

Minutes of a Meeting of the Outdoor Heritage Fund Technical Committee

Held on May 20, 2025 at 10:00 a.m.

14th Floor Conference Room, State Capitol Building

Present: Reice Haase, ND Department of Water Resources
Rhonda Kelsch, ND Association of Soil Conservation Districts
Jeb Williams, ND Game and Fish Department
Tom Claeys, ND Forest Service
Cole Garman, ND Department of Parks & Recreation

Others Present: Brenna Jessen (NDIC)

Chairman Tyler Dokken was absent from the meeting.

Ms. Brenna Jessen chaired the technical review meeting which was called to order at 10:00 a.m.

Ms. Jessen provided a financial update for the Outdoor Heritage Fund. OHF currently has \$30,182,647.46 in funds committed, and \$11,235,388.50 available to commit to new projects.

Ms. Jessen facilitated the review of the Outdoor Heritage Fund Grant Round 26 applications.

26-1 (B): ND Statewide Tree Planting Initiative, ND Conservation District Employees Association – **OHF funding request: \$2,500,000**, Total Project Costs: \$3,510,000. Project Summary: To encourage and provide financial assistance to implement agroforestry practices including farmstead, feedlot and field windbreaks, wildlife and riparian plantings, buffers, and living snow fences.

Comments/Questions:

- No Natural Resource Concerns
- Significant number of landowners will benefit
- 3,010 applicants since the program began – statewide reach/impact

26-2 (B): ND Statewide Windbreak Renovation Initiative 5.0, ND Forest Service – **OHF funding request: \$900,000**, Total Project Costs: \$1,200,000. Project Summary: Continue to offer a financial assistance program for landowners to renovate their windbreaks thereby protecting, enhancing, and preserving essential forest resources.

Comments/Questions:

- Windbreak 2.0 and 3.0 funding is committed to landowners
- Funding for 4.0 has \$240,000 left unallocated
- Program continually receives a lot of interest and is successful

26-3 (D): Ryan Lake Prairie Trail & Outdoor Classroom, Grand Forks Park District – **OHF funding request: \$251,250**, Total Project Costs: \$335,000. Project Summary: Convert the other half of Ryan Park into native prairie with a 0.5 mile ADA accessible concrete trail with benches and connect the

outdoor classroom with existing city greenway trails and two existing fishing docks on the lakeshore.

Comments/Questions:

- It is a concrete trail instead of gravel to be ADA Accessible
- \$750 City Permit – OHF may not fund this
- Great outdoor components with the fishery
- Strong educational aspect to the project
- No natural resource concerns

26-4 (D): Rivers Edge Fishing Enhancement Project, City of Grand Forks – **OHF funding request: \$155,450**, Total Project Costs: \$494,195. Project Summary: To extend the existing paved trail .4 miles with a 10' wide paved trail, safety railing at the fishing site, benches, trash cans, and an informational kiosk for trail users and anglers.

Comments/Questions:

- Great project to provide access to sovereign lands
- Will likely need a sovereign lands permit so reach out to DWR as soon as possible at 701-328-4988 to ensure timely permit issuance and to prevent project delays
- Is the paved trail asphalt or concrete?
- There was not an option to receive sovereign land project grants with the 69th legislative session like there was with the 68th legislative session.
- No natural resources concerns

26-5 (D): Mayville Dam #2 Reconstruction & Recreation Project, City of Mayville – **OHF funding request: \$896,595** Total Project Costs: \$5,260,000. Project Summary: Remove the failed low head dam and reestablish the eroded riverbank and construct a new dam in the form of rock riffle structures. The riffle structure will facilitate fish passage while also creating turbulent and aerated flows that improve oxygen levels and more natural sediment transport.

Comments/Questions:

- A lot of inconsistencies in funding
- DWR awarded \$567,156 in funds, not \$63,918
- OHF and DWR cannot be considered match
- The total project cost given to DWR was \$6,034,983 and amount listed in the OHF application is \$5,260,000
- Over \$3,000,000 over the total project costs are currently covered by FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grants, and many of the FEMA grants have been pulled back by the federal government. How would the applicant move forward with the project if that were to occur in this instance?
- Low head dam removal is always a positive

26-6 (C): Lost Lake Dam Fish Passage, McLean County Water Resource District – **OHF funding request: \$51,599** Total Project Costs: \$74,802. Project Summary: Lost Lake Dam is upstream of the

Missouri River and is a complete barrier to fish passage. There is a former meander bend at the Lost Lake Dam that provides a natural location for fish passage and a relatively cost-effective means of constructing the required improvements.

