



GRASSLANDS WORKING GROUP

Chair: Alicia Hardin, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Vice-Chair: Greg Link, North Dakota Game and Fish Department

Date: Tuesday, March 21, 2023

Time: 8:00-10:00 a.m. CST

88th North American Fish and Wildlife Conference Meeting, St. Louis (MO)

- The BBC Grassland Work Group meeting was held just prior to the BCC1 at 8 am on Tuesday, March 21st
- We had 40 participants in the room representing multiple states, NGO's, and government agencies
- **Seth Gallagher from the National Fish and Wildlife foundation (NFWF)**
 - Steve gave an overview of NFWF, who they are, what they do, and how they do it as they disperse and distribute private/govt grants to partners to get conservation done on the ground.
 - He shared information about the 1st round of America The Beautiful Challenge (ATBC) grants last year - 12 of the roughly 55 projects funded involved grasslands (2 tribes, 2 universities, 6 state govt, and 2 Non-profits)
 - 2023 ATBC grant RFP is out, April 20th deadline with \$116M available
 - NFWF has multiple areas they target with grant programs, he and the other NFWF representatives are always willing to work with organizations on which areas and grant programs might be best suited to their needs
 - Most of the successful projects check off multiple boxes in the NFWF business plans
 - Grants are mostly based on conservation implementation and will involve some type of metrics to measure success
- **Alicia Hardin gave a brief description of Nebraska's successful ATBC grant that was grassland focused**
 - Funds will be used to implement grassland and wetland practices within the sandhills and loess canyons with partners such as: The Sandhills Task Force, Pheasants Forever, The Nature Conservancy, Santee Tribe, and the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition
 - 3 positions will also be funded with partner organizations to increase conservation delivery on private and tribal lands and hire a Nebraska Grassland Coordinator
 - A total of \$4 million was received

- **Steve Riley from American Bird Conservancy talked about a “Bird Saver Option” in the Farm Bill**
 - The idea is to improve incentives in the Farm Bill especially for western ranchers improve incentives for western ranchers
 - incentives for rest/recovery of grazing lands
 - develop new ways for NGOs to build capacity
 - strengthen the CRP program
 - ABCbirds.org (for more information on the bird saver option)

- **Tammy VerCauteren from the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies gave the “Central Grassland Roadmap Update”**
 - The background of the roadmap and summit were discussed
 - Big goals of impacting 10 million acres of grassland/yr have been set
 - Now more specific goals are being worked on as to where to focus those acres based on the vulnerability of the grasslands to encroachment
 - A new map has just been created that improved data on tree/shrub encroachment
 - A new committee within the Roadmap is being established to focus on the bird community recovery efforts
 - They will be focusing on specific bird species to provide priority landscape focus needs
 - If anyone is interested in joining this group, please let Tammy know
 - The roadmap is in the final stages of hiring a Coordinator that will be able to help keep this effort moving and take the roadmap on a roadshow

- **Catherine Wightman from the Northern Great Plains Joint Venture gave the JV8 – Joint Ventures Progress and Future for Habitat Delivery in the Central Grasslands**
 - The presentation explained how the JV8 is a part of the on the ground delivery of habitat and strongly supports the Central Grasslands Roadmap
 - Involves 3 Canadian province 12 US states, 7 Mexican states
 - Specific examples were given on how this approach is already working within the different JV’s and across JV boundaries
 - Next steps are to put together a more targeted work plan
 - Currently the JV8 is being helped by a contractor before a new coordinator is hired

- **Tyler Harms from Iowa DNR gave an introduction to the Midwest Landscape Initiative Grasslands Plan**
 - The Midwest Grassland Roadmap is just getting started and wants to pattern off the success of the Central Grasslands Roadmap
 - They are gathering partners, identifying stakeholders, establishing a steering committee
 - Unique challenges they face include:
 - Connectivity
 - Encroachment and invasive species
 - Land values
 - Stakeholder engagement

- **Jim Giocomo from the American Birds Conservancy gave the Partners in Flight (PIF), Eastern Grasslands Progress**
 - This effort stems and is building off the Mississippi Flyway roadmap effort lead by Jane Fitzgerald in January 2021
 - They're working to predict and address bird population declines in the next 10 years based on where populations were 10 years ago and where they are now.
 - This will be the basis on how state-by-state habitat and conservation priorities will be made.

- **John Carlson from the USFWS (Region 6) talked about USFWS Role in Grasslands**
 - John indicated the USFWS has put a major emphasis on grasslands
 - They've been an engaged leader, partner, or sponsor in much of the activity associated with grassland conservation in recent years
 - His purpose is to enable, partnerships communication, coordination, and collaboration around grasslands, both internally and externally

- **Jeff Hodges from the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative spoke about North American Grassland Conservation Act and the Native Grassland Alliance**
 - Jeff gave a quick overview of the North American Grasslands Conservation Act (NAGCA) introduced in the Senate last year
 - NAGCA would establish a grant program to provide landowners with voluntary economic incentives to conserve and restore the nation's disappearing grasslands
 - Efforts have started in the 118th Congress to get the bill with some additional updates introduced and passed in Senate. The Republican controlled House will be more challenging
 - Jeff also gave an overview of the Native Grassland Alliance (NGA), a native grassland conservation coalition formed in 2019 to advance the sustainability and utilization of native grasslands through policy, awareness, research, and technical advancements
 - The NGA lost some steam due to Covid-19, but with the new energy and activity started through the regional strategic grassland roadmap efforts, Jeff believes the NGA could very well provide the national umbrella for these efforts.
 - The plight of our grasslands needs national attention; NGA could be that conduit.

- **Other Business or Action Items**
 - The topics of the potential for a Pacific grassland roadmap forum, as well as a renewal to the existing grassland resolution from AFWA Directors, were broached but no interest was received.
 - No other action items were identified

- The meeting was adjourned at 10 am