



PLATTE RIVER RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM (PRRIP -or- Program)

Land Advisory Committee (LAC) Meeting

Wednesday, May 15, 2024; 10:00 AM - noon PM CST

Meeting held virtually & in-person at ED Office in Kearney, NE

Land Advisory Committee (LAC)

State of Wyoming

Bill Brewer – Alternate (online)

Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation)

Brock Merrill – Member (online)

State of Colorado

Emily Zmack – Alternate (online)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service)

Matt Rabbe – Member

State of Nebraska

Caitlin Kingsley – Alternate (online)

Ted LaGrange – Member

Environmental Entities

Cody Wagner – Member (Vice-Chair) - online

Tim Smith – Member

Power Districts

Dave Zorn – Member (Chair)

Jim Jenniges – Member

Local Nebraska Rep. – Central Platte Natural Resources District (CPNRD)

Dave Carr – Member

Local Nebraska Rep. – Tri-Basin Natural Resources District (TBNRD)

John Thorburn – Member

Local Nebraska Rep. – Joint CPNRD/TBNRD

None

Executive Director's Office (EDO)

Jason Farnsworth, ED

Tim Tunnell

Other Participants

Jessie Tapp – NGPC

**WELCOME & ADMINISTRATIVE**

Chairman Zorn called the meeting to order at 10:06 am Central Time. Tunnell recognized members who were attending in-person at the PRRIP conference room and acknowledge members attending virtually. Zorn asked for agenda modifications. None offered. Zorn asked for the LAC's recommendation for the minutes of the February 14, 2024, LAC meeting.

LAC MOTION: Thorburn moved, and Rabbe seconded to approve the February 14, 2024, LAC Meeting minutes. Minutes approved.

GENERAL UPDATE AND OTHER COMMITTEE COORDINATION

Rabbe gave an update of TAC activities. Group working on development of wet meadow policy framework is going to be updating that for September GC meeting. Sediment augmentation discussions centered around triggers in the sediment augmentation monitoring plan given the GC's decision to halt sediment augmentation for the time being. WC monitoring and updates and changes to protocol including possible using drones and 95 % window of monitoring and the fall report. Discussed predator fences and monitoring of piping plovers.

Zorn asked if there was anyone else on the committee that could update the LAC on the WAC. Farnsworth stated that he was fine updating the group on WAC and GC. Program has had a long-term water lease program with CNPPID where participating irrigators are paid for their water and are able to dryland farm their enrolled crop fields. Like everything else with water, it's about how much money to pay. WAC is wrestling with how much to pay for the water and has hired a special advisor to assist. Other issues under consideration are how to construct a large recapture system around Elwood area, Phelps, and Cottonwood Ranch to have the ability to actively put water in river when it is wanted rather than waiting for natural recharge to the river. Last, consultant continuing to look for anything practical that can be done to deal with North Platte Chokepoint issue. Program not having eminent domain is a constraint as the Program is willing buy/ willing seller trying to work with folks on a major river through a major town has limitations on what can be done.

GC will meet on June 11 & 12 in Scottsbluff rather than Cheyenne this year. Focus will be continuing to grind on big science issues that the Programs has been dealing with. Farnsworth briefed the group on the recent acquisition of the BFS tract. The previous owners are under contract to continue to mine for a few more years to create additional nesting habitat. Estimates are that there will be around 50 acres of nesting habitat. Farnsworth also informed that he has been contacted by a developer about selling lots on the east side of the tract which could be a way to recoup some of the acquisition costs.

Rabbe added the EA release, the spring WC EA release and plans for germination suppression EA release that is quickly approaching were also topic of discussion during the WAC and TAC meetings. Germination suppression flow objective is to have 1500 CFS in the AHR for the month of June. Farnsworth mentioned that an update on this spring's WC migration would be good for the LAC as some may not have a good picture of that. Rabbe spoke of his presentation of the spring EA release that timed up nicely with WC migration. The total was 180-200 WC used the CPR this spring in the FWS database and Programs systematic monitoring. Record use and estimate of 30 % of the total population regardless of what the population is as there was no survey at Aransas this year.

LAND OBJECTIVE STATUS & TRACT W201601

Tunnell presented the Land Milestone summary document with the acquisition of the BFS tract that Farnsworth previously spoke about. The land total was increased by 374 acres and cost total increased by \$2 million. OCSW acres are now at 893 acres as opposed to 587 acres previously. Tunnell also



