



THE LANDSCAPE

"Preserving Our Agricultural, Historical And Natural Resources"

NOVEMBER 2018 IMPACT REPORT



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wild thoughts

from Dave Sands, Executive Director



"I have three children," Jean Norman explained to the Sioux County Planning Commission, as part of the county approval process for a conservation easement on her 3,621-acre ranch adjacent to Toadstool Park in north-west Nebraska. After giving each of her children's names Jean added, "I also have a fourth child, my land."

One hears this sentiment often when you work for a land trust. Many landowners cherish their land so deeply it is like a member of their family and they never, ever want it harmed. Other family values can also play a role in conservation easements, like love of wildlife, helping to strengthen a family farm or ranch, a desire to pass land to the next generation and helping a young family to get started in agriculture. In the process, natural and historical resources are conserved as well which benefits us all. For examples, there is no need to look any farther than this issue of The Landscape.

In addition to Jean Norman, there is the Raymer family in Nebraska's Pine Ridge, whose love of elk is integral to the management of their ranch. This is not surprising since hundreds of elk use their land for mating in the fall, forage in the winter, spring calving and summer range. The ranch is run by two generations of the family who hope to pass it on to the next.

In the Sandhills, a conservation easement protected a ranch on the Dismal River while helping two young families to become established in agriculture, keeping them in the community and kids in local schools. Loy and Jean Baumann were motivated to protect their Sandhills prairie to honor Loy's father who wanted it to be a refuge for wildlife. It also happens to be the largest undeveloped tract of Sandhills prairie between Highway 92 and the north shore of Lake McConaughy.

The Anderson family had a common goal to conserve and improve their grassland along Cottonwood Creek in the Pine Ridge. The Sisters of Mercy are a spiritual family who wanted to conserve God's creation. While family goals can differ widely, there is one common thread. When people view their land as a part of the family, a part of their history and a part of who they are, nothing could be more natural than a desire to protect it from harm, forever!

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 *Elk are a common sight on the MJD Ranch*

MJD Ranch

Unique year-round habitat for elk conserved near Chadron

It was a beautiful November evening in 2016, when Leah Burgess with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) and Dave Sands with the Nebraska Land Trust (NLT) climbed into a new elk viewing blind at the invitation of Mike and Joan Raymer, who ranch the 2,443-acre property in the Pine Ridge northeast of Chadron. Warm temps and a light evening breeze complimented the apricot clouds when a line of a dozen elk began to emerge from a nearby canyon where they spend the day. It seemed as if a faucet had opened as a stream of elk poured from the canyon until nearly 150 were counted within 100 yards of the blind. While it seemed like a million miles from anywhere, it was only 10 miles east of Chadron, past small acreages spreading out from the city.

In the deepening twilight, a chorus of mews and chirps from elk cows and calves filled the air, periodically interrupted by the bugling of bulls. If one listened intently, the clicking of bull antlers could even be heard as they jousting with one another. It was a wildlife spectacle worthy of a national park, but it was a result of private land stewardship by the Raymer family. Along with Mike and Joan's son, Justin, and a friend, David Suitts, they formed MJD Ranch, LLC to purchase the property. From the start, elk have played a prominent role in management decisions, from leaving crops standing for winter feed to repairing damaged fence without complaint. Ultimately, this also led them to permanently conserve their ranch with a conservation easement in 2018.

In explaining the family's motives for an easement, Mike pointed out "We have seen other properties become void of wildlife and somewhat commercialized trying to enhance the outdoor experience. This was not what we wanted for our property. To assure future generations the opportunity to continue in agriculture and enjoy the magnificent scenery and abundant wildlife, a conservation easement was our answer."

 *MJD Ranch in winter*



Following that November visit, RMEF showed interest in becoming a major financial partner in protecting the land, resulting in a \$50,000 grant for the purchase of a conservation easement on the ranch. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) and Nebraska Big Game Society (NBGS) provided the remainder of the funding needed for the easement purchase. Transaction costs were supported by the Sterns Charitable Foundation and the Raymer family who generously endowed the monitoring and defense of their easement. The NLT's Pine Ridge Advisory Committee also played a role by recommending the project to the NLT Board of Directors, after scoring 11 properties totaling more than 13,000 acres.

