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RESOURCE

A Monthly Publication of the Nebraska Environmental Trust

February 2016

Executive Director Corner

We are well into the new year and the Legislature is at their halfway point. This is the 60 day session, so it will be over before we know it. The session is scheduled to end April 20th. We were watching a couple of bills that directly impacted the Trust. The first was actually a legislative resolution and Constitutional Amendment. LR380CA proposed to reduce the Trust's lottery allocation from 44.5% to 26.5% and reduce the State Fair's from 10% to 7.5%. The change would result in approximately a \$6M annual loss for the Trust. That is about 1/3 of the Trust's funds and would result in 1/3 fewer projects being funded. The funds from the Trust and the State Fair would be reallocated "for education as the Legislature may direct". Fortunately that resolution was indefinitely postponed in committee by a vote of 7-1.

LB711 was the other bill and it sets up a Riparian Vegetation Management Task Force with members appointed by the Governor. It directs the Department of Agriculture Director to "apply for a grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund". Senator Hughes introduced the bill and he is proposing to remove specific language involving the Trust and make some additional changes that we believe are beneficial. I testified in a neutral capacity on the bill, but promoted the changes.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention the loss of two



Pete Ricketts,
Governor

Board of Trustees

District I

Henry "Rick" Brandt -
Roca

James Hellbusch -
Columbus

Kevin Peterson -
Osceola

District II

Gerry Lauritzen - Omah

conservation giants the past two weeks. Ione Werthman of Omaha was the creator of Heron Haven in Omaha and was a true fighter on many conservation issues, including dams on the Niobrara and Platte Rivers. The other loss was Lynn Berggren from Broken Bow. Lynn had been a Commissioner at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for several years and was a passionate conservationist. Though we mourn these individuals, we can appreciate the great things they accomplished.

Enjoy the changing weather that makes Nebraska famous.

Mark Brohman
Executive Director

Feature on the Bird Conservancy in working partnership with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

The Nebraska Environmental Trust has played a critical role in wildlife and habitat conservation in western Nebraska and is a long-time supporter of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies (formerly Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory). Funds from the Trust have enabled the creation of a strong partnership between Bird Conservancy and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) known as the Nebraska Prairie Partners (NPP). NPP was founded in 2001 by Tammy VerCauteren, Bird Conservancy Executive Director, and the late John Dinan of NGPC. What started with just one biologist has grown to a team of four full-time and up to four part-time staff that work with several partners and agencies throughout the panhandle.

Here are some of the program's major accomplishments over the past 15 years:

- Conducted bird surveys throughout the panhandle for at least eight important bird species (Tier 1 or Tier 2), breeding in western Nebraska including Mountain Plover, Burrowing Owl, McCown's Longspur, Chestnut-collard Longspur, Ferruginous Hawk, Swainson's Hawk and Golden Eagle.
- Identified Mountain Plover nesting on croplands and an innovative approach to conserving nests through landowner outreach by "marking nests" on farm fields, allowing farmers to maintain productivity during farming operations. More than 900 Mountain Plover nests on private croplands have been marked and 87% hatched.
- Hired a local landowner as a model for stewardship on private lands, creating a win-win scenario for wildlife and private lands conservation.
- Hired a Coordinating Wildlife Biologist in the panhandle working with thousands of landowners to implement conservation for species listed in the Nebraska Natural Legacy Plan.
- Disbursed more than 1,800 stock tank ladders to landowners throughout the region since 2007.
- Installed 25 nesting platforms for Ferruginous Hawks on private ranches in the panhandle.
- Hired a full-time Education Coordinator in the panhandle reaching 6,000 residents in programs annually, and coordinate two bird banding stations, bringing school groups and families to see birds up-close, and learn about bird migration and conservation.
- Offer grassland and raptor bird tours. Visitors have come from as far as Omaha and New Jersey.

Furthermore, NPP's accomplishments have caught the attention of others...