affirmed that these acres are tracked in the long-term goal not the extension plus up goal of 1,500 acres. Tunnell continued with a discussion of Tract W201601 which was acquired for a potential water project. The LAC began the discussion about transferring the acres to habitat acres as opposed to water acres. Tunnell presented the Land Evaluation report focusing on the maps identifying the tract itself and how it fits into the Programs land holdings. Tunnell went over the habitat manipulation maps in the report. LaGrange asked if any habitat work had been done on the tract. Tunnell explained that there were some trees that had been cut down on an in-channel portion of the tract but needed to be piled, burned & buried to clean the area up. Otherwise, some additional tree clearing, and in-channel disking was estimated at \$50,000. Rabbe noted that discussion about the in-channel area should be kept vegetation free with pre-emergent and disking to let the island erode providing a wide portion of the channel. Tunnel further noted how the tract had been leased to a local landowner to provide grazing in the accretion and transitioning the dryland field to forage crop rather than corn. Farnsworth noted that there is a mining permit on the cropland. Tunnell further explained that as a water property, the original intent was to create a slurry wall water project. Upon further research, the project was deemed cost prohibitive. Farnsworth noted that \$30 million dollars for 3,000-acre feet of water with no guarantee that it would work at all. Tunnell noted that the Program has owned the tract since 2016 and the question is whether to keep the property on the water ledger or transfer to the habitat ledger. LaGrange asked if the habitat evaluation group talked about any additional tree clearing along the south channel or south side to the east. Rabbe said that the group decided that the south end of the island downstream of the Stall tract was not a concern as the south channel is too narrow. Jenniges pointed out that there is a group of trees on the south bank to the east that could be removed to make the bank more friable to erode. Rabbe concluded that by cleaning up the island we would have ideal habitat conditions without clearing any trees on the south bank. Jenniges noted that any work on the island could affect the flow split what water goes down to river to the NGPC Blue Hole WMA. LaGrange said that they would have to talk to Nic Fryda about how much use that WMA gets. Thorburn said it gets quite a bit of public use, mostly on the sandpit, but there is use on the river channel as well. Jenniges pointed out that the evaluation groups recommendation was to transfer to habitat and asked what another option is "sell it?" Farnsworth agreed and submitted that there is no viable way to squeeze water off of it in a cost-effective way, so options are sell it or transfer it to habitat land. Tunnell noted that the group talked about tagging it as "excess" property that could be sold if another more desirable round out property came on the market but in the meantime hold it as habitat land. Rabbe called it an insurance policy so to speak, the Program met its First Increment land acquisition milestone goals, but this could still fit in the category of complex habitat lands total and then at the end of the extension if we haven't found the tract that gets us the final 200 acres for the 1,500 plus up acres, we could entertain rolling this tract over into that category. Tapp asked if there is an estimate of total acres of WC habitat or how would you go about estimating that. Zorn answered that the center portion of the tract would add at least a ¼ mile of 650-foot threshold for suitable WC habitat near Cottonwood Ranch where other suitable habitat exists. Tapp and LaGrange agree that it would be beneficial as habitat and connects Program ownership to the NGPC owned Blue Hole WMA. Jenniges mentioned that it also provides adequate buffer to the WC habitat and others agreed that this tract checks all the appropriate boxes. Farnsworth also pointed out that although he is not anticipating that the Program will need additional OCSW habitat but there is a mining permit on this tract if it is ever needed to work with a miner to create additional OCSW habitat. Jenniges pointed out that permit may or may not transfer. Farnsworth said that working with miners is by far the cheapest way to create OCSW habitat. Zorn asked for more thoughts, questions, or concerns from the group and if not, he is looking for a recommendation to take to the GC.

LAC MOTION: *Jenniges moved, and Rabbe seconded to recommend GC approval of transfer of Tract W201601 to habitat land. Motion approved.*

**GRASSLAND WORKING GROUP**

Rabbe discussed that the Grassland Working Group met a couple of months ago to go over strategies and to put something on paper that would help Tunnell know what the group would like to see as far as management recognizing we have more flexibility now within MBTA restrictions on management time periods and the ability to apply management actions during the appropriate applicable times. The major hangups right now as seen in the document comments is the logistics of who is doing what. Rabbe realized that maybe the group is taking on “too much of the apple” and developing a 3 -5-year monitoring plan that retroactively looked at what was done in previous years, what properties are in worse condition and prioritize them and doing the annual work plans that Tunnell provides to farm manager to develop haying and grazing leases. Comments reflect uncertainties and want to open it up for discussion and asked Tunnell to chime in on EDO side of things and preferences for discussion for members of working group to ultimately hash out and have more concrete guidelines for Tunnell prior to this fall to give guidance to farm manager to develop leases. Tunnell commented that his stance has been the same since this discussion started over a year ago. Annual guidance on management should come from the Working Group in time for farm managers to react to. The challenge of implementing a 3-year or so plan is that things change such as only burning 1 pasture in the past 3 years will affect grassland composition and be negatively reflected in monitoring. Rabbe spoke of the annual work plans and having a smaller subset of the GWG review the annual plan and provide tweaks or adjustments to the plan. Having an overall guidance document that could be updated or tweaked to provide flexibility to put together annual work plan, but also have some general themes that would promote the right kind of conditions that the GWG would like to see out there. Furthermore, less worried about monitoring than applying management techniques during the appropriate times of year that people generally agree on and just move forward. Jenniges added that the consensus was instead of right now in our overall blanket management plan that says we're going to use season-long grazing May 1st to October, because that's what people with cows want. Are there opportunities to do something different and impact the plant community in a different way? Zorn added that will be recognizably parcel-specific based on infrastructure and what there is for fences and what there is for watering capabilities. So, you can't just make a blanket recommendation. There must be some site specific to it to be able to implement it. And then you throw in the wrench of what we were planning on burning this year and it didn't happen. Tunnell reiterated that is where the GWG should make annual decisions so the guidance can be given to farm managers who can work with the tenants or to try to find tenants that are able to graze in the off season. Most tenants that we specifically work with right now, they have corn stalks, they have all the available forage already. It's the warm season grass component or the warm season grazing is what they are lacking. Jenniges added summertime grazing is what is needed. Rabbe spoke of other folks, Crane Trust, Audubon, everyone that's on, this is not unique to the Program. Recognize that the tenants want to graze during the heart of the warm season. And so maybe some tenants are going to tell us to go pound sand and they'll go find someone else. But there might be other tenants that will take grass, maybe at a decreased rate or whatever, and work within the windows we're trying to. Tunnell asked Smith if Crane Trust has tenants that are grazing in the off seasons? Smith replied that yes, they do and have both. Most tenants are kept there but are moved between parcels or properties so areas that are cool season dominant, can move cows into those areas during early spring, late fall, but also let them graze an area that has a good warm season component during growing season. So, there's a little bit of flexibility moving them between parcels. Crane Trust usually have the same tenants, but Smith was upfront with them about doing some weird stuff and they are okay with it upfront. Having pretty good tenants that are willing to work with me to get done what you want to get done. Farnsworth noted that he went through the draft guidance and didn't see below the suggested goals line about whooping cranes. Are we not trying keep short stature for cranes? Rabbe answered that the diversity of stature was what we were looking for. So that you always have areas that are short, medium and then some areas rested. Jenniges added that he doesn't think it's nearly as prescriptive as our plan is right now and



