

**Riparian Vegetation Management Task Force
Meeting Minutes
November 20, 2024
9:30 a.m. CST**

1. Call to order

- Reed called the meeting to order at 9:35 AM

2. Introductions

Task Force Members Present:

T.J. Walker	Tyler Weishahn
David Zorn	Ryan Chapman
Andrew Tonnies	Tala Awada
Tammy Zimmerman	Mike Reed
Katie Hickie	Brent Meyer
Lance Philben	Larry Heyen
Shuhai Zheng	Brad Edgerton

Task Force Members Absent:

Kevin Adams	Jeff Kanger
Mike Sarchet	John Erixson
Rich Tesar	Dalton Refior
Eli Goff	

Guests:

Sen. Teresa Ibach- Nebraska Legislature
Shannon Smith - Nebraska Invasive Species Council
Trevor Johnson – Nebraska Department of Agriculture
Tim Stortz- Nebraska Department of Agriculture
Tim Tunnel- Platte River Recovery Implementation Program
Jason Farnsworth- Platte River Recovery Implementation Program
Dan Finn- Correct Spray

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

- Motion by Zorn, 2nd by Chapman

4. Riparian projects, Nebraska Legislature discussion

Ibach discussed the diversity of water resources in Nebraska, her background, and history of the riparian legislation. The legislation was an “easy sell” in the last

session and Sen. Clements (Appropriations Chair) knows the value of the projects. Even though the increase in funding did not pass, she worked with Dir. Vinton to ensure the "\$800,000" was still available for FY24/25. Plans to bring back increased funding legislation in 2025 legislative session.

Meyer said he has a meeting with NACO and Sen. Ibach scheduled. Riparian legislation will be a NACO priority bill in the 2025 legislative session.

Reed discussed LPWMA. He said the 3 NRD's made up for NDA's money being withheld. However, it is not a sustainable solution.

Ibach said that there will be around 15 new senators. Reed asked what the approach should be to educate new senators. Ibach said it is hard to know where the bill will go and which committee to focus on (Ag, Natural Resources, or Appropriations). Hickie asked what resources could be provided to them. Chapman suggested the drinking water use map. Meyer added we should emphasize flood control, wildlife, and water conveyance. Ibach said conservation work is a great selling point. Walker added cranes, waterfowl, and threatened/endangered species. He said this work benefits the public in ways they don't realize.

Meyer suggested thinking outside the box on future legislation, such as changing the funding cycle. Ibach agreed and said it could be put into the appropriation bill. Zorn suggested a two-year funding cycle. Meyer said that would make the bidding process easier. Tunnel said it would bring down costs.

5. Public Comment

Farnsworth discussed history of Platte River Recovery Implementation Program (PRRIP). Said this is an interstate issue between CO, NE, and KS. Historically the state has been a good partner in this effort, but by withholding funding this year, PRRIP had to pick up half the cost. PRRIP can fund half next year, but it is not sustainable. Phragmites control is a statutory requirement on landowners. \$8 million has been spent on this issue since 2008. The funding status with NDA this year has been very opaque. It takes \$600,000/year to do the work that needs to be done on the Platte.

6. Platte Valley Weed Management Area Project Update

Tunnell provided a presentation on the history of Platte Valley Weed Management Area. He discussed how their cost-share program has been successful at engaging landowners in the project. \$8.7 million has been spent on 56,000 acres of applications covering 355 river miles. 94.5% of grant dollars have gone to direct control of vegetation on the river. He also discussed that NDA funding is critical for direct match on other grant funds. He finished by describing the Platte River Resilience Fund which is a perpetual endowment for

flow conveyance. Reed asked how NDA withholding funds affected projects. Tunnell said other organizations stepped up to assist.

7. Lower Platte Weed Management Area Project Update

Reed provided a presentation on the history of Lower Platte Weed Management Area. He discussed how the three NRD's increased their funding by \$78,000 to make up for NDA withholding funds. He talked about the success of the landowner cost-share program. He finished by describing the research done at UNL on drones and AI to combat phragmites. Meyer talked about the other WMA's who lost ground this year and, in some cases, lost coordinators due to NDA withholding funding.

8. Work Group/Task Force action items for 2024/2025

- **WMA needs assessment timeline**

Reed said Walker and Erixson are working on a WMA needs assessment. This needs assessment will be presented to Dir. Vinton. There was a discussion on the Treatment and Management Work Group attending the WMA conference in April. Meyer said a priority list should be created for senators that includes what is done with the funding.

Farnsworth said Ducks Unlimited has a \$7 million grant for phragmites control through NRCS.

Reed asked for vote on adding an action item to add education and outreach to the RVMTF goals and objectives. Vote passed.

Walker said we should be looking at the whole flood plain, not just phragmites. He also mentioned having Smith coordinate with entities that have not been applying for funds.

Meyer made a motion to update goals and objectives to include the language from Section 2-958.02 (2). Hickie seconded. Vote passed.

Hickie suggested putting together a 2-year plan with potential projects for senators. Meyer said it should include the Task Force needs and priorities. Hickie added that it could include the stories from WMA's who lost funding. Meyer asked if Smith should develop a survey. Awada said she has staff who could assist. Smith said she has been asked to put together a flyer on invasive species for the Conservation Roundtable in 2026.

Tonnies asked about the Insight Creative videos. Johnson said the Director did not want them on the website, but will look into getting the rights to distribute.

9. Determine next meeting date & location, adjourn to working lunch

Next meeting date will be decided after needs assessment is complete.

10. Drone demonstration with Correct Spray

Finn provided a drone application demonstration at the Odessa bridge west of Kearney.

Meeting adjourned.