Todd Nordeen, Big Game Disease and Research Manager for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, also visited the ranch and had a chance to assess its importance for elk. He reported "Mike's property...is a unique place holding elk and other wildlife throughout the year. Now that the elk are using and staying on this property, it has reduced the potential of vehicle accidents along Highway 20 to the south and the amount of depredation complaints in the area. Due to Mike's management, this property has become an iconic place for wildlife."

*"Due to Mike's management, this property
has become an iconic place for wildlife."*

It is also part of a historical landscape, where twin buttes known as the Sheridan Gates overlook the Beaver Wall and the historic site of the Spotted Tail Agency. Given all of these resources, Nordeen concluded, "This property is a high value tract deserving of protection from development and risks to the landscape and wildlife"

One reason the property attracts elk and other wildlife is its diversity, roughly divided between ponderosa pine forest, grassland and cropland. Sandstone buttes lend themselves to stunning vistas where a hidden canyon shelters a spring-fed stream. In addition to elk and deer, sharp-tailed grouse can be seen dancing on booming grounds in the spring. A small patch of badlands has rewarded children with snail fossils and pieces of ancient bone. In 2012, much of the surrounding pine forest was burned by wildfire, but forest on the MJD Ranch was spared. To increase the forest's future resilience to wildfire, the conservation easement allows for forest management and thinning to keep a green "seed island" in this eastern part of the Pine Ridge.



Sharp-tailed grouse

The ranch is also important to the community as an on-going family agricultural operation. Throughout the Pine Ridge, ranches are being purchased for recreational properties. While landowners vary, this sometimes removes a ranch operation from the local economy, while removing ranch families from local communities. When recreation replaces ranching, land ceases to be a family livelihood and legacy. Instead it can be more like an asset, making future subdivision more likely. When a ranch is subdivided into ranchettes, it is a permanent decision as fragmented land with houses on it will never be suitable for ranching again and far less desirable for wildlife.

This change in land ownership and use is especially prevalent in the Pine Ridge. According to the 2017 Nebraska Farm Real Estate Market Survey, only 55% of land buyers in Northwest Nebraska are active farmers or ranchers – the lowest percentage of any region in the state by far. Northwest Nebraska was also the leader in out-of-state buyers, who accounted for 36% of land purchases. This compared to the runner-up North region, where only 4% of buyers are from out-of-state. The MJD Ranch, with developable land and stunning views 15-minutes from the region's largest city would have been a prime candidate for ranchettes, if not for the owners of the MJD Ranch.

"Working with Nebraska Land Trust to put our property into a conservation easement was an extremely rewarding experience," Mike said. "A big 'Thank You' goes to the people from NLT, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Nebraska Resources Conservation Service, Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nebraska Big Game Society, and Dawes and Sheridan County for helping us. These people were great to work with and the end product was just what we needed and wanted. This property is guaranteed to continue being used for farming and ranching while abundant wildlife co-exist in a beautiful, protected environment for many generations."



Anderson Grassland

Grassland, pine savannah and Cottonwood Creek conserved north of Crawford

It was late fall in 2015 when members of the Nebraska Land Trust's (NLT) Pine Ridge Advisory Committee (PRAC) finally got their reward. For the past year, the PRAC had been confined to meeting rooms, in an effort to produce a transparent, locally relevant, resource-based scoring system that would guide the NLT's selection of projects in the Pine Ridge. The reward was an opportunity to participate on the scoring team and actually visit properties, such as the 547-acre Anderson ranch north of Crawford.

As the group walked along Cottonwood Creek, a perennial stream in a semi-arid landscape, one of the team members offered the opinion that "this valley is the most pristine area left in the Pine Ridge." Surrounded by grasslands under the looming escarpment of the Pine Ridge stretching to the western horizon, with the last golden leaves of autumn still clinging to cottonwoods along their namesake creek, no one bothered to voice an opposing view.