managing grasslands just for cranes is probably not good for the grasslands. Farnsworth agreed that is a good point and that this is all realistic, reasonable, even this on the ground, but the challenge he has in all of this is that when it comes to the GC, you always have to start with why are you doing this, what's your strategy, what are you going to do, and how are you going to accomplish this? The why on this is what I can see here is mostly pollinators. Jenniges interjected that it is grassland health in this committee and every one of us has a GC member that we need to talk to them and say yes, we support this. So, it's not, Farnsworth, telling them this is what we're going to do. Farnsworth reminded the group that he took a run at this when other species of concern and what should we do relative to other species of concern on our grasslands and Jenniges interrupted with maybe you should come the other direction by making sure committee members talk to their GC members before they hear from it from you. Farnsworth replied that it feels to him that this is linked with the wet meadows. If we're going to shift away from being laser focused on the target species and species of concern to something more holistic. I think that's not a tenet to do. Jenniges stated it's all related. It's all interconnected and we're going to try to get you some help. Farnsworth added that some things aren't going to matter, but things like switching away from season-long grazing is going to impact our income. Jenniges pointed out that there, six, seven different tenants on those properties that we spoke of this morning (i.e. Lindstrom, Morse, Stall, Cottonwood Ranch) and will have to get rid of half of them, or maybe most of them, so that you can move cows around the way you want to move them around. And you're going to lose money. You're going to lose half of your income. The GC may say no. Farnsworth affirmed that he and Tunnell are not opposed to doing that but can't have is this kind of jerk back and forth all the time where there's no particular, yeah, it needs to come, this is what you need to do, this is why you need to do it. So, we can go communicate with tenants and say, hey, we're out of the season long grazing business because these are our new goals and objectives for what we're doing on this grass. Jenniges stated that still have season-long grazing. It just won't be season-long grazing on each individual grazing unit every year in a row, sequentially. But to do that, you're going to lose money. Smith added that the Crane Trust took a reduction in income when they made the switch to this style grazing and most of the tenants have been happy since then, at least the ones that were kept and like Jim was saying, it is season long, it's just not season long on one area. Tunnell pointed out that for example, a lease at the Morse Tract on Cottonwood Ranch, that's what we've been doing moving him around on an annual basis and we see positive results on the properties that are native, but on the North half of Cottonwood Ranch, that north half section that's all wheatgrass we're seeing more wheatgrass. Now it's mud. Rabbe stated that there are going to be areas where we usually don't win the fight to control wheatgrass. Tunnell asked to make a list of those tracts that were not going to win? LaGrange pointed out that he thinks Tunnell needs latitude to be able to make those decisions as a land manager as it's hard for a committee, in his view, to provide the right information. Tunnell answered that there has been latitude for the past 15 years and last time we had a monitoring survey of these properties, that's what set this off. According to some committee members the grassland quality has been "tanking." We've been managing for whooping crane habitat burning at the wrong time of the year for cool season suppression and that's where I'm saying I'm done. Tell me what you want to do. Rabbe interjected that the wheatgrass dominated grasslands didn't "tank" and no one is blaming you for what we have out there. You did what we told you to do. I've said that from the beginning, okay. So, I understand it's hard to have people look at these monitoring reports and you know it comes back to you need to do this differently. Farnsworth stated the thing that will change is the number of tenants and the cattle and the system we have. Beyond that, he's frustrated that we can't get fire on the ground no matter what we do and now he has less confidence that fire contractors on the up and up just based on what's happened this spring out here. Prescribed fire implementation is an institutional hurdle we need to get over. The season, basically, coming up with a better plan for grazing, it's going to have to be three to five years because we're going to have to get rid of tenants. We're going to have to say, all right, folks, this many cattle are going to get shuffled around this many tracks through the season. And I'm fine with that. I need the GC to say, this is



