Ranching & Conservation:
The Sandhills Task Force’s Landscape Impact

Shelly Kelly
Program Director
Sutherland, NE
Overview

• Information about the Nebraska Sandhills
• Sandhills Task Force
• Projects & Impacts
19,600 square miles
Nebraska Sandhills

- Largest contiguous native grassland in North America.
Nebraska Sandhills

- 19,600 square miles
- 90% private ownership
- 95% grassland
- About 1 billion acre feet of groundwater
- 1.3 million acres of wetlands
- 1,500 – 2,000 lakes
- First ranches began in late 1800’s
Nebraska Sandhills

- Geologically young formation.
- Once a spruce & aspen forest.
- Major droughts.
- Wind deposited sand.
- Stabilized in last 100 years.
Sandhills Task Force
“Where People and Land are One”

- Non-profit organization and land trust

Organized to enhance the Sandhill wetland-grassland ecosystem in a way that sustains profitable private ranching, wildlife and vegetative diversity, and associated water supplies.
Formation of Sandhills Task Force

- Wetland Legislation
- Anti-Cattle Sentiment
- Sandhills Task Force
- Holistic Resource Management (HRM)
- Federal Land Acquisition
Mission Statement

“To partner with ranchers; local communities, groups, and organizations; and local state and federal agencies to identify, prioritize, plan, and implement mutually acceptable projects that benefit private ranching, wildlife and vegetative diversity, and associated water supplies.”
Sandhills Task Force
“Where People and Land are One”

• Established in early 1990s
• 16 board members
  – 9 ranchers
Partnerships
Landscape Strategies

• Restoring hydrology to streams and wetlands
• Designing grazing plans
• Eastern red cedar control
  • Mechanical treatment
  • Prescribed burn
• Invasive carp removal
  • Lake renovations
• Education/Outreach
  • Tours/meetings
  • Hands on burn training
• And more
Grazing Management

• Economics & Tradition
  – One chance a year to get it right.
  – Profitability and wildlife habitat.
  – Peer Pressure

• Landscape view
  – Dynamic system
Grazing Systems

• Season long → Planned Grazing System

• Rotational Grazing
  – Provides opportunity for variable stocking rates
  – Restrict time of use (rest)
  – Manage invasive species
  – Fence wetland/riparian areas into units
Season Long Grazing

High Intensity Short Duration

Winter Grazing

Winter Grazing

3 - Pasture Rotation

10 - Pasture Rotation

4 - Pasture Rotation

Season Long Grazing
Habitat Needs

- Ask wildlife?
- Large tracts
- Umbrella Species
- Nesting -- Brooding -- Foraging -- Roosting
- Residual cover from previous growing season
Stream Restorations

- Down-cutting causes
  - Historic ditching
  - Road crossings
  - Connecting river/stream level lowered
Lake Renovations

- Invasive carp
  - Poor water quality
  - Poor fishery potential
  - Poor waterfowl habitat
How do we know it works?

- Disk raised slowly to point where it reappears
- Disk lowered slowly until it disappears from view

Secchi depth is midway
Eastern Red Cedar

• Pros
  – Easy to get established
  – Grows quickly
  – Dense

• Cons
  – Easy to get established
  – Grows quickly
  – Dense
Overlooked Problems
Overlooked Problems

- Old fields & CRP
Overlooked Problems

- Accretion property
Overlooked Problems

- That lone tree in the pasture.
Obvious Problems
Photo submitted by Vernon Hansen. Taken Sept 1965
Control Methods

- Cultural
  - Prescribed Burning
- Mechanical
  - Cut below lowest branch
- Chemical
RANGE FIRES

ARE DESTRUCTIVE
HELP PREVENT THEM
Mechanical Brush Removal = $150-$400/Acre

Effectiveness = 30-100% short term
STF and Partners Impact on Cedar Invasion

- Over 27,000 acres cleared of invasive cedars in the last 5 years
- Currently have 27,000+ acres in contract or in planning phase
- For every $1 STF spends, $4.46 is leveraged from partners
- Average cost of $13.56/acre
Take home message:

• Maintenance is required.
Outreach

- Ranch Tours
- Informational meetings
- Hands on prescribed burn trainings
- Supporting Nebraska Youth Range Camp
- Supporting Nebraska Leopold Conservation Award
- Providing a scholarship for UNL Grazing Livestock Systems major
HANDS ON Prescribed Fire Training

- 25 participants in Ericson!
- 80% had zero prescribed burn experience
- Successfully burned 2 units
- Shared a lot of information and people were able to ask lots of questions.
Prescribed Fire Training!

Come learn prescribed fire techniques and safety measures from a professional prescribed burn contractor! Registration is FREE, Lunch is provided!

Two locations in the Sandhills:
Will be scheduled for spring of 2018

How to Register:
Email or text/call Tad to get on the contact list:
Tad@sandhillstaskforce.org
402-340-6839

Training sponsored by:
Summary

• Information about the Nebraska Sandhills
  – Largest native, intact grassland in North America

• Sandhills Task Force
  – Non-profit organization

• Projects and Impacts
  – Helping ranchers and wildlife at the same time
Sign up to receive our newsletters!

Check our website to learn more and keep up with our activities. Find us on Facebook and Instagram!

HELPING PEOPLE HELP THE LAND

ENHANCING GRASSLAND ECOSYSTEMS WHILE SUSTAINING PROFITABLE RANCHING
Sources


Contact information: Shelly Kelly

[shelly@sandhillstaskforce.org](mailto:shelly@sandhillstaskforce.org)

308-214-0065