Although the land had recently been purchased by the family, Wade Anderson was already describing his plans for grazing management and his goal to improve the grassland's health. As a professional rangeland ecologist who writes management plans for other ranchers, he was clearly excited about the possibilities and the prospect that his family's land could be conserved for agriculture and wildlife forever, through a conservation easement with the NLT. This prospect became a reality when the family completed their easement in January, 2018.

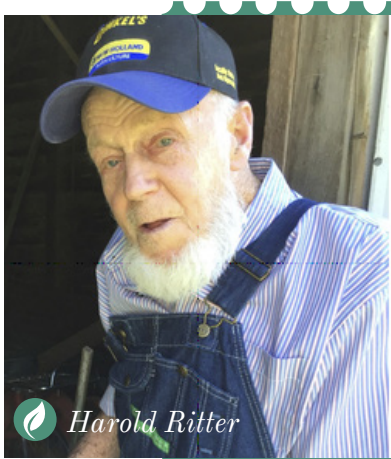
"The main reason we went the conservation easement route," Wade explained, "is because we wanted to protect this land from potentially being broken into smaller tracts and to preserve the ranching and agricultural heritage on it. In our opinion, with this type of conservation easement everyone benefits. Grazing, forestry and hunting are all still part of our operation on this particular tract of land and will continue to be. Agricultural conservation easements are a viable option to help keep ranchers on the land and provide natural landscapes for the public to enjoy and benefit from."

Referring to the NLT's local advisory committee and its development of property scoring criteria based on local values, Wade pointed out, "It's by and large a local and state led effort, which is huge as they represent our local concerns and help shape that into future agreements."

Because the land qualified as a Grassland of Special Significance under the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) program, NRCS was able to provide 75% of the funding needed to purchase the conservation easement. Since the Cottonwood Valley is a magnet for wildlife including elk, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation also provided significant funding for the agreement. The remainder of funding came from the Nebraska Environmental Trust, with the Sterns Foundation providing critical support for transaction costs. The Anderson's agreed to endow their easement with a generous donation as well. Thanks to their conservation ethic, the term "pristine" will always apply to this piece of the Cottonwood Valley.

Ritter Endowment

A double legacy protects cherished family land, while endowing future land conservation



Harold Ritter

When Karen Ritter was growing up in Minnesota, her family would travel to Nebraska each summer to visit her grandparents and Uncle Harold Ritter near Tilden. After dinner one evening when Karen was seven, she lost a cherished headband and was inconsolable, much to the dismay of her parents and grandparents. No one knew how to calm her down until Harold, a life-long bachelor, scooped Karen up, put her on his shoulders and ran laps around the house until she was laughing with delight. This was Harold's gift; no matter what the challenge, he could find a solution.

For an organization committed to permanent land protection, there is no greater challenge than preparing for perpetuity. The Nebraska Land Trust (NLT) does so by maintaining a significant Stewardship Fund to endow the future monitoring and defense of conservation easements, but the annual budget which facilitates protection of new land has not received any support from an operating endowment, until now.

Thanks to Karen, her sister Sue Ritter and brother Dan Ritter, Harold is once again providing a solution to a challenge. With a \$100,000 gift from Harold's estate, the NLT has established the Harold Ritter Endowment for the Land. In addition, the family donated 77 acres of land near Tilden, providing a solution for Harold's family who wanted to protect the native prairie and trees that Harold cherished. The NLT will assure permanent protection through a conservation easement, before the land is sold to generate additional endowment on top of the \$100,000 gift.

Whenever Harold tackled a challenge, he did so with energy and passion. Farmer, wood carver, engineer, builder, inventor, machinist, repairman, story teller, philanthropist and conservationist all describe the man. It was his passion for natural beauty and conservation that drove him to plant nearly 1,000 trees, mostly pines, at the edge of virgin tall-grass prairie on 77-acres near his house.