the strategy we want you to do this, and it's absolutely let's go do it and be ready to change things up for next year. Jenniges stated that it may be worth picking out and seeing the most concerning tract. Grazing is never going to change the composition of the wheatgrass on Cottonwood ranch but if there's certain tracts that we can look at that we can put a template together for a three-to-five-year plan, that gives the farm manager the ability to go to a to see what tenants think and whether they can find somebody to participate and let us know just exactly what it's going to cost. Wagner interject on the cost part of this discussion. They have discovered at Rowe going into these kind of early season grazing windows and late season grazing windows, especially for the purpose of cool season grass suppression, is that it's actually not costing us income versus season-long grazing because in order to go through and do our system change that we're trying to achieve here by suppressing cool seasons, we're increasing our stocking rates pretty significantly and then pulling them off of course to rest during the growing season. Whereas before we would have had more of a moderate stocking rate season long to kind of achieve that patchiness element. So there might be some places, especially where you're talking there's a lot of brome or there's a lot of other cool seasons that are actually was grazing where you might see either a net zero loss in income or a much reduced loss on income just because you will probably be able to increase your stocking rate a little bit which might also keep some of your tenants a little happier if they're spreading cows out across a bunch of properties where now they can say oh well I'm going to dump 200 and on this one where I could only dump 100 before. Tunnell asked how many grazing tenants are at Rose Sanctuary. Wagner replied that he has reduced it down to two out of simplicity's sake. They used to have four. The main one that they have now that we've kind of gone to this main system with has his own grass which is obviously a huge help in a situation like this. But we've increased his stocking rate-triple in some cases on some of these properties where they are really trying to beat up these cool seasons early. They might have been able to stick 70 head on a property for five months and now they are running 200 head of cows on it. Tunnell asked if the tenant is the landowner there that has property contiguous to Rose Sanctuary? Wagner replied yes, they are pretty much only working with neighbors right now. Tunnell asked if what you're doing is opening a few gates and pushing them around? Wagner replied not necessarily they do go through and haul for the properties that we have up on the north side because where their pastures are not contiguous with those. Farnsworth, trying to take it up another level, stated that not all our grasslands are created equal. Partially what we're talking about is really trying to protect Binfield wet meadow and a couple other higher quality tracts. Jenniges thinks there's some that are higher priority to be able to frame it. Dyer tract, for example, we removed all the trees and cedars off that tract and it's just unproductive sand. Places like Binfield, there are multiple pastures, contiguous grass, maybe there's more opportunity to change things up. Places that are mostly brome, we should prefer to just maximize income off those and not try to turn them into something else. Because a lot of your goals are things like flowering plants and diversity and things like that, places like that, that really, we just must nuke it and try to start over to accomplish that. Maybe we just call those... I don't know, is that too much of a mercenary way to look at it? LaGrange pointed out that one of the things that he remembered when we talked about Binfield tract and the acquisition of it, it was considered by many to be one of the highest quality meadows in existence and so one of the things we talked about was, do what the previous landowner was doing, because we constantly go in and we do this at Game and Parks, he's seen this on a lot of our areas. We think something's great. You know, we've done this in rainwater basins, like plant community's great, isn't that wonderful? We salivate over it. The first thing we do is change the management on it. And then we wonder why it's now full of green canary grass. Or, you know, it's like, well, duh, we liked it the way it looked because the previous landowner was doing things in a certain way, I don't know how Binfield was managed, but I think there's something we need to pay close attention to. Tunnell answered that he was harvesting hay right in the middle of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act period. Farnsworth pointed out that we can roll that back. LaGrange continued that we have some flexibility there, but reality comes about and as a land manager, you've got to be able to adapt to current conditions, wet, dry, you can burn, you can't burn,



what you have access to. It's important for the working group to clarify why the change in management, what's the vision for these, but getting into the nuanced decision of how many cattle to put where when, you got to have someone like yourself making those decisions. Tunnell clarified that that has been going on. Changing the stocking rate during that five-month grazing period there is less grazing pressure than the way it sounds as season-long grazing every year as they're not grazing every square inch of the properties and we have tried to manipulate and change things over time now. LaGrange pointed out that assessments are going to show they're going to vary, and they're going to show what's the goal you're trying to manage for. Is it short stature, open, that's going to be different than tall dense nesting cover. That's one of the things NGPC struggles with. Over the course of time, we've had those discussions about what do we want out there. Tunnell stated that our monitoring FQI is the quality index sampled by transect. You could miss a good transect by 30 feet simply by the placement of the transects. Before the last time we monitored, we pointed out that we don't have near enough data points to really get a feel for what's going on in the grasslands. Then it comes back to why we are doing it and what the GC wants to pay for. Rabbe pointed out frankly that he would rather not monitor and shift some practices to what people generally agree is good grassland management for diversity and some of those other things and have the cost savings on monitoring knowing that our grazing practices might not generate as much income. Farnsworth pondered that if he was going to talk to the GC about this, what he would we had this discussion at the beginning of the program, basically tried at that point to hue as close as we could to target species and species of concern, which meant we were managing mostly or structure, and specifically for structure for cranes. Keep a quarter of it low and then everything else, try not to do a lot of harm, but we weren't necessarily worried about composition. Now we have gotten to a point where there's not a strong crane signal using grasslands and argue over that. The folks on the ground, the folks on the committees are saying it's probably time to stop thinking in that route and start thinking more holistically, to start thinking more about composition and less about structure and that composition primarily will benefit sort of holistic parameters. One of the things to consider is that there's a lot of stuff coming down the pike, like pollinators and things like that, that make an argument that focusing more on composition will potentially release some pressure there. I need you all to help me draw the connection between that because I'm not a bug guy, but difference between warm season and cool season grasses for pollinators, I've never heard anybody talk about that. You're more flowering plants and things like that. So just help make that argument so then we can go to the GC and say, hey, folks are saying it's time to make a shift. Some places won't have an impact. Some places like Binfield could result in us having less income or some impact we can't define. But we need the GC to say, do this, and then it's sitting down complex by complex and tier it out and tell what people really want to focus on and what is worth the effort. I would like to have a couple spots where we can stash cattle if we must and not worry about it. Because we have good tenants, and they'll call in the spring because something happened, and they got cattle and it's just nice to have somewhere. We're not there to make their lives better, but we also, for folks who are willing to go through the effort, it's nice to have something we can make. Smith commented that is a good point. That's also something that he incorporates for what does as he asks for a lot from them, but he's flexible if something comes up on their end. You must be able to work with them. Managing this way is not perfect in any way, shape, or form. So, that's something you got to keep in mind is, you know, they're being flexible for you, so you also have to have a little leeway in what they're doing and getting the correct tenant helps because you don't want somebody that's going to try to take advantage of that at the same time as, you know, trying to work with you. Zmak with Colorado asked if we could also touch on what some of the impacts of not monitoring would be as she was trying to keep tabs on the conversation and she wanted to follow up on Rabbe's comment about not monitoring and instead shifting grasslands management to prioritize diversity and spreading those funds. She asked, if we weren't monitoring these lands, what does that mean kind of long-term for the Program? Rabbe asked others in this room to try and then manage lands across the Platte Valley, who does an in-depth monitoring protocol across all their lands. Smith