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have reached out to collaborate on their Golden Eagle study, which cover several western states. Because of their connection to the community and private landowners they were able to assist them in locating nests on private lands to tag nestlings. In

2014 and 2015 nine eagles were tagged with satellite transmitters. (See photo of Golden Eagle Chicks below the article).

- Nebraska Prairie Partners Mountain Plover conservation work was highlighted in the European non-profit Wader Quest's blog (July 2014) and newsletter (October 2014).
- Nebraska Prairie Partners has collaborated with Virginia Tech on a human dimensions' study evaluating landowner perceptions and motivations for Mountain Plover conservation and published this study in the journal Environmental Conservation.
- They are also collaborating with researchers at the University of Colorado at Denver, USDA Agricultural Research Service and the USFS Pawnee National Grasslands to begin addressing migratory connectivity for Mountain Plover with Colorado, Montana and Wyoming.

Testimonials...

"The children LOVED the whole experience. Getting to see the birds up close and watch the banding firsthand was fascinating! They have talked non-stop about it since coming home from the program. Several went home and "banded" their bird stuffed animals and talked about their "migration" to other family members." –Elementary teacher, at a banding station.

"...Mr. Shaun Evertson (local rancher) provided excellent information about wildlife conservation farming... Mr. Larry Snyder of the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory was very knowledgeable about good places to go birding, the local birds, and he was able to find several birds for us to add to our life lists. The Board of Commissioners should be praised for supporting the Kimball Tourism Committee and the Tourism Director in this Endeavor." –Grassland bird tour visitor from NJ.

"We have one particular spot of land we started off with two

or three, and I think last year we had 13 nests. Seems like what Larry is doing is really helping these birds, and they wanted to come back and lay eggs again, so it's really great."-Local Kimball County farmer.

To learn more, get involved, come see a Mountain Plover or pay a visit to one of our bird banding stations, contact Angela Dwyer, angela.dwyer@birdconservancy.org or 970-482-1707 x 17.



Nebraska Environmental Trust Invites Comments on 2016 Board Recommendations For Funding Placed in Rank Order

At its meeting in Lincoln on February 4, 2016, the Board of the Nebraska Environmental Trust received the Grant Committee's recommendations for funding placed in rank order of 118 projects for a total of \$18,799,900 in grant awards. Of these, 69 were new applications and 49 are carry-over projects. This is the 23rd year of grants from the Trust, which has provided over 241 million dollars in lottery revenue to preserve and protect the air, water and land in Nebraska.

As part of the grant making process, the Trust is seeking public input on the proposed grants before announcing

final awards on April 7, 2016. A list of all recommended grants and project information is available on the Trust website at: www.environmentaltrust.org. Written public comments will be accepted until April 5, 2016 at the Nebraska Environmental Trust, P.O. Box 94913, Lincoln NE 68509-4913 or via email at: marilyn.tabor@nebraska.gov. Please include your name, address and organizations (if applicable) and be sure to reference the project name and number in your correspondence. Comments can also be presented in person during a public hearing on April 7, 2016. The meeting begins at 1:30 pm at the Ferguson House, 700 South 16th Street, Lincoln NE.

[2016 Board Recommendations for Funding Placed In Rank Order](#)

Upcoming Events

- March 17 - 20, 2016 - The 46th Annual Audubon Nebraska's Crane Festival, Kearney NE.
- April 7, 2016 (Thursday), 1:30 pm - 2nd Quarter Board Meeting, Ferguson House, Lincoln NE.
- April 16, 2016 (Saturday) - Earth Day Omaha, Omaha NE.
- April 23, 2016 (Saturday) Lincoln Earth Day, Lincoln NE.
- May 10, 2016 (Tuesday) - 8:00am - 4:00pm Nebraska Children's Groundwater Festival, Grand Island NE.
- May 13 - 14, 2016 (Friday - Saturday) - Spring Into Spring at Lauritzen Gardens, Omaha NE.