

Northeast District Meeting
9/5/2023
Norfolk Shop

President Russ Hamer called the meeting to order.

Roll Call/Introductions:

Russ Hamer, Oak Valley WMA

Jim Conn, Myrtle Hall WMA

Brian Gerken, Myrtle Hall WMA

Cassidy Wessel, Norfolk

Jeff Schuckman, Norfolk

Rebecca Munter, Norfolk

Kye Schumacher, Grove Lake WMA

Brady Peterson, Ponca SP

Jeff Borchers, George Syas WMA

Phil Chvala, Norfolk

Josh Kounovsky, Grove Lake WMA

Tim Collins, George Syas WMA

Jason Thiele, Norfolk

Scott Wessel, Norfolk

Dale Davis, Bassett/Norfolk – NE district Lt.

Jeff Jones, Knox/Cedar counties

Jonathan Andreasen, Madison/Pierce/Stanton counties

Tyler Wulf, Regional Park Superintendent

Ashley Oblander, Pheasants Forever, Tekamah

Hanna Barnes, Ponca SP

Lucas Negus, Norfolk

Grant Wiemer, Oak Valley WMA

Cole Beyke, Horticulturalist

Matthew Pfeiffer, Oak Valley WMA

Colleen Rothe-Groleau, Heritage Program, Lincoln

Melody Nuesch, Norfolk

General Announcements

- Next meetings TBD probably in late October and possibly December
 - considering inviting a speaker to talk about use of herbicides and insecticides, such as rotating active ingredients
 - talk to Russ about ideas for other topics
- Registration is open for the Eastern Nebraska Wildland Fire Academy at Ponca State Park November 1-5; see <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2023-eastern-nebraska-wildland-fire-academy-tickets-657936294167> for details and to sign up
- Drone pilot training will be held in Kearney September 18-20; Mike Thome is the coordinator
- Anyone who still has turkey brood reports to submit, get them to Luke Meduna ASAP
- Nebraska Natural Legacy Conference will be in Norfolk October 3-5 (further details below)

Individuals updates were provided by most present. For ease of readability, reports are grouped below by division.

Fisheries

Jeff Schuckman

- This summer has been challenging for anglers with heat, low water levels, algae blooms, and fish kills.
- The pump and well for Goose Lake has been replaced and is running, but the water level is still dropping.
- Fisheries staff will be assisting with collecting fish for the Ponca Expo.
- One gate is open at Gavins Point Dam.
- Plans are in place for a new boat ramp and a floating fishing dock at Grove Lake.

Rebecca Munter

- Sonar and GPS data have been collected to update the lake map for Willow Creek. Sedimentation since the last mapping effort is being studied. A rehabilitation project is envisioned for the future. Water levels have continued to drop.
- Buckskin Hills Lake was also recently mapped.

Phil Cvala

- A drone is scheduled to spray cattails at Goose Lake.
- The Gracie Creek project looks good.
- Maskenthine Lake had a recent fish kill brought on by low water level, poor water quality, and high temperatures. There was no oxygen 2' below the surface. A lot of bluegill and walleyes were lost along with some bass and crappie.
- The Loup Canal and Platte River also had fish kills during hot summer weather. A pallid sturgeon was one of the Platte River fish kill victims.

Wildlife

Lucas Negus

- Help will be needed as usual for deer check stations in November. The Keya Paha, Calamus East, Calamus West, Loup West, and Sandhills units will be conducting sampling for CWD this year. Contact Lucas if interested in helping. Work schedules will be sent out as soon as possible.
- Several kinks still need to be worked out with the online check-in system
- Staff should read through the NGPC mountain lion response plan and refamiliarize themselves with the protocols. This plan was approved in 2004, and Sam Wilson plans to update it within the next year or so.
- Only one cow elk has been harvested in the district so far this season.
- Pass along reports of deer deaths suspected to be caused by EHD, or (better) enter them at the following address: <https://survey123.arcgis.com/share/02ce03e5b027437185e4d86e5be64a93>
- Thanks to other divisions for all the cooperation on various projects

Russ Hamer

- A dove hunter got stuck in the mud up to about his waist at Wood Duck WMA over opening weekend while going to retrieve a bird and had to call for help. This has happened several times to duck hunters over the past few years.

Grant Wiemer

- Has been experimenting with several techniques to control deciduous trees and brush, such as basal-bark spraying autumn olive, doing hack-and-squirt on Siberian elm with 50% glyphosate, and using a forestry tiller to damage roots of invasive trees.

Jim Conn

- Purple loosestrife has been abundant at Calamus WMA this year; they are working to control it.
- Cover crops have been planted in the past few weeks
- Finally making progress on getting new septic system put in at Meridian

Josh Kounovsky

- Some old shelterbelts have been removed at Grove Lake WMA. A press release was issued in response to reactions from the public.
- Wildlife staff will be assisting with construction of stack yards to protect hay from wildlife damage.
- Water is high on the Missouri River. A lot of rock has been added to the access road at Bazile Creek WMA. The ramps at Niobrara or Verdel would be better options with high water.

