

Steering Committee Agenda - NETX Conservation Delivery Network
Tyler Nature Center @ 11942 FM 848 - Tyler, TX 75707
6/14/2022 - 10 am to 3 pm

Actions, Tasks, and Recommendations –

Nineteen projects, proposing almost **4,300 acres of habitat improvement at a cost of \$252,235**, were approved for immediate development of project agreement. An additional 10 projects were tentatively approved to move forward if additional funds become available. Eleven projects were not approved.

Strategic Plan, Map, and Operating Guidelines. Steering Committee (SC) directed leadership to **initiate the priority area mapping revision immediately**; the outcomes of the mapping effort will better inform refinements of our strategic plan and guidelines. McCrady, Gay, and Bartush will initiate review and seek assistance from SC members and Group Leads.

Meetings and Field Days. McCrady and Gay will identify a working group to develop agenda for September 7, and the Pushmataha Field Day on October 11.

Summary Notes:

Reuben Gay, Vice-Chair, and **Bill Bartush** welcomed the group of 18 SC and CDN members, provided the Agenda for review, and a general meeting overview.

Steering Committee Roll Call and Review Agenda - SC Role and Responsibility

Caddo Lake Institute	Laura Ashley Overdyke
USDA – NRCS	Rigoberto Lopez (Jason Vilwock and Frank Baca alt)
NWTF	Annie Farrell
Texas Forest Service	Brian Pope
The Nature Conservancy	David Bezanson
Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept.	Stephen Lange (Roger Wolfe alt)
Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept.	Marcos DeJesus
USFWS (Partners)	Steve Arey (Jeff Reid alt)
USFWS (Refuges)	Erik Duerkop

Other CDN group leads and members present: Brian Townsend NRCS, Robert Perez OPJV Coordinator, Clay Shipes TPWD, Matt Jackson TPWD, Jason Estrella TPWD, Jade Buckley TAMFS, Jenny Sanders TLT, Jason Hardin TPWD, Steve Jack BSCA. Majority of SC members or their alternates were present to discuss business items, and to approve recommendations of the review team to obligate funds; 19 projects were approved for immediate development, and an additional 10 projects were approved if funds become available.

CDN Overview – working together better, leverage/coordination. Overview of the LMVJV and CDN was used to set the stage for the 2011-14 background of the original strategic planning effort. The CDN Strategic Plan and Operating Guidelines have been modified twice since 2014; both times, additional counties were added to accommodate the habitat delivery efforts of the Oaks and Prairie Joint Venture (OPJV). A Review Team was convened on June 7, primarily to evaluate RFP effort, but also to discuss operating guidelines and strategic plan, and identify adjustments in areas that should be considered by the SC. The changes in both the Strategic Plan and the Operating Guidelines are predicated on the

refinement of our priority habitat map. Suggestion was made to prepare basic editorial changes for both the Plan and Guidelines, but delay any formal changes or recommended changes until after the mapping effort is complete. Significant discussion also occurred regarding working closely with the OPJV and the Grasslands Restoration Incentive Program (GRIP). The GRIP Program becomes relevant in those NW and western counties of the CDN where grassland restoration is valued for priority species (review proposed changes). The recommendation for the Strategic Plan and General Operating Guidelines was to **initiate the priority area mapping revision immediately**; the focus will include the entire Piney Woods geography (adding a minimum of 11 counties south and west of current NETX 29-county partnership). The outcomes and discussion of the mapping effort will better inform refinements within our Strategic Plan and Operating Guidelines. McCrady, Gay, and Bartush will initiate review and editing of both documents, and seek assistance from SC and Group Leads for additional technical review and support. It was discussed that the revision of the Strategic Plan not limit the NETX CDN Service Area to specific counties – but rather describe our service area as including all counties within the LMVJV–WGCP (BCR 25). The SC further stated the CDN can support adjacent partnerships with collaborative projects that may span both geographies. This next Strategic Plan will identify a 5-year vision for the NETX CDN with goals and objectives to achieve through the evaluation of progress 2014–2022 by implementation of restoration and enhancement projects within the Service Area.

Leadership and Work Group Leads. Geographies (map/names) were reviewed, and new members were requested in several areas. New group leadership was identified. The “fire” work group has never made any traction; the emphasis with the fire group was to help form fire co-ops – but since a co-op does much more than fire (consider landowner, forestry, turkey / wildlife co-ops), our best current examples of functioning landowner groups involve a variety of resources and outcomes. NETX could help support meetings, communication, website, etc., and still include fire co-op efforts inside that “co-op” umbrella. The Open Pine Work Group is seeking leadership – NRCS foresters were asked to consider that role.

