



THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN NEBRASKA

Milestones



Cherry Ranch (© Chris Helzer)

1946 A small group of scientists forms the Ecologists Union, later to become The Nature Conservancy, resolving to take “direct action” to save threatened natural areas.

1951 The Nature Conservancy is incorporated as a non-profit organization in the District of Columbia.

1955 Pioneering a key protection tool, the Conservancy makes its first land acquisition with a 60-acre purchase along the Mianus River Gorge on the New York/Connecticut border.

1961 The Conservancy embarks on its first partnership with a public agency, the Bureau of Land

Management, to help preserve an important old-growth forest in California.

1970 The Conservancy creates a biological inventory of the United States, adding scientific rigor to land acquisition choices. This leads to the National Heritage Network, which becomes the national standard for information about the existence and location of natural communities.

1971 The Conservancy purchases the 320-acre Pawnee Preserve in Pawnee County, Nebraska. The land was later transferred to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and is now part of the Pawnee State Wildlife Refuge.

- 1974** The Conservancy purchases the 2,100-acre Mormon Island Roost Site on the Central Platte River in Nebraska. Mormon Island is still the largest contiguous tract of wet meadow along the Platte River.
- 1980** The Conservancy launches its International Conservation Program to identify conservation organizations and natural areas in Latin America that need technical and financial assistance. In north central Nebraska, the Conservancy acquires the Niobrara Valley Preserve. At 56,000 acres, it is one of the Conservancy's largest and protects 26 miles along the central section of the Niobrara River.
- 1985** The first bison herd is established to help manage 20,000 acres of grasslands in the Niobrara Valley Preserve. This is one of the largest efforts in the country to use bison to foster the biological diversity of Great Plains grasslands.
- 1988** The Nebraska Chapter is chartered and the chapter's office is established in Omaha.
- 1991** The Conservancy launches its multinational Last Great Places initiative, a \$300 million effort to protect large-scale ecosystems by making people part of the solution.
- 1993** The Nebraska Chapter helps spearhead creation of the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund, which provides grants needed to preserve critical habitat areas, protect water supplies and establish recycling programs through a unique combination of lottery proceeds and private donations. The chapter also acquires 300 acres along the Missouri River at Langdon Bend in Nemaha County.
- 1994** The Nebraska Chapter begins working with ConAgra Foods on sustainable agriculture projects.
- 1995** The Nebraska Chapter acquires the 3,827-acres Junbo Valley Fen property in Cherry County. Working with the Sandhills Task Force, the fen was restored and returned to use as a private ranch with a conservation easement. Proceeds from the resale were used to establish the Sandhills Conservation Fund.
- 1999** Worldwide Conservancy membership surpasses 1 million. The Nebraska Chapter acquires a 9,920-acre conservation easement – the first on a Sandhills stream – along a five-mile stretch of Birdwood Creek, a tributary to the North Platte River. The chapter also acquires the 1,961-acre Kelly Ranch, which contains woodlands and wet meadows along a stretch of the North Platte River that provides critical refuge for more than 230 migratory bird species.
- 2000** The Nebraska Chapter completes the 333-acre Wood River Roost acquisition along the Platte River, reunifying more than 1,200 acres of wetlands and prairie. This is a top U.S. birding location, and the acquisition helps safeguard the world's most important migratory habitat for sandhill cranes and seven endangered or threatened species.
- 2001** The Nebraska Chapter surpasses \$1 million in property taxes paid and 100,000 acres protected. A memorandum of understanding is signed with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to launch the Platte River Private Lands Partnership.
- 2002** A fourth-generation ranching family in the Niobrara River Valley places a conservation easement on 3,182 acres, so that a total of 11.5 miles is protected along the north side of the river. A Nebraska Chapter gift to Brazil helps establish a partnership between the Great Plains Division and the Eastern South America Division, which share similar landscapes and conservation challenges. The partnership qualifies for matching funds for conservation in Nebraska.
- 2003** The Nebraska Chapter completes its five-year, \$10.6 million capital campaign, Saving the Last Great Places of Nebraska, protecting 28,000 acres at 12 sites across the state.

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