

**Riparian Vegetation Management Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 17, 2008
Sokol Camp
Waterloo, Nebraska**

1. Call to order – Chairman Charles Brooks called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m. Roll call was taken. Task Force members present:

Kent Aden	Mike Clements
Jim Miller	Charles Brooks
Russ Shultz	Mike Arps
Rich Tesar	Dr. Scott Josiah
Kirk Nelson	Senator Deb Fischer
Senator Don Preister	Senator Tom Carlson
Senator Cap Dierks	Senator John Harms
Senator Tom Hansen	

Task Force members absent were:

Dr. Gary Cunningham	Ron Bishop
Greg Ibach	Mike Linder
Brian Dunnigan	Neil Moseman
Mike Sarchet	Gloria Erickson

Task Force members who sent alternates:

Ron Bishop sent Milt Moravek
Brian Dunnigan sent Bob Bettger

Guests present included:

Senator Mark Christensen	Dean Edson
Bob Heimann	Frank Albrecht
John Winkler	Dr. Bernd Blossey

NDA staff:

Mitch Coffin

2. Brooks announced the meeting was being recorded.
3. Brooks noted the availability of a copy of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act. He noted for the record that notice for today's meeting was published in the *Omaha World-Herald* on September 7, the *Kearney Hub* on September 6, and in the *McCook Gazette* on September 10.
4. Brooks opened discussion on the minutes of the July 24, 2008, meeting. Brooks asked if there were any corrections or additions. Senator Carlson noted that the wording on page 4, under Goals, Objectives, and Reports was not recorded correctly. Carlson

asked that the second sentence read: “He indicated this is an estimate of the amount of water used during a 180-day growing period at different rates per day.” In the second paragraph, Dr. Josiah asked that the words “cottonwoods and” be removed from the second sentence. Tesar made a motion to approve the minutes with the proper corrections reflected. Senator Dierks seconded the motion.

Roll call vote: In support of motion - Aden, Clements, Miller, Brooks, Shultz, Arps, Tesar, Dr. Josiah, Nelson, Senator Preister, Senator Carlson, Senator Dierks, Senator Hansen. Voting against the motion – none. Abstaining - Senator Fischer, Senator Harms.

5. Brooks noted that Open Discussion had inadvertently not been included on the agenda and asked that it be placed as item the following Vegetation Water Use Work Group.
6. Old Business:

There was no old business to discuss.

7. New Business:

Dr. Bernd Blossey of Cornell University presented information on his studies of phragmites across the United States. He reported that it was once believed phragmites seed production was not a major cause of new infestations. However, new research shows that phragmites does produce viable seed that appears to impact how fast this plant will spread. Dr. Blossey stated that seed only remains viable for about one year. He also reported that introduced phragmites goes to seed mainly during the winter months, while native phragmites seeds in the fall.

Dr. Blossey shared some key identification features to distinguish between native and introduced varieties.

<u>Introduced</u>	<u>Native</u>
Tight fitting leaf sheath. (Hard to remove)	Open, loose fitting leaf sheath. (Easily removed or falls off)
No stem gloss (rough stem).	High stem gloss.
Flowers later.	Red stems (sunburn) late summer into fall.
Leaves, gray/green in color.	Stem spot fungus.

Some biocontrol agents are currently being tested in the lab on samples collected across the country.

Mitch reported on the EQIP Special Initiative that is being proposed to the NRCS State Technical Committee. This initiative would provide a mechanism to dedicate EQIP funds to expand projects that have been funded through LB 701. This initiative would make cost-share dollars available to landowners to improve their riparian areas for grazing and wildlife.

Streambed Ownership Work Group – Shultz reported that the Nebraska Association of County Officials (NACO) has set aside a one hour block for county boards and county

weed control superintendents to discuss streambed ownership during its annual convention in December.

Some counties do not tax or assess a value to the streambed. However, counties are starting to realize that these riparian areas are being developed and do have a value. Shultz stated that some counties do not have a surveyor and county boards need to look for funding.

Schultz said he would like to see a special list developed in the Noxious Weed Control Act to deal with and act on new invasive plants as they are found in the state. He also asked if the NRDs should be responsible for streambed weed problems. He stated that the Nebraska Weed Control Association (NWCA) has taken the lead in developing a mapping program, available to all counties. The project was funded by NDA through the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

Moravek said Weed Management Areas (WMAs) are doing a good job, and there needs to be a way to help and support these groups. Shultz stated that these projects would not be taking place without the foresight of WMAs. Senator Dierks asked if the NWCA is supporting legislation to fund and support the Noxious Weed Program. Shultz stated that NWCA continues to work with and support legislation to secure adequate cash funding for NDA's Noxious Weed Program.

Vegetation Management and Treatment Work Group – Aden reported that on July 15 first initial treatments were put out at Bassway with herbicide, disking, and mowing being done. Because of high water from rain that week, the treatments at the Darr and Brady locations were not put out until July 21. Thirty-day ratings were done with both herbicide treatments of glyphosate and imazapyr, showing 65% or better control throughout. This will surely improve with more time for chemical translocation through the plant. The big noticeable difference was that flowering was delayed in the plots, compared to non-treated plots in the same area. These are rather hard ratings to make since all of the plant biomass is still present with green material. Disking at the sites was all rated to be 75% or better, which Aden said is expected, since it is a very severe control method with noticeable decrease in plant populations. Regrowth is limited, but occurring. Mowing had the least amount of initial control, with a rating of 50% or better. This was expected, and regrowth is more than half of the existing height of untreated populations. In all of the above, plant flowering has been delayed.

