

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 9, 2005

TO: Lower Platte South Natural Resources District
Board of Directors

FROM: Tom Malmstrom
Natural Resources Coordinator
Parks and Recreation Department
Saline Wetlands Conservation Partnership

RE: Saline Wetland Conservation Partnership
NEBRASKAland magazine article and 2003-04 Progress Report

As members of the saline wetlands conservation partnership I want to make you aware of the recent article in the January-February 2005, NEBRASKAland magazine. This article, in the Outdoor Update Section is titled "Preserving the Last of the Least, *A partnership of organizations is working to protect saline wetlands.*" The article provides a summary of the commitment and efforts to conserve the saline wetlands.

On February 1, 2005 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed listing the Salt Creek tiger beetle as endangered under the U. S. Endangered Species Act. The beetles are endemic to the eastern saline wetlands in Nebraska. The saline wetlands conservation partnership represents local and state efforts to conserve Nebraska's Eastern Saline Wetlands. They are Nebraska's most rare and most threatened natural community. The actions by the partnership do benefit the Salt Creek tiger beetle and rare saline plant communities.

Much has happened since the project was initiated in 2003. To guide the efforts of conserving the saline wetlands the "Implementation Plan for the Conservation of Nebraska's Eastern Saline Wetlands" was completed. The partnership has purchased nearly 590 acres of saline wetlands and associated habitats. The partnership purchased the following parcels:

Note: BELF = Board of Educational Lands and Funds NET = Nebraska Environmental Trust
NGPC = Nebraska Game and Parks Commission SWCP = Saline Wetlands Conservation Partnership

- Frank Shoemaker Marsh – 27th Street and Bluff Road
 - Size: 160 acres
 - Purchase price: \$472,000
 - Funding sources: 2001 State Wildlife Grant through the
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (\$222,000)
2002 NET grant (\$250,000)
 - Owner: City of Lincoln

- Melvin King Property – South of Arbor Road and East of 27th Street
 Size: 61.2 acres
 Purchase price: \$204,700
 Funding sources: Federal Section 6 (\$153,525)
 2002 NET grant (\$51,175)
 Owner: City of Lincoln
- BELF land - 98th Street and Interstate 80
 Size: 140 acres
 Purchase price: \$298,580
 Funding sources: Federal Section 319 (\$179,148)
 Lower Platte South NRD (\$43,043.20)
 SWCP (\$76,388.80)
 Owner: Lower Platte South NRD
- BELF Land – 1st Street and Raymond Road
 Size: 156 acres
 Purchase price: \$476,000
 Funding sources: Federal Section 6 (\$276,000)
 2004 NET grant through NGPC (\$200,000)
 Owner: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
- Anderson Property – Adjacent to Arbor Lake, 27th Street and Arbor Road
 Size: 69.2 acres
 Purchase price: \$361,710.67
 Funding source: 2002 NET grant through City of Lincoln
 Owner: City of Lincoln

The partnership is also involved in efforts to restore saline wetland habitat on Frank Shoemaker Marsh located along north 27th street. A conceptual design plan for wetland and upland habitat restoration and improvement measures has been completed. Final design will be completed this spring. Funding for this effort comes from a Federal Section 319 grant the city of Lincoln received for the eastern saline wetland complex.

A saline wetlands educational kiosk is nearing completion. This exhibit will be located at the Pioneers Park Nature Center. It will include general information about Nebraska's saline wetlands and its flora and fauna, endangered species, a map of the saline wetlands in Lancaster and Saunders counties, and include a tabletop interactive ecosystem balance. Funding for this exhibit is from the saline wetlands conservation partnership. Information on the saline wetlands and the partnership is also available on the city website.

We think this program has been extremely successful and that we have been able to accomplish many of the goals of the Implementation Plan for the Conservation of the Eastern Saline Wetlands. We hope you would agree. Your continued support is appreciated. If you have any questions, please contact me at 476-2729 or tmalmstrom@lpsnrd.org.

Preserving the Last of the Least

A partnership of organizations is working to protect saline wetlands.

By Jon Farrar

With little fanfare, a long stride was made in 2002 to preserve and restore Nebraska's most endangered ecosystem – eastern saline marshes. Salt marshes in eastern Nebraska occur principally in Lancaster and Saunders counties. Before settlement they occupied only about 20,000 acres, and were restricted to Salt Creek and its drainages. Since settlement, they have been drained and filled, and their delicate hydrology disrupted by channelization of streams for urban and rural uses.

Today, about 4,000 acres of salt marsh remain; home to some of state's least common plants and its rarest insect, the Salt Creek tiger beetle, of which fewer than a thousand are believed to exist. But salt marshes are more than last refuges for endangered species. They provide habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds and songbirds, and aid in flood control and water quality improvement.

The Saline Wetlands Conservation Partnership (SWCP), which was

organized in 2002, grew out of a \$750,000 Environmental Trust grant to the city of Lincoln to protect and restore saline wetlands. Partners, each contributing \$75,000, were the city of Lincoln, Lancaster County, Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, The Nature Conservancy and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Other partners include Ducks Unlimited, Nebraska Wildlife Federation, Nebraska Sierra Club, Lincoln Homebuilders Association, Wachiska Audubon, Pheasants Forever, Conservation Alliance of the Great Plains, Cooper Foundation, Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The SWCP has hired a full-time coordinator and prepared an *Implementation Plan for the Conservation of Nebraska's Eastern Saline Wetlands*.

The partnership of diverse agencies and organizations was recognition that by acting alone the preservation of remaining saline wetlands would

continue to be piecemeal.

"Time was running out to save these unique wetlands," said Ted LaGrange, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Wetland Program Manager. "The partnership is trying to protect corridors, so we don't just have little postage stamps of relict habitat. I think if we can get a broader swath it will give us the opportunity to conserve the best of the wetlands remaining, restore others, and try to get the natural functions of those wetlands back."

This holistic watershed approach is designed to preserve both wetlands and their surrounding watersheds. The partnership uses several options, from the purchase of wetlands from willing sellers to conservation easements keeping the land in private ownership but protecting it in perpetuity. State and federal programs such as the Wetlands Reserve Program are also used.

Perhaps as important as all these programs has been the action of the city of Lincoln and Lancaster County in approving a comprehensive plan to guide future development and expansion to conserve saline wetlands.

By merging resources and expertise under a broad umbrella, the SWCP has already proven to be more than the sum of its parts. As of November 2004, grants and matching funds have been assembled to preserve and protect more than a thousand acres of Nebraska's rarest ecosystem.

For information, contact Tom Malmstrom, Saline Wetland Coordinator, P.O. Box 83581, 3125 Portia Street, Lincoln, NE 68501-3581, 402-476-2729, or look at SWCP's web site at <http://interlinc.ci.lincoln.ne.us/city/parks/admin/wetlands/index.htm> for descriptions and locations of saline wetlands. ■



JON FARRAR

Characteristic plants of eastern saline wetlands include silver-scale saltbrush, saltwort and sea blite; as well as freshwater cattails, foxtail barley and sedges.