



NEBRASKA ANNUAL REPORT

2024 - 2025

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John Cougher, State Director

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Program Manager

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& Events Specialist

Ashleigh Dean, Executive Coordinator
& Trustee Liaison

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Rachel Hampton, Senior Attorney*

Rich Johnson, Paralegal*

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Sara McClure, Director of Development

Daisy Mora, Operations Manager

Laura Norian, Grants Specialist*

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Katie Torpy, Director of External Affairs
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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,



There's a challenging juxtaposition in conservation: everything is urgent, and everything takes time.

The Nature Conservancy's 2030 Goals are driven by urgency. We MUST tackle climate change and address the biodiversity crisis in our world. This is a deciding decade for nature. We all feel that there's absolutely no time to lose.

Yet, most of our work takes time. It is oft-repeated wisdom around here that conservation moves at the speed of trust.

For example, in this last year we have celebrated:

- the return of 270 bison in collaboration with the InterTribal Buffalo Council and the Tanka Fund. This brings the total number to 1,106 animals transferred from the Niobrara Valley Preserve to Indigenous hands. The success of these partnerships stems from a foundation of mutual trust.
- the final enrollment class of the Nebraska Soil Carbon Project, which brings our program total to 100 farmers on 35,000 acres. We got there with the support of the Central Platte and Upper Big Blue Natural Resources Districts, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Cargill, McDonalds and Target. Farmers enrolled in cost-share programs for adoption of soil health practices including adoption of cover crops, reduction of tillage, and/or diversifying crop rotation. Again, trust and time were the key ingredients for bringing so many stakeholders and farmers to the same kitchen tables.
- the creation of 63 ranch plans impacting 127,620 acres in the eastern Sandhills. We talked to ranch families about how to 'keep grass in grass' rather than converting prairie to cropland, protecting habitat, preserving soil carbon, and slowing further chemical application. We worked with 17 families on prescribed fire. These are deeply personal decisions, and we don't take that trust lightly.

Not one of those projects was quick or easy, but they mattered — not just in Nebraska, but as pieces of a network of connected contributions of not only local partners but TNC colleagues and partners worldwide.

This is not just about our work with landowners. We know, too, that urgency is felt by our field staff, as they work relentlessly to stay ahead of invasive species and deploy fire and grazing techniques at the Niobrara Valley Preserve and Platte River Prairies. These special places are havens for wildlife and for people because they have committed their careers to them.

I do not pretend that The Nature Conservancy has discovered the perfect way to balance urgent needs with deliberate work. I do know one thing: loyal and generous members like you make it possible for us to address the most pressing challenges with patient, intentional progress.

Please enjoy the stories in this annual report, and know that your support is working in fast, slow, and thoughtful ways in our beautiful state.

Warm regards,



John Cougher

NEW FACES OF CONSERVATION

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY CELEBRATES THE ELECTION OF NEW 2025 TRUSTEES



Ennis Anderson IV, Omaha, is the CEO of Lauritzen's Garden in Omaha, a 100-acre urban oasis garden. He came to Lauritzen from the Fort Worth Botanic Garden, where he served as Senior Vice President of Operations & Guest Services of the newly merged Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT) and the Fort

Worth Botanic Garden. Before the transition, he was Chief Financial Officer for the Fort Worth Botanic Garden.

Prior to that, Ennis held several senior-level management positions within hotel management in his 15-year tenure, including General Manager, Director of Operations, Director of Guest Services, and Director of Food and Beverage. During those fifteen years, he oversaw budgets of up to \$44 million, managed renovation of over \$10 million, and opened several hotels from the ground up.

Ennis was awarded a White House Communications Agency Certificate of Appreciation for his coordination and logistical planning of several presidential visits.

He is serving on the American Public Garden Associations Executive Board as the Vice President (formerly the treasurer), and has served on the City of Fort Worth's Diversity and Inclusion Board. Ennis earned a Bachelor of Arts in History from Baylor University. He enjoys watching all sports and spending time with his wife and three daughters.



Julie Liddy, Valentine, was raised on the family ranch, which has been passed down from generation to generation since 1874. She has been involved in all aspects of its operation.

