



## **Trail Resources and Opportunities**

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*Above: The White River Valley between Crawford and Harrison. The development of the White River Trail along the former Chicago and North Western right-of-way will open this scenic area to recreational users.*

*Previous page: Trail in Ponca State Park.*

# Trail Resources and Opportunities

Resource corridors will form the structure of Nebraska's trails system. These corridors emerge from the clustering of important features and trail opportunities. This section develops the resource corridor concept by mapping these features and opportunities throughout the state. It also establishes a process that allows the plan to grow as new resource corridors are added and older ones expanded and improved.

Resource corridors can be thought of as layered maps of resources and opportunities. The resource corridors are those areas that have the densest concentrations of resources that trail users will find interesting and the best opportunities for linking those resources.

The following *resources* help define the resource corridors:

- *Recreational and Open Space Resources* include State Parks and Recreation Areas, National Forests and Grasslands, National Park Service sites, National Wildlife Refuges, National Scenic and Recreational Rivers, water features, and other major attractions.

- *Historic and Archeological Resources* include historic trails, National Historic Landmarks,

State Historical Parks, properties operated by the Nebraska State Historical Society, museums, sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and other historic sites.

- *Trail Resources* include existing and proposed community projects, nationally-designated trails, and canoe trails.

The following *opportunities* exist for linear connections linking major resources:

- *Trail Development Opportunities* include recent and pending railroad abandonments and lightly used rail lines, and the routes of major regional irrigation and power canals.

- *Road Resources* include roads with wider or surfaced shoulders, scenic byways, and other routes which are adaptable to trail use.

During the preparation of this plan, regional focus group meetings were held in Scottsbluff, Chadron, Valentine, McCook, Hastings, Broken Bow, Wayne, Mahoney State Park, and Nebraska City. At these meetings, participants considered the need and potential for trails in their respective regions. These proceedings, vital to the definition of the resource corridor concept, are also discussed here.

**NEBRASKA'S STATE PARKS***(with nearest towns)*

- **Indian Cave** (Shubert)
- **Platte River** (Louisville)
- **Eugene Mahoney** (Ashland)
- **Ponca** (Ponca)
- **Niobrara** (Niobrara)
- **Smith Falls** (Sparks, Valentine)
- **Fort Robinson** (Crawford)
- **Chadron** (Chadron)

*Photographs**This page: Ponca State Park.**Opposite page: Johnson Lake State Recreation Area near Lexington.*

## Recreation and Open Space Resources

While the vision of trails development in Nebraska identifies many benefits, recreational needs will initially attract most people to the trails system. Therefore, trails should utilize and reinforce the state's superb system of parks, recreation areas, and other open space resources. Trails development can increase use of the state park system by adding an increasingly popular outdoor recreation resource. Trails also link state recreation areas with neighboring communities, helping towns establish themselves as service centers for parks and giving park users an opportunity to experience life in neighboring communities. Towns and parks that could establish this "home base" relationship include Ponca with Ponca State Park, Crawford with Fort Robinson State Park, Ashland with Mahoney State Park, and Niobrara with Niobrara State Park.

Federal lands and resources are also vital parts of the state's open space system. These include National Forests and Grasslands, administered by the U.S. Forest Service, National Monuments, National Historic Trails, and National Scenic and Recreational Rivers, managed by the National Park Service, National Wildlife Refuges, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and lakes developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.



### State Parks

State Parks are defined by statute as facilities with substantial land area and which have:

- A primary value of statewide scenic, scientific, or historic interest.
- A potential for complete development.
- An ability to retain a significant portion of the area in a natural or relatively undisturbed state.

Nebraska's eight state parks, developed and operated by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, are the flagships of the state's open space system. These parks usually offer a wide array of innovative programs and facilities, ranging from hiking to live theater. With the current exception of Smith Falls, all parks offer a variety of camping



accommodations. In addition to recreation and camping, they offer frequent opportunities for historic and natural interpretation. Each park also provides marked trails within their boundaries, primarily for hiking and nature study. Most parks also provide equestrian trail rides.

### **State Recreation Areas**

State Recreation Areas (SRAs) are defined by statute as facilities with:

- Primary value for day use.
- Secondary overnight-use facilities or potential for overnight use.
- Reasonable expansion capability.
- A location in accordance with sound park management principles.

Nebraska's 69 state recreation areas are administered by the Game and Parks Commission, although some SRAs are on properties owned by agencies such as public power and irrigation districts, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, or the Bureau of Reclamation. Typically, SRAs are water-oriented or include a water feature: 64 SRAs contain water suitable for recreation. Recreational water resources include natural lakes, rivers and river access, sand pit lakes, and reservoirs. About three-quarters of all SRA land is classified by the Game and Parks Commission as natural environment.

