



Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Annual Report 2007



Making the Good Life Better!

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission



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For Further Information...

This report presents the highlights of activities and events of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission during the calendar year 2007. Complete division reports with further information and details are available by contacting these administrators (402 area code):

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Dear Governor Heineman:

Nebraska's fish, wildlife and park resources are in good hands, thanks to support by the state's citizens and the conservation and management efforts of Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

The hard work and dedication of the agency's employees in 2007 resulted in more outdoor recreation opportunities for Nebraskans than ever before. The pages of this report will reflect that.

This is a challenging and exciting time for the agency. As it moves forward, it realizes that its future is in the hands of Nebraskans who enjoy the outdoors. Therefore, the agency is developing a 20-year plan that targets participation of hunters and anglers. This plan addresses the recruitment and development of new hunters and anglers, and the retention of current hunters and anglers.

The agency also marked a turning point in 2007 with the introduction of its new online permitting system. The user-friendly system makes buying permits, including multiple permits at the same time, easier than ever before. And there is encouraging news about permits. Thanks to expanding deer and turkey populations, the number of big game permits sold rose 7 percent as sportsmen took advantage of unprecedented opportunities. Lifetime permits and stamps sold increased sharply last year, and fishing permit sales also increased.

Research, education and conservation efforts served the Commission, Nebraska and its citizens well in 2007 and the agency will strive to make The Good Life even better in 2008.

Sincerely,

Rex Amack
Director

Making The Good Life Better!



Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Mission:

Stewardship of the state's fish, wildlife, parks and outdoor recreation resources in the best long-term interests of the people and those resources.

To accomplish that purpose, the Commission strives to plan and implement its policies and programs efficiently and objectively; maintain a rich and diverse environment in Nebraska's lands and waters; provide outdoor recreation opportunities; manage wildlife resources for the maximum benefit of the people, and strive to help Nebraskans appreciate their roles in the natural world.



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COVER PHOTOS: (clockwise from top left) The western fringed prairie orchid is a plant species on Nebraska's Endangered Species list; an American bison roams the pastures at Fort Robinson State Park; this tom turkey is in spring display; white bass are commonly caught at Lake McConaughy and Platte Valley reservoirs; a young sledder is enjoying an outing at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park's sledding and toboggan runs.

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Financial Report

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is predominately self-funded, receiving only around 15 percent of its total 2007 funding from the State General Fund. Eleven additional cash/federal funds have been established for agency use, each having various revenue sources and explicit use restrictions.

The 11 cash/federal funds, in order of use, are Game Cash Fund, Park Cash Fund, federal funds, Habitat Fund, Nebraska Outdoor Recreational Development Act (NORDA) Fund, Recreational Trails Federal Fund, Aquatic Habitat Fund, Trail Development Assistance Fund, Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Fund, Cowboy Trail Fund and Nebraska Snowmobile Trail Fund. While most of the fund names are self-descriptive, a few of the more critical warrant further explanation.

General Fund – It is supported by money collected by the State Department of Revenue, deposited with the State Treasurer and appropriated by the Legislature. General Fund money is appropriated to the Commission for those operating activities that are either nonself-supporting (primarily administration of the state park system and non-game and endangered species activities); administrative activities that are general in nature, applicable to the entire agency and difficult to prorate between the various other funding sources; and activities that extend beyond the statutory use of the various cash funds.

Game Cash Fund – Most of the cash funds receive their primary revenues from use fees. This fund serves as the primary funding source for fish and wildlife activities. The fund derives its revenue from a

variety of sources, including hunting and fishing permit sales, Federal Aid reimbursements and interest earnings. It is the largest source of funding for the agency.

Park Cash Fund – It is the second largest source of funding to the agency. It is used to improve, maintain and operate areas within the state park system. Major revenue sources include camping and lodging fees, park entry permit sales, restaurant and food services and other park facility use fees.

Federal Grants – These are the third largest “cash” funding source for the agency. They include reimbursable and direct grants.

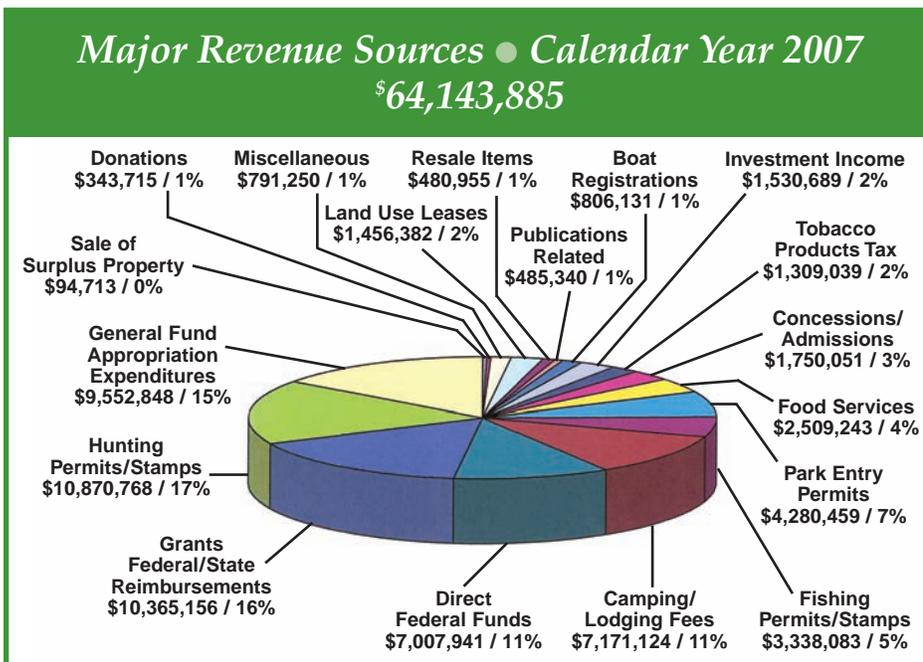
Habitat Funds – There are two types of these funds, terrestrial and aquatic. They are supported primarily from the sale of the stamps tied to hunting and fishing activities, respectively.