Julie graduated from Chadron State College with a Range Management degree with three livestock options and minor in Ag Business. After college, she worked for 10 years at First National Bank (which became Security 1st Bank) in Ag Loans.

Once back to her stomping grounds of Valentine, Julie joined many activities and ran numerous committees, from 4-H Council, Relay for Life, and the local theater group where she met her husband, Jim. They have very active 12-year-old boys in the sixth grade. Brantley and Ryker spend the summer chasing cattle, fencing, operating hay equipment and working at 4-H concession stands.

When the twins were born Julie went from the banking world to the childcare world, eventually with a full-time employee, a half-time employee, and herself with a roster of 20 kids that

would flow in and out of the daycare in a day. Julie still provides after-school care for the children of the community.

When Arabia Ranch lost its manager, Jim stepped into the role. During this time, Julie took on the record keeping, feed ration formulas and grain orders, employee issues, work with the take-in cattle owners, and among other things, figured out a current cost per cow for the ranch and worked with all the lease contracts.

Julie is looking forward to this new adventure with The Nature Conservancy. "With my various interests and experience, I believe that I can provide a general ranch perspective," she said.



Rachel Lookadoo, JD, Omaha, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Environmental, Agricultural, and Occupational Health at the College of Public Health at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. She serves as the Director of Public

Health Policy for the Water, Climate, and Health program at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Rachel's background is as an attorney, and her research focuses on the various legal and regulatory issues that can arise in emergency preparedness and response. In addition to general legal preparedness, she specializes in crisis standards of care, healthcare surge events, isolation/quarantine law, infectious disease response, and public health impacts of climate change and extreme climate events.

One of the primary aims of Rachel's work is to translate preparedness and climate policy and research findings into practical tools and education for healthcare workers, public health practitioners, and the broader community. One of her proudest professional accomplishments was co-authoring the first comprehensive drought and health assessment in the United States, along with corresponding messaging guidelines for frontline healthcare workers to use with patients in drought-stricken communities.

Rachel received her Juris Doctor degree from American University Washington College of Law and her bachelor's degree from Baylor University.

Growing up in entirely urban and suburban environments, Rachel has long appreciated and valued the beauty and calm of fresh air and open, natural spaces. She was drawn to serve on the board of TNC because its mission is well-aligned with her own beliefs about the importance of clean water and protected land, and she appreciates the emphasis on scientifically backed conservation work.

FIVE QUESTIONS WITH KATIE TORPY

How do you describe your role at TNC?

I'm on point for helping communicate our conservation priorities and objectives to policy makers at the state and federal levels. As a science organization, we often have solutions to bring to bear – either through testing hypotheses on our own preserves or by co-creating strategies with input from the farmers and ranchers with whom we often collaborate.

When does TNC get involved in a policy issue?

Generally, this is a high bar. Our engagement is triggered when it is both germane to our mission and our voice is uniquely additive to the deliberation. Our approach to policy is nonpartisan, grounded in science, and rooted in the perspective that nature unites us. Four out of five Nebraskans think more needs to be done to protect our lands and waters—this holds true across political parties.



Brigadier General Bob Barnes, TNC U.S. Government Relations Volunteer, TNC Caribbean Trustee and Nebraska resident Dean Hollis, Katie Torpy, Senator Deb Fischer, TNC Trustee Mike Gloor, and State Director John Cougher.



Congressman Don Bacon and Katie Torpy.

Writer Jill Wells sat down with Katie, TNC Nebraska's Director of External Affairs and Climate Policy to talk about her work in Nebraska and beyond.



TNC Division Director Ben Postlewaith, State Director John Cougher, Katie Torpy, Congressman Don Bacon, TNC Caribbean Trustee and Nebraska resident Dean Hollis, Nebraska Trustee Mike Gloor.

Tell us about a recent issue you've advocated for in the state legislature.

Last session, we helped successfully defend the Nebraska Environmental Trust from structural changes that would have halved its operating budget; however, this effort will continue to need public engagement and support. The Trust is funded by Nebraska Lottery proceeds. In spite of this being a constitutionally mandated competitive grant agency, it continues to be targeted as a means through which to backfill the everyday responsibilities of state agencies.