answered that the Crane Trust does, but he could see a reduced version of monitoring, but he would not go away from it completely. Maybe once every five years, just take a status check of what's been happening over the last five years. Are you going in the right direction or are you not? Do you need to make changes? Jenniges stated that is pretty much what the Program does on a three-year schedule. Rabbe asked Zorn with CNPPID if they are required to monitor their grasslands for their license and if so, is it every year? Zorn replied that they have started doing some baseline monitoring on some transects. They monitor 1/8 of them every year so they are on an eight-year return interval. Jenniges asked if they change management based on the monitoring data. Do you change your grazing regime based upon your monitoring results? Smith answered yes. Jenniges elaborated that in his experience the thing with a lot of grassland monitoring data is collected but you never do anything with it. Smith replied that the other part about it is, some of these changes you don't see on an annual basis, like after a few years, if you see trends going one way or the other, then you know, well, maybe I need to change things up a little bit. Zorn commented that one of the shortcomings of the monitoring is the fact that it is a snapshot in time, a lot of it depends on what the moisture was like that year leading up to it, what it was the previous year, what the grazing was. It's just a snapshot of time which makes it tough to draw general conclusions that then lead to management changes immediately. CNPPID does it just to keep tabs on things to make sure that we're not going in the wrong direction and a lot of theirs was focused on thistle control because they had a severe thistle problem that we were trying to keep tabs on, and the grazing regime hasn't changed significantly for close to 10 years now. Rabbe explained that he mentioned it because the discussion was kind of shifting towards what does this mean for the GC and a reduction in money, and he was basically saying if money is the serious issue here that he is less worried about monitoring it than he is about doing stuff that is generally agreed upon to promote grassland health and diversity. Zorn elaborated that by simply having more flexibility with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act window, we're going to start seeing some of these things that everybody wants, and I think as far as the GC is concerned, rather than managing for structure, I think this group could recommend that a functioning native grassland also benefits cranes and other species. Rabbe agreed. Tunnell asked how we are going to increase diversity at Cottonwood Ranch. Jenniges stated yeah, good luck. So, first off, like the monitoring, where you're comparing everything to the FQI indices, and you are starting already at a totally non-native or pretty much totally non-native plant community and what natives are there have been put back in there. All Cottonwood ranch was farmed at some point in time, so that's a different thing than Binfield wet meadow or Shoemaker Island or Mormon Island. Farnsworth agreed that there is a need to look at each piece of property individually or each complex individually., some complex, and I think we have to, I mean, I grew up in cattle country, folks here that have cattle really are cattlemen from the perspective that they got a truck and a pot and they can haul this and that. If you don't have something that's confined enough that they can do it on a four-wheeler, it's going to get really complicated. If you have enough, I mean, if you're running 20 head or something, it's not a big deal, but on a complex scale, I think, to plan on a complex scale that revolves around having just enough tenants on that complex to keep it, that makes sense. And then we, I'd say we increase the level of attention and complexity based on how high quality it is right now. Farnsworth asked Smith, "Do you feel the problem before you see it in the data when you're out in the landscape or is it the other way around?" Smith answered, so to Matt's point, to some degree, yes, but not always. Most of the time, especially with my crew, we're out there all the time. So, from year to year, you notice changes. Usually before the monitoring does. But that's not for everything. You usually notice issues before you see benefits. Tunnell interjected that is part of the issue for the Program. Without a crew to do stewardship work he is lucky to get around to the properties twice a year. The Program does have noxious weed crews that scattered across the AHR, and they go spray the weeds, but they do not report on anything else that is going on and it's a challenge to make sure they spray the bad stuff, not the good stuff. Program biologists in the summertime are on the sand pits and the river monitoring birds, I don't have a lot of eyes on the ground. Smith replied that from his perspective, he is not saying that we should be



