Northeast District Meeting
2/10/2020
Danish Alps SRA

Meeting was called to order by President Josh Kounovsky at 10:44 a.m.

Kounovsky announced that individual updates would not be given at this meeting but instead a few people would give important updates and time would be provided at the end for other announcements.

Roll Call/Introductions:

Josh Kounovsky, Grove Lake WMA

Rob Gray, PF, Tekamah

Nate Remter, Niobrara SP

Grant Wiemer, Oak Valley WMA

Cody Baker, PF, Neligh

Brady Petersen, Ponca SP

Tom G., Ponca SP

Lynn Mellick, Ponca SP

Jordan Swenson, Fort Atkinson SRA

Tyler Wulf, Lewis & Clark SRA

Dan Sutherland, Willow Creek SRA and Cowboy Trail

Steve Rasmussen, Nebraska Forest Service

Clayton Stalling, Retired

Bill Vodehnal, Bassett

Scott Wessel, Norfolk

Jamie Bachmann, NPLT, Norfolk

Russ Hamer, Oak Valley WMA

Jeff Fields, Northeast Region Parks

Jen Corman, NPLT, Bassett

Bruce Trindle, Retired

Tom Zimmer, Law Enforcement, Norfolk

Jeff Jones, Law Enforcement, Cedar/Knox counties

Jon Voelker, Lewis & Clark SRA

Kelly Corman, Bassett

Ryan Pfeifer, George Syas WMA

Logan Pierce, Grove Lake WMA

Lucas Negus, Norfolk

Cole Beyke, Horticulturalist

Jorden Smith, Nebraska Forest Service

Dan Vander Veen, Danish Alps SRA

Chris Wood, NPLT, Ponca SP

Cody Dreier, Pollinator Ecologist, Lincoln

Jason Thiele, Norfolk

Cassidy Wessel, Norfolk

Nebraska Forest Service update: Steve Rasmussen, District Forester

* Steve is moving toward retirement; Jorden Smith, currently working out of Hartington, will be transitioning into the District Forester position and eventually be based out of the Lower Elkhorn NRD office in Norfolk
* Ponderosa pine seedlings
	+ NFS has been doing a study with the Bessey Nursery to evaluate survival of Ponderosa pine seedlings planted as bare root plants and variously sized containerized plants; Ponderosa pine is one possible alternative for eastern redcedar, but survival has historically been comparatively poor for pines; one demo planting was done at Danish Alps
	+ Containerized seedlings generally survive better than bare root plants because they retain root hairs; bare root plants need to regrow root hairs after being planted
	+ Have been planting thousands of pines in Pine Ridge and Niobrara Valley post-wildfires; extra containerized seedlings will be available at NRDs across the state this spring; these fit through a tree planter; most will be 8-10’ tall in 5-6 years
	+ Ponderosa pine is much more resistant to pine wilt than other commonly planted pines (e.g., Scotch pine)
* Emerald ash borer
	+ First confirmed in Nebraska in 2016; has so far only been detected in the southeast part of the state (Fremont, Lincoln, Omaha, Mahoney SP)
	+ Firewood seems to be the main mode of transport for the species; firewood should be bought from local sources; if you must move firewood, do it during the winter, and try to burn up the supply you have before spring to prevent emergence of EAB and other pests
	+ In other states where EAB has become established, ash die-offs have happened over several years, and the opening of the understory has resulted in increased abundance of invasive shrubs like honeysuckle and buckthorn
	+ Information sources on EAB and ash forest management can be found at:
		- [www.nfs.unl.edu](http://www.nfs.unl.edu)
		- [www.emeraldashborer.info](http://www.emeraldashborer.info)
		- <https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/205052>
* Thousand cankers disease
	+ This is a disease of black walnuts that has impacts many other states to the west and east of Nebraska
	+ Nebraska is under statewide quarantine; black walnut products cannot be brought into the state without inspections and approved treatment
* Wildfire Control Act
	+ Legislation after 2012 wildfires
	+ Allowed single-engine air tanker to be deployed for rapid response to spot fires in western NE
	+ Also provided funding for fuels reduction projects
		- 50% cost-share on public land
		- 75% cost-share on private land
* Additional funding available for wildland-urban interface fuels management
	+ 75% cost-share; private land only
* Employment opportunities
	+ Jorden’s position in Hartington will be backfilled
	+ Potential new forester position in O’Neill
	+ Vacancy around May/June in Ainsworth (Beth Arens moving to Kearney)
* NFS strategic plan
	+ Five-year update to statewide forest management plan
	+ Listening sessions open to public
		- March 2, 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m., Papio-Missouri River NRD Field Office, 1505 Broadway St., Dakota City
		- March 3, 6:30 to 8 p.m., Middle Niobrara NRD, 303 East Highway 20, Valentine