What's a federal issue that you'd consider a win this year?

Nebraska played a role in helping get the U.S. Foundation for International Conservation Act enacted into law. This legislation establishes a groundbreaking fund to support local communities and Indigenous Peoples in managing protected and conserved areas. FY26 Appropriations permitting, the fund will leverage up to \$100 million annually in federal dollars and incentivize a 2:1 match in private and philanthropic investments to help address critical challenges, such as biodiversity loss and the degradation of natural habitats, while contributing to global security and resilience.

What gives you hope?

The people with whom we work. Each of us is rooted to place in meaningful, authentic ways, and we channel the purpose and intention we find in our home and this landscape to communal action. We offer clear-eyed, actionable pathways and forge our way with the tools we have before us.



DOING MORE WITH LESS

TNC STAFF PARTNER WITH FARMERS ON CONSERVATION PRACTICES

The Nature Conservancy has an ambitious set of 2030 goals – which includes a mission to build sustainable food systems for both people and nature.

The Nebraska row crop team thinks about what this means on the farm... a lot. The team consists of Jacob Fritton who directs the program and strategy, Nick Arneson leading on-the-ground relationships with farmers and partners, and Sara Cahill maintaining operational efficiency.

Together, with partners, the team has led five different projects over the last 12 years, all designed to support farmers who want to adopt new conservation practices:

The Western Nebraska Irrigation Project (WNIP): In 2014, TNC recruited stakeholders from Coca-Cola, John Deere, McDonald's, and the World Wildlife Fund to contribute resources to launch this project along a 20-mile stretch of the South Platte River Valley west of Ogallala. Jacob provided training to 11 farmers on how to use soil moisture probes, pivot telemetry, and weather stations. They learned how to fine-tune irrigation across their fields, enabling them to reduce pumping by about 20% on 8,000 acres.

The Central Nebraska Irrigation Project (CNIP): Taking lessons learned from WNIP, CNIP was launched in 2018. It was a collaboration with Nestlé-Purina, Cargill, the Central Platte Natural Resources District, and 50 producers in Nebraska's Central Platte Valley, aimed to reduce water use intensity in the beef supply chain. CNIP provided farmers with a suite of irrigation technology: flowmeters, weather stations, pivot telemetry, and soil moisture probes. Just as importantly, TNC and the Central Platte NRD provided technical support, training, and a platform for peer-to-peer information exchange and mentoring. This project impacted 6,500 acres.

The Upper Big Blue Soil Health Project: This effort leveraged funds from Kellogg's and the Nebraska Environmental Trust to collaborate with Nebraska Extension and Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District to expand the program's portfolio of projects into the soil health realm. The project enrolled 11 farmers into UNL's on-farm research network to better understand the effects of interseeding cover crops (the practice of planting into standing corn at an early stage of development).

Current programs include:

The Nebraska Soil Carbon Project: Launched in 2021, the Nebraska Soil Carbon Project is a Nature Conservancy-led public/private collaboration with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Upper Big Blue and Central Platte Natural Resource Districts, the Ecosystem Services Market Consortium (ESMC), Cargill, Target and McDonald's. The goal is to work with 100 Nebraska farmers to understand how adoption of no-till, diversified rotations, and/or cover crops impacts carbon storage while unlocking opportunities for local farmers through corporate sustainability efforts. Practices have been implemented on 35,000 acres throughout central Nebraska croplands.

Farming for the Blue River: The Farming for the Blue River project is a partnership between the Little Blue Natural Resources District (NRD), Lower Big Blue NRD, the

National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, and The Nature Conservancy. The goal of this project is to co-learn with 30 farmers to develop nutrient management plans to reduce nitrogen losses and improve nitrogen use efficiency across 4,800 acres. Project partners work with farmers to create a nutrient management plan in line with the plant's nitrogen needs, provide farmers technical assistance in adopting precision nutrient management, and participation in a peer-to-peer learning network to scale practices regionally. TNC NE's presence on the ground working on nitrogen management with farmers has enabled influence on state-wide nutrient stewardship policy providing additional support for farmers to meet the pressing need of addressing water quality.