able to do what is done at the Crane Trust because it's two totally different situations. As a land manager, it's a worthwhile goal to try and give to more diversity versus structure but knowing that it's not going to be a perfect system. He likes what Rabbe was saying about Tunnell having an idea of what is planned on an area and then the GWG provide comments, suggestions, and or modifications on management practices that will shift to more diversity. Tunnell asked then how you know without going out to the property and looking or seeing a data point or a chart that's showing here's what it's doing how do you know what is being proposed is any better or worse. Smith replied that from his point of view, he would put that on you to try to go, you know, view the properties, do a quick, whatever your own sample monitoring might be, and just say, you know, we have a lot of brome here. This is what I want to do. And yeah, attack it that way. LaGrange stated that he thinks that's what has been done, you know, going back to, we have the track plans that we review, and you lay out, here's the management I'm going to do on this area. Tunnell replied that was 15 years ago, and it was one paragraph about managing 25% for short stature. LaGrange agreed and stated that's important to give you that but also for the committee, there's opportunities to look and ask is that going to be the right thing for that piece of property? Every property is different, with different challenges, different tenants, and one size fits all is not what we want or what I would recommend. Having that ability to be adaptive and to say, you know, this is all brome or whatever issue is and this place we can dump cattle, or we can do season long grazing there, or even a site like Binfield that might benefit from season-long grazing. I'm not a grassland expert, I'm a wetland guide, but I mean we talked about that, and I don't think in some places you get away from structure. I go to something that I deal with in like the Rainwater Basins where reed canary grass chokes, we're not going to get that back to the way it used to be, but we know by hitting it hard that you can knock the structure back, which benefits our target species, which are waterfowl and shorebirds. So, it kind of gets into, what's your target? And that's what Farnsworth is asking, and structure can still be a part of that. And it's not necessarily total diversity for pollinators that's great, but if our target's still whooping cranes, then we need to reconcile with that, so you have guidance and you're not being told different do this do that by different people and then that really creates this challenging situation for you so. Thorburn stated that structure and diversity aren't necessarily opposing objective either. Tunnell asked how's structure and diversity are not opposing objectives. Thorburn replied if you're managing diversity, the structure will follow would be my assumption. Rabbe provided the example of grazing something, a heavy stocking rate in the fall, down to hardly anything or whatever, it's still going to be short the next spring, but you've targeted that fall season as opposed to the heart of growing season. That's one way that you could have achieved both structure and diversity. Tunnell asked what do you mean by diversity? Floristic diversity? Rabbe answered yes because the consensus is that cool season grasses tend to choke out most everything. You get a nontypical stand of one species of vegetation. They do that more often than those warm season periods of time when you're not grazing May through October. But without getting back into the weeds on that, because we're not going to resolve people's philosophical differences today, what I've heard is that the GC first needs to decide on whether we are going to shift away from simply doing what makes us the most money on these grasslands to another management focus. And so, this document here I think needs to get updated a little to reflect that. Needs to get put in front of the GC and we get the GC approval to do that first because otherwise we're all just talking. Zorn pointed out that their last recommendation was to manage for structure so there needs to be shift. Rabbe said that if the GC approves that then part two would be a blended approach of the Grassland Working group working with the EDO to both prioritize areas that we do or don't care and basically try and put that implementation on changing management, if so, deemed appropriate on a complex by complex or tract by tract basis and we collectively work towards putting plans on the ground. That makes sense. Farnsworth agreed. Zmak stated that she has a basic question to back it up. And again, I'm not a grasslands expert, but if I heard everything right, we had record crane use this year. And so, I guess my question is, what is the impetus for changing our management if what we're doing is set us up for the biggest whooping crane success we've ever had in



the history of the program? And again, maybe that's foundational and basic, and maybe that's a GC question, but I think I'd like to ask that from you all. Farnsworth replied that he was going to say something that may dovetail into what you're asking. On the TAC side, there is the wet meadow question that's been percolating and trying to deal with and what do we do with wet meadows? Almost all the WC use sites are in the channel, we have these big tracts of grass that aren't in the channel, they get used sometimes but not frequently but they are buffers, and they are important. What we're trying to do is clarify what do we do with all of that and that's the bulk of the property that the Program owns now is off channel, grass, all the other stuff. So, I guess my thought for what was your timeline for the wet meadows stuff? Rabbe agreed that's what was talked about, and it feels like that needs to be combined again. Farnsworth agreed. Jenniges interjected that we need to step back to the whole complex idea of grasslands mixed with river channel definitions, bring it all back forward to a more cohesive way to manage your land. Now that the Program owns them, now that you got 20 years of data on WC use, and we recognize they're not all the same quality. Shoemaker Island or Binfield Tract or Dyer is so far from that or Jeffrey Island they shouldn't even be talked about in the same sentence as they are all very different. Farnsworth replied that it'll help to sync these things up as they're not the same, but there's a lot of crossover between them. Jenniges stated further that he doesn't know about Rabbe, but he is willing to work on it, but it's not going to happen in the next month or two. So, I mean, in the meantime, the EDO should keep getting tenants like we get tenants. Tunnell stated that we started this process a year ago and indirectly, this is kind of where he wanted us to land is consensus, if we can find consensus on what we're doing. Jenniges replied that anytime you have Rabbe, Jenniges, and Smith and others working on these, Wiese with the Trust, we all have a different job. Rabbe agreed that focus on this comes and goes. Farnsworth thinks September or December GC either of those are reasonable targets. He would prefer September, because going into budget season we can get farm managers on board. Jenniges interjected that if we don't make it, then the budget next year should reflect you're going to continue to graze the way you're going to continue to graze. If it becomes such a high priority, one of us will pick up all of it. Rabbe thinks that the first piece that he talked about of getting something in front of the GC to see the concept is reasonable and then the piece that follows, it'll get done as we are able to get it done as a group. Farnsworth stated that the development of this will take some work, but it's not rocket science. So, what we need is the direction of this is the why and once that's pinned down, then it's easy enough for us to develop things and bring them back to you for review, but we run into issues when it's not in a cohesive strategy moving forward. We get that strategy to the GC says and they buy into this and it may take you guys working with me, for example, that say this is generally how this might impact income or things like that, just to put some numbers on it, because we've got folks that are concerned about costs but if I get that green light, but then we can go to tenants and say, all right, sorry, folks, this is going to be a rough transition, but this is generally the number of cattle that we're going to have on this complex going forward and our managers will have to do a lot of heavy lifting work and tenants on that, which is fine. But it'll be nice to have a cohesive direction on where we're headed. Zmak asked did we have a formal agreement to bring that to the GC in September? Zorn said I don't know. Rabbe clarified it will be an attempt to put something together in front of the GC in September. Zorn elaborated that it's going to be continued to work on it in the background and kind of incorporate the grassland working group with the wet meadow group to see if we can get something to the GC by September or December.