To honor their uncle's love of Nebraska, its land, prairie and trees, the family wanted to donate the land to a conservation organization that would protect it. "Harold felt a special connection to Nebraska and planted most of the trees himself on the parcel we are gifting," Karen explained. "It only makes sense to put the money back into preserving the area he so loved. We believe the NLT is the organization to best fulfill Harold's wishes, as the NLT is dedicated to preserving the beauty of the state's natural resources."

In thanking the Ritter family, Dave Sands, NLT Executive director said their gift would create "a double legacy – permanent protection of their uncle's beautiful land and an endowment that will help the NLT to conserve additional land across the entire state of Nebraska. The establishment of a permanent operating endowment has been a long-held goal of the NLT and this initial gift is like throwing a pebble into a pond. It will create ripples that spread outward over time, touching people and land we can only imagine." Like those ripples, the size of the endowment must grow over time to support a growing budget and the Ritter gift provides a model for other landowners who may also want to leave a double legacy.

It is fitting that Harold created a model to endow land conservation in Nebraska, because he was happiest when creating things. His obituary describes "a farmer by day, a woodcarver by night and a wizard inventor with any other spare moment." The Pierson Wildlife Museum in Neligh provided inspiration for his carvings, which ranged from horses to giraffes. Many of his carvings are on display at the Antelope County Museum and some of his larger inventions will be on display at the Elkhorn Valley Museum, next to the Johnny Carson exhibit.

Harold was also extremely modest. According to the family, his highest salute to his own work was, "I guess I'm not too disappointed with the way that one turned out." In her eulogy, Karen said "I still feel him with us...looking down at us with those deep, blue eyes. That knowing, mischievous smirk. I see that flowing white beard. I see him shaking his head, confounded and saying, Gosh, what are they all making such a big fuss for?" The Harold Ritter Endowment for the Land is one answer to that question.



Our Heritage Ranch

3,621 acres are protected next to Toadstool Park

Cresting the first big hill on Highway 20 west of Chadron, a person can see the Nebraska badlands from 30 miles away, gleaming white like a jewel set into the dark crown of the Pine Ridge. At the heart of this landscape, Toadstool Park draws visitors from afar to the Oglala National Grassland, of which it is a part. Looming over this land of “gumbo” soil, prairie grass, sheer cliffs and weather sculpted sandstone is a conical landmark known as Roundtop. At its base, adjacent to Toadstool Park, is a 3,621-acre ranch started by Jean Norman’s family in 1887. It is still in the family today and Jean protected her family’s heritage from harm forever, by placing it in a conservation easement with the Nebraska Land Trust (NLT) in August, 2018.

“I feel I am protecting my ancestors hard work,” Jean said. Her ancestors were Swedish immigrants who homesteaded just below Roundtop. They knew a railroad would soon be built through the area so they could provide food, lodging, labor and blacksmithing for construction crews. Jean is the fourth generation to steward the land. With her husband Rick, they run Our Heritage Guest Ranch to share the stunning landscape, sunsets and dark skies with visitors. Guests also have the opportunity to experience a working cattle ranch and can participate in daily chores like fixing fences, haying and calving. Hiking, biking, photography, art retreats, fossil hunting, trainspotting and immersion in Native American culture are offered as well.

Whatever the activity, most visitors come away from the ranch with a better understanding that ranching and conservation go hand in hand in the Pine Ridge. “Our management philosophy is that we cannot work against Mother Nature, but must work with her,” Jean explains. “Working with and understanding



nature, the elements, wildlife, cattle and horses is what has kept us in business over the generations. I learned from my Dad as we would ride our horses out on the ranch for two purposes: The first was to train horses and the second was to train me. He was always teaching me the best management practices for our ranch.”

Whether they know it or not, anyone who visits Toadstool Park appreciates the ranch as well, especially if they enjoy the park’s solitude and pristine views. A visitor could literally stand in the campground at Toadstool and if they threw a rock in the right direction, it would land on Jean’s land. Aside from protecting a treasure trove of resources on the ranch itself that includes productive agriculture, native grasslands, wildlife habitat, deep canyons, towering cliffs, ponds, springs, cultural sites and Roundtop, the conservation easement preserves the solitude that is fundamental to a Toadstool Park experience. For these reasons, the Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nebraska Big Game Society and Jean provided funding to make the easement possible.