This is "the Why"

"Farmers are among our greatest conservation allies. We are proud to work side-by-side with the families who care for our natural resources, so that as rapid change comes, there are tested tools at the ready," said Jacob.

One of those farmers, Hank McGowan, was recently recognized with a statewide Outstanding Soil Conservation Award. Hank is enrolled in the Nebraska Soil Carbon Project. "These things will test your faith," said McGowan of cover crops and no-till practices. "It's been working better than I expected it to. I was told it would take five years before I saw improvement, but it's not true. I saw some benefits immediately."

"With the price of farm ground being what it is, topsoil is expensive. Try to keep it. That's what we're doing," said McGowan.

Snapshots 2024-2025



Ice and frost on a frozen wetland at the Platte River Prairies.
© Chris Helzer/TNC



Box turtle tracks (probably) at the Niobrara Valley Preserve.
© Chris Helzer/TNC



Lark sparrow at the Niobrara Valley Preserve.
© Chris Helzer/TNC



Lightning and coming rain at the Niobrara Valley Preserve.
© Chris Helzer/TNC



Sandhill cranes at sunrise.
© Chris Helzer/TNC



Sunrise, sunflowers, and bison fence at the Niobrara Valley Preserve. © Chris Helzer/TNC



Bull frog in wetland at the Platte River Prairies.
© Chris Helzer/TNC



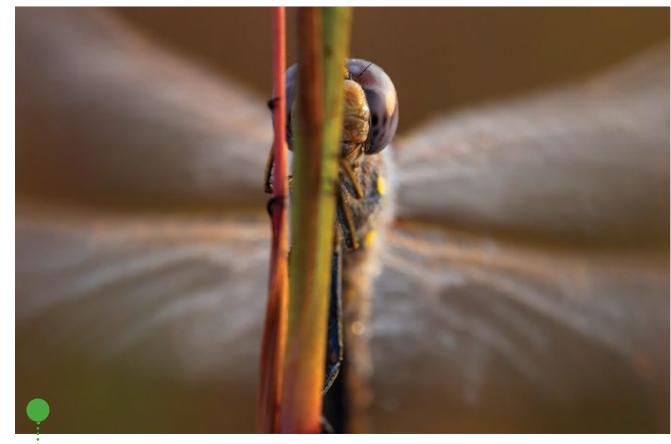
Hubbard Fellow Kojo Baidoo watching bison at the Niobrara Valley Preserve. © Chris Helzer/TNC



Plains pocket mouse with volunteer Master Naturalist Mike Schrad.
© Chris Helzer/TNC



Monarch caterpillar on showy milkweed (probably a hybrid showy/common milkweed) at the Niobrara Valley Preserve.
© Chris Helzer/TNC



Variegated meadowhawk (migratory) on a dewy morning at the Platte River Prairies. © Chris Helzer/TNC



Yucca with Sumac and smoke from a prescribed fire at the Niobrara Valley Preserve. © Chris Helzer/TNC

NEBRASKA by the Numbers

The Nature Conservancy in Nebraska
July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025

