How to talk with landowners about wetlands

Presented by Ted LaGrange, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is our state’s wildlife agency.

I work as the Wetland Program Manager in the Habitat Partners section with a focus is on private lands and partnerships.

*Nebraska has a long history of collaborative conservation, much of what I will discuss is based on the great work of many colleagues and landowners who are far more knowledgeable than me.*
Regional Variation--- in Nebraska
Webinar 4: Wetlands Ecology for Planners - Examples of Variation Across the United States

Friday, December 14, 2018 at 3:00-5:00 pm ET; 2:00 pm CT; 1:00 pm MT; 12:00 pm PT

View Webinar

INTRODUCTION
Jeane Christie, Association of State Wetland Managers

PRESENTERS
- Doug Norris, Wetland Program Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources [POWERPOINT PRESENTATION]
- Andy Robertson, Executive Director, Geospatial Services, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota [POWERPOINT PRESENTATION]

ABSTRACT

Different Types of Social/Economic Drivers

Photo by Shelly Kelly Sandhills Task Force
Need to tailor the actions to the wetland type and local heritage and economy.
OK, so now what---?
How to talk with landowners about wetlands

Presentation Outline

• How to conduct in-office inventories of site information

• Determining landowner objectives

• How to discuss options with landowners
How to conduct in-office inventories of site information
But it is important to emphasize that although in-office inventories are helpful and needed, you still need to visit the field with the landowner.

- You will learn a lot by visiting with the landowner (they know their property best) both from a conservation and an agricultural perspective, and you may also observe some things that are not able to be looked at using GIS and other off-site tools.
Some assessment tools:

- Aerial Photographs
  - new, old, wet-period
  - “Using only current information doesn't allow us to fully recover wetland acres because the restoration work only focuses on what is present, not what WAS present”.
- Soil Surveys
- National Wetland Inventory (NWI)
- Topographic maps
  - LiDAR
- Ownership
- Infra-structure
  - Roads, power lines, pipelines, etc.
- Many others
  - Floodplain maps
  - Natural Heritage Program and T&E data
  - etc.

Laurel Badura, USFWS
Assessor and/or Common Land Unit (CLU) data
Google Earth--- historical imagery
Google Earth--- KMZ files
# Web Soil Survey

## Map Unit Legend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Map Unit Symbol</th>
<th>Map Unit Name</th>
<th>Acres in AOI</th>
<th>Percent of AOI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3561</td>
<td>Hobbs silt loam, occasionally flooded</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3820</td>
<td>Butler silt loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes</td>
<td>412.5</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3824</td>
<td>Crete silt loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes</td>
<td>856.4</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3825</td>
<td>Crete silt loam, 1 to 3 percent slopes</td>
<td>525.6</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3829</td>
<td>Crete silty clay loam, 1 to 3 percent slopes</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3831</td>
<td>Crete silty</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Web Soil Survey--- ponding frequency
Soil Survey of Fillmore County, Nebraska
1918 soils map
National Wetlands Inventory (NWI)
Determining landowner objectives
• Understand what brought them to you.

• Did they reach out to you, or did you reach out to them?
• They often have a problem they want solved

  • Their objective may or may not be a fit for one of your programs, but don’t stop there. Keep listening.

• “Landowners often do self-identify what their objectives are, but in many cases, they aren’t even sure what their objectives are. Part of our job in these cases, is to unbiasedly help the landowner develop those objectives.”

  Chad Christiansen, USFWS

• Even though wetlands are regulated, there are still lots of options available to make improvements and conduct management.
Determining landowner objectives

- Determine who the decision maker(s) is for the land. Owner, operator (tenant), family, banker, crop advisor, etc.

- Try to understand where they get their information

- Family, neighbors, sales people, etc.
Determining landowner objectives

Types of landowner objectives (they can have multiple objectives):

- Economic
  - Income/Investment
  - Tax issues
- Heritage/Legacy
- Recreation
- Other
How to discuss options with landowners

Types of options:

• Technical Assistance
• Short-term Agreements
• Long-term Agreements
• Conservation Easements
• Fee-title Ownership

Don’t get too focused on the type of program to offer until you understand what the landowner needs.
How to discuss options with landowners

- Even though the landowner may have one option in mind, there are often other options that will come to light as you visit.
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• “Share past successes or examples, explain why you pursued a similar type of restoration, and what wildlife benefits you were trying to reap from the project. Sharing past examples gives the landowner an idea that you are supportive of management of working lands and wetlands and the need to have a product that works for both of you”.