### **National Forests and Grasslands**

National Forests and Grasslands are owned and managed by the Forest Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture for multiple uses. Nebraska's National Forests and Grasslands include just over 350,000 acres, all available for outdoor recreation activities such as hiking, sightseeing, nature study, horseback riding, camping, and hunting. Developed recreation sites include trailheads, developed campsites, and picnic areas. These holdings also include the 8,100-acre Soldier Creek Wilderness, managed to minimize evidence of human use; and the 6,600-acre Pine Ridge National Recreation Area.

Forest Service lands in Nebraska include the Nebraska National Forest, the Samuel R.

### **ARCHEOLOGY AT OGLALA NATIONAL GRASSLANDS**

*In addition to the famous rock formations of Toadstool Park, the Oglala National Grasslands also includes the Hudson-Meng Bison Bonebed, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Hudson-Meng site is the largest known bison bonebed of its age in the Western Hemisphere. It contains the remains of at least 600 extinct bison from over 10,000 years ago. The bonebed is one of many archeological resources that could be interpreted through a trails system.*

**CHIMNEY ROCK**

*There was now observable through the midst high up in the clouds a pointed object becoming more and more distinctly defined as we proceeded. With its base still enveloped in fog, we camped parallel with it. . . We headed toward this tapering rock, called by roamers of the prairie "Chimney Rock".*

- William Kelly, 1849

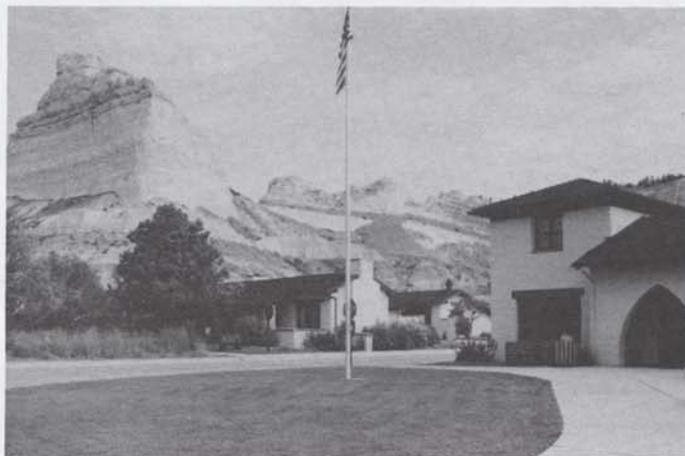
*One of the most grand and splendid objects I ever saw. . . The first 250 (feet) are like a large, shapeless mound then a spar of hard sand extends almost to the clouds. It can be ascended to the monument, which is inaccessible by the power of man.*

- Henry Shombre, 1849

**SCOTTS BLUFF**

*The spectacle was grand and imposing beyond description. It seemed as if Nature, in mere sportiveness, had thought to excel the noblest works of art, and rear up a mimic city as the grand metropolis of her empire. No higher encomium could be passed upon it than by employing the homely phrase of one of our voyageurs. He said: "I could die here . . . certain of not being far from heaven."*

- Rufus Sage, 1841



McKelvie National Forest, and the Oglala National Grassland. The Nebraska National Forest includes the Bessey Division, a human-planted forest in the Sandhills near Halsey and the Pine Ridge Division south of Chadron and Crawford. The McKelvie Forest is a human-planted forest in native grasslands southwest of Valentine. The Pine Ridge is one of the state's most distinctive environmental attractions. The Oglala National Grasslands are located in the far northwest corner of the state and include the unique rock formations of Toadstool Park.

**National Park Service Sites**

Open space resources in Nebraska administered by the National Park Service include National Monuments, rivers in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system, and National Historic Trails.

**■ National Monuments.**

Nebraska's three national monuments incorporate over 6,000 acres and combine aspects of history, recreation, and interpretation. These sites include:

- Homestead National Monument near Beatrice, representing one of the first homesteads filed under the 1862 Homestead Act. The Monument also includes interpretive displays and trails through a site that features a restored prairie.
- Scotts Bluff National Monument, west of Gering, with its majestic bluff and surrounding badlands, a key landmark to westward emigrants along the Oregon Trail.
- Agate Fossil Beds National Monument, between Mitchell and Harrison, one of the nation's richest paleontological sites.

In addition, Chimney Rock, 19 miles east of Gering, is a National Historic Site, owned and operated by the Nebraska State Historical Society. This formation, perhaps the most famous landmark of the Oregon Trail, is the site of construction of a new interpretive visitor's center.