Nebraska Outdoor Recreational Development Act Fund – It is restricted to the development, operations and maintenance of areas of the state park system. The primary source of revenue is the Nebraska Tobacco Products Tax. The portion of the tax earmarked for NORDA is the equivalent of one cent on a conventional package of cigarettes. This fund is critical to the development and maintenance of the state park buildings and amenities infrastructure.

Major Expenditure Details

PARKS, ENGINEERING AND CONSTRUCTION DIVISIONS:

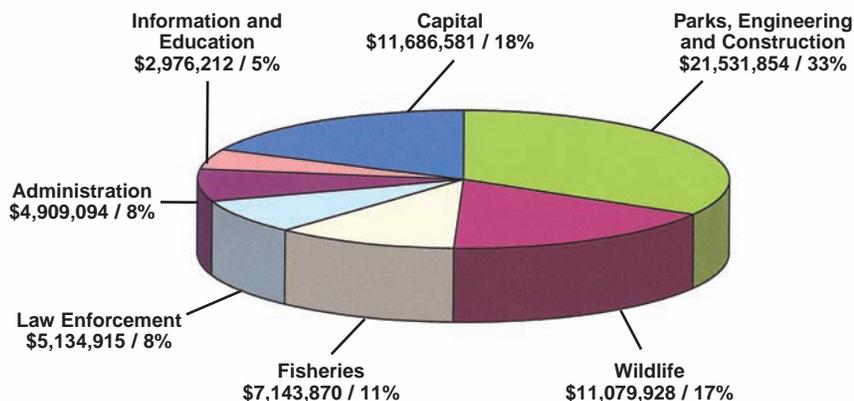
These include administration and operation of state parks, recreation areas, historical parks, recreation





Major Expenditure Sources • Calendar Year 2007

\$64,462,453



trails, and related engineering and construction services.

Funding sources include: Park Cash Fund, \$13,502,968.62 (63 percent); General Fund, \$7,413,241.66 (34); NORDA, \$549,377.17 (3); Direct Federal, \$66,266.92 (<1).

WILDLIFE DIVISION: These include administration and operation of wildlife management areas, private lands habitat work, game and nongame species activities, and related engineering services.

Funding sources include: Game Cash Fund, \$4,611,563.29 (42 percent); Habitat Fund, \$3,599,707.29 (32); Direct Federal, \$2,174,597.50 (20); General Fund, \$524,843.44 (5); Nongame Fund, \$169,216.52 (1).

FISHERIES DIVISION: These include administration and operation of fish hatcheries, Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium, public and private waters fisheries resource management, and

related engineering services.

Funding sources include: Game Cash Fund, \$5,173,741.62 (72 percent); Direct Federal, \$1,762,164.40 (25); Aquatic Habitat Fund, \$112,554.65 (2); General Fund, \$95,408.88 (1).

LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION: These include wildlife, fisheries, boating and parks law enforcement administration and operations. They also include support provided by the division to many other agency programs, such as outdoor education and Homeland Security.

Funding sources include: Game Cash Fund, \$3,751,029.90 (73 percent); General Fund, \$743,100.63 (14); Park Cash Fund, \$640,636.05 (13); Game Law Investigation Fund, \$148.50 (<1).

ADMINISTRATION DIVISION: These include activities associated with the office of the director,

divisions of personnel, realty and budget, plus activities in information technology, district offices, federal aid, Board of Commissioners, credit card processing, and related engineering services.

Funding sources include: Game Cash Fund, \$2,932,337.77 (60 percent); Park Cash Fund, \$1,130,697.78 (23); General Fund, \$708,075.04 (14); Habitat Fund, \$96,117.39 (2); Direct Federal, \$41,853.88 (1); Aquatic Habitat Fund, \$11.67 (<1).

INFORMATION & EDUCATION DIVISION:

These include administration and operation of agency printing and mailing, NEBRASKAland Magazine, multimedia news releases, information publications and some hunter education and range development programs.

Funding sources include: Game Cash Fund, \$2,426,411.64 (82 percent); Park Cash Fund, \$451,311.95 (15); Direct Federal, \$98,488.14 (3).

CAPITAL CONSTRUCTION: These include construction activities in state parks, recreation areas, recreation trails, historical parks, wildlife management areas, fish hatcheries, land acquisition and grant pass-throughs for community trails.

Funding sources include: Aquatic Habitat Fund, \$5,885,660.86 (50 percent); Direct Federal, \$3,226,921.16 (29); NORDA, \$1,103,371.45 (9); Game Cash Fund, \$708,513.70 (6); Habitat Fund, \$522,284.50 (4); TDA, \$140,000.00 (1); Park Cash Fund, \$99,828.94 (1).

Recreation

Providing Nebraskans an array of recreational opportunities is the core business of the Game and Parks Commission. For example:



Branched Oak State Recreation Area near Raymond offers many opportunities for visitors.

Parks' Many Activities _____

Guests enjoyed a wide variety of activities at the state's 85 park areas and two recreational trails. Those activities included horseback riding, raft tours on the Missouri River, naturalist and outdoor education programs, swimming, boating, fishing, and camping.

Picking up the Pieces _____

Staffers were busy picking up the pieces after a May 5 tornado hit Weigand Campground at Lewis and Clark Lake State Recreation Area (SRA). While there was considerable damage to trees and campground structures, no one was injured. Some structures were repaired by the end of the year while others were to be repaired by the start of the 2008 camping season.

Champion Mill State Historical Park's pond was flooded after a heavy rain, resulting in major structural damage to the dam. Planning for the rebuilding of the dam has begun.

A fire did \$750,000 worth of damage to the Lake McConaughy SRA Visitor Center. Efforts have begun to receive funding for displays destroyed by the fire.

