

Balancing Water Uses and Needs

Wildlife makes significant use of Nebraska's water and habitat. The threatened Piping Plover and endangered Least Tern, Whooping Crane and Pallid Sturgeon use various Platte River habitats for nesting, feeding and resting.

Achieving a balance between productive agricultural land in the Platte Valley and the enhancement of native habitats is important as the state looks toward the future.

Preserving diversity within the Platte Valley ecosystem can be achieved without harming the region's agricultural economy, which provides tremendous benefits not only to the people in the Platte Valley, but also the entire state of Nebraska.

Federal programs have temporarily retired irrigation rights to create habitat and enhance instream flows, but more can be done.

The Platte Basin Habitat Enhancement Project (PBHEP) was established to provide additional options to help Nebraska's Platte Valley meet the region's water needs.

PBHEP aims to fulfill widely diverse water needs by changing the demands on the Platte River system, decreasing depletions and "retiming" recharge and demand when possible.



The Platte Basin Habitat Enhancement Project is funded in part through a grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

The Nebraska Legislature created the Nebraska Environmental Trust in 1992. Using revenue from the Nebraska Lottery, the Trust has provided over \$142 million in grants to 1,134 projects across the state.

Anyone – citizens, organizations, farmers and businesses – can apply to NET for funding to protect habitat, improve water quality and establish recycling programs in Nebraska.

The Nebraska Environmental Trust works to preserve, protect and restore our natural resources for future generations.

PBHEP Sponsors

Central Platte Natural Resources District
(308) 385-6282

North Platte Natural Resources District
(308) 632-2749

South Platte Natural Resources District
(308) 254-2377

Tri-Basin Natural Resources District
(308) 995-6688

Twin Platte Natural Resources District
(308) 535-8080

Nebraska Department of Natural Resources
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

PBHEP

Platte Basin Habitat Enhancement Project

Protecting Water Resources and
Habitat Within The Platte River Basin



*Working Today
For Nebraska's Future*

Maintaining Diversity and Productivity

Nebraska is unique because of its rich diversity of natural resources, wildlife, and business opportunities. From Crawford to Nebraska City, the state's heritage and success lie in its people and their wise use of resources.

The state's diversity is very apparent in the Platte River Basin. The North Platte River meanders in from Wyoming, while the South Platte River comes in from Colorado. The two join to form the Platte River near North Platte, flowing across the state.

Within the Platte River Basin, people and nature both depend on the life-supporting water course, marked by a gallery of trees and green fields filled with a variety of crops. Wildlife depends on the river's habitats to survive.

The Platte Basin Habitat Enhancement Project (PBHEP) was established to provide an added solution to help landowners in Nebraska's Platte River Basin meet the region's water needs, for wildlife and for the state's valuable agricultural economy.

PBHEP hopes to accomplish this by helping landowners make transitions that can maintain economic health, while at the same time reducing depletions to the river.

This can be accomplished by taking advantage of a variety of conservation projects. Landowners can choose easements or other projects that fit their operations best, using cost share dollars to ease the costs associated with the transition.



Platte Basin Habitat Enhancement Project Objectives

- Transfer irrigated cropland to dryland cropland and native grassland habitat suitable to the local ecosystem.
- Reduce consumptive use of water to enhance stream flows by 15,500 acre feet per year.
- Open additional acres of land to public hunting access.
- Inform the public about the benefits of preserving native habitat.
- Develop projects that reduce consumptive water use or increase benefits to wildlife. Such projects could include conjunctive use of surface water irrigation projects, reservoir development for storage and release or retiming of recharge, water leasing, or others deemed beneficial to general habitat improvement.

How Does It Work?

Landowners wanting to participate should contact their local Natural Resources District office to discuss options that work for their own operation. Then, in cooperation with the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the Nature Conservancy, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Platte River Whooping Crane Trust and the Nebraska Farm Bureau, staff from NRDs and cooperating entities will work with landowners to develop a plan suitable to the native ecosystem and the landowner's farming practices and land uses. Possible conservation easement options include:

- Change commingled ground water/surface water irrigated cropland to dryland cropland or grassland
- Change ground water irrigated cropland to dryland cropland or grassland
- Other methods effective to reduce depletions other than retirement of irrigated acres.

In addition, landowners providing walk-in hunting access can receive up to \$7.50 per acre per year from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Rates will depend on the amount of huntable cover and hunting opportunities provided on the property.

Reaping the Benefits

The primary project beneficiary will be the Platte River Basin ecosystem. Increasing habitat diversity and the resilience of the Platte River Basin ecosystem will provide sustainability of both the natural and agricultural production systems. Achieving greater stability will provide multiple long-term economic, social and environmental benefits to all inhabitants of the Platte River Basin.