Aside from its beauty, the area has seen a unique pressure to subdivide ranches into smaller parcels owned by people from out-of-state. Because the badlands are rich in fossils which can

*“Our management philosophy is that we cannot work
against Mother Nature, but must work with her.”*



not be legally collected on surrounding federal land, nearby ranches have been subdivided into small parcels for buyers who want to excavate and extract fossils for fun and profit on their own land. While the conservation easement allows for surface collection of fossils by children and guests, it does not allow for the excavation of fossils unless it is done for research by a recognized educational institution approved by the NLT.

This threat of subdivision provided another motive for Jean to keep her ranch whole, especially since she hopes to someday pass it on to the fifth generation of the family. If it were subdivided, current management practices could not be maintained and ranching would no longer be economically viable. As Jean put it, “I feel I have ensured these practices well into the future, by placing the ranch in a conservation easement with the NLT.”



 Pond on the Sisters of Mercy property

Sisters of Mercy

Sisters of Mercy commitment to care of the earth preserves land along the Lower Platte River

Fifteen years ago, Sister Catherine Kuper contacted the Nebraska Land Trust (NLT) to inquire about a conservation easement on 22 acres owned by the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas West Midwest Community. In 2002, Sister Catherine, then director of the Sisters of Mercy Earth Project in Omaha, wrote, “We believe the property known as Mercy Acres and Knowles Mercy Spirituality Center is land that speaks to us of God’s goodness and generosity as a sacrament of healing and revelation...As responsible stewards and grateful recipients of God’s gift, we wish to preserve and share this gift in a way that will endure...”



Steve Knight, Sister Catherine, and Doug Sorenson

In a prayerful ceremony on March 28, 2018, the Sisters of Mercy and NLT signed a donated conservation easement on the 22-acre property located on the Platte River near Waterloo, Neb.

At the ceremony, Dave Sands, Executive Director of the NLT, pointed out, “While the property is modest in size, it is large in terms of conservation value. With about 700 feet of pristine Platte River shoreline, mature woodlands that provide habitat for songbirds and bald eagles, and a large pond that attracts migratory waterfowl, beaver and other wildlife, permanent conservation of these resources is a gift to current and future generations who value our natural environment. This is especially true in the Lower Platte Valley; a region projected to have 2 million people by 2050.”

This action is a natural outcome of the Sisters of Mercy’s Commitment to Care of the Earth, said Sister Margaret Mary Hinz, RSM, a member of the Sister’s Leadership Team. “For over 50 years the Sisters of Mercy have enjoyed the natural beauty of the Knowles Mercy Spirituality Center and Mercy Acres property. It is natural that we would seek to protect in perpetuity its unique vegetation and the various species of birds and animals that thrive there. Over the years, we have committed time and resources into keeping the natural beauty of this property where so many people have come to connect with God and connect with the earth. We are so pleased to ensure that its beauty will continue to be preserved for generations to come.”

Stewardship of the environment is a priority for the Sisters of Mercy and is referred to as one of five “Critical Concerns” that they collectively focus on as a congregation. The Sisters of Mercy are “impelled to act in harmony and interdependence with all creation.” In Omaha, this commitment first took shape in 2002 as the Mercy Earth Project, thanks to the efforts of Sister Catherine, who for 12 years was an environmental educator at Fontenelle Forest. Coincidentally, the initiation of Mercy Earth Project was not long after the NLT was formed.

“When I first visited the property in 2004, the NLT was a young organization with just two easements protecting 790 acres in Douglas County,” Sands said. “On that visit, I told Sister Catherine that the NLT would be honored to partner in its protection. Today the NLT holds 41 easements in 18 counties protecting nearly 27,000 acres, but that has done nothing to diminish the importance of protecting this beautiful property, or the honor of partnering with the Sisters to do so.”

