



LOWER PLATTE SOUTH natural resources district

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TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Dan Schulz, Resources Coordinator *DS*
DATE: May 12, 2020
SUBJECT: Nebraska Land Trust Report

As the District's appointed representative to the Nebraska Land Trust Board, I was asked to provide a report on what the Nebraska Land Trust (NLT) is doing for the Lower Platte South NRD (LPSNRD) and how the NLT expends the LPSNRD's annual \$30,000.00 contribution (the current three-year agreement expires June 2021).

My background in conservation easements goes back to 1986. I was involved in the drafting of the conservation easement and the negotiations when the District purchased its first conservation easement on a saline wetland east of Ceresco, Nebraska from Ray and Jane Otto. Since then, I have been involved with the District's acquisition of 21 conservation easements (outside the watershed easements the District acquired with the City of Lincoln) on wetlands, virgin prairie, native woodlands, open space and riparian corridors.

The Nebraska Land Trust was originally formed to protect working agricultural lands in the Lower Platte Valley. The LPSNRD's first agreement with the NLT was during the early stages of the Lower Platte River Corridor Alliance which is why the NLT agreement is with the Platte River Subcommittee. Other members of the Alliance are also members of the NLT Board, Lower Platte North and Papio-Missouri River NRDs who contribute staff time and financially respectively. When the Alliance was more active, it was viewed as the educator of the holistic view of conserving and protecting natural resources in the lower Platte Valley and the NLT as one of the implementation organizations for perpetual protection and conservation.

In regards to what the NLT is doing for LPSNRD and what the money is used for:

- Engaged Cass County landowners interested in conservation easements near Camp Carol Joy Holling, Platte River State Park, Mahoney State Park and a large family farm near Platte River State Park (see attached).
- Organization and facilitation of the Lower Platte Valley Advisory Committee
- Development of an objective property scoring procedure
- Offset transaction fees for easements in the lower Platte valley
- Guarantees NLT will continue working in the lower Platte valley
- Has helped leverage \$7,330,449.00 million dollars for conservation easement acquisitions from federal, state, local and private sources.

Please see attached information from Dave Sands NLT.

**AGREEMENT BETWEEN
LOWER PLATTE SOUTH NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT
AND
NEBRASKA LAND TRUST
FOR
COOPERATIVE ASSISTANCE**

THIS AGREEMENT is made and entered into by and between the LOWER PLATTE SOUTH NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT (hereinafter referred to as the "NRD") and the NEBRASKA LAND TRUST (hereinafter referred to as "the TRUST").

WHEREAS, The TRUST is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization that has adopted Standards and Practices promulgated by the Land Trust Alliance and actively acquires or stewards conservation lands and conservation easements, with the goal of land conservation in Nebraska; and,

WHEREAS, the mission of the TRUST is to accept conservation easements or gifts of land to preserve lands that remain essentially in their natural state; are ecologically, historically, or archeologically significant; serve as wildlife habitat, and/or are used for low impact agriculture; and,

WHEREAS, the authorities of the NRD include prevention of damages from floodwater and sediment, development and management of fish and wildlife habitat and recreational and park facilities, and forestry and range management; and

WHEREAS, the NRD desires to utilize the expertise and experience of the TRUST to explore the opportunities for acquisition of conservation easements District-wide, with particular focus on the Platte and Missouri River corridors and on the Haines Branch Prairie Corridor.

NOW, THEREFORE, for and in consideration of the foregoing recitals and their mutual covenants hereinafter expressed, the parties agree as follows:

- 1. The TRUST agrees that it shall:**
 - a. Conduct educational programs with landowners, public officials, and others within the NRD for the purpose of explaining conservation easements and the multiple advantages thereof; and**

- b. Provide technical assistance to the District with the development of baseline surveys on proposed conservation easement properties, and in the monitoring and evaluation of held conservation easements; and
- c. Assist the NRD in the development of a land protection strategy and easement templates for the acquisition of conservation easements in the District; and,
- d. Consult with the NRD on funding and grant proposals and assist in compliance with the requirements of the fund sources ; and,
- e. Assist the NRD in negotiations and acquisition of conservation easements over priority properties.