Bill Vodehnal, NGPC
Social:

- Be genuine about who you are and your background.
- Always be honest.
- Don’t talk “down” to landowners.
- Trust is a key component and that takes time to build.
Social:

• Be genuine about who you are and your background.

• Always be honest.

• Don’t talk “down” to landowners.

• Trust is a key component and that takes time to build.

All you really need to know you learned in Kindergarten
• **Listen**--- People like to tell you about their land, operation, and background

  • They know their land best

  • Respect their views

  • Acknowledge their past conservation efforts, as applicable, and applaud their willingness to engage in a discussion about future options.

  • “If the only landowners we choose to develop relationships with are the people who are already willing to think like us, we hardly can function as agents of change”.

  *Cassidy Wessel, NGPC*
“You are never in too much of a hurry to have a cup of coffee with someone. There is no ‘cup of coffee’ column on any time sheet I’ve ever encountered, but over the course of their careers the attendees of this training will find that more groundwork for long-term success is laid when you are talking about kids, hunting, high school sports, etc. than when you have a project map laid out in front of you.”

Cassidy Wessel, NGPC
• Who is the point of contact? Designate a “leader” if multiple people/partners are involved.

• You are not alone and don’t have to be the expert in everything. Reach out to others and make use of the institutional knowledge around you.
How to discuss options with landowners

• One-stop shopping--- landowners are busy with lots of things and working with conservation programs is not likely their highest priority. Be as efficient with their time as possible and do the “leg-work” for them instead of simply referring them to someone else.
• Arrange site visit--- may include team or just you to start (see what landowner is comfortable with).

• If you bring a team, try and keep the group size small or to a level that the landowner is comfortable with.
• Be responsive and keep the landowner informed.

• Many projects take time, especially wetland projects. This can be related to compliance issues (NEPA, 404 permits, SHPO, etc.), water rights, engineering and/or soil assessments, weather conditions, etc.

• Make the landowner aware of this. It is best to “under promise and over deliver”.

How to discuss options with landowners--Social
• Revisit the project site with the landowner at points in the future after the project is done to see how things are going. This is an opportunity for both of you to learn.
Programmatic:

- What are your objectives?
  - How are they similar and different from the landowners?
    - “Ecology before policy.” “This simply is a statement that is designed to make you think about how this particular site could/would/should function, before moving into the planning/options phase.”
    - Make the landowner aware that you are “accountable for the public trust monies you spend.”
    - Remember that “you provide information and the landowner makes decisions”.

Scott Luedtke, NGPC
• Define the longest-term or biggest-scale options as part of any discussion on options. From a resource agency perspective, we want the most gain possible for the funds we have available.

• Lay out the pros and cons of the available options from your perspective. However, you need to be careful doing this, as your viewpoint will be different than the landowners.
• Make it clear that long-term management likely will be needed.
• You don’t always get all that you want. Need to determine if the gain is worth the cost.

• Often requires some give and take.

• Don’t let perfect get in the way of the good.

• OK to say no, and not move forward with a project if the benefits for the resource are not there.
• Learn who the other potential partners are (e.g., state wildlife agency, USFWS, NGO, etc.) and understand what they might be able to help with and what programs they offer. (See Webinar 7)

• Just because what the landowner wants is not a fit for your program(s), there are often other program options available.

• Offer to help the landowner with the transition to another partner’s program(s) if that needs to happen.
Key Summary Points:

- Understand that each wetland is different
- Understand that each landowner is different
- Use assessment tools and local knowledge
- Visit the site with the landowner/decision-maker(s)
- Listen
- Be honest and work to develop a trusting relationship
- It is OK to get help from others
- There are often other options/programs available
Thank You!

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