Northeast District Meeting
10/28/2019
Calamus Fish Hatchery

Meeting was called to order by Josh Kounovsky at 10:35 a.m.

Staff Reports

*Fisheries Division*

Brett Brunken, Coldwater Production Manager, Calamus Hatchery

* Stocked about 3.5 million fish in previous year; walleye, channel catfish, and rainbow trout were most abundant species

*Wildlife Division – Management Section*

Josh Kounovsky, Biologist, Grove Lake WMA

* Several tree clearing projects completed, both with NGPC staff and contractors
* Completed most brome spraying and some noxious weed spraying
* One burn is planned for fall

Logan Pierce, Technician, Grove Lake WMA

* Tree clearing projects; spraying brome, crown vetch, etc.; hack-and-squirt treatment in oak woodlands
* Access to Goose Lake has been difficult all year
* Put rock around boat ramp at Grove Lake

Jeff Borchers, Biologist, George Syas WMA

* Major flood damage at all WMAs around Loup River; adjusting to working out of Oak Valley shop
* Been working on establishing access to various areas as county road opened; put in new parking lot at Lookingglass Creek WMA and removed a car that had washed in; low water crossing at Dworak WMA has washed out several times; most parking lots at WMAs are now accessible
* Section meeting was held in Burwell; work day held doing tree removal, etc.
* Thanks for help with parking at Expo
* Water level and vegetation management at Wilkinson WMA has been a priority; very popular with waterfowl hunters; well issues
* Have been checking boundary fences for signing needs
* Fall burns planned for Council Creek and Wilkinson WMAs
* Oak woodland project at Council Creek will need to be rebid
* Still unsure where new shop will be located
* Released 500 pheasant at both Wilkinson and Syas WMAs for youth hunt
* Worked pheasant/quail opener at Oak Valley; participation and harvest was low

Ryan Pfeifer, Technician, George Syas WMA

* Spent lots of time at Wilkinson WMA working on maintaining water levels for the early teal season; hunters had some success
* Fire break preparation and fall food plots
* Did pheasant check at Syas past two weekends; about 100 hunters, some success

Grant Wiemer, Biologist, Oak Valley WMA

* Planted winter wheat food plots for dove hunting next fall
* Tree control work at Wood Duck WMA
* Noxious weed control was very difficult this year
* Worked at Wilkinson WMA for the youth pheasant release; low success
* For regular season opener, there were 85 hunters; interviewed 50 who had only harvested 10 released and 10 wild birds

Russ Hamer, Biologist, Oak Valley WMA

* FEMA mitigation money may allow for shop relocation away from creek
* City of Battle Creek had resumed talks with Lower Elkhorn NRD about a new flood control reservoir; NGPC officially opposes (this project has been discussed off and on for years)
* Participated in “Moon Walk” event with Jamie Bachmann; kids caught some bullheads in the creek
* Met with Corps of Engineers about Wood Duck WMA wetland project
* Attended a mountain lion trapping seminar at Ponderosa WMA
* New pheasant release site for youth hunt at Powder Creek WMA; lots of people but low harvest success
* Very few hunters at Elk Point Bend WMA on opening weekend, which is very unusual
* Participated in NWTF JAKES Day at Yellowbanks WMA and PF Youth Mentor Hunt in Wayne County

Kelly Corman, Biologist, Bassett

* Several landowner complaints about elk damage in green fields and some scattered deer damage
* Lots of calls about sick mule deer; test results are pending, but most likely meningeal brain worm
* Major flood event in September, especially in Bone Creek drainage; creek through Keller Park has essentially doubled in width
* Working on access roads to WMAs but rock has been hard to get; Twin Lakes WMA is accessible
* Attended mountain lion workshop; got good training on investigating kill sites
* Have several cameras set up to get instantaneous photos on mountain lion visits to deer carcasses; hoping to catch another lion this year; the GPS collar on last year’s lion is malfunctioning
* Finished Pine Glen stream project

Jim Conn, Biologist, Myrtle Hall WMA

* Working on fire breaks and tree removal
* Ducks Unlimited project at Mirdan Canal WMA went out for bid
* Easement approved for pipeline at Myrtle West

Trent Closson, Technician, Myrtle Hall WMA

* Lots of time spent on tree removal and noxious weed control
* Worked at the youth pheasant weekend; Saturday there were 10 groups that harvested fewer than 20 pheasants and Sunday 6 groups harvested about 15-20 pheasants (all released birds); a few quail seen

Lucas Negus, District Manager, Norfolk

* Assistant Division Administrator Pat Molini is out indefinitely with health problems; burn plan approval will be on hold as a result
* Deer check station assignments will be sent out soon

*Wildlife Division – Partners Section*

Bill Vodehnal, Biologist, Bassett

* Attended The Wildlife Society conference in Reno, NV; had several committee/working group meetings and symposia
* Headed to Bartlesville, Oklahoma for Prairie Grouse Technical Council meeting next week
* Wrapping up some PR grouse projects; about 15-20 more tree clearing and grazing management projects in the works under various programs
* Grouse harvest seems to be slightly down this year, but hunters are having success