2. The NRD agrees that it will assist the TRUST to develop land protection and easement acquisition strategies for the Corridor; will pay the sum of \$30,000, annually, to the TRUST for the purpose of partially funding the activities of the TRUST undertaken pursuant hereto; and, will work with the TRUST to identify prospective donors of conservation easements, additional funding sources and partnership opportunities.

3. The term of this Agreement shall commence upon execution thereof by both parties; and this Agreement shall terminate on June 30, 2021, unless sooner terminated as provided below.

4. The following personnel shall represent the parties in carrying out the terms of this Agreement and are designated to receive notices hereunder:

For the NRD:	For the TRUST:
Paul Zillig, General Manager	David Sands, Executive Director
	Glenn Johnson, Chairman

5. This Agreement may be terminated by either party with or without cause on 60 days written notice delivered to the other party.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have executed this agreement on the dates hereinafter indicated.

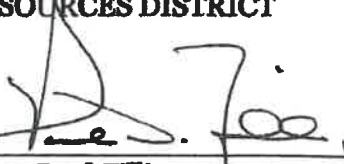
Executed by THE NEBRASKA LAND TRUST, on this 26th day of April, 2018.

NEBRASKA LAND TRUST

By 
David Sands
Executive Director

Executed by the LOWER PLATTE SOUTH NATURAL RESOURCES
DISTRICT on this 24th day of APRIL, 2018.

**LOWER PLATTE SOUTH NATURAL
RESOURCES DISTRICT**

By 
Paul Zillig
General Manager



Report to the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District on the Lower Platte Valley Preservation Partnership

In 2017, the Nebraska Land Trust (NLT) initiated the Lower Platte Valley Preservation Partnership (LPVPP) with formation of the Lower Platte Valley Advisory Committee (LPVAC), who were asked to create a locally relevant scoring protocol for prospective easement properties, a process we call Community Conservation.

Over the course of a year, this broad based group of Valley stakeholders (*Attachment 1*) identified conservation values that were important to them and created property assessment criteria tied to those values by assigning point values to each criteria based on importance. The Committee also identified the core competencies needed on the scoring team and developed a checklist so landowners can provide useful information prior to a visit.

Once the Property Scoring Worksheet (*Attachment 2*) was approved unanimously by the NLT Board of Directors in 2018, the NLT hosted a dinner to thank LPVAC members, who also invited family, friends and other interested landowners. **This has proven to be one of the prime benefits of the Community Conservation approach. Aside from creating a transparent project selection process designed to select the very best projects available, LPVAC members have become landscape ambassadors for conservation easements and the NLT, enhancing both the quantity and quality of projects to choose from.**

This was demonstrated by the first round of property scoring in late 2018, as six families in three counties (Cass, Sarpy and Saunders) wanted their properties scored. All but two were brought to us by members of the LPVAC and all were excellent conservation easement prospects, so the value of a local, transparent project ranking process was considerable! A nine-person scoring team from the LPVAC visited all six properties and scores were then averaged and totaled to guide project selection. Through this process, the 201-acre Miller farm adjacent to Schramm State Park was identified as the top priority (*Attachment 3*).

Miller farm was selected as the top priority for a variety of reasons, including the fact that NLT already has two conservation easements that border the park. If another can be obtained on the Miller farm, the park would be nearly surrounded by protected private land, in Nebraska's smallest and fastest growing county. In addition, a stream that flows through the park begins on the Miller farm and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission plans to use it as an experiential educational resource. The stream's water quality would be adversely impacted if the

farm were developed. The farm also has significant oak/hickory woodlands that provide important migratory habitat for songbirds. In total, it is a very consequential project!

With the farm's tremendous upside for conservation, there is a complication that requires patience. The entire farm is close to 400 acres and it is jointly owned by Virginia Miller and her brother who wants nothing to do with a conservation easement. Because of this, they have been working through the process of dividing the farm so Virginia can protect the half that abuts Schramm Park. So far, this process has taken over a year, including two appraisals and ongoing negotiations among attorneys. Progress has been made and we hope the division will be completed by year-end so the process of protection can begin.

In addition to Miller farm, two potentially consequential new prospects have emerged in Cass County. One is a ~ 475-acre farm sandwiched between Mahoney State Park and Camp Carol Joy Holling, with a half mile of frontage on Highway 66. The landowner was hoping we could score her property this spring and plans were being made to do so, until Covid-19 cancelled most plans. The other prospect is an ~ 375-acre farm near Platte River State Park that also has frontage on Highway 66. On both properties, cropland must be crossed by people and vehicles for a proper assessment of conservation values, so scoring will now occur in late fall.

