

# THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN NEBRASKA

*Where We Work: Missouri River*



Missouri River (© Nebraska Game and Parks Commission)

Two hundred years ago, when the Lewis and Clark Expedition headed up the Missouri River to explore unknown territory into one of North America's most diverse and dynamic ecosystems – an ever-changing landscape of meandering channels, chutes, sloughs, islands, sandbars and backwater wetlands and woodlands. It has been greatly altered since then.

One-sixth of the nation's water eventually finds its way to the Missouri River, which flows 2,341 miles from its Montana headwaters to meet the Mississippi River at St. Louis. Today, the river plays an important role in the Great Plains economy. In Nebraska, it is estimat-

ed to generate more than \$360 million in economic benefits, with demand for recreational land use near the river expected to triple within the next few years.

All of the 735 miles below Sioux City, Iowa have been engineered for barge traffic, eliminating most sandbars and vegetation that wildlife need to feed, reproduce and rest. Habitat loss and altered flows have contributed to the decline of paddlefish, sturgeon, flathead catfish and other species. Bald eagles lack nesting trees and continue to decline along the Missouri, while populations increase in other areas.

## Missouri River Program

The Conservancy's new Missouri River Program is creating partnerships among public and private organizations that have united to protect and restore some of the landscapes that Lewis and Clark encountered in 1804. The program's goal is to catalyze community-based conservation efforts. Four Conservancy states – Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri and Kansas – lie along the channelized stretch of the river from Yankton, S.D. to St. Louis. The program's manager coordinates the four states' programs and partnerships. The Conservancy and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have formed a new Missouri River partnership that will identify opportunities to cooperate on efforts that meet the goals of both organizations, include developing and managing water resources to meet human needs, protecting priority species and restoring natural habitat.

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