

Nebraska Natural Legacy Project

What is a wildlife action plan?

Congress asked each state to develop a wildlife action plan, known technically as a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy. These proactive plans examine the health of wildlife and prescribe actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and more costly to protect.

Nebraska snapshot

Geography: Nebraska is predominantly a prairie state comprised of tallgrass, mixed grass and shortgrass prairie. Approximately 40 percent of the state is in grasslands, about half of which occur in the Sandhills region, the largest grass-stabilized dune system in the western hemisphere. Roughly 4 percent of the state is comprised of wetlands and about 2 percent is forested, mostly along major river courses and in the northwestern region of the state. Nebraska contains more than 12,000 miles of rivers and streams and two thirds of Nebraska lies over the Ogallala Aquifer, one of the largest sources of groundwater in the world.

Landscape: Of Nebraska's 49 million acres, more than 97 percent are privately owned, mostly in family farms and ranches. Nebraska contains approximately 1.1 million acres of federal land and 247,000 acres of state-owned land, ranking the state 48th in the amount of federal and state lands. Approximately 1.1 million acres of private land are enrolled in the USDA Conservation Reserve Program.

Wildlife: Nebraska supports one of the largest wildlife migration spectacles in the nation, as more than 500,000 sandhill cranes and 10 million waterfowl visit the state each spring. The diminutive



Swift fox/Nebraska

swift fox is a resident of the shortgrass prairie in western Nebraska. The state and federally endangered American burying beetle appears to be faring better in Nebraska than it is over most of its range.

The northern red-belly dace is found in high quality prairie streams in grass-dominated landscapes. The state and federally endangered salt creek tiger beetle is found only in Nebraska's Lancaster County.

Nebraska's planning approach

The Natural Legacy Project took a habitat-based approach to conservation, identifying 40 biologically unique landscapes to help prioritize where conservation work can best be directed. These landscapes contain representative samples of each of the state's natural communities and host the greatest known assemblage of biological diversity, including many populations of at-risk species. The Natu-

"Nebraska is comprised of varied landscapes and overlapping ecosystems. It plays host to a diverse collection of wildlife species, many of which are found here on the outer reaches of their ranges. Because Nebraska is 97 percent privately owned, efforts to conserve biodiversity are dependent on collaboration with private landowners. The strength of Nebraska's Natural Legacy Project is that it was developed through a partnering effort with our stakeholders – ranchers, farmers, conservation organizations, governmental entities, and the citizens of our state – with an eye on preserving our natural treasures for future generations."

*- Rex Amack, Director,
Nebraska Game and Parks
Commission*

ral Legacy Partnership Team, made up of twenty of the state’s major conservation and agricultural partners, was assembled at the outset to develop a public input process and guiding principles, as well as to develop a shared responsibility for conserving biodiversity. Twenty public meetings were held across the state to gather input from private landowners. In addition, a workshop of conservation practitioners was held to solicit advice from natural resource professionals, and a series of small workshops was used to gather input from species experts. Since most of the state is under private own-

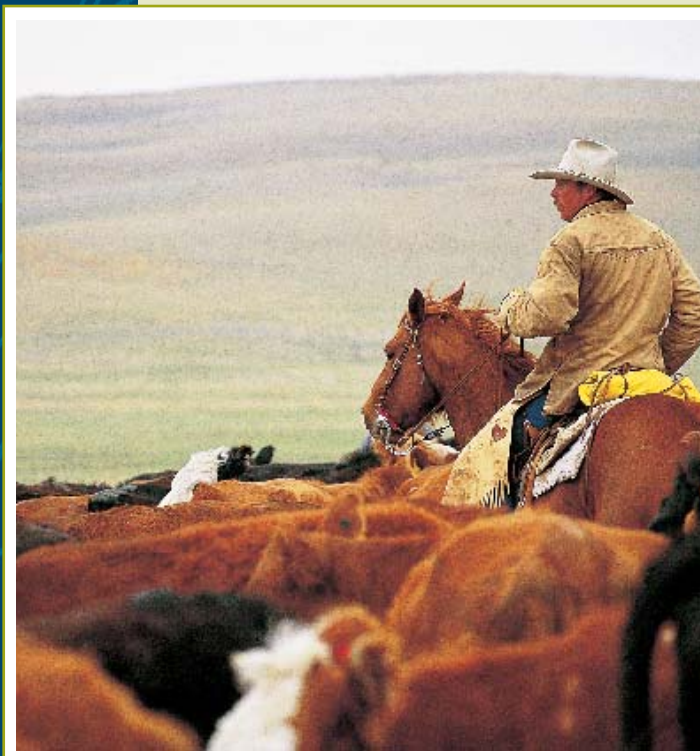
ership, it was agreed that conservation actions would focus on working lands, be voluntary and incentive-based, and be implemented using a local community-based approach.

Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Nebraska

Nebraska’s wildlife action plan identifies conservation barriers and priority stress factors at statewide, eco-region, and landscape levels. In total, several hundred actions are proposed based on input from natural resource professionals and private citizens.

Key conservation barriers and stresses include:

- Insufficient communication and collaboration between conservation organizations and private landowners
- Insufficient environmental education
- Insufficient and ineffective conservation programs and incentives
- Improper habitat management (e.g. fire suppression, hydrologic modification, invasive species)
- Inefficient use of resources
- Incomplete network of public and private conservation lands
- Inadequate wildlife-viewing opportunities.



Sandhills rancher/Nebraska

Wildlife	Total number of species	Species of Conservation Concern	Threatened/endangered listed species
Mammals	95	33	5
Birds	400	101	6
Reptiles & Amphibians	60	25	1
Fish	80	25	7
Insects	25,000+	28	2
Mollusks	32	13	1
Plants	1,470	300+	7

Wildlife highlights

Key Habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
Tallgrass Prairie	Henslow's sparrow, Plains Pocket mouse Massasauga (snake)	Reduction of native plant diversity due to grazing and lack of fire	Voluntary installation of planned grazing systems and controlled burning
Mixedgrass Prairie	Long-billed curlew, Whooping crane, Regal Fritillary	Loss of native plant diversity to broadcast herbicide spraying	Integrated pest management
Shortgrass Prairie	Burrowing owl, Brewer's sparrow, Swift Fox	Invasion by exotic grasses (e.g. cheatgrass)	Implement ecologically sensitive grazing practices on federal lands
Rainwater Basin Wetlands	Buff-breasted Sandpiper, whooping crane, King rail	Sedimentation of wetlands	Install grassland buffers around wetlands
Pine Ridge Forest	Lewis' woodpecker, Townsend's Big-eared bat, tawny crescent (butterfly)	Fire suppression resulting in increased stand density	Use of fire and mechanical clearing to thin ponderosa pine stands
Missouri River	Pallid surgeon, Piping plover, Higgins eye (mussel)	Channel cutting due to lack of sediment	Restore river meandering where possible.

Recommended actions to conserve Nebraska's wildlife

Working together for Nebraska's wildlife

Through public meetings, expert workshops, and outreach activities an effort was made to reach the greatest possible number of interested professionals and citizens. More than 500 Nebraskans directly contributed to the development of the plan. The Natural Legacy Partnership Team was one of seven teams that helped guide the planning process. Partnership Team members included leaders from Nebraska's conservation and agricultural community. Organizations included on the Partnership Team were: *Audubon Nebraska* • *Ducks Unlimited Inc.* • *The*

Grassland Foundation • *Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA)* • *Nebraska Alliance for Conservation and Environment Education* • *Nebraska Association of Resource Districts* • *Nebraska Cattlemen, Inc.* • *Nebraska Department of Agriculture* • *Nebraska Farm Bureau* • *Nebraska Farmers Union* • *Nebraska Forest Service* • *Nebraska Game and Parks Commission* • *Nebraska Partnership for All-Bird Conservation* • *Nebraska Wildlife Federation* • *Pheasants Forever, Inc.* • *Ponca Tribe of Nebraska* • *Rainwater Basin Joint Venture* • *The Nature Conservancy* • *US Fish and Wildlife Service* • *US Forest Service*

"In today's ever changing society, it's more important than ever that we have a plan for the future. Although we are headed towards uncharted waters, we now have a compass and a roadmap that better prepares us for the challenges ahead. The future of Nebraska's natural legacy looks bright."

- Bill Grewcock, Chairman, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission



Fishing/Nebraska

“The Natural Legacy Project is a comprehensive wildlife strategy that addresses the needs of the unique diversity of life and landscapes in Nebraska. Based on the most current information available, it reflects the best opportunities for wildlife conservation, as identified by a diverse group of Nebraskans from the private, public and non-profit sectors. It is a valuable tool for those wishing to protect and enhance our natural heritage for current and future generations.”

- Vince Shay, Director, Nebraska Chapter of The Nature Conservancy

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