

**Riparian Vegetation Management Task Force
Meeting Minutes
July 24, 2024
10:00 a.m. CST**

1. Call to order

- a. Mike Reed called the meeting to order at 10:03 AM

2. Introductions

Task Force Members Present:

T.J. Walker	Tyler Weishahn
David Zorn	Ryan Chapman
Andrew Tonnies	Nathan Munter
Tammy Zimmerman	Mike Reed
Katie Hickle	Brent Meyer
John Erixson	Rich Tesar
Shuhai Zheng	Jeff Kanger
Eli Goff	Larry Heyen

Task Force Members Absent:

Kevin Adams	Lance Philben
Tala Awada	Mike Sarchet
Brad Edgerton	

Guests:

Brent Davis- Operations Director, Nebraska Department of Agriculture
Ashley Dempsey- Finance Administrator, Nebraska Department of Agriculture
Shannon Smith - Nebraska Invasive Species Council
Trevor Johnson – Nebraska Department of Agriculture
Mark Borchers- Lower Platte Weed Management Area
Marcus Kallhoff – Lower Platte Weed Management Area
Max Birkel- Lower Platte Weed Management Area
Josh Nelson- Lower Platte Weed Management Area
Rick Leonard- NE Legislature Ag Committee
Bryan Schardt- Twin Valley Weed Management Area
Todd Siel- Lower Republican NRD
Greg Schuck- Twin Valley Weed Management Area
Seth Tausan- Panhandle Weed Management Area
Tim Conover- Sandhills Weed Management Area
Kristi Paul- Nebraska Weed Management Area Coalition
Scott Erthurm- Middle Niobrara Weed Awareness Group
Todd Weverka- Twin Valley Weed Management Area
Rob Schultz- Platte Valley Weed Management Area
John Rundel - Southwest Weed Management Area

3. Review and approval of April 24, 2024 meeting minutes

- a. Motion by Munter, 2nd by Zimmerman

4. Nebraska Department of Agriculture Statement

Davis opened up the floor for questions. Davis, Dempsey, and Leonard responded to questions about riparian funding, legislative language, what happened to LB218, and how the state budget bill is written. Tesar asked what other funding sources NDA was pursuing. Johnson explored opportunities through Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC), National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), and Ducks Unlimited (DU). Johnson stated pass through funding is limited, but potential partnerships exist. Erixson talked about funding available through Nebraska Forest Service. Weed Management Area's were asked about Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) funding. Many lost NET funds with NDA's matching funds not available. Chapman mentioned potential tax changes could impact NET funding pool. Reed asked what could be done differently in the Legislature to secure funding. Leonard said a senator needs to carry it across the finish line. Legislative Bill 218 was pulled by the introducing senator. Zorn asked if NDA has ability to increase funding through budget request. Dempsey said NDA will reduce budget request by \$706,000. Meyer discussed Republican River Compact. Reed discussed impact of loss of coordinators and infrastructure. Climate impacts and water issues are not going away and these decisions will impact agriculture in the state.

5. Update on 23/24 Grant Cycle

Johnson presented the 23/24 Grant Cash Summary and noted that Twin Valley WMA is turning back \$84K. Schuck stated this was due to contractors falling through and it was too late to find alternatives. Twin Valley is exploring other funding opportunities and Lower Republican NRD has been very helpful. Zorn and Chapman talked about the difficulties of the fiscal year funding cycle.

6. Public Comment

Chapman asked if there are other examples in state government that are not constrained by the fiscal year. Walker said NET offers three-year contracts that are evaluated annually. Nelson discussed drawing up a plan to have a uniform message to senators. Reed said it was key to identify a senator willing to take the bill to the finish line. Hickle talked about developing a rainy-day fund and asked if anyone has reach out to Sen. Ibach. Zorn discussed the Platte River Resilience Fund. Target is \$12-15 million with \$1.5 million secured so far. Money is protected and interest can be spent. Tesar asked who the partners are and said Republican River is moving in the wrong direction. Zorn said Natural Resource

Districts, Crane Trust, Rowe Sanctuary, Platte Valley WMA, Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, and Ducks Unlimited. Zorn said places that are hardest to control are often the most visible (i.e. bridge areas). Johnson talked about touring Twin Valley projects. Meyer discussed positive impact of Twin Valley on Republican River flow. Kanger said Task Force should present how the WMA's have leveraged NET grants. Chapman and Walker discussed NET funds rolling over and that they are frequently a target of the legislature.

7. Task Force Work Groups Breakout and Selection of Chairs

Task Force broke out into work groups to elect chairs and discuss actions items.

8. Task Force/Work Group Actions Items for 23/25

Meyer reported that Leonard recommended creating a prioritized list for senators and change the statutory language to protect funding. Hickle said there should be a short term and long term strategy. Zheng and Hickle suggested creating a map showing work done. Reed said NET funds could pay for it. Walker mentioned the Rainwater Basin GIS lab as a potential collaborator. Zimmerman reported that chemical companies are receptive to providing funds for education and outreach. Weverka mentioned previously created videos on projects. Meyer said we could put them online if we obtain the rights from Becky McMillan. Johnson will reach out. Funding and Incentive Group discussed a state needs assessment and meeting with the Governor's office with support from Dir. Vinton. There was discussion between Meyer, Zheng, and Hickle on evapotranspiration data. Reed concluded discussion with a request for work group chairs to send Action Items to Johnson and Reed.

9. Determine July Meeting location and adjourn for tour

Task Force was divided on meeting location, centrally located vs. project visit. Walker emphasized that flow conveyance should be priority in these conversations.

Next meeting set for October 23

Meeting adjourned.