Access Opportunities _____

Since 97 percent of the state is privately owned, it is imperative that opportunities exist for hunters to access as much private land as is possible. Many landowners offer considerable hunting access for free, while others charge a fee. In order to augment the opportunity of our hunters to access private

lands, the Commission has placed a high priority on developing programs and processes that appeal to landowners.

CRP-MAP is the Commission's flagship hunting access and habitat enhancement program on private lands in Nebraska. Currently 180,000 acres of habitat are enrolled and are accessible to hunters free of charge without the need to

ask permission. Other access programs include the youth hunting access program known as PATH,

certain WILD Nebraska properties and the Hunting by Written Permission Only partnership.



Keeping Nebraska's Fish Healthy _____

The Fish Production Section monitors feral fish populations, private aquaculture facilities and state fish hatcheries for prohibited pathogens, including viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus (VHSV) and whirling disease. No positive findings for any of the listed prohibited pathogens were found in 2007. Monitoring for aquatic invasive species such as zebra mussels and New Zealand mud snails also were conducted during the fish health checks.

Parks Reservations _____

The Commission entered into a five-year contract with Reserve-America to provide reservations for camping and lodging at 24 state



park areas. System design and development began in 2007 and the system became operational in January 2008. The system brings the Parks Division a complete point-of-sale finance package, along with providing a Web-based real-time reservation system. The user-friendly system has interactive maps, improved search tools and shopping cart functionality.

Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail

The latest section of the Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail to open was in the spring of 2007 and included a 21-mile stretch from Stuart to Bassett. The trail now is complete for 143 miles from Norfolk to Ainsworth. The plan is to finish the last 30 miles of trail west of Ainsworth in the summer of 2008 and connect Norfolk to Valentine. This section is now under construction after a delay of funding approval in 2007.

The Lied Platte River Bridge Trail

The Lied Platte River Bridge Trail is popular with sightseers, being one of the few bridges that one can actually walk on and cross the Platte River without concerns for



FAST fact

There were 43,633 reservations made at state park areas in 2007.

2007 Permits and Stamps Sold

Permit or Stamp	2006	2007	% Change
Resident fishing	113,221	113,985	1
Resident hunting	44,942	42,310	-6
Resident hunt/fish	37,707	37,352	-1
Resident hunt/fish, veteran	1,060	1,702	38
Resident hunt/fish, senior	1,643	2,737	40
Resident 1-day fishing	6,907	7,944	13
Nonresident 1-day fishing	10,575	12,321	14
Nonresident 2-day hunting	1,561	1,535	-2
Nonresident fishing	5,719	6,248	8
Nonresident hunting	18,351	16,863	-9
Resident 3-day fishing	1,397	1,391	0
Nonresident 3-day fishing	10,275	10,723	4
Aquatic stamp	168,319	169,699	1
Migratory waterfowl stamp	38,598	37,405	-3
Resident fur harvest	6,342	6,750	6
Habitat stamp	138,171	136,454	-1
Annual park	132,050	137,223	4
Daily park	251,329	240,253	-5
Duplicate park	51,174	51,944	1
Nonresident youth hunt	837	779	-7
TOTAL	1,040,178	1,035,618	0
Lifetime hunt, fish, stamp	2,203	2,721	19
Total big game	166,179	178,134	7
Total paddlefish	4,036	4,566	12
TOTAL lifetime, big game, paddlefish	172,418	185,421	7
TOTAL permits, stamps	1,212,596	1,221,039	1

Recreation (continued)

Building and Improving

Commission engineering and construction projects in 2007:

Fort Robinson State Park (SP) – The Fort Robinson Sewer Lagoon Project, which included the construction of two wastewater treatment retention cells and a spray irrigation field, was completed in the fall. The project uses treated wastewater generated from the park to irrigate 10 acres of pasture. Also, adobe bricks were repaired on five National Historic Landmark buildings.

Langdon Bend Wildlife Management Area (WMA) – The Engineering Division worked in conjunction with the Army Corps of Engineers to design and construct water supplies to augment wetland habitat in the Langdon Bend Wildlife Management Area.

Ponca SP – Two new 1,524-square-foot, four-bedroom cabins were nearly completed by the end of 2007 and expected to be ready for use early in 2008. Also, a trail project saw the completion of three wooden bridges, totaling 830 feet.

Fremont Lakes State Recreation Area (SRA) – In order to provide a park office and public meeting facility, two modular buildings were acquired and moved to their foundations last year.

Swanson Reservoir SRA – A federal grant was obtained by the Fisheries Division to construct a jetty and a wave attenuator (floating breakwater) to protect the Overlook Jetty.

Two Rivers SRA – Maintenance of cabooses was completed, including repainting, and installation of carpet and new flooring. New tanks, pumps, and injection field were installed for Lake Side Campground shower building.

Eugene T. Mahoney SP – Cabin renovations continued, with new paint, windows and roofs, as well as siding repaired and sidewalks replaced.

Big Alkali WMA – This area project that began in 2006 was completed with the installation of three shower/latrine buildings, pouring of concrete for two handicap accessible camping pads; and landscaping, seeding and mulching of the ground.

Sac-Wilcox WMA – A quarter-acre brood pond for research and restocking of the plains topminnow was built and a bentonite liner was installed.

Boosalis Park – A new concrete pit toilet, and associated handicap accessible sidewalks, were installed as part of a cooperative agreement between the Commission, the City of Lincoln, and the Lincoln Gun Club.

Sherman Reservoir SRA – A wave attenuator was transferred from Lake McConaughy and installed in the Marina Bay area.

vehicle traffic. Being only a short three miles long it is not a point A to point B trail. But in the future it will be a key link in a trail system being developed by local natural resources districts that will connect Omaha with Lincoln.

