



TO: GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
FROM: EXCESS LANDS SUBCOMMITTEE
SUBJECT: EXCESS PARCEL RECOMMENDATIONS
DATE: 5/10/2017

I. OVERVIEW

At their March 2017 meeting, the Governance Committee (GC) requested that the Excess Lands Subcommittee expeditiously evaluate the Program's existing habitat lands to identify parcels that could potentially be sold to generate revenue for future high-priority habitat land acquisitions. Subcommittee members include Brock Merrill (Bureau of Reclamation), Matt Rabbe (United States Fish and Wildlife Service), Suzanne Sellers (State of Colorado), Harry LaBonde (State of Wyoming), Mark Czaplewski (Downstream Water Users) and John Shadle (Downstream Water Users). The subcommittee has completed its work and recommends that the Governance Committee consider disposal of four parcels of land (Table 1).

Table 1. Parcels recommended for sale.

Property Name	Tract Number	Acres	Rationale
Follmer Pit	2011002	78	There has been no tern and plover use at this site and habitat development has been slow.
Johns Tract South Grassland	2012002	181	The Johns south grassland is more than ½ mile from the channel and visually screened by a ridge. Sale would not affect whooping crane habitat suitability on the remainder of the tract.
Binfield Tract North Grassland	2010004	461	The Binfield north grassland is more than ½ mile from the main channel and has little buffer value. Sale would not affect whooping crane habitat suitability on the remainder of the tract.
East ½ Mile of Leaman West	2011001	77	Excess the east ½ mile of the tract. This portion of the property has reduced whooping crane habitat value due to bridge disturbance.

The subcommittee recommendations come with additional caveats¹ for several of the properties (see Section IV) and under the overarching principle that these parcels should only be sold if revenue (on a per acre basis) is similar to or exceeds the original purchase price. It is anticipated that sale of these parcels could generate on the order of \$1.5 - \$2.0 million for acquisition of other high-priority habitat lands.

¹ One important consideration for Tract 2011002 and 2010004 recommendations was their relationship to a potential high-value land transaction that the Program is currently considering.



II. BACKGROUND AND RANKING PROCEDURE

The Excess Lands Subcommittee met three times to discuss a prioritization approach, identify potential excess parcels for evaluation, and finally to discuss rankings and develop recommendations to the Governance Committee. At the first meeting, the subcommittee identified metrics that were potentially important for ranking of excess parcels. Since future tern and plover actions were addressed through the 2016 structured decision-making process, this effort focused on complex habitat managed to benefit whooping cranes. Metrics included:

- General
 - Ownership type (only fee-title acquisitions were considered)
 - Encumbrances (easements, agreements, etc.)
 - Location within the Associated Habitat Reach (bridge segment)
 - Proximity to and quantity of other conservation lands in the area
 - Land use and associated value
 - Other priority Program activities/uses for the property
- Whooping Crane Habitat
 - Linear miles of channel
 - Proximity to bridges (disturbance)
 - Distance from channel (buffer value)
 - Probability of whooping crane flyovers (location within the migration corridor)
 - Whooping crane use (number of documented use locations)

The Executive Director's Office (EDO) developed a web-based mapping application that allowed subcommittee members to visualize existing Program properties in relation to the metrics described above (<http://arcg.is/1Cvqml>). The subcommittee then met and discussed every Program-owned tract that could potentially be excessed. Subcommittee members identified ten parcels for further evaluation (Table 2). In some cases, the subcommittee identified portions of tracts that appeared to have diminished habitat value. In others, entire Program tracts were identified for evaluation.

Table 2. Parcels evaluated as potential sale.

Property Name	Tract Number	Acres
Wyoming Tract South Grassland	2008001	110
Fox Tract	2009001	182
Hostetler Tract	2009004	244
Stall Tract	2009006	317
Cook Tract	2009007	363
Binfield Tract North Grassland	2010004	461
Leaman West Tract	2011001	174
Follmer Pit	2011002	76
Johns Tract South Grassland	2012002	180
Blessing North Lots	2012003	12



III. PRELIMINARY RANKINGS

The EDO calculated general and habitat metric values for each parcel and provided them to the subcommittee members. Each member was then asked to identify which parcels they wished to keep or sell and then prioritize sell parcels through a simple weighting process (Table 3). Subcommittee member results were then aggregated and the subcommittee met a final time to discuss rankings and attempt to come to a consensus on which properties should be sold. The web-based mapping application can be used to explore each of the parcels evaluated by the subcommittee (<http://arcg.is/1Cvqml>).

Table 3. Preliminary subcommittee parcel rankings.