This timeline works well for a 2021 spring application to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) program, which can fund up to 50% of a farm easement's value. ALE in various iterations has been a Farm Bill fixture for decades as it always attracts bipartisan support. Conservation easements are after all, an effective, conservative, free-market approach to land conservation that keeps land on tax rolls, in private hands and in the economy through agriculture. NLT has an excellent track record with NRCS, receiving nearly \$6,000,000 to date. In the 2019 Farm Bill, Congress increased ALE funding to \$400 million and made the program much more user friendly for both land trusts and landowners.

For example, the program used to require a minimum 25% cash match from the land trust, even if the landowner was willing to donate the remaining 50% of the easement's appraised value through a "bargain sale." For years, the Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) provided that cash match, but this no longer seems likely. Fortunately, **the 2019 Farm Bill made a significant change in the NRCS ALE program, which now allows landowners to donate the entire match through a bargain sale. Cash match is no longer required and given NET's recent refusal to fund conservation easements, this change could not have come at a better time!**

Since an honest report must also include setbacks, it is important to note that the NET's abrupt about-face on conservation easements represents a major one that was not anticipated. In 2017, with the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District (LPSNRD) and Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (PMRNRD) as partners, we submitted a \$1,000,000 request to the NET for the Lower Platte Valley Partnership (LPVP), to help fund the purchase conservation easements in the lower Platte Valley over three years.

The grant ranked 15th out of 130 requests but in that particular year, the NET was only in a financial position to fund the Year-one request of \$350,000. They encouraged us to proceed with community outreach component and reapply for the remainder the following year, which the NLT did in good faith, believing that our subsequent request would be treated just as fairly. Unfortunately, this was not to be. Although our second request also ranked far above the funding cutoff, anti-easement advocates on the NET Board managed to have our request tabled at their April meeting. Despite our best efforts, including a nationally respected speaker from Colorado, opponents mustered just enough votes and abstentions to kill our request in August.

In another display of antagonism toward private land conservation last February, the NET Board refused to grant a one-year extension for the \$350,000 grant which had been earmarked for the Miller farm project. Unlike the previous vote on our second LPVPP request, this one wasn't close, reflecting a complete reversal of the NET Board's attitude toward conservation easements and permanent land conservation in general.

Because many in agriculture cannot afford to donate a significant portion of a conservation easement's value, the NLT is still seeking other sources of funding to match NRCS ALE dollars. One foundation we have been cultivating is the Suzanne and Walter Scott Foundation in Omaha. On the very day that NET denied our extension in February, NLT received an invitation from the Scott Foundation to apply for a grant to match ALE funds for conservation easements that abut public lands in the lower Platte Valley and Pine Ridge. Since the Scott Foundation only accepts grants by invitation, this was a very promising sign and by late February we had submitted a \$1,000,000 request.

Among the many things that Covid-19 changed in March are the priorities of foundations and the immediate needs of non-profit organizations, especially those that provide human services. Because of this, we actually expected our request to be denied at the Foundation's April meeting. Instead, they told us they would simply table our request until November. The fact that it is still on the table is a more positive outcome than expected!

In summary:

- The NLT successfully led a community outreach initiative resulting in objective scoring criteria for lower Platte Valley land conservation that will be used and refined for years.
- Members of the LPVAC have acted as landscape ambassadors in bringing new potential projects to the land trust.
- Miller farm was selected by the LPVAC and NLT Board in 2018 as the top priority due to its strategic location next to Schramm State Park and another conservation easement, even though the project requires patience while farm ownership is divided.
- Two new, potentially impactful properties in Cass County will be scored this fall and if they merit the LPVAC's support, an application for NRCS funds could be made in 2021.
- A major setback occurred when the NET Board reversed past precedent by opposing grants for the purchase of conservation easements from willing sellers.
- Changes in the 2019 Farm Bill will help to fill this void since cash match is no longer required when a landowner can afford to donate 50% of their easement's value.

- The NLT is seeking other funding sources so that when a landowner cannot afford to donate a significant portion of their easement, conservation opportunities will not be lost forever.

Our partnership with the LPSNRD and PMRNRD has been integral to this progress, including the participation of Dan Schulz on the LPVAC and scoring team. We look forward to even more progress in the future.

