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**PRRIP – ED OFFICE MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE  
**FROM:** BRUCE SACKETT, LAND SPECIALIST, EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS OFFICE  
**SUBJECT:** DELAY OF HARVESTING GRASSES ON 2012005  
**DATE:** JUNE 3, 2013  
**CC:**

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The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide information about a request by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine the cost of delaying hay harvesting on PRRIF land in Hall County to allow for migratory birds nesting in this field to complete their nesting cycle.

Tract 2012005, known as Martin Meadows, came to the Program with three years of a five year lease in place. Continuation of this lease was a critical point in successfully concluding the negotiations. The terms of the lease allow for the harvest of cool season grasses annually on 190 acres. No restrictions were in place concerning the time that harvest may occur. Program staff was asked by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to contact the lessee and ask what value would be required by the present lessee to delay harvesting until after July 15 annually to allow migratory grassland nesting birds more time to complete their nesting cycle.

Timing did not allow the harvest for 2013 to be delayed since notice of this action was not given prior to September of 2012 and Nebraska law states substantial changes in the terms of an agricultural contract must be done before September 1 of the prior year.

In discussions with the lessee they estimated that delay of harvest would most likely reduce the yield on the order of 10% annually. Based on their opinion of grass value and reduced yield, delaying harvest until after July 15 would result in a loss of \$12,000.00 per year or \$24,000.00 for the remaining two years (2014-2015) of the lease.

Program staff feels this is a reasonable estimate of the reduction in value for the harvested hay considering our knowledge of quality of hay from this tract and the current cost of forage in the market. Program staff believes that allowing present terms in the contract or adjusting the contract to delay the harvest until after July 15 will both accomplish the Program goal of keeping vegetation below a meter during spring and fall whooping crane migration. Delaying haying operations until after July 15 provides a better perception of Program agricultural operations with respect to migratory grassland birds.

The value to the Program of delaying haying is not addressed in this memo and is a judgment call for the Governance Committee. The cost to the Program of delaying haying is known and the specific action Program Staff is asking of the GC is to approve or reject paying \$12,000.00 per year, for a total of \$24,000.00 via amending the present lease to delay hay harvest at tract 2012005 annually until after July 15, for the next two years of this lease (2014 and 2015).