\$5,726,082
Budget

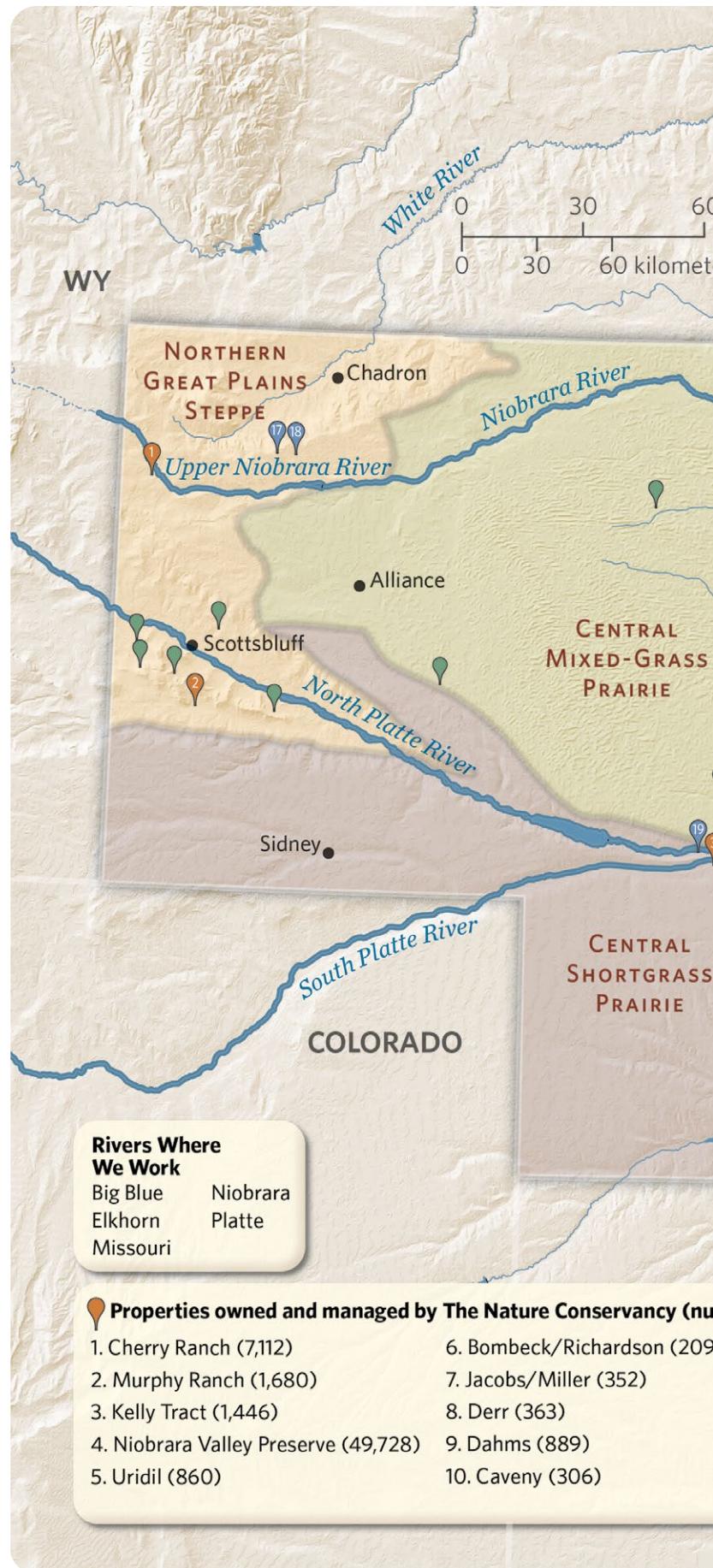
\$331,468
Property Taxes Paid

34
Staff

5,610
Member Households



Dormant flower, seedhead of rosinweed
(*Silphium integrifolium*). © Chris Helzer/TNC







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Bruce Forney, <i>Alliance</i>	J. Michael Keenan, <i>Florence, KY</i>	Neal Ratzlaff, <i>Omaha</i>	Charles Wright* <i>Lincoln</i>
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Lance Foster*, <i>White Cloud, KS</i>	Robert Kelley, Jr., <i>Scottsbluff</i>	Sue Renken, <i>Stanton</i>	LaReesa Wolfenbarger, <i>Chassell, MI</i>
Rich Fruehling, <i>Grand Island</i>	John Kenefick*, <i>Omaha</i>	Larry Reynolds, <i>Lexington</i>	*deceased
Richard Gady, <i>Nisswa, MN</i>	Timothy R. Kenny, <i>Lincoln</i>	Diane Rikkers, <i>Madison, WI</i>	



LANCE'S LEGACY

TNC MOURNS THE LOSS OF TRUSTEE LANCE FOSTER

Lance first became involved with the Nebraska program during a land transfer from TNC to the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska. In 2018, he was Vice-Chair of the Tribe, and was instrumental in 444 acres of land in the Rulo Bluffs returning to tribal control. At that time, Lance said, "To be somewhere where it's quiet, that's one of the things I enjoy about being here...and the fact that our ancestors are here. In our private moments we hear them sometimes. We communicate with them. You just feel that this place is part of you, and you're part of this place."