PLATTE RIVER RECREATION ACCESS PROGRAM- PUBLIC USE REVIEW

Rabbe began discussion that the PRRIP subcommittee met on April 16 and discussed everything for the 2023 year. There wasn't any public comment received. We had a couple of minor violations resulting in folks ticketed. There was some frustration in area A, which was to be expected. We enrolled that back to waterfall hunting and that upset a couple of the landowners and we've received a lot of comments on



that. LaGrange asked if they wanted anything specifically changed. Rabbe, report they wanted it back the way it was before as a refuge on Cook and Dyer property. The comments were received and basically folks that are enrolled, which most all the adjacent landowners enroll into the rec access just so they can submit comments. LaGrange asked if there was any sense from Fuhrman how much issue it was with how much hunting pressure that area got that was of concern? Rabbe replied it was getting a fair amount of use and then started, to tie into my next point, started to get reserved and booked a lot. And there was, again, a perception that we've had on other properties as well that it's getting booked by folks trying to keep people from hunting it. And I just received another comment, that Tunnell forwarded, of someone complaining about that issue on multiple properties, and they mentioned Area A as well. We've struggled with this as a committee for quite a long time. Folks have suggested having a check-in system where you reserve a property, you need to show up and sign in or something like that to try and get rid of folks that are just booking to keep a property full but there's always this issue of turning an honest hunter into a lawbreaker. Life happens sometimes, family emergencies, whatever it is and the idea of forcing, you know, or disciplining someone, taking privileges away that makes an honest mistake of not canceling their reservation once they realize they're booked and going to use it, or not being able to show up, things like that. We've just never agreed to enforce that type of change in our system. Zorn added that we encourage but don't require people to cancel a reservation if they can't make it out for the day and we had also looked at the possibility of doing like a morning reservation and an afternoon which comes with its own inherent issues. A lot of the people, their perception is that it's reserved but nobody's there, but if someone goes and hunts it for two hours in the morning and then two hours at night, they have it for the whole day, but they're not there for the whole day. Jenniges stated that there was a snow drift across the Dyer tract (Area A) parking lot for a month with no way to get across. Zorn stated there are some areas that are being reserved and not utilized or accessed but how you regulate that is something that we've shown. Jenniges added that the neighbor runs an outfitting service, all they need to do is tell his client to get on the PRRP website and sign up. It's not even coming from the same computer or anything, likely. Rabbe added that those same people, what should prevent them from being able to sign up and then ducks landed on the other side of the river, and they can go over there and hunt that's a realistic scenario that I don't particularly like it, but it's reality. Jenniges stated that it effectively closes the site back down. So, you either take your limits of number of people off or I don't know how you do it. Farnsworth asked why we went from expecting a cease and desist to nothing from that neighbor? Rabbe and Jenniges replied probably so. Rabbe elaborated that folks either must prioritize and say this is the site I want to hunt on this weekend and right July 1, they must reserve it and use however many reservations they want to for the whole year to book that site on that day. That's one option. Otherwise, they take the chances of this happening. LaGrange added the system allows the same person day after day after day, do you have a, you know, a pause where you can't reserve it day to day, but again, they'll be other friends in there. Rabbe said if it's an outfitter, if any of them have new clients every day, and he can get those and sign up on this website. We can even figure some of that out very easily with this system probably. It's a motivated argument. Yeah. That's what it comes down to. But if you want to, if they're going to put it on one of these program properties, you can't go put four days' worth of waterfowl hunting up on Area A, right? Now your four days are reserved. So, yeah. I don't have the answer for it. Just something that we talk about every single year. Jenniges added that the answer for that site would just be to just do away with the limit on the number of people. Rabbe said that has been suggested. LaGrange said that eventually they'll get tired of doing it and just see that really isn't that big an issue and they'll go away. They're playing that game this year and they can continue. Maybe they will. Farnsworth added that for Area A, it's maybe a feature not above that gives neighbors something to do to feel like they can do to control their destiny out there. Jenniges said that the problem there is because whatever, Platte River Outfitters or whatever, you know, they get 10 people a day. So, it's easy to take up the two spots in Area A. Rabbe said we can tell those landowners that we're going to take away the limits of people on the property if