Comments/Questions:

- Good project series
- No natural resources concerns
- If the design changes, DWR requests the applicant to contact the Regulatory division at 701-328-4965 as soon as possible to avoid regulatory delays

26-7 (A): Pheasants Forever Public Access to Habitat (PATH) Program, Pheasants Forever – **OHF funding request: \$1,089,375** Total Project Costs: \$1,452,500. Project Summary: Increase new wildlife habitat development and expand public hunting access in 38 counties, by adding 10,000 acres of new habitat to the PLOTS program. Landowners establishing new grassland habitat through the programs will be eligible for an additional one-time incentive payment with a 40-acre minimum enrollment.

Comments/Questions:

- No natural resource concerns
- If landowners adjacent to the State's sovereign lands elect to join the program, this project would benefit in enhancing access to both desirable habitat and to sovereign lands
- This is an expansion to what they've previously done before
- Good habitat initiative and access project

26-8 (D): Fargo Southwest Pond Regional Recreation Area, Fargo Park District – **OHF funding request: \$521,250** Total Project Costs: \$915,813. Project Summary: Create a native wetland and upland prairie for establishment of 80 acres of recreation and wildlife habitat through a .6 mile gravel trail network that would tie into an existing trail with benches, interpretive panels, trail crossings, and dry creek beds.

Comments/Questions:

- No natural resource concerns
- Gravel trail is being utilized instead of concrete
- Found the match necessary for this project and substantially lowered project costs from last grant round

26-9 (C): Enhancing State Parks Through Strategic Tree and Shrub Plantings, ND Parks and Recreation District – **OHF funding request: \$1,292,715** Total Project Costs: \$1,742,715. Project Summary: Due to the aging out of trees, victims of pests or disease, or simply not at optimal locations, the focus is to obtain and plant larger containerized trees in high-priority (Tier I) areas where they can quickly establish and have a positive impact on the visitor experience by providing shade, delineation of spaces, habitat, erosion control and an aural and visual aesthetic.

Comments/Questions:

- This project is a benefit to the people's parks
- Good installation plan, post planting assessment and post installation management
- Biggest causes of failures are: not selecting the right tree for the right areas, trees planted too deep, lack of follow-up maintenance, and in areas like parks, wildlife damage/destruction
- ND Parks and Rec dept. has the knowledge and staff to address issues that arise

26-10 (B): Cover Crop & Livestock Integration Project 4, Ducks Unlimited, Inc. – **OHF funding request: \$936,000** Total Project Costs: \$1,440,000. Project Summary: CCLIP 4 is the fourth phase of previously successful grants that will help producers initiate cover crop and grazing practices on more than 4,000 additional cropland acres, enhancing 5,000 additional grassland acres over the next five years.

Comments/Questions:

- No natural resource concerns
- Continues to be a successful project with a lot of demand

26-11 (C): ND 4-H Camp, ND 4-H Foundation – **OHF funding request: \$75,978** Total Project Costs: \$107,978. Project Summary: Install a 1,440 foot pump from the Missouri River to the ND 4-H Camp Pond to maintain water levels during dry periods.

Comments/Questions:

- No natural resource concerns
- Depending on the design, a sovereign lands permit and water appropriations permit would likely be required. DWR encourages the applicant to reach out to the Regulatory Division at 701-328-4956 and the Water Appropriations Division at 701-328-2754 to ensure timely reviews and to avoid permitting delays
- Does "equipment" refer to the pump? What is the "shelter" over the pump?
- What is the scale/size of the pump and can it be moved?
- No comments about remediation to the trees being removed
- Would like to see a map of the area provided

26-12 (B): Grazing Management and Habitat Enhancement, The Nature Conservancy – **OHF funding request: \$72,680** Total Project Costs: \$119,099. Project Summary: Install additional grazing infrastructure at the Brown Ranch (Ransom County) and John E. Williams Preserves (McLean County) which will create fresh water sources for livestock, improve habitat for wildlife species, protect sensitive areas, create flexibility in the grazing intensity and rest periods, and provide critical habitat on 3,600 acres of grassland.

Comments/Questions:

- If the applicant is decommissioning wells, DWR requests the contractor to submit a well log to the Department. Livestock use of new wells is registered using SFN 61330

- No natural resource concerns
- Brown Ranch is open to hunting
- Would like an explanation of the indirect funding being utilized as match

26-13 (B): Smart Livestock Advancing Terrestrial Ecosystems, Ducks Unlimited, Inc. – **OHF funding request: \$505,327** Total Project Costs: \$720,585. Project Summary: Provide cost share for virtual fencing that provides GPS tracking and animal behavior to manage cattle movement via smart collars for enhanced grazing management to improve wildlife habitat and reduce impacts to ecologically sensitive areas. Over the period of 5 years, SLATE will partner with at least 12 private landowners to enhance grazing management on 5,760 acres.