Lake Renovations

Undesirable fish communities were removed, using the chemical rotenone, at Carney Pond (O'Neill), Cottontail, Duck, Fremont No. 3, Heartwell Park (Hastings), Humphrey (Ogallala), Meadowlark, Southwest and Middle Morrill pits, Pony, Swan Creek 67, North and South Twin, Swan, and War Axe.

At Fremont Lakes State Recreation Area No. 20, the fish community was removed and the lake was treated with liquid aluminum sulfate (alum) and liquid sodium aluminate (LSA) to reduce blue-green algal blooms. This project was a joint effort between the Commission, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality.

Free Fishing and Park Entry Day

The Commission organized and provided fishing supplies for Free Fishing and Park Entry Day events at 11 state parks and recreation areas. It also assisted with more than a dozen other fishing events at city park ponds. Free use of rods, reels, and tackle was made available at 19 state park areas, as well as David City, Lincoln, Nebraska City, and Omaha.



Interior view during construction of a new four-bedroom cabin at Ponca State Park.

Ashfall Rhino Barn

The Commission received a \$1.2 million gift to expand Ashfall State Historical Park's rhino barn. Many key fossils at Ashfall unearthed from their 12-million-year resting place soon will gain protection from Nebraska's wind, rain and snow – elements that can damage the relics as they are exposed and studied. The gift will be used to construct a 17,200-square foot building to expand the current rhino barn. The project aims to preserve and protect a large portion of the remaining fossil bed, while providing more opportunities to the public.

Aquatic Habitat Rehabilitations

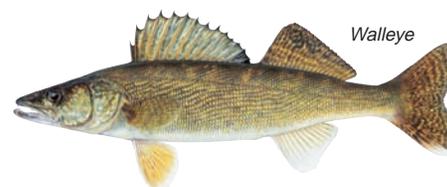
Aquatic habitat rehabilitation projects were completed at Cunningham Reservoir (Omaha), Bowling Lake (Lincoln), Walnut

Grove Park Pond (Omaha), and Heartwell Park Pond (Hastings). Ninety-five percent of construction work on a Sherman Reservoir project has been accomplished; modifications are being made to Memphis Lake, where a new well is being installed, and Jack Harkreader Pond, where the cost/benefit of sealing the bottom is being explored. Projects are ongoing at the Hospital Pond in Columbus, Humphrey Pond (Ogallala) and city park ponds in Curtis, Friend, and Hooper.

Fish Stocking

The Commission's five fish hatcheries produced and stocked approximately 25.6 million fish (14 species) into 271 public water bodies in Nebraska. Included were 21.2 million walleye fry and 1.2 million walleye fingerlings; 205,930 (10-inch) channel catfish; 279,837

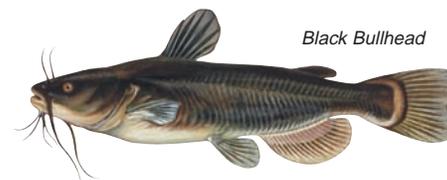
(10-inch) rainbow trout; 403,873 hybrid striped bass (wipers); 640,129 bluegill and 412,570 largemouth bass. "Operation Yellow Belly" was implemented in 2007 with 9,630 catchable-size black bullheads stocked at three lakes on Fremont, Louisville and Two Rivers state recreation areas.



Walleye



Rainbow Trout



Black Bullhead

Boater/Angler Access Improvements

New boat ramps were constructed at Cottontail, Meadowlark and Timber Point lakes and a rock breakwater was built at Swanson Reservoir. Motorboat access improvements continued at Sherman Reservoir; and projects were designed for Sutherland Reservoir and Louisville State Recreation Area (for an airboat launch facility). Engineering design and planning began for motorboat access projects at Leigh Dam, Lawrence Youngman Lake and Pigeon/Jones Creek Recreation Area.

Conservation

Preserving Nebraska's natural resources is one of the Commission's most important responsibilities. Many programs are dedicated to managing the state's fish and wildlife populations and land and water habitats. For example:



Ring-necked Pheasant

Grassland Management

Wildlife Division staff have used a number of management tools over the years to manage grasslands on wildlife management areas, including prescribed burning, grazing, haying and inter-seeding. These help keep grasslands productive and diverse, benefiting a wide array of species, from insects to meadowlarks to pheasants. A new tool in the land manager's tool chest is the skid loader with a tree shear. This piece of equipment is used to remove invasive trees from grasslands. Grassland birds are the most imperiled guild of bird species in Nebraska and conserving our remaining grasslands has become a management priority.

Loess Canyons BUL

The Loess Canyons Biologically Unique Landscape, an area of mixed grass prairie southeast of North Platte, is a Nebraska Natural Legacy Project Flagship Initiative where an effort is trying to improve the mixed grass prairie through removal of eastern red cedar, improvement of grazing management, and use of prescribed fire. The main goal is to improve this mixed grass prairie landscape for the endangered American burying beetle. It will also improve range conditions for



American Burying Beetle

grazing and stands to benefit the landowners of the area through increased beef production and better net profits. Funding has been provided from a Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund grant used to match funding from the Landowner Incentive Program and State Wildlife Grant Program, and from contributions from partners such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service, among others.

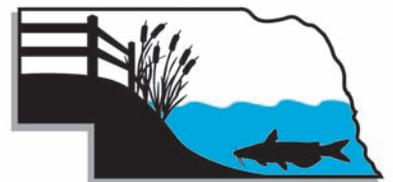
Wildlife Friendly Farm Bill 2007

Wildlife conservation on Nebraska's private lands will continue to see support from the 2007 versions of the Farm Bill passed in the House and Senate. Commission staff was intimately involved in state, regional, and national efforts that brought unified support to continue and expand conservation provisions in what will be the 2008 Farm Bill. New in this Farm Bill: "Open Fields" language that will provide additional funds for states to use to open private lands to public access.

