
EDITORIAL

Area's saline wetlands are worth saving

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Just as the Salt Creek tiger beetle is endangered, so are the area's saline wetlands they call home.

However, coordinated efforts by a variety of government agencies, nonprofits and businesses have teamed up to preserve this exceedingly rare habitat - one that's found only in the Lincoln area - for future generations. Lincoln recently added to land protected by these collaborative efforts.

Using money from the Nebraska Environmental Trust and park acquisition funds, the city purchased another 61 acres of land along Salt Creek within its 3-mile jurisdiction beyond city limits. That parcel, adjacent to another city-owned marsh, joins more than 6,100 acres of such habitat in and around Lincoln that are owned by conservation groups or preserved by conservation easements.

Lincoln is one of the founding members of the Greenprint Challenge, which was founded near the turn of the century to preserve wetlands, prairie, flood plains and streams. To go from zero to 6,100 acres in 14 protected areas in that time is astounding and deserves praise.

Much of this natural heritage has been turned over to the public for hiking and other activities that add to humans' quality of life, too, with plenty of access points in northern Lancaster and southern Saunders counties. The newly acquired land will one day be a park as well.

The Salt Creek tiger beetle is perhaps the best known denizen of these wetlands. This endangered insect, one of the rarest in the world, has seen its small habitat reduced to four known colonies in and near its namesake waterway. (The bug has generated its fair share of frustration, too, in lawsuits and the slowing of construction and roads projects in the protected area.)

But these rare ecosystems, ones where groundwater can contain nearly as much salt content as oceans, are home to other plant and animal species that depend on them for survival. With much of the remaining habitat degraded by development, keeping and restoring the remaining pieces has become that much more critical.

Rarely in journalism do we use the word "unique." It's infrequent, at best, for something to be truly one-of-a-kind. But these wetlands fit the bill.

Though it may pass by largely unnoticed by many Lincolmites, this habitat belongs to us - and no one else. Years of effort to preserve and redevelop these saline wetlands are a worthy endeavor that we should treasure now and in the years to come.