they don't stop you can have two people a day or you can have 200, what do you want? We didn't propose any changes this year relative to that. I just brought it up because we talk about it a lot and I thought this committee should be aware. But if there's a silver bullet out there that fixes all our problems let him know. Made a minor update on the web page. Another change was, so law enforcement is going to be allowed to have the real-time data that Andrew gets as far as who's reserved, when they're out driving around to help minutes before you show up on it if there was a reservation open and have it on your phone, have your reservation be completely legal or not, the reverse, but law enforcement if they don't have that real-time information then they don't know if someone's in the parking lot or out on the property should or shouldn't be there. So, we thought that was a good change. Farnsworth asked if the change to the website was to emphasize private property and he assumed that's just to make the distinction between everything else. Zorn added that's more for some of the permit types too because some of the doe tags only allow harvest on private property, some of the Game and Park Zone managed properties, you can't harvest an antlerless deer on a certain permit. We just wanted to clarify that because there were several questions. And to clarify that it's, that type of permit is allowable on Program property. Farnsworth clarified that's private property permission. Zorn answered yes. Farnsworth said the public would be happy with this. Because they think it's public access, so public property. Rabbe continued that we discussed an exclusion zone on the distance for rifle and shotgun hunting. So, for dwellings, that's 100 yards for shotgun, 200 for rifle. That comes into play on some of the properties where we have some sort of development or building or whatever. Farnsworth asked if we had any complaints or anything at all from the truck stop? Rabbe said no, we did not which was kind of surprised on that because a fair number of people there at Area K. It was the first off-channel sand and water open to public recreation access as a pilot property. We first opened it up to fishing, and then the following year it was opened to other recreational uses like hunting primarily. We didn't have any problems there, so the Rec Access Subcommittee wanted to explore and recommend considering opening the Newark off-channel sand water, which is at the Minden exit. Tunnell asked to clarify, that we're talking about the west sandpit at Newark? Rabbe replied yes, only the west. As there is still active mining on the east pit and open the west it for fishing and have it mirror the regulations that we have for Area K as far as access and follow the NGPC fishing regulations. LaGrange asked how much fishing use did we get on the area that was open to fishing? Rabbe said he could ask Fuhrman, but it's closed during the tern and plover season, which is for most folks the heart of when people are fishing. So, it's your spring and fall fishermen. Noticed some discrepancies on the map on Area A as to what was open to hunting on the off-channel sand and water pit there. As far as the water being closed or open, we wanted to basically sync those together with Area K map to have our regulations be consistent on where people can access or be excluded from accessing. Tunnell asked for clarification. It was essentially whether the hash marks close the water portion of it or not? Tunnell verified that the peninsula is always off limits. Rabbe said yes and then that's to make it consistent on both sites, or all sites. We're not making a change to the actual public access policy. Rabbe asked Farnsworth if he checked on the issue of mining at East Newark? Farnsworth reported that we probably need to wait until they're out of the site and done mining because there's an open permit and he's using it. He'd much prefer to just wait then we could open it that way as MSHA inspectors interpret things will never give you the benefit of the doubt as to whether somebody is in violation. Because they're physically attached and because the scales are on end and they're driving through, I would just wait until that's completely done. Rabbe said that NGPC has an access road that gets you to Bassway WMA. Farnsworth answered that's separate and off our property. That's a public road. It's a public road off our property. So, people come in, they're on the sand pit site on Program property. I'm semi-afraid to even ask a MSHA person about this. The guy that comes and does the training for us is super conservative and says, no, don't open it but if this committee says it's important to open that before they're done with that short-term agreement, then I can do more exploration. So, just like the nuance of saying these two pits are on the same property, but this one's not a sand pit and this one is a sand pit, but they're the



same site and share a whole road. Zorn commented that having gone through MSHA training for now 12-15 years he thinks we should avoid any MSHA issues if we can and wait one to two years. Farnsworth suggests getting the miner off there and getting them done and then we could open both sides if we want to and it's not an MSHA issue. Rabbe agrees that makes sense. The only changes really are just having area K and area A synced up as far as the access goes and then that's really, that's it for this year. Farnsworth asked who's going to give the update at the GC? Rabbe said he would. LaGrange reported that Fuhrman's position was upgraded to permanent 12-month with benefits.

LAC MOTION: *Thorburn moved, and Jenniges seconded to recommend GC approval of PRRA subcommittee recommendations. Recommendations approved. LaGrange abstain from vote*

EXECUTIVE SESSION

No items for discussion within executive session.

PUBLIC FORUM

Chairman Zorn asked for public comments, none were offered.

LAC MOTION:

- February 14, 2024, LAC Meeting minutes approved.
- Recommendation for GC approval to transfer Tract W201601 water to habitat.
- Recommendation for GC approval of PRRA Subcommittee recommendations.

Future calendar events:

~~February 14, 2024 - 10:00- noon CDT~~ [1st Quarter LAC meeting](#), Kearney, NE

~~May 15, 2024 - 10:00- noon CDT~~ [2nd Quarter LAC meeting](#), Kearney, NE

August 14, 2024 - 10:00- noon CDT [3rd Quarter LAC meeting](#), Kearney, NE

October 16, 2024 - 10:00- noon CDT [4th Quarter LAC meeting](#), Kearney, NE

LAC MEETING END

The LAC meeting adjourned at 11:48 AM Central Time.

MEETING REVIEW AND LUNCH