Property Name	Tract Number	Acres	Sell (% of Committee Members)	Sell Priority Weight
Johns Tract South	2012002	180	100%	86
Follmer Pit	2011002	76	83%	113
Blessing North Lots	2012003	12	83%	165
Binfield Tract North	2010004	461	67%	73
Leaman West	2011001	174	67%	65
Wyoming Tract South Grassland	2008001	110	33%	15
Fox Tract	2009001	182	33%	30
Cook Tract	2009007	363	33%	44
Hostetler Tract	2009004	244	17%	5
Stall Tract	2009006	317	17%	4

IV. FINAL RANKINGS

During the final subcommittee meeting, members discussed the preliminary rankings for each parcel and attempted to come to a consensus decision for each one. At the conclusion of the meeting, the subcommittee agreed to recommend disposal of the four parcels identified in Table 1 assuming certain conditions are met. Major decisions during the ranking meeting included:

- 1) Tracts with less than 67% of subcommittee members supporting sale were not given further consideration with the exception of the Cook Tract. One member recommended splitting of that tract and excessing of the cropland portion. The rest of the members were not in favor as the cropland is currently a backup sediment augmentation source material location.
- 2) Blessing north lots were removed from consideration despite the high sell priority weight due to relatively low income potential in relation to the real and/or perceived potential for whooping crane disturbance.
- 3) The subcommittee decided to recommend excessing only the east ½ mile of the Leaman West tract. The entire tract was originally evaluated as excess.

The remainder of this memorandum presents an overview of subcommittee discussion and excess recommendation caveats expressed by members during the subcommittee ranking meeting.

**Wyoming Tract South Grassland, Fox Tract, Hostetler Tract and Stall Tract**

- There was low agreement to sell these parcels with only one member of the subcommittee recommending for disposal.
- The subcommittee agreed that they should be removed from consideration and they were not discussed further.

Cook Tract

- There was low agreement to sell this parcel with only one member recommending for disposal.
- One member wanted the parcel to be split and the cropland south the channel excessed. Other committee members were not inclined to do so as this is a potential future sediment augmentation source material location.
- Due to continued low subcommittee agreement, the committee declined to recommend disposal.

Leaman West Tract

- A majority of subcommittee members originally agreed that this parcel should be excessed with some members recommending against because it provides channel habitat.
- Subcommittee members acknowledged that the quality of channel habitat on the east ½ mile of the tract is degraded due to its proximity to the Wood River bridge.
- Subcommittee members discussed the potential to excess only the east ½ mile of the parcel, maintain an access route to the west portion of the tract, and also maintain the ability to manage the active channel in the east portion of the tract. Some members recommended that this be accomplished by retaining ownership of the channel portion of the ½ east mile of the parcel.
- Subcommittee members unanimously agreed to recommend disposal of the east ½ mile of the tract while retaining an access easement and channel ownership.

Binfield North Grassland

- A majority of subcommittee members originally agreed that this parcel should be excessed with some members recommending against because of the low per-acre value of the acres that would be excessed.
- The EDO discussed the existing first right of refusal associated with this tract and the potential for it to become part of a land trade for another high priority acquisition.
- Subcommittee members unanimously agreed for disposal of this parcel as part of a potential trade for another high priority tract. However, if that does not occur, the committee recommends further evaluation of non-target species habitat value in relation to the revenue that may be generated through a sale.



Follmer Pit

- This is the only non-complex property that the subcommittee included in the ranking process. It was included due to the slow pace of site development and lack of target species use.
- A majority of committee members originally agreed that this parcel should be excessed with some members recommending against because of an aversion to disposal of any of the Program's limited non-complex acres.
- The EDO discussed the potential to develop a larger, better-situated non-complex nesting complex on lands associated with a potential high-priority acquisition.
- The EDO also discussed the potential for low sale revenue for the tract given that is being actively mined and will be sold with an existing 25-year mining agreement.
- Subcommittee members unanimously agreed for disposal of this parcel in favor of using sale funds to acquire lands that could be used to develop higher quality nesting habitat in the future. However, members stressed that the tract should not be sold if sale price is significantly lower than the original purchase price.

Johns South Grassland

- Subcommittee members originally unanimously agreed that this parcel should be excessed.
- Subcommittee members discussed potential sale encumbrances including the need for a no-build easement. The EDO agreed to evaluate the potential to allow for building on at least a portion of the parcel if it would not pose a whooping crane disturbance risk. This would likely increase sale price.
- The EDO indicated that there appear to be previously-unidentified certified irrigated acres on the parcel that would need to be addressed prior to disposal of the property.
- Subcommittee members unanimously agreed for disposal of this parcel as the highest sale priority.

Blessing North Lots

- Most subcommittee members originally agreed that this parcel should be excessed with one member objecting to sale due to potential whooping crane habitat/disturbance issues.
- Subcommittee members discussed potential sale revenue (less than \$100,000) in relation to the potential for real or perceived whooping crane habitat impacts and unanimously agreed against disposal of the parcel.