Private Waters Assistance

Fisheries personnel provided management assistance to 683 owners of private lakes, pits, ponds, and streams in 2007; on-site assessments of fish populations were conducted for 15 water bodies; fish communities in three ponds were renovated using rotenone; largemouth bass and bluegill were stocked in 59 ponds and rainbow trout were provided for one pond. The "Nebraska Pond Management"

Private Waters Program



Management Assistance for Lakes, Ponds, Pits & Streams



book, developed in 2006, was requested by more than 1,700 people in 2007.

Angler support for a leased walk-in access program was assessed via the Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey; 64 percent supported such a program (18 percent neutral), with 80 percent willing to pay at least \$1 more for a fishing permit to finance such a program.

Assessing Fish Populations and Angling Success

Fisheries Division staff sampled fish populations in 109 reservoirs, lakes, and ponds and eight coldwater streams in 2007. The information collected is used to evaluate management strategies (such as stocking, regulations, rehabilitation projects) and is shared with anglers to help them plan fishing trips.

Angler surveys were conducted in 2007 to measure fishing pressure, catch rates, and harvest at Lake McConaughy and Lake Ogallala; Box Butte, Enders, Medicine Creek, Red Willow, Sherman, Swanson, and Walnut Creek reservoirs; and Johnson, Wehrspann and Zorinsky lakes.

Prescribed Fire

Fire is a natural phenomenon and was instrumental in the development of grassland ecosystems. Fire keeps trees at bay and rejuvenates the soil chemistry. Fire stimulates the growth and even reproduction of certain grasses and forbs. The

problem is, people are widely afraid of fire and, as a result, less than 1 percent of the prairie is burned on an annual basis.

Since fire is such an integral part of the health of grassland ecosystems, Nebraska's conservationists are working hard and in many areas to reinstitute fire as a common tool. As a result, there are fire networks springing up all across Nebraska. Examples include the Loess Canyons area south of North Platte, the Central Loess Hills north of Grand Island, and the middle Niobrara area east of Valentine.

Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist Partnership

One of the Commission's key shared efforts, the Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist Partnerships, is with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS),

Pheasants Forever and Ducks Unlimited. This is strictly a program to put wildlife biologists in direct contact with farmers and ranchers to help them address the wildlife habitat needs. There are currently seven biologists who work out of NRCS offices. Six are employed for Pheasants Forever, one by Ducks Unlimited and all are supervised



FAST fact

Nearly the entire population of Buff-breasted Sandpipers, a species of significant conservation concern, stops over in the Rainwater Basin of south-central Nebraska during the species' 8,000-mile spring migration from southern South America to the North American Arctic.



Aerial view of the Rock Glen WMA prescribed burn.

Conservation (continued)



These conservation officers cited people unlawfully possessing waterfowl, deer and various fish species. Several illegal traps were seized, and boating law violators were ticketed.

by district wildlife managers from the Commission.

A sample of the work they have conducted over the last year includes: at least 950 land-owners assisted, development of 25 wildlife management plans, assistance on more than 300 habitat related contracts and implementation of over 12,300 acres of habitat management and/or restoration.

Langdon Bend Wildlife Management Area Wells

With support from Nebraska's waterfowl stamp funds, three wells were placed at the Langdon Bend Wildlife Management Area near Nemaha. Details are being finalized on a development project at the site that will provide up to 220 acres of reliable, publicly accessible wetlands for migration habitats.

Small Grain Losses and Upland Game

Small grain losses in Nebraska are directly, and negatively, related to pheasant and quail populations. Pheasants and quail often nest and occasionally raise broods in wheat and oats. They rarely do so in the crop fields that replaced the small grains. Further, nesting — although sparse — is highly successful in small grain fields, since it is very difficult for predators to survive and find prey in that environment.

Since 1965, small grain production in Nebraska declined from 7 million to 2.7 million acres. During that same period, row crop production of corn and soybeans increased from 4.6 million to 13.2 million acres. This change, among other things, has contributed to the decline in nesting and nest success of upland game and other bird species.

Conservation Officers' Details

Officers conducted several special fishing details to target illegal activity. One detail in June at Calamus Reservoir involved five officers, including four in plain clothes. In nine hours, 451 anglers and 177 boaters were contacted and seven violations were uncovered.

In an October detail during paddlefish snagging season, undercover officers in the northeast checked 669 anglers, 63 boaters, 361 paddlefish, and 13 hunters, resulting in 18 citations that went to court.

A detail in the Panhandle in January had five officers undertaking long-term surveillance of several blinds belonging to two waterfowl hunting guides along the North Platte River. The effort resulted in charges being filed against two outfitters, one guide, a waterfowl processor and four hunters.



Bobwhite Quail



Education outreach includes many publications and multi-media news and information programs. The Information and Education Division's efforts are complemented by education programs in the Parks, Fisheries, Wildlife, and Law Enforcement divisions. For example:

Tallgrass Prairie Management Seminar

The Tallgrass Prairie Management Seminar attracted 85 ranchers and biologists and focused on how tallgrass prairie functions and how to sustainably manage it. The seminar included presentations by landowners and biologists and focused on cutting-edge prairie management ideas and the economic and social needs of landowners. The result has been a greater awareness of landowner motivations and their impacts on prairie management.

Project WILD

Twenty-one Project WILD and Aquatic WILD workshops were conducted, training 258 formal and nonformal educators. The Wildlife Education Program also certified 13 vocational agriculture instructors in Project WILD, Aquatic WILD, and Science and Civics. Two Flying WILD workshops were conducted, training 23 teachers for a total reach of 395 educators in 2007.

The Wildlife Education Program conducted 67 environmental education programs, reaching an additional 3,085 adults and youth.



To meet an increasing need, an education coordinator was hired in 2007, in partnership with Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, and a new central Nebraska education assistant will be hired in 2008.