Attachments:

- 1. LPVAC Charter and members**
- 2. Lower Platte Valley Scoring Worksheet**
- 3. Miller Farm Photo Page and Map**



Charter for the Lower Platte Valley Advisory Committee

(Approved by the Board on June 7, 2018)

Introduction

At the Nebraska Land Trust (NLT), we believe it is important for our work to be relevant in the communities where it occurs. For this reason, we decide to focus on a given landscape, we do not tell people in these regions "This is what we want to protect." Instead the NLT prefers to ask local stakeholders, "What do you want to protect?" As the only nonprofit statewide land conservation organization started by Nebraskans, based in Nebraska, governed by Nebraskans and dedicated to working with private landowners, the perspectives of local residents are of paramount importance to the NLT!

Purpose of the Lower Platte Valley Advisory Committee

As a state-based land conservation organization, the NLT's work should be relevant to Nebraskans who live in the areas where our projects are located. Because of this, when the NLT proposes to focus on multiple projects in a specific landscape like the Lower Platte Valley, it is essential that we work with local interests to create conservation criteria and pursue projects that recognize local priorities.

Criteria developed and amended by the Lower Platte Valley Advisory Committee (LPVAC) will be used to guide the NLT's selection of projects through a fair, transparent and locally relevant ranking protocol. Members may also volunteer to assess potential properties through site visits using the ranking protocol. After prospective properties have been visited and scored, the LPVAC will be responsible for making recommendations to the NLT Board of Directors regarding the prioritization of projects that should be pursued. In addition, the LPVAC will provide ongoing advice to assure that our work remains relevant to people who live, work and recreate in the Valley.

Need

In eastern Nebraska, there are few areas that match the beauty, history, recreational opportunities and natural resources of the Lower Platte Valley. The Valley is a braided ribbon of river, wetlands, woodlands, bluffs, prairie and prime farmland draped across Nebraska's most populous region. It sustains wildlife in a Biologically Unique Landscape, families in agriculture and people with drinking water and nature-based recreation. The Valley below Fremont is also a region projected to have 2,000,000 people by the year 2050.

Despite several state parks, its future is largely in private hands creating a challenge for conservation. By working with landowners who care about the future of their land, the NLT can protect agricultural, historical, and natural resources in one of Nebraska's most scenic, historic, valued and populous regions.

The Lower Platte Valley Advisory Committee will be responsible for the development and amendment of conservation criteria that will be used to score prospective properties and prioritize the NLT's selection of projects in the future. This is especially important when using limited state and/or federal funding to purchase conservation easements, so that the greatest conservation benefit is obtained for the dollars spent. The Lower Platte Valley Advisory Committee will provide this input through the following responsibilities:

Responsibilities

- Hold at least one meeting per year after the development of scoring criteria, to review projects, discuss property scoring, prioritize projects, and to review and/or amend scoring criteria as needed.
- Prioritize identified resources based on local importance, creating a transparent ranking system to score potential projects.
- Work cooperatively with Committee members to achieve consensus on decisions.
- Identify any "red flags" that should be avoided in land conservation projects.
- Participate via email or telephone in discussions of issues as needed.
- Provide information and data as needed from one's area(s) of expertise.
- Establish policies for the ranking protocol, including the make-up of the Scoring Team.
- Serve as an advisor to the NLT Board on projects and activities in the Lower Platte Valley.
- Members may also participate in site visits and help to score properties if they wish.

Lower Platte Valley Advisory Committee Membership

- **Agricultural Landowners** – Dean Fedde, Sarpy County; Kim Scholting, Cass County; Tim Shanahan, Saunders County
- **County Government** – Bruce Fountain, Sarpy County; Jim Peterson, Cass County; Larry Mach, Saunders County; Doug Cook, Douglas County
- **Valley Communities** – Janece Mollhoff, Ashland City Council
- **Recreation** – Daniel Huebner, Platte River Rentals
- **Tourism** – Richard Hilske, 426 Winery; Alex Duryea, Nebraska Tourism Commission
- **Business** – Dave Brakenhoff, Western Sand and Gravel (NEBCO)
- **Camps** – Brad Schweer, Cloisters on the Platte; Mark Dietz, Camp Maha
- **Conservation Organization** – Mary Brown, Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership
- **University of Nebraska Extension** – Meghan Sittler
- **Lower Platte South, Lower Platte North and Papio-Missouri River NRDs** – Dan Schulz (LPSNRD); Chris Poole (LPNNRD); Jim Becic (PMRNRD)
- **Nebraska Game and Parks Commission** – Jim Swenson, Parks Division Administrator
- **History Nebraska** – John Rissetto
- **Nebraska Forest Service** – Steve Karloff