Fall treatments will be going out in the next couple of weeks. Aden stated that the Nebraska Environmental Trust grant application submitted on behalf of the Task Force would be for two more years of additional test plots, with year three funds used to clean up the plots and control vegetation in the check areas.

Aden stated that from his experience, controlled burning of phragmites promotes the growth. Moravek said Central Platte NRD has a prescribed burning program to burn phragmites in two consecutive years. Dr. Blossey reported some studies indicate that fall herbicide control, followed with spring burn, and then seeding for a restoration project improves long-term control.

Survey and Monitoring Work Group – Tesar reported that this work group has provided information for mapping the Platte and Niobrara Rivers to NDA to submit in the grant

application to the Nebraska Environmental Trust. Dr. Blossey said seed dispersal of introduced phragmites is much greater than originally thought. Seed dispersal takes place throughout the winter months. Sources for dispersal are water, wind, birds, and construction equipment.

Education and Awareness Work Group – Clements said this group has not met since the last Task Force meeting. He did report that the Twin Valley WMA is now working on a stretch of the Republican River from Harlan Reservoir to the Cambridge diversion dam, which covers approximately 53 miles. Herbicide applications have been completed and the WMA will be letting bids for logjam removal. Twin Valley also plans to incorporate deep disking above and below Harlan Reservoir.

Moravek stated that on the Central Platte, water flows of 14,000 cubic feet per second did not appear to reduce stands of phragmites. Conveyance is greatly improved where the phragmites has been controlled.

Funding and Incentives Work Group – Arps stated that there is no new report to be given, at this time, except that the Task Force has submitted a grant application to the Nebraska Environmental Trust to fund the vegetation management study, survey and monitoring, and education and awareness projects.

Goals and Objectives Work Group – Senator Carlson said he appreciates the efforts of the Riparian Vegetation Management Task Force members. He believes this group has accomplished a lot of work on the ground in a short time. Conveyance of water has been greatly improved on the Republican River and he expects the same on the Platte. Senator Carlson said while the conveyance has improved, water quality, fishing, wildlife, and recreation will all benefit as well. He said all of the projects have been so positive to date, and he was very pleased with the article in the July 24, 2008, *Omaha World-Herald*. Senator Carlson said he collected some figures from the Twin Valley WMA for the first year. Cost of spraying by helicopter was \$190 per acre, logjam removal \$180 per acre, and deep disking \$136 per acre, with a total of \$506 per acre. He said that \$9 million was spent on buying surface water, and if you divide that amount by the cost of treatment, 17,786 acres could be treated.

Senator Carlson said he will ask the Legislature to extend LB701 for two additional years, with \$2 million per year to continue projects and the Task Force. He said he is convinced that removal and control of vegetation is a good thing and needs to be continued. Moravek said the main channels are being treated, and there is a need to address the side channels as work continues.

Senator Christensen asked how maintenance will be handled after initial treatment. Moravek said the Nebraska Noxious Weed Control Act requires landowners to control noxious weeds. Clements suggested projects need to transition landowners into maintaining control efforts. Dr. Josiah stated that restoration should be implemented in some treated areas. Seeding plants that are desirable for the site would help to maintain the treated areas. Brooks said he expects follow-up herbicide treatment will be needed with the possibility of mowing or shredding controlled vegetation and deep disking to allow river flows to scour sandbars and remove the root mass. Senator Preister said project partners need to look at the whole picture and document all of the activities that are performed. He also stressed the need to replace vegetation where needed.

Senator Preister asked whether these invasives can be used for other things. Miller commented there is a great need to continue funding to keep continuity in the program. He said from his experience, the flows in the Republican River have greatly improved since the vegetation has been controlled.

Vegetation Water Use Work Group - Bettger reported that the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources has completed a draft of the vegetation water use report. This work group will be meeting in the future to discuss the report and present at the next meeting. Moravek stated that Central Platte NRD is working with UNL to study consumptive water use on the Platte River. The NRD is funding this project, which started this summer. After treatment, they will study which plants replace the phragmites.

8. Open Discussion

Aden reported that the West Central and Platte Valley Weed Management Areas have started helicopter chemical applications to phragmites. In a two-day period, two helicopters covered 1,000 acres in a 15 mile stretch. In this area phragmites covers about 70 acres per mile.

Clements reported that Twin Valley will be letting bids for logjam removal on the Republican River. Because of landowner concerns, logjam removal will not start until after deer season ends on January 15.

Brooks stated that helicopter application bids this year are \$134 to \$156 per acre. Last year, those bids ran \$184 to \$190 per acre. Some of this reduction is due to a decrease in herbicide costs.

9. Next Meeting

Members agreed to schedule the next Task Force meeting for Thursday, November 13, 2008, at the Central Platte NRD office in Grand Island. The meeting will begin at 10:00 a.m. Moravek will reserve the meeting space and make arrangements for lunch.

10. Meeting adjourned and members participated in an airboat tour of the Platte River to view phragmites and woody vegetation on sandbars. The tour was hosted by Rich Tesar.