



Preserving Our Agricultural, Historical And Natural Resources.

December 2015

It was a perfect October morning in Nebraska's Pine Ridge. Under a deep blue sky the Black Hills rose like an island from rolling waves of grass 60 miles to the north. Curving away to the western horizon, the escarpment of the Pine Ridge resembled a rocky shoreline. Eight members of the Nebraska Land Trust's (NLT) Pine Ridge Advisory Committee were enjoying the view as we toured a private ranch near Chadron, until we came upon a small patch of badlands where fossils could be found. As our group climbed out of the pick-ups all eyes were fixed on the ground, searching with delight for fossil snails and pieces of oreodont jaw bones.

Our young guide and expert fossil hunter was the third generation in a family that ranches and farms on the land. His parents and grandparents are interested in permanent conservation of their ranch and the exceptional habitat for elk that it provides. As houses and acreages creep ever closer from Chadron, the family would like to work with the NLT to place a conservation easement on their ranch and they wanted our committee of ranchers and resource professionals to assess their land for conservation value. It was a tour that was years in the making.

***When the NLT decides to focus on an area like the Pine Ridge, we do not tell local people "This is what we want to protect." Instead, we ask "What makes your region special? What do you want to conserve for your grandchildren? What are your priorities for conservation?"*** It is a process we call Community Conservation and it is essential for success. It took nearly two years to form a local advisory committee and ask these questions in the Pine Ridge, which resulted in property scoring criteria that the Committee used to assess four properties covering 4,400 acres in three days. **You can be a partner in Community Conservation through annual support of the NLT.**



Members of the NLT Pine Ridge Advisory Committee admire the view after fossil hunting

Just a few days before our Advisory Committee toured properties in the Pine Ridge, the dividends from a past investment in Community Conservation were apparent on a tour in a very different Nebraska landscape more than 400 miles to the east.

On this tour, amid the red and gold leaves of an oak/hickory woodland, Ron and Carol Patterson proudly showed their 693-acre Sarpy County farm to a reporter from the *Omaha World-Herald*. ***Permanent protection of the Patterson Farm is big news in Nebraska's smallest and fastest growing county, where large swaths of farmland have become suburban Omaha.*** The enclosed article describes the farm's outstanding natural, historic and agricultural resources that will be preserved thanks to the Patterson's incredible conservation legacy.

In total, the NLT has protected 1,240 acres in the Schramm Bluffs overlooking the Platte River between Omaha and Lincoln; an area projected to have 2,000,000 people by the year 2050. *This effort started in 2007, with an investment in the Community Conservation process. We brought many interests from landowners to developers to the table, to establish assessment criteria that were used to score 13 properties and identify top priorities, like the Patterson Farm. This Community Conservation process also started with support from people like you, who value a beautiful river valley running through the heart of our state's most populous region.*

While our work in the lower Platte Valley has been ongoing for years, we are just getting started in the Pines and Buttes landscapes of western Nebraska. In the coming year we will:

- Apply for federal funds to match a \$900,000 grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust for the purchase of conservation easements in our “Pines and Buttes” landscapes – the Pine Ridge and Wildcat Hills
- Spend significant time and resources to put easements in place, including legal counsel, travel, baseline documentation, county approval, title work and other transaction costs
- Develop local Wildcat Hills ranking criteria as we have done in the Pine Ridge
- Provide outreach to interested landowners
- Assess properties through site visits

Once permanent land protection is achieved, our job is still not done. Whenever possible, we will continue to work with landowners to enhance conservation values on their land. We must also visit each protected property at least once a year to assure that easements are upheld. This requires 32 annual property visits in 14 counties, from Sarpy County in the east to Sioux County on the Wyoming border.



A well-managed, fire-resistant forest was among properties assessed in the Pine Ridge

**With so much to do, your donation of any size is welcome and will make a difference in conserving our native landscapes. As we expand the scope of our work to include our western “Pines and Buttes” landscapes, please consider an expansion of your tax-deductible support for the Nebraska Land Trust. Whether you are a first-time donor or a long-time supporter, our growth and ongoing conservation efforts depend on you.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dave Sands". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Dave Sands  
Executive Director