Property Scoring Worksheet for Purchased Conservation Easements in the Lower Platte Valley

Property: _____

Reviewer: _____

Agricultural Resources

Criteria	Maximum Points <u>Available</u>	Total Points <u>Given</u>
1) Property has an aesthetic character and/or location that would make it attractive for subdivision/development.	<u>100</u>	_____
2) Property has Prime Soils or Soils of Statewide Importance designated by the NRCS (percentage of such soils shall equal the score)	<u>100</u>	_____
3) Property is a historic farm with at least 100 years of documented history	<u>100</u>	_____
4) Property includes grassed waterways or buffer strips that would be preserved by a conservation easement	<u>100</u>	_____
5) Property includes terraces on steep slopes that will be preserved, maintained or replaced through a conservation easement	<u>100</u>	_____
6) Property is a generational family farm, operated by members of same family for at least three generations	<u>100</u>	_____

	<u>Maximum Points Available</u>	<u>Total Points Given</u>
7) A land management plan* is being implemented or the landowner can provide a history of past land management that can aid in the creation and implementation of a land management plan, which may include but not be limited to: Farming, grazing, control of invasive species, forestry, wildlife habitat, water resources and other issues as indicated.	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
* Land management plans are adaptive, written documents that may change according to conditions. Increased points will be given for more comprehensive plans.		
8) Land currently supports an existing agricultural operation that produces crops and/or livestock	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
9) Property has planted wind breaks	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
10) Property has farmable land	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
11) Property size:		
161 acres and up	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
0 to 160 acres	<u>50</u>	<u> </u>
12) Property includes farm/ranch infrastructure	<u>50</u>	<u> </u>
13) A conservation easement would help a beginning farmer or rancher by reducing financial pressure	<u>50</u>	<u> </u>
14) Property has irrigated farmland	<u>50</u>	<u> </u>
TOTAL POINTS FOR AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES	<u>1,175</u>	<u> </u>

Natural Resources

	<u>Maximum Points Available</u>	<u>Total Points Given</u>
Aquatic Resources		
1) Property has Platte River frontage	<u>100</u>	<u> </u>
2) Property has wetlands, bogs, and/or fens	<u>100</u>	<u> </u>
3) Springs are found on the property	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
4) Property has one or more perennial streams	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
5) Property includes ponds and lakes	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
6) Property has oxbows or sloughs	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
7) Property has one or more intermittent streams	<u>50</u>	<u> </u>
8) All or part of the property is in or immediately adjacent to a Wellhead Protection Area	<u>50</u>	<u> </u>
9) A Conservation Easement on the property will help to provide Flood protection by keeping buildings out of a flood plain	<u>50</u>	<u> </u>
Terrestrial Resources		
1) Property includes native grassland (virgin prairie or restored)	<u>100</u>	<u> </u>
2) Land is adjacent to or within two miles of an existing perpetual conservation easement(s)	<u>100</u>	<u> </u>
3) Property has upland hardwood forest	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
4) Property has riparian woodlands	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
5) Quantity of wildlife habitat	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
6) Quality of wildlife habitat	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
7) Property has habitat for Tier 1 and 2 At-risk species listed for the Lower Platte River Biologically Unique Landscape (BUL)	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
8) Land is in the “viewshed” from a public park	<u>50</u>	<u> </u>
9) Land has open sand habitat for nesting terns and plovers	<u>50</u>	<u> </u>
10) Property has shrub habitat	<u>50</u>	<u> </u>
TOTAL POINTS FOR NATURAL RESOURCES	<u>1,375</u>	<u> </u>

