



TO: GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

FROM: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

SUBJECT: TRANSFER OF REMAINING NON-COMPLEX ACRES FROM PALUSTRINE WETLANDS TO OFF-CHANNEL SAND AND WATER

DATE: FEBRUARY 28, 2017

The Program Document makes provision for acquisition of up to 800 acres of off-channel (non-complex) species habitats during the First Increment.¹ Non-complex habitats were included in the Program to pursue and test the concept of using mechanical creation and maintenance of habitat to benefit the Program's target bird species. Per the Adaptive Management Plan, half of the non-complex lands (400 acres) were used for acquisition and restoration of off-channel tern and plover nesting habitats.² The remaining 400 acres were to be focused on acquisition and creation/restoration of palustrine wetland whooping crane roosting habitat.³

As of December 2016, the Program has acquired an interest in 391 acres of off-channel sand and water (OCSW) tern and plover habitat and 254 acres of palustrine wetland whooping crane habitat. This leaves an additional 155 acres of mostly palustrine wetland habitat yet to be acquired. The Executive Director's Office (EDO) has attempted to identify at least one additional palustrine wetland site for acquisition but the paucity of potentially restorable wetlands in the AHR has made this difficult. It is the EDO's assessment that it is infeasible to acquire and restore enough wetland sites to ensure most cranes would encounter palustrine wetlands in the AHR during migration. Accordingly, palustrine wetlands are not a feasible alternative to riverine roosting habitat.

In contrast, the Program has constructed and/or rehabilitated seven off-channel OCSW sites since 2007. Tern and plover use and reproductive success at those sites has generally been high. In 2015, the Program's Governance Committee entered a structured decision making (SDM) process to adjust management actions to meet least tern and piping plover management objectives. The revised management approach focuses on creation and maintenance an additional 60 acres off-channel sand and water nesting habitat (actual sand nesting area) along with maintenance of 10 acres of mechanically-created on-channel habitat.⁴

These issues were discussed by the Governance Committee (GC) at the September and December 2016 GC meetings. At the conclusion of the December meeting, the GC requested that the Land and Technical Advisory Committees (LAC and TAC) explore the idea of suspending efforts to acquire additional non-complex palustrine wetland habitat in favor of acquiring additional off-channel tern and plover nesting habitat. The LAC and TAC discussed this issue during their February meetings. Specifically, the committees explored the technical and good neighbor implications of policy options including:

¹ See Section D.1.a. of the Program Document and Section I.A. of the Adaptive Management Plan.

² See Section IV.B.2.a. of the Adaptive Management Plan.

³ See Section IV.B.2.c of the Adaptive Management Plan.

⁴ On-channel habitat is anticipated to provide limited benefits to terns and plovers while increasing suitability for whooping cranes and sediment supply.



- 1) Continuing pursuit of an additional 146 acres of palustrine wetland habitat
- 2) Abandoning pursuit of palustrine wetland habitat and use of remaining non-complex acres to make progress towards the development of the additional 60 acres of off-channel tern and plover nesting habitat.
- 3) Abandoning pursuit of palustrine wetland habitat and use of remaining non-complex acres to continue to pursue OCSW habitat acquisitions in addition to the 60 acres of off-channel tern and plover nesting habitat.

The TAC met on February 13th and passed the following motion:

The TAC recommends use of remaining, or a portion of remaining non-complex acres to make progress towards the development of the additional 60 acres of off-channel tern and plover nesting habitat.

The LAC met on February 14th and discussed the policy options as well as the TAC recommendation. The LAC passed a motion that differs slightly from the TAC:

The LAC recommends use of remaining, or a portion of remaining non-complex acres to make progress towards the development of the additional 60 acres of off-channel tern and plover nesting habitat but do not preclude the evaluation and acquisition of palustrine wetland habitat.

Both committees supported the concept of using the remaining non-complex acres to acquire additional off-channel tern and plover nesting habitat. The LAC, however, was concerned about eliminating the potential for future palustrine wetland acquisitions as there may be unique tracts and/or circumstances that warrant evaluation. This is reflected in their motion.