Jeff Borchers

- Jeff will again be coordinating shuttles and drivers for the Expo
- Lots of time has been focused on spraying to control leafy spurge, purple loosestrife, and invasive trees.
- The pumps have been running at Wilkinson WMA in preparation for the teal season.
- 34 teal hunters were checked at Wilkinson on Saturday, September 2.
- Several access points along the Platte River have been closed to hopefully avoid problems with ATVs driving onto WMAs and private lands from the river

Hanna Barnes

- Bumblebee Atlas surveys have been completed. They found both at-risk species: American Bumblebee and Southern Plains Bumblebee
- Traveled to help spray Caucasian bluestem at Rock Creek Station SHP
- Working on prep work for prescribed burns at Ponca State Park and spraying Canada thistles at Niobrara State Park

Scott Wessel

- The Supreme Court's ruling earlier this year on the definition of Waters of the United States in the Clean Water Act greatly lessened the number of wetlands that are protected under the Act. The implications remain to be seen.

- Please let Wildlife Partners Section staff know about signage needs at Open Fields and Waters sites. We also like to hear reports of hunter success.
- Spending will likely begin soon on the \$4 million America the Beautiful Challenge grant. A position will be advertised to help with implementing prescribed fire with the Santee Sioux Tribe.
- NRCS recently hosted a series of conservation practitioner workshops across the state, allowing various agencies/organizations to reconnect and discuss ways to work together more effectively.
- Wildlife and Fisheries staff have been involved with construction and monitoring of beaver dam analogs.

Kyle Schumacher

- Great Plains Grasslands Initiative is an initiative by the NRCS and partners to change the approach for addressing woody encroachment in grasslands by being proactive vs. reactive. A training was held in Broken Bow for the NRCS GPGI cadre, and several NGPC biologists attended.
- NGPC will be focusing more on follow-up actions to keep areas where trees have been removed free of trees in the future.

Cassidy Wessel

- Deer/turkey habitat workshop to be held at Ohiya Casino on September 30; will be guest speakers and field trips; go to <https://outdoornebraska.gov/about/press-events/events/woodland-habitat-convention/> for further information and registration
- Will also be a banquet the evening before for the newly formed Verdigre Niobrara Valley Sportsmen

Jason Thiele

- Open Fields and Waters payment rates were increased this year for the first time in years.
- Check Atlas for OFW sites that were added or dropped. Lots of CRP fields were partially hayed this year.

Parks

Brady Petersen

- About 35 schools are signed up for the Expo School Day.
- New attractions for the Expo include a bush plane fly-in, a log roll across the Missouri River by the Ax Women of Maine, a bison processing demonstration, and a high school / junior high trap shooting demonstration.
- About 14 UTVs are still needed for the Expo. Help is also needed for setup on Tuesday and Wednesday. Contact Scott Oligmueller.

Tyler Wulf

- This is the 18th year for the Ponca Expo. There will be a special celebration for the 20th. Most similar events across the nation have failed to continue beyond about 5 years.
- They are looking for someone to do the bison processing demonstration.

- The new Weigand Marina (STAR WARS project) is at 90% design. The plan is to pump dredge material to the Bloomfield Area. No construction work can begin until the Corps of Engineers gives approval. Trees will also need to be planted to mitigate for trees that will be removed during the project.
- The Niobrara State Park lodge project will require a Request for Qualifications, and they are working through that process.
- Two proposals have been received for the Missouri River access component of the STAR WARS project. Interviews will be held soon with the two bidders.
- Some sediment was removed from the kayak launch on the Niobrara River
- The superintendent position at Lewis & Clark SRA will be advertised soon

Cole Beyke

- Landscaping plantings were delayed this year due to drought and late spring burn season.
- Hoping to get a replacement hi-ranger bucket truck for hazard tree work
- Beginning prep work for fall burn season; looking to add two more slip-in pumper units to the Parks fire cache this winter
- A 13-acre woodland project has been approved for the South Shore area
- Ponca State Park has a lot of sick/dying oaks from bur oak blight (staff noted outbreaks at other locations around the district as well); there is also a suspected case of Emerald Ash Borer; a specialist with Nebraska Forest Service will investigate

Law Enforcement

Dale Davis

- Labor Day weekend was relatively uneventful.
- The legislature gave authority for each district to hire two permanent sergeants, with ten additional officers to be added over the next few years.
- A youth muzzleloader deer hunt will be held in the Ponca area the first weekend of December. They are looking for youth approximately 14-15 years old with an interest in hunting and the outdoors but limited opportunities to participate.

Administration

Melody Nuesch

- Jasmine Villa is the new part-time office technician in the Norfolk office. She speaks Spanish, which has been very helpful with some customers.
- The new permitting systems is still presenting challenges for staff and customers.
- Non-resident statewide archery deer permits and nonresident muzzleloader permits are sold out. The total nonresident quota for permits allowing harvest of an antlered deer will likely be met soon.
- Landowners need Parcel ID numbers to enter their properties into the permitting system. They also need to authorize people who can use a landowner permit on their property.

Nebraska Natural Legacy Conference Update – Colleen Rothe-Groleau

- The conference will be held at Divots October 3-5. A welcome social on Tuesday evening will be held at the Stables.
- Tuesday will have a wetland focus, Wednesday will include presentations and a field trip to Wood Duck WMA, and Thursday will have a pollinator focus; there will also be a “pollinator summit”/workshop following the Legacy Conference on Thursday
- Please send presentation proposals/abstracts to Colleen ASAP
- About 8 landowner scholarships are available – invited landowners to attend; contact Colleen
- Nominate candidates for conservation and education awards; contact Colleen
- For registration, go to <https://outdoornebraska.gov/about/press-events/events/natural-legacy-conference/nebraska-natural-legacy-conference-registration/>

Minutes submitted by Jason Thiele