	<u>Maximum Points Available</u>	<u>Total Points Given</u>
<u>Historical and Cultural Resources</u>		
1) Property contains building(s), structure(s) or site(s) currently on the National Register of Historic Places	<u>100</u>	<u> </u>
2) Property contains building(s), structure(s) or site(s) eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places	<u>100</u>	<u> </u>
3) Prehistoric or historic artifacts have been recovered on the property (i.e. landowner has a box of artifacts)	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
4) Property contains building(s) or structure(s) that are at least 100-years-old	<u>50</u>	<u> </u>
5) Property has the potential to contain archeological resources	<u>50</u>	<u> </u>
TOTAL POINTS FOR HISTORICAL/CULTURAL RESOURCES	<u>375</u>	<u> </u>

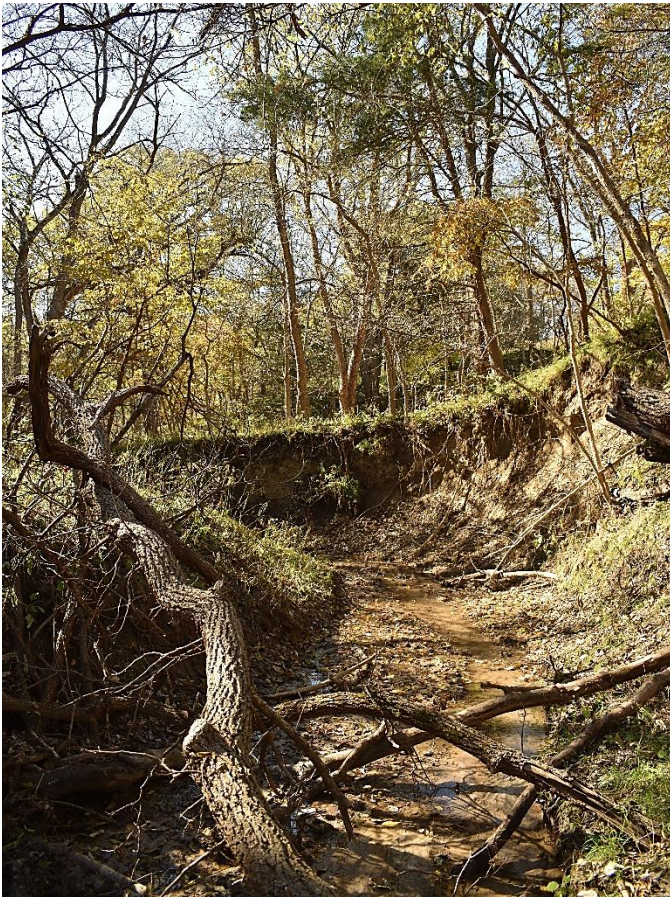
Recreational and Tourism Resources

1) Land is adjacent to other conserved land, including but not limited to state parks, Wildlife Management Areas, camps, other public land, local or state designated trails, Scenic Byways, public attractions, Interstate 80 and BNSF right-of-way	<u>100</u>	<u> </u>
2) Landowner allows some form of public access (Open Lands Program, fee-based hunting, occasional tours or events)	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
3) Land has watchable wildlife that can be viewed by the public	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
4) Landowner has a stated interest in ecotourism/agritourism	<u>75</u>	<u> </u>
5) Property offers on-site lodging (i.e. B & B) to the public	<u>50</u>	<u> </u>
TOTAL POINTS FOR RECREATIONAL/TOURISM RESOURCES	<u>375</u>	<u> </u>

	<u>Maximum Points Available</u>	<u>Total Points Given</u>
<u>Bonus Points for Special Characteristics</u>		
Special Characteristics may include, but are not limited to:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waterfalls at least 3 feet in height over a rock ledge • Unique trees or vegetation • Unique geological formations such as caves or rock outcrops • Identified wildlife corridors • Historic cemeteries, quarries or trail ruts 	<u>250</u>	<u> </u>
AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES	<u>1,175</u>	<u> </u>
NATURAL RESOURCES	<u>1,375</u>	<u> </u>
HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES	<u>375</u>	<u> </u>
RECREATIONAL AND TOURISM RESOURCES	<u>375</u>	<u> </u>
BONUS POINTS FOR SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS	<u>250</u>	<u> </u>
<u>TOTAL SCORE FOR PROPERTY</u>	<u>3,550</u>	<u> </u>