Butterfly Surveys: Cody Dreier, NGPC Pollinator Biologist

* Assistance is needed with conducting surveys for monarchs and regal fritillaries in the tallgrass prairie region; both private and state lands
	+ Trainings will be held at Schramm Park SRA on May 30, Pfanny’s Farm near Randolph on June 3, and Rock Creek Station on June 9
	+ Each site contains three transects and will take roughly an hour to complete
	+ If you have done surveys in the past, make sure that Cody has your data!
* Monarch conservation database
	+ This needs to be updated; Cody will send out an e-mail with instructions soon
	+ This is an important source of information for the USFWS on the ESA listing decision for the monarch
* Nebraska Bumble Bee Atlas
	+ Coordinated by Katie Lamke of the Xerces Society
	+ First major effort to survey bumble bees in the state; simple protocol
	+ Lots of need for volunteers in the northeast and north-central regions of the state
	+ A few trainings will be held later this year; see website for locations and dates
	+ <https://www.nebraskabumblebeeatlas.org>

Statewide Prairie Grouse Surveys: Scott Wessel and Bill Vodehnal

* This will be the first year of a three-year statewide survey for greater prairie-chickens and sharp-tailed grouse across the state; this is to fill in data gaps such as statewide and regional population estimates and responses of grouse to landscape-level changes (e.g., CRP, tree encroachment, etc.)
* 11 of the traditional lek survey routes will continue to be run as normal, but the new protocol uses intensive surveys of 1 mi2 blocks; about 50 different blocks will be surveyed each year in the Northeast District
* Each block must be surveyed twice between March 20 and April 30; staff will be assigned to blocks within their coverage areas; get total count of birds on each lek detected
* If interested in picking up a survey block, contact Bill Vodehnal, Scott Wessel, or Lucas Negus

NGPC Education Strategic Plan: Jeff Fields

* First-ever agency-wide education plan was developed by a working group with representation from all involved divisions; the plan was adopted at the January Commission meeting
* The plan in scheduled to be updated every five years
* All NGPC employees can/should be involved in some way in public education; if NGPC doesn’t take the lead, who will?

Parks Division Update: Jeff Fields

* Flood recovery
	+ Still dealing with FEMA; last year was a lot of inspections, this year repairs will begin on millions of dollars’ worth of damage to parks facilities and the Cowboy Trail
* Regional supervisors meeting was recently held in Kearney
	+ Second straight year of decreasing park permit sales; down 8-9% in 2019, perhaps due to flooding/weather and recent fee increases
* Niobrara State Park
	+ New sewage lagoon being installed in flat area on south side of Highway 12 after previous lagoon slid off hillside
	+ Working on access to the Niobrara River and the Bazile Creek WMA area; meeting with NDOT soon to discuss options
* Lewis & Clark SRA
	+ New sewage lagoon has gone through design phase; construction will hopefully begin soon
	+ Plan to do repairs to the north boat ramp at Weigand
	+ A contractor is currently working on removing eastern redcedar at South Shore; some of the large trees are being logged
* Ponca SP
	+ Main boat ramp washed out in the flood and is scheduled to be replaced; only usable ramp at this time in the ramp at the North Addition
	+ Asphalt project also scheduled around pool and new cabins
* Summit Lake SRA
	+ 13 new campsites to be added
	+ New shop is planned in cooperation with Papio-Missouri NRD
* Fremont Lakes SRA
	+ Repairs to roads and other structures continue
	+ Working with Fisheries on management/renovation strategy now that some of the lakes have become connected
* Willow Creek SRA
	+ Repairs to causeway with the Lower Elkhorn NRD
* Dead Timber SRA
	+ Under water again
* Fort Atkinson SHP
	+ Fort walls need to be repaired, currently looking for a contractor