Jason Thiele, Biologist, Norfolk

* Conference call on Berggren Plan budget with Lincoln staff; will be promoting incentives for CRP general sign-up in December
* Staff were out on pheasant/quail opener on OFW sites; good use of OFW sites, hunters were having some success
* Two growing season burns completed in September for Siberian elm management on CRP fields
* Various site visits for weed and tree issues; several small habitat projects in the works

Cassidy Wessel, Biologist, Norfolk

* Ponca Fire Academy will be held November 7-10; good opportunity for training for staff; see Nebraska Forest Service website for details
* Chad Bladow with TNC will be putting together an S-130/S-190 course that focuses on prescribed burning in Nebraska; details to come

Ethan Beringer, Farm Bill Biologist, Hartington

* Was busy writing CRP contracts and seeding sheets for the signup this past summer
* Has been working on burn plans for some woodland burns in Knox and Cedar counties
* FSA recently sent out mid-contract management reminders
* Helped with youth mentor hunts; good turnout and kids had success

Cody Baker, Farm Bill Biologist, Neligh

* Lots of CRP mid-contract management site visits; putting together seeding sheets
* Many trainings coming up, included CRP general sign-up training
* Helped with youth mentor hunts for Boone and Greeley county PF chapters; good turnout for Greeley County, Boone County had few participants

David Lowman, Farm Bill Biologist, Stanton

* Wrote about 42 new and renewal CRP contracts during the summer signup, mostly in Cuming County
* Weed management issues
* Attended NRCS brush management training in Pierce
* Looking for burn workshop ideas

Rob Gray, Farm Bill Biologist, Tekamah

* Lots of new and renewal CRP contracts this summer
* Mid-contract management and weed control
* Tagged monarchs at Ponca Expo and other events at Lake Wanahoo and Omaha
* Nebraska Prescribed Fire Conference will be held December 10 in Kearney
* Basic burn workshop will be held at Northeast Community College in Norfolk; advanced workshop location is TBD

Lacey Clarke, Farm Bill Biologist, Ainsworth

* Several Working Lands for Wildlife projects for cedar removal
* Assisted with range judging
* Some potential Pathway for Wildlife site visits; this is a program for habitat work where other programs don’t fit
* Helped with three youth mentor hunts ranging from 10-22 kids; held after-school pollinator and bird programs

Ryan Lodge, Working Lands for Wildlife Coordinator, Neligh

* Recently hired two new Farm Bill biologists in Broken Bow and Grand Island; has been training them
* Helped with youth mentor hunts in Albion and Neligh
* Site visits coming up for new eastern redcedar clearing projects and prescribed grazing projects
* NRCS is working on new Rangeland Brush Estimation Toolkit (RaBET) to estimate cedar densities; hope to roll it out for the Sandhills next year
* Annual Farm Bill biologist training is next week
* Youth pollinator event will be held in Fullerton on 10/31 for grades K-4
* CRP training will be held with NRCS and FSA in mid-November for December general signup
* Putting together burn workshops for winter/spring
* Hunted Boone County on opening weekend of pheasant/quail season; no other hunters encountered; killed a few pheasants and observed some very young broods

Kyle Schumacher, Coordinating Wildlife Biologist, Grove Lake

* Conducted butterfly surveys on easement properties; attended pollinator workshop at Ponca SP
* Wrapped up three tree clearing projects in the last three months; trying to complete some old projects
* Two fall burns planned; working on more multi-landowner projects, particularly involving fire
* Assisted with district range judging competition at Santee
* Introduced a draft management plan for the Verdigris-Bazile BUL at the Natural Legacy Conference in Gering
* Camera traps have been set up at a habitat restoration site in Niobrara SP; have some good pictures including a bobcat with a rabbit
* Not a lot of demand for new projects at this time
* Has a prescribed burn trailer available for loan to landowners

Jen Corman, Coordinating Wildlife Biologist, Bassett

* Fall grassland burn in Rock County completed on 10/25; will hopefully be a good demo site for other landowners who normally don’t burn in the fall; 2-3 more burns to go this fall
* Working on plans for spring burns
* Completed some experimental prairie violet plantings on prairie restorations
* Ran a pilot survey route for American burying beetles in the Middle Niobrara BUL
* Attended climate change adaptation workshop in Lincoln and presented a MNBUL management plan from this workshop at the Natural Legacy Conference in Gering

Scott Wessel, District Manager, Norfolk

* Norfolk private lands staff went out on pheasant/quail opener to gauge hunter pressure and success in the Northeast Pheasant Opportunity Area; virtually all hunters were using OFW sites; most were done hunting by 11 a.m.
* Working on updating prescribed fire protocols for private lands staff and partners; get your task books updated and take advantage of training opportunities
* PR grouse meeting will be held on 10/29 at Calamus hatchery
* USDA has a new floodplain easement program; hundreds of applications have been received for $4 million in funding; will be looking at some of these sites this week

