



THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN NEBRASKA

Where We Work: Niobrara River

The Niobrara River is the largest undammed river in the Great Plains. It originates in far eastern Wyoming and snakes across northern Nebraska to the town of Niobrara, where it empties into the Missouri River above Yankton, S.D. The river's swift, cold, spring-fed currents churn below dramatic bluffs and flow over the state's tallest waterfall, Smith Falls, and the grass-covered Sandhills roll away to the south. In 1991, a 76-mile stretch of the Middle Niobrara – a popular canoeing destination – was designated a National Scenic River. The area is a meeting ground for northern, eastern and western forest types, three types of grasslands and many plant and animal species, such as bald eagles, mule deers and whooping cranes.

Niobrara Valley Preserve

The nearly 58,000-acre Niobrara Valley Preserve, located northwest of Ainsworth in north central Nebraska, is one of The Nature Conservancy's largest U.S. preserves. It encompasses pine-clad canyons and extensive grasslands to the south of the Niobrara and protects a 26-mile stretch of the river. The Conservancy also has conservation easements on more than 6,000 acres along an 11.5-mile stretch along the north side of the river. The Nebraska Natural Heritage Program identified this area as the biological crossroads of the Great Plains. The Conservancy's goal is to maintain the region's biological diversity by adapting land management practices to local environmental conditions, with help from public and private partners.

for the Conservancy's Nebraska chapter, has developed the Niobrara Valley Preserve bison herd along with herds at Conservancy preserves in Oklahoma, Kansas, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Nearly 600 plant species have been identified at the preserve, including numerous grasses: big bluestem, little bluestem, buffalo grass, indian grass, junegrass, needle-and-thread grass, sand bluestem and sand lovegrass. The wide range of tree species includes ponderosa pine, paper birch, eastern cottonwood, bur oak and silver maple. Animals and birds found in the preserve include mule deer, bald eagles, the Great Plains toad, ornate box turtle, many-lined skink, great blue heron, horned lark, belted kingfisher, ovenbird, sandhill crane and whip-poor-will.



The preserve, acquired by the Conservancy in 1980, is a model for grassland management using bison, cattle and fire. Thousand of cattle and several hundred bison are part of a grazing management program that creates conditions similar to settlement of the area in the 1800s. Other conservation techniques include prescribed burning and noxious weed control. Allen Steuter, a rancher who is director of conservation programs

Contact information

The Nature Conservancy
in Nebraska
1019 Leavenworth Street, Suite 100
Omaha, NE 68102

tel (402) 342-0283
fax (402) 342-0474
email: nebraska@tnc.org

nature.org/nebraska