Miller Farm

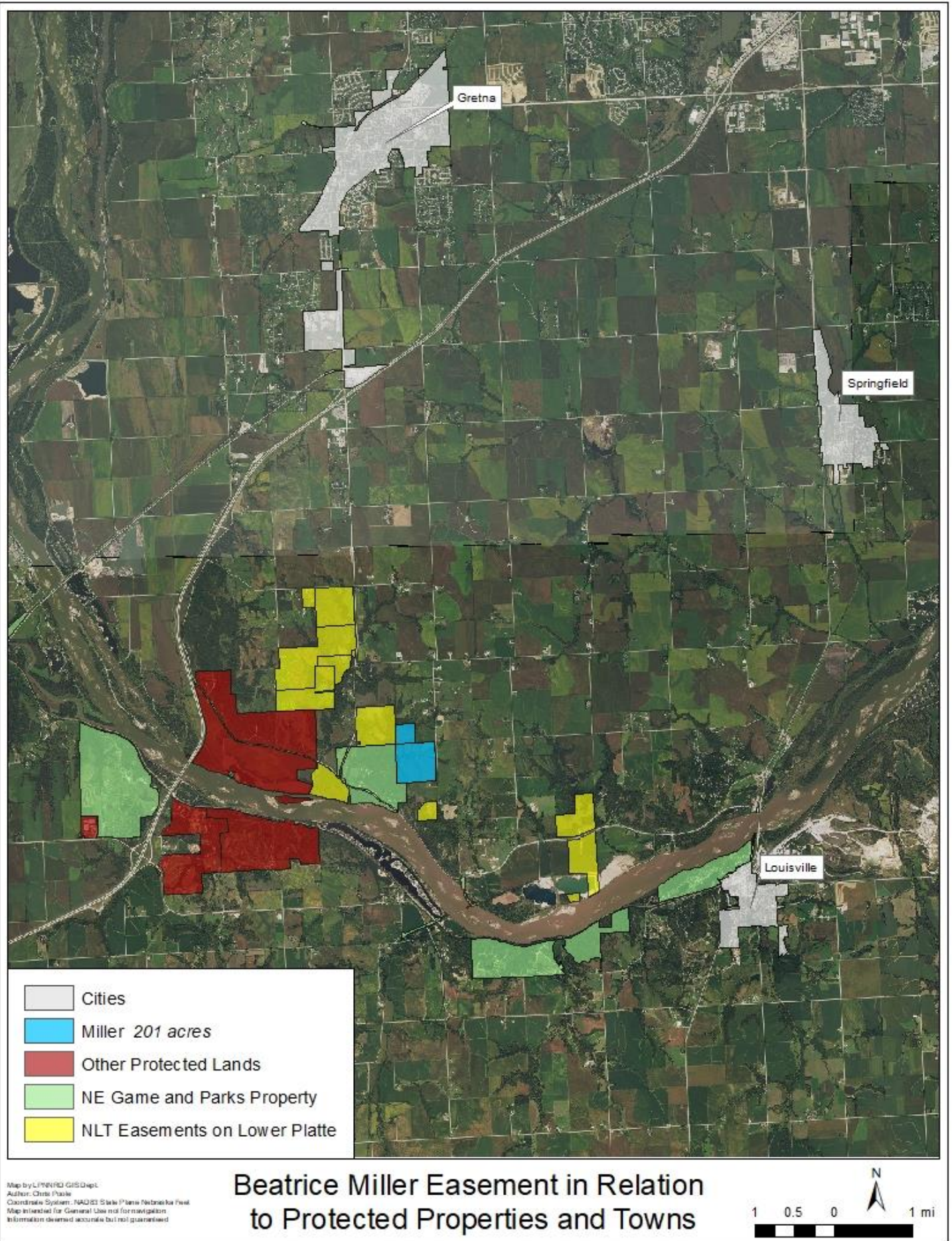
~ 200 acres adjacent to Schramm State Park and the
Fedde Farm Easement in Sarpy County



- Working farm with prime soils and terraces on steep slopes
- Farmhouse built in 1884
- Archeological sites eligible for listing on the National Register
- Development Threat -- **HIGH**



- Springs at the head of a perennial stream that flows into Schramm Park
- Mature oak/hickory woodlands
- Key habitat for migrating songbirds and bats



