](#)

## **comprehensive review of ideas/suggestions received**

Secretary Jeff Vonk briefly discussed each point of the three documents (non-habitat issues, private lands, and public lands) with the PHWG. Chair Roberts suggested to PHWG members to notify GFP of specific questions or items missed that need to be added to the list.

*Action Item: Jeff Zimprich will look into the ability for School and Public Lands (SPL) to offset lost income through federal programs for turning SPL land into habitat and report back.*

Nathan Sanderson suggested the final report should demonstrate the evolutionary process of how comments were received and used. The consolidated lists should be included in the final report to show the public how it was used.

Chair Roberts suggested additional recommendations from the PHWG should be added to the recommendations received from the public.

Another important aspect in generating final recommendations is that most of the public comments received were prior to passage of the 2014 Farm Bill, so those conservation programs are now set.

John Cooper stated the need to communicate with the public on how federal programs have changed or included in the new Farm Bill. Another feature of the final report is to serve as an outreach tool. Nathan Sanderson suggested the inclusion of a “roadmap” within the report to show people how programs have changed and current status. An example used was how the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) and the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) are now part of Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).

## **facilitated discussion**

Some discussion revolved around the types of funding sources that interest the group. The PHWG concurred there need to be discussions on this topic to implement recommendations developed.

John Cooper asked about the Governor’s perspective on potential approaches to securing the funds necessary to implement programs and initiatives recommended by the PHWG. He said that it would only be feasible to implement large-scale final recommendations if there is a dedicated funding source that comes from the public at large, not just sportsmen.

Nathan Sanderson noted that property tax discussions should not hold up the work of the PHWG, as the Legislature has a task force studying that specific issue. He stated that the Governor would not support a sales tax increase, though he might consider suggestions related to fees to fund habitat. The PHWG's role is to be creative in finding available funding sources to do more habitat work and establish partnerships to do the work of the recommendations developed. The PHWG needs to consider a variety of sources for funding: short-term, long-term, one-time, and on-going.

A few states were mentioned which have some type of Dedicated Funding Source such as Minnesota, Nebraska, and Missouri. In the case of Nebraska, their Environmental Trust Fund is funded from lottery earnings.

Jeff Zimprich stated the importance of agriculture being considered hand-in-hand with habitat funds.

Jan Nicolay talked about the importance of looking at long-term sustainable solutions that can address the current habitat issues and the need to build a strong coalition for success.

Jeff Vonk noted that in SD there has not been strong support of any type of tax increase, but any efforts for funding will require building a coalition through outreach and education. The outcome of a highly educated and informed public could result in the establishment of a dedicated funding source.

Lucas Lentsch noted the dialogue within these discussions has the potential of building the coalition between agriculture, tourism, sports, and the general public.

### **discussion on next steps**

Nathan Sanderson suggested going through the short list now and determine what is currently in place, what needs to be ramped up, and get into the specifics of both lists. The next meeting may include an outside facilitator to brain-storm suggested solutions and ideas.

### **final remarks**

Dean Barry Dunn concurred that simplifying and organizing all these programs is a great step for the PHWG to include in the final report. Dunn also suggested the last item to consider and what needs to be worked on is a conservation ethic, but the question is how we do that.

Jeff Vonk stressed the next meeting needs to form small groups and start working on specific items.

Jeff Zimprich agreed the abbreviated list is helpful and the need to get into detailed discussions.

***Action Item: Jeff Zimprich said NRCS will work on a "Simple go to Guide" and try to complete before the next meeting. He also noted a land-use decision making tool, but NRCS is only in the early process of putting this together.***

John Cooper stressed the wheel (habitat ideas) does not need to be reinvented. USDA will remain the central location for producers to do their best for conservation. How do we incentivize precision aimed conservation efforts? The partnerships can get the work done, but we need to develop the focus list of efforts to put in place. How do we raise the money to maximize available funds coming through USDA? He suggested a discussion on the best 15 habitat ideas and 8 best funding sources.

Doug Dieter asked how we educate farmers of the 5-10% of acres farmed each year that they lose money on and put in conservation. How can they be helped in implementing?

Tim Kessler commented that there appears to be opportunities for not farming small acres and the need for salesmen to do the work.

Jan Nicolay stressed the importance of educating the public on the overall picture of conservation.

Lucas Lentsch suggested a process be developed to incentivize and award for the certification of conservation friendly farms/operations. The habitat solution must include the agricultural community.

Steve Halverson noted that the future is "finding a home for marginal acres."

Senator Jason Frerichs suggested enhancements within the CStP program is encouraging and could have some positives for wildlife habitat.

Nathan Sanderson commented on the potential look of the final report format and the inclusion of items such as, but not limited to, an Executive Summary, an outline of programs, recommendations for final rules within Farm Bill, outreach, public and private land, education, and funding.

***Action Item: Jeff Zimprich will visit with FSA to determine if agricultural acres planted to habitat would have to come out of certified acres.***

***Action Item: When putting notes together, make sure ideas or solutions brought up by working group members are included with suggestions from the public. Examples - go to guide for farm bill programs, assist with rounds outs, etc.***

### **next meeting**

- Monday, May 5 at 10 a.m. CT
- Agenda Items for May Meeting
  - Dean Barry Dunn: discussion on conservation ethic and motto
  - Department of Revenue: discuss tax items
  - Facilitated Discussion: best habitat ideas and funding ideas
  - Group goal and motto
  - Discussion on current suggestions

- GFP habitat programs: private and public lands