



Prairie Wetlands Chapter

Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams

Happenings

December 2002

Our Purpose:

The Chapter serves as a clearinghouse for wetlands and riparian areas information and activities, promotes educational opportunities with a variety of targeted audiences, and facilitates project implementation for wetland and riparian area projects within the participating counties.

Our Mission:

To ensure the future of wetlands, streams, and their adjacent riparian areas as an integral part of our Kansas heritage and landscape.

Our Vision:

A public that is well informed and involved in activities that foster the protection, enhancement, and establishment of wetlands and riparian areas in Kansas.

Steering Committee

Duane Cheney, Western Prairie RC&D, Colby

Leonard Hopper, KDWP, Colby

Membership is free and open to any interested individual, organization or agency interested in wetland, stream, and riparian area conservation. For more information on KAWS and its activities please contact:

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July 24 Meeting Highlights

Member Updates—Chapter Business

Next Prairie Wetlands Chapter Meeting

January 13, 2003

1:00 p.m.

Western Prairie RC&D,
Colby, KS

Troy Schroeder, KDWP, discussed the results of a meeting held in Norton on July 23 to determine interest between Colorado, Nebraska, and Kansas in developing a multi-state Super-CREP (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program). Interest seems to be high and natural resource issues are being laid out. Those might include the declining Ogallala aquifer, Shortgrass prairie habitats, wetlands and streams, and a host of others. The group discussed calling the proposed program something larger than CREP since it covers areas

outside CRP. Follow up meetings are begin scheduled. And a similar meeting will be held for Oklahoma, Texas, and perhaps New Mexico. The stimulus for the work came from the Playa Lakes Joint Venture.

Troy also discussed the status of the Buffer Partnership. Apparently, it will be funded for the coming year, in part, through a KDHE 319 Incremental grant as well as money from the State Conservation Commission, KDWP, and others. The funding level should allow for up to 35 buffer coordinators to be hired through conservation districts to sell buffers. He also noted that the SCC buffer coordinator will probably be committing over 50 percent of his time to the program (currently 50/50 split).

Leonard Hopper, KDWP, provided an update on the playa easement program. He indi-

Coordinator's Report

Tim Christian, KAWS, welcomed Steve Price, new KDWP regional supervisor, to the group. Tim provided a written coordinator's report and made additional comments relative to KAWS activities. He noted that KAWS was submitting a proposal to NRCS for educational assistance to help with specific elements of the new farm bill conservation provisions. *Tim asked for members to begin building lists of farmers and ranchers that would make good interviews for producer-to-producer education and outreach materials.*

Christian also noted that **Drue Durst** is coming on board as of August 1 to serve in a marketing specialist/coordinator position. He will primarily be doing outreach and educational materials as well as providing oversight on grants, plus working with local chapters on funding opportunities. **Following is an update since the PWC did not meet this fall.**

KAWS Fall Tour

Over 40 people attended the Fall Tour held in Topeka on October 14. The tour was hosted by Mark Green, City of Topeka. The group viewed several innovative projects designed to help treat stormwater.

KAWS Executive/Steering Committee meeting highlights held October 15

Steve Swaffar, KFB, discussed the Farm Bureau's award programs noting the Natural Resource Award winners. He asked for KAWS to help with ideas for expanding the Wetlands Conservation Award noting that only two counties have used the award over the past two years. He referenced the Resources newsletter article and said he is open to expanding, renaming, or making other changes to improve participation.

Swaffar provided an overview of the work of the Natural Resources Legacy Alliance. He noted that **Connie Richmeier**, Finney County CD, presented on KAWS at the October 9-10 meetings in Garden City.

Barth Crouch, PF, discussed the status of the PF Habitat Teams and the need for funding to get started in Kansas. The Teams are being set up and funded in Colorado (one of his other state responsibilities), and he is anxious to be able to focus back in Kansas soon. The Teams will serve to help landowners put practices on the ground including grass and tree plantings, fencing, and the like.

Barth also covered the Playa Lakes Joint Venture draft Super CREP plan which is designed to protect 10 percent of the playas in the affected states amounting to about 100,000 acres. It is much like the farmable wetland program and even the KS playa easement program, but provides for larger areas to be enrolled.