National Archery in the Schools Program

The National Archery in the Schools Program expanded in 2007, with nearly 125 schools instructing 15,000 middle school and high school students. The state tournament in April had 225 participants from 14 schools. Nearly 250 instructors have been trained since the program began in 2004.

Youth Mentored Hunting Programs

Nebraska continues to be the premier youth mentored hunting state, thanks to partnerships with groups such as Pheasants Forever and National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf). In 2007, more than 1,600 Pheasants Forever volunteers took to the field with 916 youth bird hunters. NWTf



FAST fact

Commission staff and volunteers provided two outdoor skill camps for 175 youth that covered the shooting disciplines, aquatic education and natural resource activities.

members mentored nearly 100 young hunters, and 94 youth hunters took part in the Commission's mentored deer hunting programs driven by Bowhunter Education instructors.

Hunter Education

Hunter Education trained 8,266 students – 6,752 firearm and 1,514 bow hunter – in 2007. The program also trained 102 firearm and 58 bow hunter instructors. Forty-nine firearm and 33 bow hunter instructors became certified.

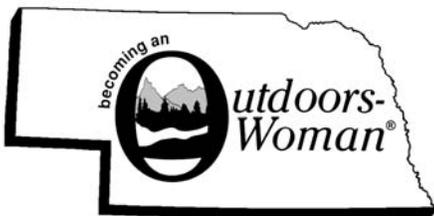
Hunter Education funding and staffing assisted with the Cornhusker Trapshoot and a variety of other shooting events, youth skills camps, mentored youth hunts, Becoming an Outdoors-Woman, and Woman in the Outdoors. Program funding assisted in the construction of an archery range and staff and volunteers helped with the expos and State Fair.

Recruitment, Development and Retention Plan

The Commission worked toward final development of a 20-year plan that will guide its effort toward future participation of hunters and anglers. The plan uses a systematic

Education (continued)

approach in addressing five main goals, including recruitment and development of youth, adults, lapsed hunters/anglers, development of current hunters/anglers and statewide support of hunting and fishing in Nebraska.



Becoming an Outdoors-Woman

More than 110 women took part in the popular Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program in October at the state 4-H Camp near Halsey, providing a solid introductory foundation for women from across the state. Participation remains at an above-normal capacity.

NEBRASKA OUTDOORS EXPO

Kearney and Ponca Expos

Outdoor expos were held in the spring and fall. Nebraska Outdoors: Expo 2007 was a huge success in Kearney in May, showcasing the partnerships with many conservation organizations, nongovernmental organizations and the Commission. There were approximately 5,000 participants, including more than 1,500 school students.



Boating safety officers and other Nebraska Game and Parks Commission staff taught school students how to safely enjoy kayaking and canoeing during the Ponca and Kearney expos.

Participants took part in hunting, fishing, shooting, camping, boating and ecology activities. Conservation officers dedicated 1,402 hours preparing for and helping with shotgun shooting, canoeing and kayaking, security, and the conservation officer display area.

An estimated 38,000 people attended the Missouri River Outdoor Expo at Ponca State Park in September. The focus of the expo was to reacquaint participants with the outdoors and services and programs offered by the Commission. Like the Kearney expo, a day was devoted only to school students.

Ponca State Outdoor Education

Ponca State Park's outdoor education program had more than 20,000 participants, not including the Missouri River Outdoor Expo, Halloweenfest and other special events.

Several programs were offered, including archery, Dutch oven cooking, muzzleloader shooting, fishing, canoeing, orienteering, outdoor survival, backpacking, animal tracking, and edible plants.

Aquatic Education

A total of 173 fishing clinics were held in 2007, attended by 20,648 youngsters and taught by 1,118 volunteers who contributed 3,567.5 hours. Nearly 6,000 children, 40 educators, and 100 women learned about fish, fishing and aquatic environments at 12 different events held across the state. At two of these events, attended by approximately 1,000 children, fishing opportunities also were provided. A new Youth





Fishing and Aquatic Education brochure was developed and is now available.

Boater Education

Boater Education certified 1,360 students in 2007. Thirteen new instructors also were certified, bringing the active force of Boater Education instructors to 370. Those instructors conducted 103 classes around the state.

There were 84,500 boats and 9,300 personal watercraft registered in 2007. There were 34 boating accidents that included 47 injuries and seven deaths.



FAST fact

The state's turkey population doubled between 2002 and 2005.

There were an estimated 48,400 deer harvested during the November firearm season.

(including 2,423 Big Game permits), and served as a deer check station from September-January.

Wildcat Hills Bird Banding

Education at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center saw a 38-percent increase in participation over 2006. One of the popular programs was the fall migratory bird banding conducted with the Nebraska Prairie Partners and Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory in the fall.

Fisheries at State Fair

In addition to providing fish for State Fair aquaria, the Fisheries Division provided visitors the opportunity to experience what it would feel like to catch a small-mouth bass, via a fishing simulator.

Mahoney Naturalist Events

Eugene T. Mahoney State Park offered various naturalist events throughout the summer. Youth and adults enjoyed nature hikes, insect



FAST fact

Law Enforcement Division conservation officers in 2007 contacted 65,333 anglers; 31,125 hunters; 1,219 trappers; 161,191 park visitors; 37,579 boaters; and 144,381 miscellaneous citizens for a total of 440,828 personal contacts.

workshops, reptile seminar, wildlife movies, wildflower walk, archery, wilderness survival, animal tracks and plant identification.

Hispanic Outreach

In an effort to gain willing compliance with hunting and fishing regulations by the Hispanic community in the Lexington area, District IV conservation officers conducted two outreach training sessions in the spring, relating to park, boating and fishing regulations. In all, Nebraska conservation officers presented 1,645 programs to a variety of groups in 2007.

Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium

A total of 289 groups, consisting of 23,784 children and 11,379 adults, visited the Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium in 2007. Workshops were held for the public on antler scoring, snakes, walleye and catfish fishing, bluebirds, bird banding, venison sausage making, fly tying, hunter education, and photography. Approximately 1,600 fifth graders from Omaha-area schools attended a water festival. The aquarium sold 5,250 permits



Students learned about fish and wild animal habitat, identification and management from Nebraska Game and Parks Commission staff, displays and hands-on experiences at the expos.

Research

Management of Nebraska's natural resources involves a constant quest for knowledge. Research is a key component via in-house studies and testing, cooperative programs with other agencies and outsourcing. For example:



The vast numbers of migrating geese bring concern of avian influenza.

Avian Influenza Early Detection Efforts

This was the second year that Commission staff assisted with the U.S. Interagency Strategic Plan for the early detection of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in wild migratory birds. The spread of HPAI into North America is still a major concern for the nation. Biologists began sampling in July and continued through early December.

The Commission and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services collected 1,500 samples

from ducks and geese. No HPAI was detected from these samples. However, as expected because migratory waterfowl are the natural reservoirs for these types of influenza, a variety of low pathogenic avian influenzas were found.

UNL Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit

Studies of white perch impacts on recruitment of sport fishes at Branched Oak and Pawnee reservoirs; walleye recruitment in the southwest reservoirs; and food habits of predator fish in southwest reservoirs continued under the direction of Dr. Kevin Pope.

Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance

Hunters voluntarily submitted their deer for chronic wasting disease (CWD) testing. A total of 3,279 samples was collected. There also were 31 deer collected that exhibited clinical signs of the disease and tested for CWD. There were 18 deer that tested positive.

This surveillance is conducted to provide hunters with information about the distribution and prevalence of the disease. For the last three years the prevalence has remained low and unchanged. The distribution



FAST fact

According to the 2006 National Survey of Hunting, Fishing and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, the West North-Central Region (which includes Nebraska) had a 5 percent increase in hunters between 2001 and 2006, compared to a national trend of a 4 percent decrease.

of CWD was extended in 2007 with a deer taken from Keith County and one from Red Willow County. There was also a deer that tested positive taken in the proximity of the 2004 positive Hall County deer.

Niobrara River Instream Flow

A number of scientific studies were initiated in 2007 to obtain information needed to justify an instream flow appropriation on the Niobrara River. These studies included: 1) a bibliography of Niobrara Basin reports and publications; 2) a comprehensive hydrologic and water balance evaluation; 3) a geomorphological and macro-scale habitat project; and 4) a recreational flow study.

The National Park Service (NPS) is a funding partner on two of these studies and the NPS, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and The Nature Conservancy are funding partners for the Commission's grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust for this Niobrara Instream Flow Initiative.



Tree Removal Improves Habitat for Grassland Birds

The Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, in cooperation with Commission biologists, studied the effects of tree removal on grassland birds in southeast pastures. Seven species of birds increased in number following tree removal, although other habitat factors were important in determining abundance as well. This suggests that although beneficial, tree removal alone may not maximize bird response when managing pastures.



Least Tern guarding nest with eggs

Lower Platte River Research

Lower Platte River flows are getting another look because of increasing threats to habitat supporting least terns, piping plovers, and pallid sturgeon. Studies to determine spring flows needed to maintain habitat for these species were completed and will hopefully be used to make river management decisions in the future.



Pallid Sturgeon

Missouri River Research

Multi-agency Missouri River research projects involving the Fisheries Division include a basin-wide long-term fish monitoring program; evaluations of in-channel and off-channel habitat creation efforts; and studies examining the movement, habitat use and reproductive behavior of pallid sturgeon, blue suckers, and paddlefish.

Research and monitoring on the Missouri in 2007 resulted in the capture and release of 136 endangered pallid sturgeon, which contributed to our understanding of this rare species. In addition, Fisheries Division staff documented spawning of pallid sturgeon in the National Recreational Reach of the Missouri River for the first time and assisted with the first successful spawning and hatchery production of pallid sturgeon from broodstock collected in Nebraska.

Cumulative Impact Study of the Lower Platte River

A partnership with local, state and federal entities was formed to complete a cumulative impact study of the lower Platte River, which has habitat for an exceptional amount of biodiversity. The study, which seeks the protection of this ecosystem by understanding riverine and landscape functions, focuses on

the interaction of the land and water and how changes have shaped the integrity of the river corridor.

The main product of the study will be a state-of-the art Geographic Information System (GIS) product, which will show the trends for different habitats and structures (such as channel width, grasslands, timber, housing, etc).

Upland Game Birds and CRP

The Wildlife Division and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln studied the effects of Conservation Reserve Program field management on upland game bird populations. Results have shown pheasant hens that nest and raise broods in fields disked and interseeded with legumes raise up to twice as many chicks as those that nest in unmanaged fields. Prairie chickens in Johnson County using unmanaged brome CRP fields are considerably less productive than those in the Sandhills, suggesting more disking and interseeding might be needed to maintain long-term populations there. Our results are being used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and others to make CRP-related policy decisions.



FAST fact

Fueled by an energy market for ethanol, Nebraska farmers planted an additional 1.3 million acres of corn in 2007 as compared to 2006; the largest one-year market-driven increase in corn acres since 1924.

Partnerships

The Commission and other agencies and groups work well on the federal, state and local levels. These partnerships include agency-wide projects that serve the common Commission cause. For example:

Partnership Aiding in Critical Habitat Preservation

Tremendous strides for wildlife habitat conservation have been made in the Wildcat Hills Biologically Unique Landscape. The Commission, Platte River Basin Environments, Inc., The Nature Conservancy, private landowners, and other partners, have been preserving critical wildlife habitat through management, conservation easements, and land acquisition. A priority of the partnership is to provide public access that is compatible with habitat needs. Twelve Tier I (most

imperiled) species and more than 50 Tier II (at risk of becoming imperiled) species benefit from the effort, including two herds of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep.

