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PROTECTING PINE RIDGE

Worthy conservation

Forever protected: That's the new status of nearly three square miles of the Pine Ridge near Fort Robinson State Park, thanks to landowners and the Nebraska Land Trust.

Ranches in the beautiful area are under pressure to subdivide land for residential development. The trust purchased voluntary conservation easements on ranchland owned by Gary and Nancy Fisher in Dawes County, and Sioux County land owned by Chief Dull Knife College, to protect it from future residential or recreational development.

The 1,700 acres include the historic Cheyenne Buttes just west of Fort Robinson, part of the route taken by about 150 Northern Cheyenne Indians when they fled Fort Robinson in 1879 after being starved and allowed to freeze in subzero weather while in U.S. care. Some 64 Native Americans and 11 soldiers died in the 12-day running battle.

The Fisher land will serve as a wildlife migration route between Ponderosa Wildlife Management area and the Nebraska National Forest near Crawford. Elk and big-horn sheep are among the animals that use the corridor. The price for easements on both pieces of land was about \$820,000, most of it from the Nebraska Environmental Trust and a U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation program that protects working ranches.

Landowners who volunteer for the conservation program continue to own the property. They are allowed to live on the land and can farm, ranch, hunt and use it for similar activities. What they can't do is develop the land's natural or historic resources in a way that is incompatible with conservation goals.

A huge thank-you is due Gary and Nancy Fisher and the Chief Dull Knife College, based in Montana, for their stewardship. Their public-spirited action means a wild and magnificent portion of the Cornhusker State will be protected in perpetuity.

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