

**Riparian Vegetation Management Task Force  
Meeting Minutes  
April 24, 2024  
8:30 a.m. CST**

**1. Call to order**

- a. Mike Reed called the meeting to order at 8:29 a.m.

**2. Introductions**

**Task Force Members Present:**

Lance Philben	T.J. Walker
David Zorn	Ryan Chapman
Andrew Tonnies	Nathan Munter
Tammy Zimmerman	Mike Reed
Katie Hickle	Brent Meyer
John Erixson	Rich Tesar
Mike Sarchet	

**Task Force Members Absent:**

Kevin Adams	Jeff Kanger
Larry Heyen	Tala Awada
Shuhai Zheng	

Upper Niobrara-White Hat surface water project representative  
Republican surface water project representative  
Nebraska Association of Resource Districts representative

**Guests:**

John Rundel - Southwest Weed Management Area  
Shannon Smith - Nebraska Invasive Species Council  
Trevor Johnson – Nebraska Department of Agriculture  
Heather Dizmang - Middle Republican NRD  
Jack Russell - Middle Republican NRD

**3. Review and approval of June 14, 2023 meeting minutes**

- a. Motion by Meyer, seconded by Munter, motion carried.

#### **4. Review of Bylaws and Election of Chair and Vice Chair**

Reed reviewed bylaws. Vice chair will chair first meeting of the year when elections take place. Walker as current vice chair has concerns about time commitments involved with current bylaws. Reed is willing to remain chair. Hickie suggested vice chair may succeed chair. Zimmerman agrees with changing shall to may in bylaws.

Tesar moves to change shall to may in bylaws, Chapman seconds, motion carried.

#### **5. Election**

- a. Reed requests nominations for Vice Chair
- b. Tesar nominates T.J. Walker for Vice Chair
  - i. Seconded by Sarchet
  - ii. Walker remains vice chair
- c. Meyer nominates Mike Reed for Chair
  - i. Seconded by Zorn
  - ii. Reed remains chair

Zimmerman discussed vacancies. Philben suggested Brad Edgerton. Walker will investigate Upper-Niobrara White Hat. Philben suggested Brett Skinner.

#### **6. Legislative Update**

Meyer gave update on LB 218. Bipartisan legislation to appropriate an additional \$3 million for riparian grants. Never made it to the floor for Final Reading. NACO provided comment that they will make it a priority for next year. Brent asks: can this group do more to help this legislation next year?

Reed has heard from WMA's that the window is very small to spend funds. A two year cycle would help. Discussion on an endowment fund and legislative study to research the possibility. Sen. Ibach has been open to doing a study.

Tesar suggests cost share should be expanded to the entire state. It should be required. Chapman discussed administrative costs for cost shares.

Reed asks: Would it be appropriate to request a meeting with the Appropriations Committee?

Meyer said it was an Agriculture Committee priority bill. Sarchet suggests annual meeting with Appropriations Committee. A half hour meeting with committee to discuss projects and history of program. Zimmerman suggested doing it before the session begins. Hickie suggests we should show them applications to demonstrate need for the funding. Sarchet said the education process has to

continue as turnover happens in the legislature. Meyer discussed success story in the Republican River. Senators may remember the KS lawsuit, but don't know how it was solved. Reed encourages folks to get senators out to view projects. Sarchet suggests putting together a brief, but exciting presentation. Multi-state cooperation has worked to raise awareness in the past. Walker says government relations does not fit into the existing workgroups. Meyer suggested getting past senators to come talk about the importance of the riparian work. Zimmerman suggested association meetings to get in touch with senators. Chapman suggested the wellhead protection network. Perhaps a short video on water projects. Sarchet says to keep it to 4.5 minutes and tell the story passionately. Need to get commitment and buy-in which is easier face-to-face. Hickie suggested taking them out to a project. Sarchet discussed past trips taking senators on air boats and how eye-opening it was. Zorn says it is more visual striking to see before and after. Tesar talked about documentaries made by Becky McMillan. Zimmerman said videos could be distributed and posted to the website. Each member should contact their own senators and there should be a group-led effort. Reed suggested having annual meeting with legislature and provide year-in-review video to show work going on. Sarchet said herbicide producers have donated funds in the past which could fund the educational campaigns.

Philben asked if a needs assessment has been done? Senators want to know how big is the need. There are a lot of stakeholders. Sarchet said NRD's have maps of original statewide survey.

Zorn and Walker discussed that Shannon's position will help the groups coordinate and apply for funds. Walker suggested applying for more than they need. Zorn suggested changing to a two-year cycle. Johnson said that would require a law change.

Zimmerman discussed additional oversight on grants from NDA Finance Administrator and above.

Hickie asked what a needs assessment would cost? Can we type up a general description for what that would look like?

Reed asks that workgroups report back to everyone on who chairs the committees.

Tesar brought up that county commissioners aren't aware of vegetation management issues. Suggested presenting at NACO meeting. Send out call to task force for a speaker.

Sarchet said conservation organizations used to tie-in with RVTMF. DU, PF, and WTF used to join in on grant projects in the west. Walker suggested annual PF habitat meeting.

Meyer said they have presented to some county boards in the past. Tough to get them all in the same room. Use existing video resources to create new content.

Zimmerman will reach out to pesticide registrants for educational resource funding.

## **7. WMA Conference Update**

- a. Need for multi-year funding
- b. Rundel discussed where SWMA operates. SWWMA has primarily been funded through NET in the past. Tough to get big projects completed in a year's time with uncertain future funding. Worked on Republican, Frenchman, Medicine Creek, and Rock Creek. 50% cost share for cedar removal with \$10K max. Important to have buy-in from landowners.
- c. Reed said WMA's met in April to discuss potential projects. Tough choices for WMA's with reduced funding. New southeast WMA forming with emphasis on landowner cost-share. SE does not plan to apply this year.
- d. Talking points for senators about their projects.

## **8. Task Force Work Group Assignments and Outcomes**

- a. Notes from 4/9 meeting
- b. Johnson reported discussion from April 9 mirrored today's discussion

## **9. Public Comment**

Reed opened the floor for public comment. Meyer said weed superintendents should be here.

## **10. Review of funded projects for 23/24**

Johnson presented handouts on 23/24 projects. Reed suggested having TNC facilitate a meeting with the WMA coordinators. How do we address areas that aren't being covered by WMAs. Walker asked if the Army Corps on the MO is working with invasive species.

Hickle asked: should we invite the corps to riparian meetings? Smith said MO River Natural resources committee has good attendance from Corps. Discussed cottonwood removal/planting and invasive carp.

Meyer said this group's role is to advise the Director. Get back to what these projects are supposed to be. Projects are getting outside the role of the funding. Suggests having scoring committee read the statute.

Meyer motioned that the funding priorities focus on original legislative intent, seconded by Sarchet, motion carried. Scoring committee will review original statute prior to evaluating applications.

Walker said the impetus behind the grants is flow conveyance. Tesar asked for copy of the statute. Will be e-mailed out.

#### **11. Determine July Meeting location and adjourn for tour**

Meyer suggested Ogallala. Walker suggests Lake Mac visitors center. Ogallala selected as next site for meeting and tour.

Zorn discussed issue with Mac dam which could result in additional water releases into the Platte River.

Philben asked if talking points will be sent out. This will be action item for the education committee.

Next meeting set for July 24 in Ogallala.

Meeting adjourned.