Joe Kramer, KDWP, discussed deer management issues, chronic wasting disease concerns, and other Department priorities. He outlined the playa easement program status. KDWP has enrolled a total of 87 acres containing 49 acres in playa lakes in 5 separate playas in 3 counties in western Kansas. There is a total of 44 acres of buffer strips scheduled for establishment to protect the playas. Additional contracts are pending and there are additional applications to consider. The additional applications total nearly 300 acres of playas and buffers with a potential dollar value over the 10-year life of the contracts of \$120,000.00. He described the interest in and funds raised to date for a visitors center at Cheyenne Bottoms similar to the one at the Milford Hatchery or even the Nature Center in Wichita. Surrounding towns and others are working hard to raise the needed money with KS Wildscape engaged to help fund raise.

Don Sneath, KDHE Watershed Management, provide an update on water quality and KDHE efforts. He noted that the federal fiscal year 2002 funds from EPA Region 7 for the 319 Incremental NPS Pollution Control Program have \$461,000 earmarked for KAWS per our request. The funds should be accessible after they are awarded from EPA in early 2003 calendar year. He discussed the details of the EPA Watershed Initiative noting that several are being formulated for the Governor's review. They are the Marais des Cygnes in KS/MO, Cheney Lake/Wichita, Blue River in KS/MO, and the Blue River in KS/NE.

Damien Miller, Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program State Coordinator, reviewed the Partners program in Kansas covering staffing, funding and challenges.

Rod Egbarts, NRCS Programs Staff, provided an overview of several USDA programs including WHIP, Farmland Protection Program (FPP), and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). He provided handouts on these with updates for Kansas. A quick summary includes WRP for 2002 - \$370,000 committed in 9 contracts covering 830 acres; WHIP totals 265 contracts on 47,000 acres committing \$1.1 million and FPP which is new for KS has one easement held by the Nature Conservancy in Butler County. Rod discussed how KAWS can help promote these programs through active education and noted our CO-OP agreement to provide educational materials on WRP.

cated that two playas - one in Ford County for 20 acres and one in Sherman County for 29 acres are signed up committing \$19,600 which is about half of the available money. He has about 7-8 contacts yet to make and other biologists are making similar contacts. Two of the applicants were referred to NRCS and have applied for the Wetlands Reserve Program. Tim indicated the US FWS Partners funds (\$5,000) that KAWS had been provided by Jerre Gamble, Partners State Coordinator, had been tentatively set for use to establish buffers around the enrolled playas. Leonard will need to see that the landowners get the paperwork processed to commit the funds prior to September 30.

Troy mentioned that the farmable wetland practice in Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) is being expanded in the new farm bill to cover the entire nation. He thinks we should promote it as another means to protect and restore playas. He thought perhaps a publication listing playa wetland options for landowners similar to the web-based publication now on the KAWS site. He also suggested using the Iowa Buffer CD PowerPoint presentation with chapters to promote buffer design and considerations.

Tony Ifland, US FWS, announced that Damien Miller has been selected as the new State Coordinator for the Partners Program. He reports in late September and will be stationed in Manhattan.

Phil Balch, SCC, presented on the Riparian and Wetlands Protection Program (RWPP) and on alternatives for enhancing, restoring or protecting riparian areas and streams. He noted a number of practices available to ranchers and farmers to improve the health of these systems. He covered some aspects of stream stabilization and highlighted a demonstration project in Kingman County on the SF Ninnescah River where continuous bags of sand were used for construction of bendway weirs. This is a new process of using sand or other suitable fill material in a bio-textile material that is stapled into an 18-inch diameter bag then place where rock would normally be use. The effect is much the same and is cheaper than hauling rock. It could prove to be ideal for sandy bottom streams.

Jim Strine, KFS, asked if RWPP funds could be used to control non-native woody species along riparian areas and streams...and asked the others if they were aware of any problem species or spots in the northwest corner of the state. Phil indicated that he had recently cost-shared on a Russian olive control on 500 acres in Meade County. The operator seems to think that the stream flow has come up since the control occurred and he noted that USGS stream flow monitoring stations were in place, so they can collect that type of information. Tony asked if RWPP funds would be cut this year with the budget reduction. Phil said yes, but that he anticipated the funding to come back or perhaps even increase in a year. He noted that the Sunflower RC&D had organized and developed an RWPP for the seven counties within its boundaries. The group that thought perhaps Western Prairie RC&D might host a similar planning event.

Upcoming Chapter meetings, activities, and events

NEXT Prairie Wetlands Chapter meeting—January 13, 1:00 p.m., RC&D office, Colby

Buffalo Wallow Chapter , January 8, Lakin

Playa Lakes Joint Venture Board meeting, January 14-17, Littleton, CO

Western KS KAWS Conference, February 18, Cimarron

Lower/Little Ark Group meeting, January 29, Maize

Executive Committee, February 4, KFB, Manhattan