Pine Ridge Partnerships

Pine Ridge area volunteer fire departments are vital partners in the protection and management of wildlife management areas (WMA) and state parks. These volunteers, along with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, provide valuable fire training and support for Commission staff that manage ponderosa pine forests. The Commission also gets help in

managing forests on WMAs from a new partnership with the Nebraska Forest Service. Also, a major fuel-reduction project on the Chadron Creek Ranch WMA is planned for 2008. These partnerships are especially critical in the Pine Ridge, where extended drought conditions and high fuel loads in the forests combine to keep wildfire risks at high levels.

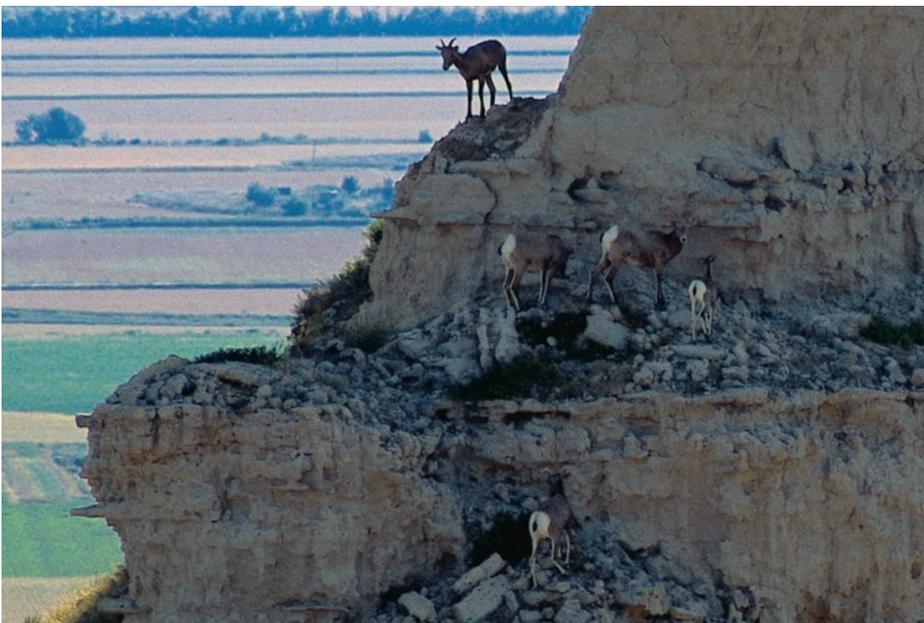
Bighorn Sheep Management

Several partners have contributed funding and support for the bighorn sheep program, which includes reintroduction of sheep back to their native lands and management of the herd in the best interest of the resource and for outdoor recreational opportunities.

Sponsors include Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; Colorado Division of Wildlife; National Foundation for North American Wild Sheep (FNAWS); Iowa FNAWS; Minnesota/Wisconsin FNAWS; Safari Club International; Nebraska Chapter of Safari Club International; Platte River Basin Environments Inc.; Grand Slam Club Ovis; Conklin Foundation; and Nebraska Game and Parks Foundation.

John J. Dinan Bird Conservation Area

In 2007, wildlife biologists discovered two nests of the federally threatened piping plover and 10 nests of the federally endangered least tern on National Audubon's John J. Dinan Bird Conservation



Bighorn Sheep



Piping Plover nest with eggs

Area near Gibbon. This was the first documented nesting of these species on the main channel of the central Platte River in more than a decade. The 200-acre site was purchased and restored in partnership with the Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Audubon Nebraska, Nebraska Environmental Trust, Pine Tree Conservation Society, The Nature Conservancy and Platte River Whooping Crane Trust. The site was dedicated in honor of John Dinan, the agency's former nongame bird biologist in April.

Boy Scout Tree Planting

Approximately 1,500 Boy Scouts and family members planted 10,000 ponderosa pines at Fort Robinson State Park in April.

Take Pride in America

Take Pride in America is a partnership of individuals, civic groups, corporations and others that volunteer with the goal of instilling a sense of ownership and responsibility for our natural, cultural and historic resources.

Nebraskans celebrated Take Pride in America Day on May 5 at several state parks and wildlife management areas, with approximately 1,500 volunteers participating. Under current and foreseeable budget constraints, such volunteer efforts will become increasingly vital, and our gratitude grows accordingly.

Nebraska's Fishing Host Program

The Fishing Host Program is a volunteer effort designed to teach youth traditional outdoor recreation pursuits such as fishing. Fishing hosts are experienced anglers who volunteer to conduct free "how-to" fishing clinics in state parks and recreation areas. They conduct one- or two-hour shoreline-based clinics for youths and parents, teaching the basics of fishing. The hosts also serve as the park's primary contact for the agency's Free Tackle Loaner Program (at participating parks).

Law Enforcement Partnerships

Conservation officers in the southwest used Highway Safety Grant money to support cooperative efforts with the Nebraska State Patrol and the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office. The efforts targeted alcohol and drug violations at Maloney and Sutherland state recreation areas and the Interstate 80 wildlife management areas around North Platte. The efforts resulted in many citations and arrests for driving under the influence, driving under suspension,



FAST fact

Nebraska's Teaming With Wildlife coalition grew by more than 100 supporters in 2007, making it the fifth largest in the country. The coalition was started to support dedicated funding for wildlife conservation, education and nature-based recreation.

possession of drugs and paraphernalia, and outstanding arrest warrants among others.

Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance

Staff participated in the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance, an umbrella organization of state and local agencies that fosters development and implementation of locally drawn strategies, actions, and practices to protect and restore the vitality of the lower Platte River's resources. Other projects associated with the lower Platte River include the Backwater Habitat Area being constructed on the south part of the Schilling Wildlife Management Area and the River Obstruction Removal Project.

Homeland Security

The Law Enforcement Division has headed the agency Homeland Security preparations and involvement. Personnel attended a myriad of Homeland Security meetings and training sessions in 2007.

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

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