2020 LOWER PLATTE SOUTH NRD ELECTION
PRIMARY ELECTION
(unofficial)

SUBDIST. NUMBER	NAME	BUTLER	CASS	LANCASTER	OTOE	SAUNDERS	SEWARD	TOTAL
1								-
2								-
3								-
4	Gary Aldridge			2,326				2,326
	Ron Roeber			1,477				1,477
	LeRoy Sievers			3,501				3,501
	Edison McDonald			2,161				2,161
5								-
6								-
								-
7								-
8								-
8								-
9								-
10	Ray Stevens			3,510				3,510
	Eric Lee Wimer			1,124				1,124
	Bastienne Salners			1,818				1,818
At-Large								-

To: Lower Platte South NRD Board
From: Dean E. Edson, Executive Director
Re: NARD Report
Date: May 20, 2020

NARD Budget – The budget draft of March 2020 is still pending. Final action will not occur until the June 8th NARD Board meeting.

Over 2/3rds of the budget income is from grants, conferences, interest income and trees sales. Conferences make up most of the income. It is obvious that there will be impacts to conferences as far as attendance. However, to what extent that will be is unknown. Less than 1/3rd of the income is from dues.

In discussion with other NARD Board members, it has been recommended that we do not increase dues or tree sales commission beyond the current proposal and see what happens with conferences. Even if we have decreased attendance, which will reduce income, there will be corresponding reduced expenditures as well. There are adequate reserves to cover losses. The NARD staff is also looking at other grant opportunities.

NCF Envirothon – As you are aware, the 2020 NCF Envirothon was to be held in Lincoln at the end of July and was cancelled due to the COVID-19 issue. We have a proposal from the NCF Envirothon to host the event in 2021, which the NARD Board will act on in June.

The budget for the 2020 NCF Envirothon is included with the NARD budget and will be moved to 2021 pending NARD Board approval. Funds have been set aside to run the event and no other fund raising is needed at the current time.

NARD Employee Insurance – In the Fiscal Year 19-20, the NARD Risk Pool Insurance has 12 individuals that hit over \$100,000 in insurance claims. One individual was over \$800,000. This will result in an estimated loss of at least \$600,000 for the year.

The NARD Risk Pool Loss Control Committee has reviewed the premium needs based upon our actuary's estimates claims for the next fiscal year (FY 20-21). The committee had choices to raise rates as much as 26% or choose lower rates and rely on reserves to help pay claims. The committee chose the lower rate option and is proposing a 7.5% increase in premium. The NARD Risk Pool is going to rely on reserves for the next year, so premium increases are at the lowest amount.

Nebraska Legislature - State senators will return to finish the last 17 working days of the 2020 session on July 20th. The plan is to work ten days in July and seven days in August (Aug. 3-6 and 11-13).

The budget adjustment bill is still pending, which will obviously be an issue of discussion. Although tax receipts were significantly short of projections for April, mostly because of a delay in income tax filing to July 15, the overall the state was still ahead of forecasts in the 10th month of the budget year. We are fortunate that agreements were reached in 2019 to begin collecting sales tax on internet purchases. That has probably helped state revenues more than anticipated.

The Nebraska Economic Forecasting Advisory Board meets in July prior to the senators coming back into session and will likely adjust the revenue forecast which the legislature base decisions upon. Also pending are property tax relief and economic development proposals. It is probably safe to assume that expectations will be reduced on the level of spending.

NRD Board Meetings - Governor Ricketts issued Executive Order 20-03 to allow local boards to hold meetings via teleconferencing. The Attorney General's Office also issued several guidance opinions for boards to utilize. Governor Ricketts announced on May 19th at his daily press conference the executive order will be extended until June 30, 2020. He mentioned that it will not be extended beyond that date if the state stays on target to relax orders and re-open the state.

All NRD boards have utilized the tele-conferencing. Some are posting the meeting information sites so the public can participate on-line. Most of the districts made space available in their board room for public participation and did not allow the public to join via tele-conferencing. There have been a couple problems in rural districts with broad-band service capacity to handle the meeting. Overall, use of the technology has gone well and there are no complaints from the public about ability to participate.

NRD Office Operations -- Most all district offices are closed but available for appointments. Employees are either working in the office or remotely. There were no reported issues with field visits. Adjustments have been made to utilize electronic files and forms as much as possible.

Most districts followed the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission policy and closed over-night camping. Just as the NGPC has, most districts are now beginning to re-open facilities.

Districts have also reported that tree plantings and tree deliveries have gone well.

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