*Parks Division*

Michael Jacobs, Willow Creek/Cowboy Trail

* Noxious weed management, mowing trail work
* Wind storm took out some big trees
* High school students came out for community service project and hand-harvested >1000 milkweed posts for distribution
* Planted some shade trees in campgrounds

Joe Hoppe, Willow Creek/Cowboy Trail

* March-May was spend just trying to get Cowboy to a usable state after the flooding
* Major washouts still remain, especially in the Neligh area
* Mowing and spraying along trail were behind schedule all year

Galen Svoboda, Cowboy Trail

* They started servicing the Cowboy Trail from O’Neill to Bassett after several customer complaints on trail conditions; then all the way to Valentine
* Looking for summer help on the trail in the Bassett area

Jim Domeier, Superintendent, Fort Hartsuff SHP

* Attendance was up this year from last year; living history events in May and August were well attended
* Held a wildlife activity day in September; about 200 kids grades 4-6 attended
* Otherwise working on basic maintenance; replacing floors on three verandas

Logan Epp and Korey Johnson, Superintendents, Calamus SRA

* Pumpkin carving event at Homestead campground was very popular; every campsite was filled; abound 1200-1300 people attended
* Shower buildings have been winterized
* Several road construction projects going on in the area

Jeff Fields, Northeast Region Superintendent

* Eight areas were affected by spring flooding; meetings with FEMA; over $12 million in damage across parks division; repairs will be continuing into next year
* Contractor estimate to remove the Niobrara railroad bridge from the Niobrara River is $4 million; unclear who will pay
* Mormon Canal Bridge that washed out is also on park property now
* Flooding impacted visitation to some parks, especially Niobrara SP
* Good attendance at most fall events in the parks; visitors were pleased with the parking for the Ponca Expo this year
* Thanks to everyone who has helped with major events like the Expo and the Becoming and Outdoors-Woman (BOW) workshop (126 women participated; Ponca SP will host every other year, trading with Fort Robinson SP)
* Parks has purchased a new Clark boat for the northeast; could be available to others needing a large boat
* Three positions in the region are open and will be filled in the upcoming months

Tommy Hicks, Central Region Superintendent

* Road project with two new bridges over the Calamus and Loup rivers that will be raised to avoid future ice jams
* Working on paving campsites at Calamus
* Attended the Midwest State Parks Executive Conference in Iowa; lots of states in the region have been raising fees to help with deferred maintenance issues
* Lots of parks staff in the region lack fire experience; looking for training opportunities
* Calamus dam was recently inspected, so lake level was dropped quickly after being full all year
* Parks Division will be celebrating centennial in 2021; working on sponsorship package for events; big events will be held at Chadron SP, Arbor Lodge SHP, and Victoria Springs SRA; changes to park permit will be made in conjunction with the centennial

Scott Oligmueller and Brady Petersen, Superintendents, Ponca SP

* Hallowfest was very popular; all 2000 tickets for the hayrack rides sold out in 30 minutes; other events included a pumpkin roll and a maze
* Pool winterized; working on cabin upgrades
* Hosted new employee orientation
* Upcoming events include Christmas in the Woods and Winterfest
* Will host NFS fire academy; most courses still have spots available; contact park for lodging
* Several paving projects
* Working on cross-training employees
* Announcement from Maria Korver-Miersma – baby due in March

Cole Beyke, Horticulturalist

* Has been working on grant-funded Ponca SP entrance project; planted about 70 trees and made upgrade to the Towers of Time; will be planting various perennials/prairie plants and installing rain gardens
* Available to help throughout the district with hazard tree removal

Tyler Wulf and Jonathan Voelker, Superintendents, Lewis & Clark Lake SRA

* Revenue was up, largely due to fee increases
* Hosted a cross country meet when the Crofton Golf Course flooded
* Waiting on contractor to complete a cedar thinning/fuels reduction project this fall/winter; will be doing whole tree harvest where trees will be used for biofuels
* Hoping to do more cedar thinning in oak woodlands, but difficult to find contractors
* Steve Rasmussen with Nebraska Forest Service is wanting to have a cedar thinning demonstration area; work will be completed in the South Shore area to create cedar savanna
* Fall burns are planned for the South Shore
* Tyler will be attending the State Park Leadership School in West Virginia
* Made changes to marina operations: slips must be occupied by June 1; capped waiting list at 150 people

*Law Enforcement Division*

Doug Pollard, Conservation Officer

* New C.O. will be stationed in Albion; more interviews for new hires; another supervisor will be stationed in Kearney

Deer Check/CWD Sampling – Lucas

* CWD samples will be collected for the Elkhorn, Calamus East, Loup East, and Missouri units
* Sampling will focus on 2 ½-years-old and older deer, particularly bucks
* Note that November 11 (Monday before season) is a holiday; figure these eight hours in when estimating your hours for the pay period
* BGHarvest program (online) will be used again to enter data; should be able to use your e-mail login credentials, but temporary user names and passwords will be made available
* This year we will start cleaning knives with Clorox wipes between deer to avoid cross-contamination of samples; you should probably also change gloves between animals
* A demonstration of lymph node removal was given

Minutes submitted by Jason Thiele