Building on that relationship, Lance agreed to join The Nature Conservancy's board. State Director John Couger asked him how TNC could increase collaboration with tribal nations as conservation partners. "Lance told me that we need to be working together urgently to halt biodiversity loss," said Couger. "He encouraged us and offered to help us connect with leaders of other local Tribal nations."

Foster suggested convening a gathering of conservation leaders of Nebraska's tribal nations. Brandon Cobb (then a Claire M. Hubbard Young Leaders in Conservation Fellow) took this suggestion and held the Nebraska Intertribal Conservation Summit in April of 2023, bringing together the six landholding Tribes and the Maya community.

"This gathering, which set a number of successful collaborations in motion, would not have happened without Lance's encouragement, leadership, and effort," said Cobb.

In fact, the Summit sparked the Nebraska program to add a new position built on the advice that Lance had given the chapter – an Indigenous Partnerships Program Manager. Cobb, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation – stepped into that role and has developed partnerships based on shared conservation goals and Lance's vision for more connected, supported, and stewarded Indigenous lands in Nebraska and beyond.

When Lance passed away in January, his loss was deeply felt around the nation. As Tribal Historic Preservation Officer since 2013, Lance served as a leader, mentor, and role model in historic preservation on a regional and national level, as well as within his Tribal community. He had tremendous impacts in the fields of language, sociology, and archeology.

"We are so much better for Lance's leadership," said Couger. "I miss not just his counsel but his unique perspective and sense of humor. He will never be forgotten."

Alan Kelley, former executive committee vice chairman of Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, left, and Lance Foster with the Tribal Historic Preservation Office walk the land The Nebraska Conservancy transferred to the Iowa Tribe. © Matt Dixon/The World Herald

THANK YOU GIVE NEBRASKA DONORS!



The Nature Conservancy is grateful for the support of the workplace givers who donate through Give Nebraska. Give Nebraska is a federation of nonprofit member agencies, operating across the state to make our communities a better place for all who live, work, and visit Nebraska. Learn more at givenebraska.org



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A FAMILY LEGACY

BRUCE EDWARD STEPHENS PRAIRIE DEDICATED AT PLATTE RIVER PRAIRIES

July 11th was a warm, beautiful day to be in the prairie, as friends and family gathered near Wood River to celebrate the naming of the Bruce Edward Stephens Prairie.

Bruce grew up on a farm — the same farm his family cared for four generations, over a hundred years. Bruce's great-great grandfather came from Wales, taking a covered wagon from Red Oak, Iowa, to Waco, Nebraska in 1874. He recalls watching the sunset after chores while petting the dog and listening to the birds and just enjoying the sights and sounds of nature.

Bruce has been a member of the Conservancy for many years, and got involved in the 90's as a volunteer, harvesting and scattering native seeds at the Platte River Prairies. Now, he has made a lifetime gift to protect them.

He wanted to do something that would leave a lasting legacy for his family. Although he has traveled extensively all over the world helping with research on various conservation projects, Bruce still counts the sandhill crane migration as one of his top nature destinations.



"The Nature Conservancy best fit my ideals," Bruce said. "TNC does nature preservation, acquiring property and managing it. Chloé (Sweet, Associate Director of Philanthropy) told me about this prairie. I came out and looked at it and thought, 'yep, this is what I want to do.'"

The sign on the prairie includes Bruce's middle name for a special reason — Edward was his father's name. "This isn't about me," said Bruce. "This is about my family."

TOP LEFT: Eudryas unio - Pearly Wood-Nymph moth at Platte River Prairies. © Chris Helzer/TNC

CENTER: Bruce Stephens. © Kojo Baidoo/TNC



TRIBUTES: July 2024 – June 2025

Thanks to all who donated in the name of a friend or loved one.

The name of the person being recognized is listed first, with the giver's name below.

IN HONOR OF:

Bruce Carpenter

Gail and Mike Yanney

Dan Hamann & Joan Squires

Jacqueline Anderegg
Jack Becker & Lester Katz
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REMARKS | 5:45 PM

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hors d'oeuvres and drinks as we
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Please RSVP to
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Owl © Ben Jiang



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