Comments/Questions:

- No natural resource concerns
- Excited about the possibility of virtual fencing for livestock
- Could get expensive if OHF funds are continually requested – 12 landowners for \$500,000
- Is infrastructure the collars?
- Could there be additional liability factors?
- Good pilot project for new technology
- Less fencing to achieve the same goals is a win
- Would like more data on the longevity of the collars

26-14 (B): Grazed Wildlife Habitat – Meadowlark Initiative, United Prairie Foundation – **OHF funding request: \$580,000** Total Project Costs: \$806,750. Project Summary: Implement patch-burn-grazing and expand landowner experience using controlled burning on 1,500 acres to manage grasslands, enhance grazing, remove invasive trees, and improve cattle forage while enhancing wildlife habitat in southeast ND. Also, implement patch-burn-grazing on 245 acres of demonstration plots for community education purposes.

Comments/Questions:

- The invasive trees being removed are Russian Olive, Siberian Elm and Cedar?
- Practice includes tree removal and herbicide treatment if necessary
- Potentially a management issue
- Liability – UPF has prescribed fire insurance
- UPF has great working relations with rural fire departments

26-15 (C): Wildlife and Livestock Dams – Wetlands Creation, Restoration, and Enhancement III, ND Natural Resources Trust – **OHF funding request: \$445,000** Total Project Costs: \$890,000. Project Summary: Create, restore or enhance 25 wetlands for wildlife and livestock benefits covering 100 surface acres, primarily situated on private lands with 1:1 match funding.

Comments/Questions:

- No natural resource concerns

- Due to their size, this likely would not require a construction permit from DWR, however, Water Appropriation permits would be required at some sites. DWR encourages the applicant to reach out to the Water Appropriations Division at 701-328-2754 to ensure timely reviews and to avoid permitting delays
- Clearly a demand for these series of projects
- NDNRT has great relationships with landowners
- The project provides an important habitat component

26-16 (B): Grazing Resiliency in North Dakota, ND Natural Resources Trust – **OHF funding request: \$2,110,000** Total Project Costs: \$2,845,000. Project Summary: Implement rotational grazing during times of drought to retain remaining grasslands by assisting landowners with grazing management plans, cost-share on practices, and technical assistance. Over the five-year duration of this project, at least 50 landowners will be serviced, encompassing over 40,000 acres.

Comments/Questions:

- No natural resource concerns
- Clearly a demand for these projects
- Funds from other projects have been allocated
- NDNRT has good relationships with landowners

26-17 (A): Western North Dakota Private Land Open To Sportsmen (PLOTS), ND Game and Fish Department – **OHF funding request: \$1,500,000** Total Project Costs: \$2,100,000. Project Summary: To provide additional funding to the Private Land Open To Sportsmen (PLOTS) program which offers habitat development and hunting access agreements to landowners willing to provide public walk-in hunting access. The focus area is all counties south and west of the Missouri River. The department anticipates enrolling between 20,000 to 40,000 acres in agreements (paid upfront for 10 or 20 years) and enrolling a combination of 10- and 20-year agreements, totaling approximately 32,000 acres.

Comments/Questions:

- No natural resource concerns
- Great access to open acres
- Good partnership program
- Good opportunities for other partnership incentives

26-18 (D): Western North Dakota Private Land Open To Sportsmen (PLOTS), ND Game and Fish Department – **OHF funding request: \$205,377** Total Project Costs: \$273,837. Project Summary: To construct a new gravel, multi-use recreational trail on the south side of the City of Flasher on city owned property which will provide direct connections to the golf course and baseball fields and accessible from the city park and Centennial campground. The trail will feature eight commemorative historical signs and eight benches throughout the trail.

Comments/Questions:

- No natural resource concerns
- Appreciated the map of the area that was provided
- Utilizing a gravel trail
- Question on whether connecting baseball fields and golf courses should be spent with OHF funds

The Technical Review Committee discussed the following amendment request –

- Contract 013-138 – Crooked Crane Trail Phase 2 – adjusting trail layout and lowering grant request from \$1,200,000 to \$719,173 (an adjustment of -\$480,827)

Comments/Questions:

- Is the golf barrier necessary? OHF will likely not cover any of the cost for the barrier
- Are all agreements in place with this new route?
- Are there any approvals/agreements still needing to be made with any private landowners?

Ms. Jessen shared the draft agenda for the June 3rd, 2025, OHF Advisory Board meeting.

Being no further business, Chairman Dokken adjourned the meeting at 11:35 a.m.