

Fish and Wildlife Subcommittee Update

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Fish and Wildlife Subcommittee

- Role – we serve in an advisory capacity to provide information regarding pressing wildlife concerns in Texas to the State Conservationist for her consideration
- The subcommittee met via Microsoft teams on April 18, 2023. In total, 44 people called into the meeting. Notably, we had some NRCS folks on the call including Lori Ziehr to discuss the new 10% EQIP fund pool and Rob Ziehr discussed the TX Partners in Conservation funding opportunity.

Subcommittee Discussion

- CRP - Jeff Dudensing (FSA) provided an overview of all things CRP in TX and upcoming deadlines.
- Playa Conservation Initiative - Heather Johnson (TPWD) provided an overview of this highly successful Playa Conservation Initiative.
- Migratory Bird SAFE project - Mike Carter (PLJV) expanded on the PCI and discussed the effort to add Texas counties to the Migratory Bird SAFE project. Playas are the primary source of recharge in the Ogallala aquifer. They provide water quantity and quality. Further, their native grass buffers provide wetland and grassland wildlife habitat. This SAFE project provides the program tools necessary for producers to bring back functionality by restoring cropped playas.
- CRP County Cap Waiver - Will Newman (TPWD) discussed the inflexibility with the CRP County Cap waiver that has contributed to the loss of 115,000 acres of LPC habitat and in future years could cause another 130,000 acres of lost habitat unless the previous waiver flexibility is restored in the next Farm Bill.

Subcommittee Discussion

- Erosion Management for Watershed Restoration – Ryan McGillicuddy discussed several TPWD Landowner Incentive Program projects using scenarios from western states including 5, 6, 16, 32 & 51 - 643 Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities and 410 Zuni bowls scenario 30. You can see in these before and after pictures how erosion will be reduced and water quality can improve down stream.
- Several partners reiterated the need and hope that NRCS TX adopts these scenarios as requested at the fall STAC.



Subcommittee Discussion

- Prescribed Fire Working Group – hope to continue working with NRCS to expand prescribed fire in TX. Approaching that goal through education, practice refinement, and open dialogue with working group members, NRCS, and other TX agencies
- Through Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, they developed an “on-line” training platform for basic prescribed fire for NRCS staff specifically. The group will continue to support and improve this platform. They will also continue to collaborate with other subcommittees and NRCS.
- This working group will soon work to develop fire prescriptions for invasive species per NRCS request.

Subcommittee Discussion

- Lesser prairie chicken talking points – myself and Manuel De Leon discussed the NRCS's talking points that were jointly developed with the US. Fish and Wildlife Service to help folks understand the recent relisting of this species.



Formal Requests

- The subcommittee formally and respectfully requests that the NRCS STAC support the addition of Texas counties to the multi-state CRP - Migratory Bird SAFE project.
- Request that Texas NRCS adopt for Conservation Practice 643 Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities - Scenario 5, 6, 16, 32, & 51 and Conservation Practice 410 scenario 30
- Request to collaborate with NRCS on training that is beneficial for wildlife including riparian and watershed restoration, upland wildlife habitat management e.g., CP 645, CP 314, CP 338 & CP 643.
- Last, we request that NRCS consider developing a riparian buffer incentive payment for producers
 - perhaps through EQIP or other programs.

Thanks on behalf of the Fish and Wildlife Subcommittee

