



THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN NEBRASKA

Environmental Threats

There are a number of key ecological threats to Nebraska's natural habitats, plants and animals. These represent The Nature Conservancy's primary challenges as we focus on conservation and restoration work across the state. Following are explanations and examples of each threat

1) Fragmentation of remaining high quality/extensive native habitats. This threat is most severe in and along waterway corridors. Fragmentation results primarily from land subdivision and development that leads to changes in ground cover and the encroachment of trees and shrubs.

2) Altered hydrological practices. This threat is most severe when recurring drought and high demand for water result in interrupted

stream flows. In western Nebraska's Sandhills, groundwater pumping combined with out-of-basin transfers is an increasing threat to river and wetland habitats. Along the Platte River, the withdrawal of water for irrigation and hydropower threatens the river system, its plant communities and wildlife, especially migratory waterbirds.

3) Grazing and altered fire practices. In the Great Plains, these two ecological processes are interactive and dynamic in healthy habitats. This is rarely the case under current land management practices. For example, in eastern Nebraska's Loess Hills, repeated intense grazing is common. The short vegetation that is left at the end of the grazing season is incapable of carrying fires. Without fire, the results are often less diverse plant communities and invasive species.

4) Incompatible development in river and wetland areas and gravel extraction associated with river and wetland habitats. These threats include mining and gravel extraction, especially when followed by recreational or residential development. The increase in recreational development along the Platte River has fragmented the habitat along the river, threatening roosting areas for sandhill

cranes and whooping cranes. It also raises land prices on riverfront property, making it difficult for local farmers and conservation groups to compete with recreational buyers.

5) Exotic and invasive species. This threat is in large part due to the combination of many stresses on native habitats. As native habitats are fragmented and converted, exotic and invasive species have opportunities to become established and spread within open niches. Canada thistle, a noxious weed, has been steadily moving east through the state into both grasslands and woodlands. Difficult to kill even with herbicides, Canada thistle makes invaded sites inhospitable for both wildlife and cattle and spreads underground as well as by seed.



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