New Education Division: Jamie Bachmann

* The Fish and Wildlife Education Division is up and running; Lindsay Rogers was recently named the Division Administrator; a program manager position will be advertised in the near future; terrestrial and aquatic educator positions (Monica Macoubrie and Grace Gaard) and two partner positions (Jamie Bachmann, Northern Prairies Land Trust, and Chaley Jensen, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies) round out the team

Law Enforcement Division Update: Tom Zimmer

* Division has gone through another reorganization to go back to five districts; our district lost 7 counties in southwest portion (map and contact info for officers provided)
* Officer Owen Johnson from Ponca will be transferring to a new assignment; Nick Fix will be his replacement in April or May
* Districts will be stretch very thin during the summer; all districts are sending five conservation officers each to Lake McConaughy during the major holiday weekends of Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Labor Day and three to four officers during other summer weekends from July 4 weekend to Labor Day weekend; Tom will try to keep park superintendents and district managers informed on which officers are on duty in the district during the summer

Wildlife Updates: Lucas Negus

* Legislature
	+ Several current bills in the legislature could have major repercussions for the NGPC if passed; if members of the public ask about them, keep commentary to a minimum and refer them to Lincoln HQ; refer any comments you hear from the public to your supervisor; don’t contact your senator directly; talking points will likely come later from administration
	+ Appears to be momentum for a bill that would provide up to four free landowner deer permits and a special early season for landowners
* Deer season updates
	+ Five CWD-positive deer were detected in the district; three were in the Loup East unit near Fullerton, one was in the Elkhorn unit near Petersburg, and the other was in the Loup East unit near St. Paul
	+ Also of note, a road-killed deer near Sioux City tested positive
	+ Extra bonus tags in Loup East were successful, with 49.7% of harvest being antlerless
	+ Recommendations for 2020 season have been written; it will likely include additional bonus tags for most units in the Northeast and more opportunities for elk permits (particularly cows)
* Burn season
	+ Snow cover will not last long this time of year, so be careful with burning brush piles
	+ Get burn plans submitted to Lucas as soon as possible
	+ Get your task books/qualifications updated

CRP sign-up and Open Fields and Waters: Scott Wessel

* Conservation Reserve Program general sign-up goes through February 28; there has been a good amount of interest in our area, but it is still unclear how many acres will go into CRP; it is virtually certain that we will see a net loss of acres over the next few years, including some of our public access (OFW) sites
* NGPC has made a new access agreement with the Lower Loup NRD to provide OFW enrollment incentives in the Central Pheasant Opportunity Area, which we share with the Southwest District
* Send Scott Wessel, Cassidy Wessel, or Jason Thiele contact information for any landowners you know who may be interested in signup up for OFW; priority habitats include CRP fields for upland gamebirds, “canyons access” (relatively large tracts with some good timber and terrain) for deer and turkeys, and grasslands in the eastern Sandhills for prairie grouse

Open Floor for Other Announcements

* Maria Miersma at Ponca SP has a baby due in March, she will be resigning from her position at that time
* Niobrara SP Outdoor Educational Rendezvous will be held on May 1; details will come out later
* Niobrara Valley Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (TREX)
	+ Will be held at the Niobrara Valley Preserve from March 21-April 3
	+ Contact Jen Corman, Kelly Corman, or Cassidy Wessel with any questions
* Woodland habitat funding
	+ Some funding is available for woodland thinning work, particularly with a follow-up prescribed fire management regime; contact Gerry Steinauer

Next meeting date/location are TBD, but may be held in May in conjunction with District Birding Day

Meeting was adjourned at 12:20; a fish fry was enjoyed after the meeting

Minutes submitted by Jason Thiele