SC membership discussed a number of possible new members: Sabine River Authority (SRA), US Forest Service (National Forests in Texas), and US Corps of Engineers (COE) due to their active involvement with specific projects (SRA at-risk species, Neches River USFS, COE Wright Patman). These partners are welcomed as participating members, and further discussion with them about possible SC membership should be continued by SC. The group also discussed the importance of having alternates, keeping them aware, engaged, and available to fill in for business of the CDN when appropriate. SC members should keep alternates informed and prepared to act in a member’s absence.

OPJV – Robert Perez explained the need to coordinate with the LMVJV and NETX CDN on a variety of existing projects in overlapping JV counties, as well as consider new opportunities to collaborate in those areas of NETX CDN. GRIP counties like Fannin, Lamar, Red River, Hunt, and Delta fall under both the oversight of LMV and OPJV landscape. Although NETX CDN and OPJV have coordinated on a few project efforts, improvement is needed. Other areas along the Trinity River have similar potential (Navarro County) for improved coordination. Robert described opportunities with America the Beautiful NFWF grants, which could be used to capture additional resources for future conservation projects. Bartush will continue to work with Perez to investigate these potential opportunities.

RFP Review and Project approvals

2022 RFP Habitat Incentive Program - FY 2023 Project Recommendations (\$252,235 obligated)

The SC spent the final hour reviewing the projects, based on RFP results, and offered recommendations from the Review Team (consisting of Andy McCrady, Penny Wilkerson, Reuben Gay, Jeff Reid, Jade

Buckley, Rusty Wood, Roger Wolfe, and Bill Bartush). The Review Team met on June 7 to evaluate the RFP response (39 projects, over \$400k requested). Each proposal was reviewed, and raw score validated, to confirm final ranking for approval of funds. The Team prepared a draft spreadsheet for the SC to consider approval of funding.

Scores were initially prepared by Annie Farrell. A total of 39 projects were reviewed; though some project packages were incomplete, the vast majority of project proposals were well-developed and followed format identified in RFP. Overall, this new process worked smoothly. The approximately 40 proposals were the most responses received to date for any one RFP; this volume also included the greatest request for funding. Much discussion involved the Habitat Incentive Program's (HIP) available funding (\$246,000), with an ability to "over-commit" due to expected cancellations, delays, and with most completed projects submitted with slightly reduced invoices. This question was debated at length: "How much to over-commit?" Changes in RFP process and project protocol was discussed throughout; we are now using a single funding pool RFP (combining the standard HIP with NR RFP applications, ranking and agreements); this consolidated format will reduce confusion and streamline processing for future NETX habitat incentive projects. The funding cap was increased to \$40K, and agreements now have a much simpler modification format. During the Review Team discussion – the idea of having a small landowner pool (projects and ownerships less than 60 acres) was raised. Small landowners (and new landowners with no conservation experience) do not compete well with larger, well-developed conservation partners. This disadvantage hurts properties under 100 acres, and penalizes new or "first-time" landowners; this suggestion should be continued in further review at a later date. There are strong concerns about firebreaks and their high cost, along with the need for close Archeological Review; consider removing firebreaks due to cost and complications. Suggestions and any Plans to improve ranking process, payment rate, and priority map. These and other items garnered much discussion, and were tabled for a later date:

- Re-evaluating new map in regards to scoring and delivery area;
- Closely review ranking; does alignment with NRCS, TLT, OPJV have merit;
- Large projects vs small landowners – consider separate pool funds;
- Ad Hoc Team should ID items to change in strategic plan/operating guides.

Calendar

- August 1-5 Quail "9" Springfield MO
- August 10 AR-LA CDN Monticello AR
- September 7 NETX CDN (Tyler)
 - Forestry for the Birds, Fire, Open Pine, Drone demo
- September 12-14 Forest and Water Forum Planning
 - Texas Forests and Drinking Water Partnership
- September 26-27 TPWD Farm/Ranch Forum
- October 3-5 LMVJV Waterfowl Symposium Memphis
- October 4-6 Private Lands Partners Fayetteville
- October 11 Pushmataha OK
- October 26 TX Forestry Association Bryan
- October 23-26 TLT Meeting at TFA
- October 25-28, 14th Biennial Longleaf Conference Wilmington, NC