Located west of Omaha, meadow and woodlands on the banks of the Platte River provide walking paths, benches for contemplative sitting, and a spring-fed pond. In addition, trees, shrubs, and flowers—wild and domestic—as well as a variety of birds and small animals are at home there. For 25 years, individuals and small groups have found rest and relaxation, sacred space for retreat and nurturing resources for their spirits on the property. In keeping with the Sister’s mission, those resources are now conserved in perpetuity.

First read by Sister Catherine Kuper on March 28, in celebration of the signing of the conservation easement:

Forever and Ever, Alleluia

Forever, In Perpetuity, Longer than our Lives

All you trees- Cottonwood, Hackberry, and Walnut,
This Place belongs to you. Sink your roots deep.

All you Oaks- stand tall and strong, spread your acorns and prosper.

All you Evergreens, Pines, and Cedars- let your boughs whisper
“Forever and Ever.”

All you broken and dead branches, holes in trees, nests to Woodpeckers,
Chickadees, Nuthatches - nurture their young forever.

Forever and Ever, Alleluia

All you prairie grasses, Bluestems, Golden Rods, and Penstemons, have
your way, forever.

All you fruit-bearing plants, you Coralberry and Bittersweet, fill this
place with your seeds and feed all who live here.

All you bodies of water, the pond, wetlands, and wild Platte, give life
to all you touch and all who touch you.

Forever and Ever, Alleluia

All you birds - large and small	
Eagles, Hawks, and Owls	Find life here.
Ducks and Geese and all you who wade	Find life here.
Cardinals, Blue Jays and Kingfishers	Find life here.
Warblers, Perching Birds and Hummers	Find life here.
All you who sing: Meadowlarks and Robins	Find life here.

Forever and Ever, Alleluia

All you fur-bearing animals
Fox, raccoon, squirrel, and beaver - find your dens here.

You White-Tailed Deer - Prance and dance whenever you can.

Forever and Ever, Alleluia

All you fishes, snakes and amphibians
You bass and bluegill, you frogs and turtles
Dart, crawl and swim forever.

All you spiders and insects, dragonflies, beetles, butterflies and bees,
Even you flies and mosquitoes
Tickle the plants and spread their pollen everywhere.

All you plants and flowers, prosper and grow...
Fill this place with smells and colors that give praise and glory to God.

Forever and Ever, Alleluia

All you humans, listen, touch, see, walk carefully and know the privilege of
being a Creature among other creatures.

Let your hearts and minds praise and thank the One Who began all of this
and sustains it to this very day.

Forever and Ever, Alleluia

(Written by Sister Catherine M. Kuper, RSM, on December 8, 2017 upon hearing that the Nebraska Land Trust Board had approved acceptance of the conservation easement.
Reflection while walking the land.)

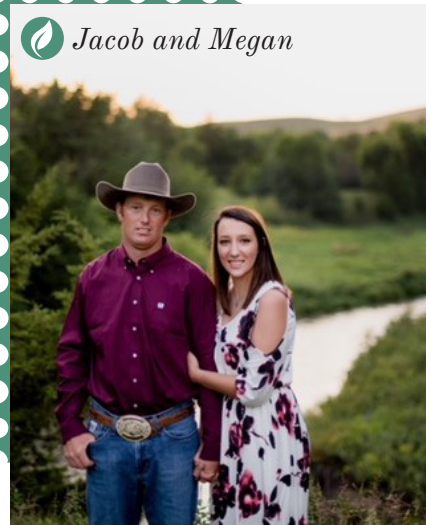
Licking Ranch

Conservation easement gives young families a path to purchase a ranch on the Dismal River

It isn't often that articles on Husker football and conservation easements intersect, but a recent article in the Omaha World-Herald is an exception. In a story about the declining number of football players in rural Nebraska, the coach of Anselmo-Merna high school pointed to fewer young families in rural areas due to a problem that affects far more than football. "One of the biggest topics in agricultural banking," he said, "is how to give young people a chance. It takes a staggering amount of equity to even begin."

This was the challenge facing Riley, Melissa, Jacob and Megan Licking. Jacob and Riley had grown up on their parents Sandhills ranch, but they wanted to strike out on their own which is a daunting proposition for young ranchers.

