United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Ecological Services
Nebraska Field Office
203 West Second Street
Grand Island, Nebraska 68801

October 18, 2011

NEFO-2012-008

Jerry Kenny
Platte River Recovery Implementation Program
4111 4th Avenue, Suite 6
Kearney, NE 68847

RE: U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Leaman Tract Habitat Evaluation for the Platte River Recovery and Implementation Program

Dear Dr. Kenny:

This responds to your request for a habitat evaluation regarding tract 2011001(Leaman Tract). As you know, in December 2010, the Platte River Recovery and Implementation Program's (Program) Governance Committee (GC) authorized the Program's Executive Director's (ED) Office to negotiate acquisition of Tract 1001 (now 2011001). The motion approved by the GC stated "The GC authorizes the ED Office to negotiate acquisition of Tract 1001. Both parcels (west and east) of Tract 1001 will be credited toward the Program's First Increment land objective. The east parcel will be considered excess land and the ED Office is directed to pursue sale in whole or in part of that excess property within three years of the closing date of the original Program acquisition pending a habitat evaluation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the LAC."

After (GC) authorization in March of 2011 and successful negotiations, Tract 1001 was acquired. The following habitat evaluation is in response to the GC request that the USFWS perform a habitat evaluation on the east tract to facilitate decisions related to land management plans.

Tract 2011001 is comprised of two separate and distinct parcels of land split by the north/south Highway 11. The west parcel needs no further evaluation and should be credited as complex acres. This evaluation will focus on the parcel east of the highway. This tract consists of approximately 110 acres when the south boundary is delineated to the center of the North Channel of the Platte River. We have evaluated these acres for their relative potential to provide benefits to the target species and their ability to fit into the complex or non-complex habitat category.

Recently, the GC agreed to enter into a contract for sand and gravel mining on the east tract. As part of this mining operation, the Program and the contractor have agreed on a plan that is intended to provide "off-channel sand and water" habitat for least terns and piping plovers while allowing the contractor to extract the necessary material. A large bare sand peninsula surrounded by water will be created and will provide approximately 62 acres of habitat with the characteristics required for non-complex habitat as described within table 2 of the Land Plan (Program Document). After evaluating the current and projected habitat, we recommend that these 62 acres, as per the attached map be credited toward the programs first increment goals and categorized as non-complex habitat.

The remaining portion of the east parcel (approximately 48 acres) has limited value in adding to the non-complex "off-channel sand and water." The potential for non-complex wetland development is also limited and not warranted. The grassland portion is directly abutting I-80 and could be detrimental to whooping cranes or other migratory birds due to disturbance, and potential collisions with traffic. The remaining portions of this parcel are riparian forest or active river channel.

The river channel is a narrow segment of the North Channel (approx. 115 feet under normal flows) and is limited in value as least tern and piping plover habitat or whooping crane habitat. This portion of the tract would not meet any of the programs minimum habitat requirements or characteristics of complex habitat (Table 1, Land Plan). Due to its limited size, lack of beneficial habitat characteristics and location near disturbance (I-80, gas station, Highway 11) there is very little potential for habitat improvement or ability to supplement or buffer an existing complex. Therefore, we recommend disposing of these 48 acres and consider them as excess lands.

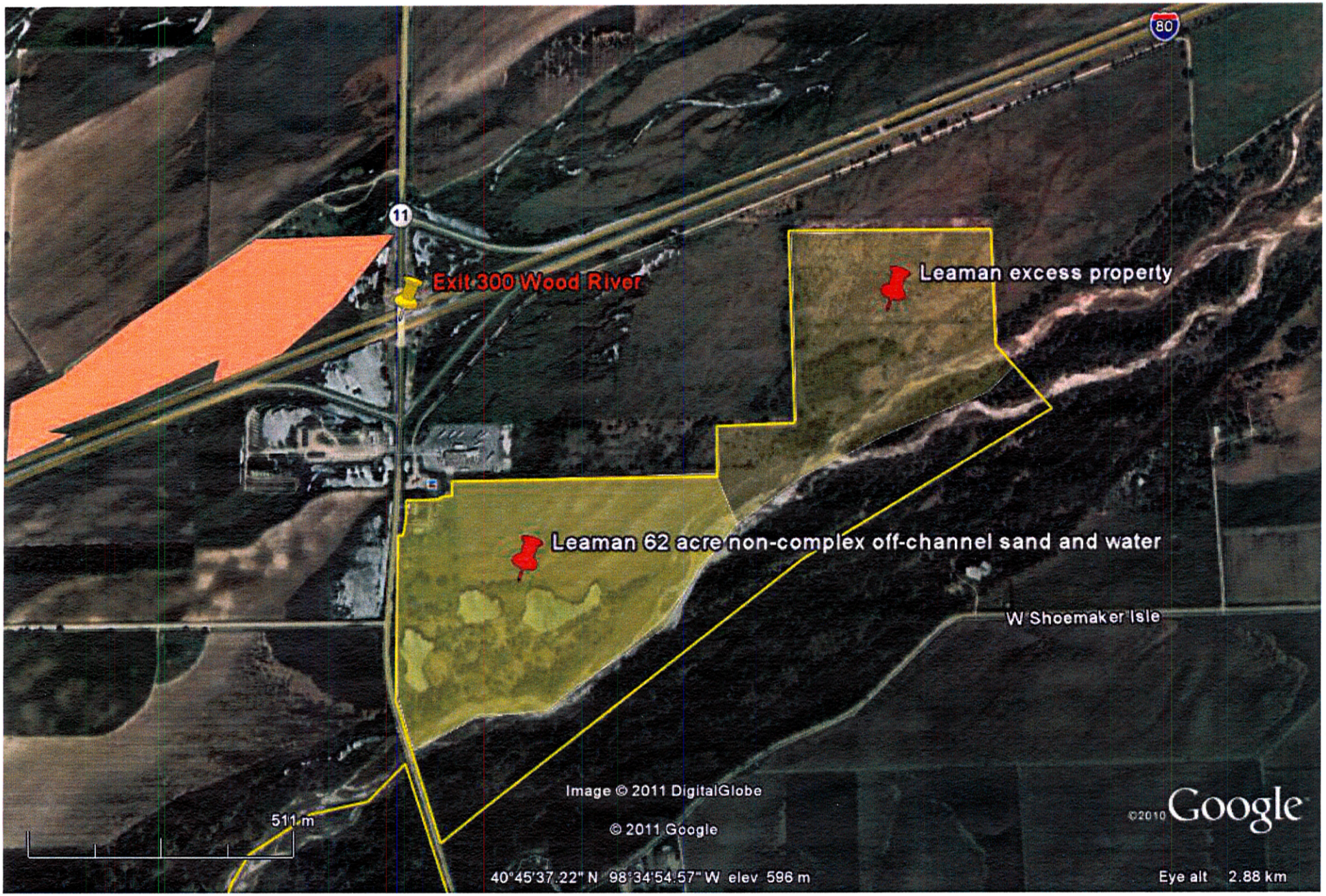
We appreciate the opportunity to evaluate and comment on this property. Should you have questions, please contact Mr. Matt Rabbe at matt_rabbe@fws.gov or (308)382-6468, extension 25.

Sincerely,

John Cochran

for Michael D. George
Nebraska Field Supervisor

Attachment


80
11
Exit 300 Wood River
Leaman excess property
Leaman 62 acre non-complex off-channel sand and water
W Shoemaker Isle
Image © 2011 DigitalGlobe
© 2011 Google
511 m
©2010 Google
40°45'37.22" N 98°34'54.57" W elev 596 m
Eye alt 2.88 km