



Ninety acres adjacent to park will be saved

The land will be preserved as part of an easement with Nebraska Land Trust

BY ALGIS J. LAUKAITIS
Lincoln Journal Star

Ninety acres of land along the Platte River adjacent to Schramm Park State Recreation Area will be preserved for future generations thanks to a conservation easement with the Nebraska Land Trust.

The perpetual easement, granted by brothers John and William Walz, will protect 25 to 30 acres of woodlands on the west side of the Sarpy County park, "creating a larger contiguous block of permanently protected habitat in the area," according to Dave Sands, executive director of the Lincoln-based Land Trust.

Described as a pastoral landscape of farmland and woodlands lining the Platte River along Nebraska 31, the property includes large cottonwoods used by bald eagles and important habitat for a wide diversity of migratory songbirds that fly through the area each spring.

"This is a key easement because conservation easements are at their best when you can start with a protected core such as we have at Schramm State Park and then build

out from there and create even a larger protected landscape," Sands said in an interview.

The easement also protects nearly one-half mile of natural riverbanks adjacent to the protected riverfront at the park and the last half mile of an unnamed tributary that flows out of the Schramm Bluffs into the river.

The 90-acre parcel that is in the river's floodplain is in an environmentally sensitive river corridor between Lincoln and Omaha. Earlier this year, developers unveiled plans for The Seven Hills Business Park, a proposed 438-acre development at Interstate 80 and Pflug Road.

Conceptual plans showed two corporate campuses for large employers, an area of office/flex space for smaller employers, a retail area, space for two hotels, several ponds and hundreds of trees.

Sands said the conservation easement is an important first step in a larger effort to preserve the Schramm Bluffs from rapid development. "We feel now is the time to conserve the area rather than waiting until development is imminent," he said.

The land is owned by John and William Walz, whose family has owned the farm for more than 100 years. It's about four miles "as the crow flies" from the proposed Pflug Road Interchange project, which is on hold.

John Walz, who lives in Montpelier, Vt., said he and his brother grew up in a tradition of conservation and restoring plowed land to native grass in northern Lincoln County.

"Both my brother and I grew up in western Nebraska," he said in a phone interview. "We're farm boys. We've always had an interest in conserving the land."

John Walz said his mother, Mary Clare Barron (her maiden name), may have been born on the property. In recent years, the family has leased the farm ground but has always set



Nebraska Land Trust

As people drive down into the Platte Valley on Highway 31 toward Schramm State Recreation Area in Sarpy County, they behold a pastoral landscape of farmland and woodlands lining the Platte River. Thanks to John and William Walz, whose family has owned the land for more than 100 years, this scenic vista, wildlife habitat, and natural Platte River frontage will be preserved forever through a conservation easement with the Nebraska Land Trust.

conditions to protect the river banks and other natural features.

The easement was made possible through funding and technical assistance in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Papio-Missouri Natural Resources District, Nebraska Land Trust, Nebraska Department of Roads, Hawkins Construction Co., Nebraska Environmental Trust, Cooper Foundation and the J.A. Woollam Foundation.

"When the Nebraska Environmental Trust approved a \$1.1 million grant to the Nebraska Land Trust to purchase development rights in the area, they recognized that we were presented with a unique opportunity where many landowners were willing to voluntarily protect their land," Sands said.

Jarel Vinduska and the Schramm Association for a Viable Environment also were credited by the Walz brothers for their efforts to preserve the Schramm area.

The land preservation effort

began with an offer by Hawkins Construction to provide funding to the land trust for a conservation easement that protected natural riverbanks along the Platte River, according to Sands. The offer was the result of environmental mitigation for construction of the new six-lane I-80 bridge across the Platte River.

By some estimates, more than 50 percent of the riverbanks have been stabilized by concrete and other materials downstream from the I-80 bridge, Sands said.

"Since natural riverbanks are essential to river process and hydrology, preservation of the remaining natural banks is important," he added.

Sands said the Nebraska Land Trust is talking to a number of land owners in the area about similar conservation easements. Such agreements allow farming, hunting and fishing but prohibit landowners from subdividing or developing the property, digging gravel pits or rip-rapping the riverbanks.

Reprinted with permission.

More park land

Ninety acres of land along the Platte River adjacent to Schramm Park State Recreation Area will be preserved for future generations thanks to a conservation easement with the Nebraska Land Trust.



Source: Nebraska Land Trust SHEILA STORY/Lincoln Journal Star