They had their eyes set on a 4,580-acre ranch south of Thedford, which also happened to have frontage on the Dismal River, habitat for the endangered American burying beetle (ABB) and a population of endangered blowout pen-



Jacob and Megan



Riley and Melissa with their three children

stemon. The ranch was owned by a Colorado couple who wanted to sell it to the Lickings. They knew that the brothers would take good care of the land since they had been leasing it for grazing. The only question was how to make it work financially. Two conservation easements with the Nebraska Land Trust (NLT) in 2018 helped to address this challenge.

Riley had heard about conservation easements through the Sandhills Task Force (STF), but at the time the STF did not have funding to purchase the easement. So the STF brought the project to the NLT. The timing was perfect, as the NLT had recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Grand Prairie Wind, LLC, to provide funding for the permanent protection of grassland habitat for the beetle. Thomas County where the ranch is located and the Sandhills in general are one of the last strongholds for the ABB. After a visit from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff to approve the ranch as a mitigation site, a plan was developed to help the Lickings to buy the ranch.

Because banks can only extend a limited amount of credit to beginning ranchers, a bank loan only allowed them to purchase the southern half of the ranch. The NLT then used MOU funds to purchase a conservation easement on that part of the ranch in January, which allowed the family to reduce their debt and get a loan to purchase the northern half of the ranch. The NLT purchased a conservation easement on this part of the ranch in July, lowering the Lickings debt to a more manageable level. Additional funds were used to buy equipment that will help them to keep invading cedar trees out of the prairie. The result is permanent protection of Sandhills prairie on the Dismal River south of Thedford, which also helped to keep young families in the community.

The project required cooperation among a variety of partners, including Grand Prairie Wind (a subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Steve and Pam Reed (who sold their ranch to the Lickings) and Farm Credit Services. For their part, the Licking family expressed their appreciation by thanking the NLT "for being so helpful and patient while walking us through the easement process. We were able to use the easement to help secure a loan to buy the ranch where we are raising our family. We are forever grateful to have found the Nebraska Land Trust."



 Lake McConaughy from the Baumann Ranch

Baumann Ranch

Largest undeveloped property on north shore of Lake McConaughy protected from development

When Loy and Jean Baumann received a unanimous vote of approval from Keith County, for their 240-acre conservation easement on the north side of Lake McConaughy, Loy naturally thanked the Commissioners for their support. While counties in Nebraska generally approve conservation easements as required under state law, it is somewhat unusual for a county official to voice their personal support in a public meeting. So it was a bit surprising when one of the Commissioners responded to Loy by saying, “Thank you! You are doing a great thing.”

To Loy and Jean, the truly great thing was finding a way to honor Loy’s father, who had always wanted to conserve this last vestige of the family ranch as a refuge for wildlife, since much of their land had been submerged under the lake. As ranches continued to be lost to subdivision and development after construction of the lake, it solidified Loy and Jean’s resolve to make sure it did not happen on this land that meant so much to Loy’s father. As a result, Loy and Jean generously donated a conservation easement to the Nebraska Land Trust in December of 2017.

As Loy explained it, “Dad told me many years ago, he wanted to preserve this land...so it could never be developed. I told him that someday this parcel of land would be worth a million dollars for development. I was right and he was right, but he won. Money is not important when preserving the natural beauty that God created.”

In thinking about their legacy of conservation, Loy pointed to “A small creek that runs through this land, the deer and other wild animals that live on the land. The small bank where shells and remains of the past are embedded. If it were to be developed, this magnificent beauty may have been destroyed.”

The Keith County Comprehensive Plan agrees. Recognizing that “strip development” along Highway 92 poses a threat to the rural character of the area, it states, “The best balance between the need to develop and the value of maintaining open space and rural character can be achieved by...maintaining significant stretches of open space (and) agricultural land...Continuous ‘strip’ development, most severely compromises rural character by preventing travelers from seeing the land.”

