

Agenda Item 5. Review Project 18-109, The Nebraska Land Trust, Lower Platte Preservation Partnership II. Dave Sands, Executive Director and Glenn Johnson, Chairman of the Board, The Nebraska Land Trust

The Lower Platte Valley is a braided ribbon of river, wetlands, woodlands, bluffs, prairie and farmland winding through our most populous region. It sustains wildlife in a Biologically Unique Landscape and families engaged in agriculture.

The Valley and its natural resources are uniquely threatened in 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 permanent land conservation. The Nebraska Land Trust (NLT) has been meeting this challenge since 2002 through voluntary agreements known as conservation easements. To date, the NLT and private landowners have permanently protected 3,384 acres in the Valley, through 14 agreements in three counties.

The Trust has been a key partner since 2008, providing \$2,222,913 in three grants to purchase eight of these easements, which attracted \$3,089,875 in matching funds from the NRCS, landowners and others. NRDs and NGPC have provided in-kind services and financial support for administrative costs. Stakeholders have been consulted for input on project selection. It is a proven formula for success.

The NLT seeks to build upon this success, through involvement of a new, broad-based advisory committee and by obtaining a minimum 1:1 match for NET funds to purchase conservation easements in the Lower Platte Valley.

In 2017, NET approved \$350,000 for this project over one year and the Trust recommended NLT apply in the 2018 grant cycle for the second two years of funding. This application is a resubmission of that multi-year request, asking for an additional \$650,000 over two years. This will give NLT the financial flexibility they need to apply for NRCS funds and pursue multiple projects that could buffer state parks from development, protect watersheds, conserve wildlife habitat, preserve scenic views and maintain productive soils for agriculture.

Staff recommends approving the original Grant Committee recommendation and Board Recommendation of funding Project 18-109 at \$325,000 in Year 1 and intent of funding \$325,000 in Year 2.

***Possible Action: a motion to approve, modify and approve or deny the project.***