As the largest, private undeveloped parcel remaining on the north side of the Lake, with more than a mile of frontage on Highway 92 just west of Lemoyne, the Baumann Conservation Easement is a significant step in toward the county’s stated goal. Thanks to Loy and Jean, travelers will never be prevented from seeing the land or the lake as they drive by. Instead, they will see Sandhills prairie and the blue waters of Big Mac just beyond. Less obvious will be the tribute to Loy’s father, who wanted to make sure that the land provides a forever home for Sandhills wildlife, instead of second homes for people. “I’m glad I did it,” explained Loy, “and the longer I think about it, the happier I am!”

Pine Ridge Easements

Six families conserve 9,582 acres within the Pine Ridge



CHIEF DULL KNIFE COLLEGE

1,121 acres adjacent to Ft. Robinson State Park and the Petersen WMA. It has historical significance as the site of the Cheyenne Breakout of 1879



FISHER RANCH

546 acres of key wildlife habitat between two large parcels of public land



MJD RANCH

2,443 acres of Pine Ridge habitat that harbors hundreds of elk year-round, just 10 miles from Chadron



ANDERSON GRASSLAND

547 acres of prairie/pine savannah along Cottonwood Creek near Fort Robinson State Park



OUR HERITAGE RANCH

3,621 acres adjacent to Nebraska's iconic badlands at Toadstool Park



SOWBELLY RANCH

1,304 acres of native wildlife habitat for bighorn sheep, elk and a Class A Coldwater trout stream

You can help to protect land forever!

You can help protect agricultural, historical and natural resources in perpetuity, with your generous support of the Nebraska Land Trust (NLT). Whether it is an annual gift that supports the costs of new land protection or a Planned Gift that endows the future, please consider the NLT in your charitable giving. For more information, contact Dave Sands at dsands@nelandtrust.org or call 402/438-5263.



Fawn on the MJD Ranch

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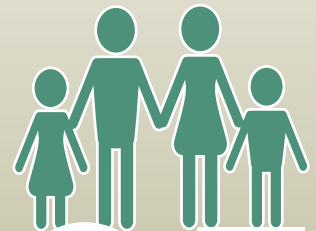
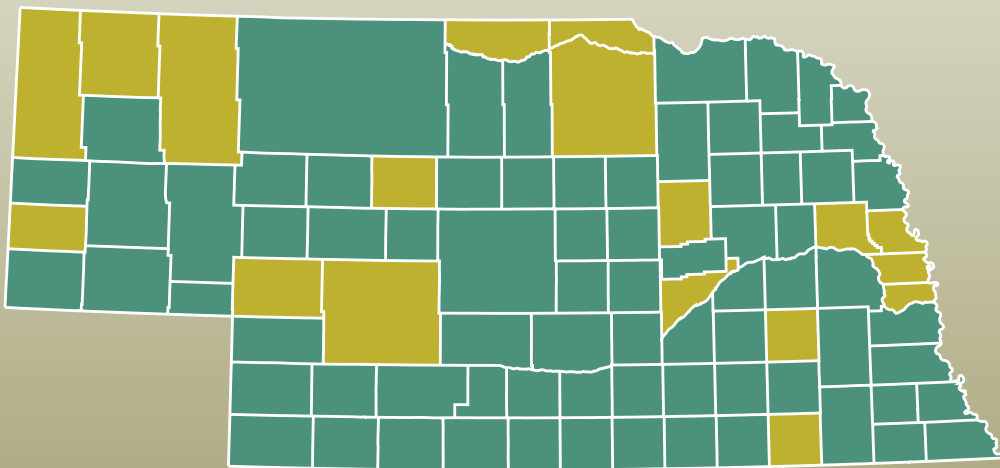
YOUR MONEY AT WORK



18
COUNTIES

26,990
ACRES

Preserved for future generations



35
families

Make up the Nebraska Land Trust Easement Holders.

The Nebraska Land Trust offers the E-Landscape to provide more current updates on our work and other timely information. If you'd like the E-Landscape delivered to your email inbox, please contact Jacob Alishouse at jalishouse@nelandtrust.org or sign up online at www.nelandtrust.org



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ON THE COVER

Our Heritage Ranch features eye-catching badlands adjacent to Toadstool Geologic Park