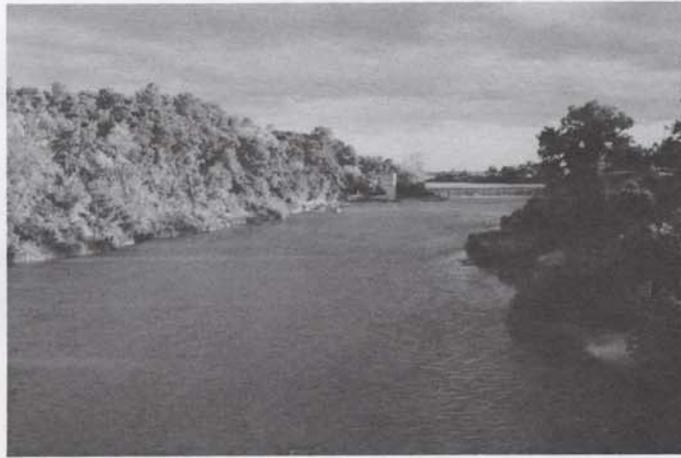
**■ National Scenic and Recreational Rivers**

Designation of river segments under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

recognizes environments of unusual quality or importance to the nation. The Act establishes National Park Service management of designated rivers and prohibits the installation of federally funded or assisted projects that would change their free-flowing characteristics. These river segments combine wildlife habitats, scenery, and recreational potential into an exciting and irreplaceable regional resource.

Several river segments along the Missouri and Niobrara Rivers have received this significant designation:

- The segment of the Missouri River from Gavins Point Dam to Ponca State Park was designated a National Recreation River in 1978.
- The Missouri River from Fort Randall Dam to the headwaters of Lewis and Clark Lake, the lower 20 miles of the Niobrara River from the Boyd/Holt County line to its confluence with the Missouri, and eight miles of Verdigre Creek from the town limits of Verdigre to the Niobrara were designated as National Recreation River segments in 1991.
- Two segments of the Niobrara were designated in 1991 as National Scenic Rivers. These Scenic River designations include the segment from Borman Bridge east of Valentine to Chimney Creek and from Rock Creek to the Highway 137 crossing.



National Recreational and Scenic River status recognizes unusual and irreplaceable natural environments, but does not guarantee public access to rivers. Major public and private steps have been taken to provide protection for these resources. These include the development of Smith Falls State Park by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and the acquisition and management of the approximately 54,000 acre Niobrara Preserve by The Nature Conservancy. The National Park Service is also studying the possible creation of a Niobrara-Buffalo Prairie National Park.

### ■ National Historic Trails

The designation of National Historic Trails was created by the National Trails System Act. National Historic Trails recognize prominent past routes of exploration, migration, and military action. These routes, administered by the National Park Service, include lands in

#### *Photographs*

*This page: Niobrara National Scenic River.*

*Opposite page: Scotts Bluff National Monument.*

### **MAJOR NEBRASKA STREAM CORRIDORS**

- *The Dismal River, from western Hooker County in the Sandhills east to the Middle Loup near Dunning.*
- *The Frenchman River, from the Nebraska-Colorado state line east to the Republican River near Culbertson.*
- *The Calamus River, from Moon Lake in Brown County south to the Calamus Reservoir and the North Loup at Burwell.*
- *The Platte River system across the state.*
- *The Snake River, from eastern Sheridan County east to the Niobrara River at Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge near Valentine.*
- *The Cedar River, from northern Garfield County southeast to the Loup near Fullerton.*
- *The Republican River, from southwestern Dundee County east to the Nebraska-Kansas state-line at Superior.*
- *The Elkhorn River, from Bassett southeast to the Platte River at Two Rivers State Recreation Area near Venice.*

both public and private ownership. Five of the nation's eleven National Historic Trails pass through Nebraska. They are considered in more detail in the next section, addressing Historic and Interpretive Resources.

### **National Wildlife Refuges**

National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs) are managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Four National Wildlife Refuges lie entirely within Nebraska and two are shared with neighboring states, comprising about 138,000 acres. Recreational activities allowed in National Wildlife Refuges include wilderness and wildlife photography, sightseeing, hiking, and nature study. Thus, NWRs and trail usage are highly compatible.

Refuge facilities vary in character and intensity of use. The DeSoto NWR, north of Omaha, provides a relatively large amount of land for recreational use and features the Bertrand steamboat display among its interpretive resources. The Valentine and Crescent Lake Refuges provide wilderness grassland environments, while the Fort Niobrara Refuge includes the unique and scenic environment of the Niobrara River Valley.

### **Water Resources**

Water is a vital resource for Nebraskans. The Ogallala Aquifer is the world's largest underground inland sea. However, the

relative scarcity of surface water causes Nebraskans to place an especially high value on the state's rivers and lakes.

Water resources and river courses are major determinants of resource corridors and the character of the state trails network. Where public access is possible, waterways provide opportunities for such water-based trail activities as canoeing and parallel land trails and greenways. The magical and reflective qualities of water, made more precious by the character of the state's environments, provide another layer of meaning for Nebraska's trails network.

### **■ Rivers and Waterways**

The State's rivers include the cliffs and broad flood plains of the Missouri, the changing flows and unique ecology of the braided Platte system, the incomparable landscape of the Niobrara, and the subtle, haunting environments of Sandhills rivers such as the Loup, the Calamus and the Dismal. In addition to nationally designated river segments, Nebraska's rivers are major scenic, economic, and regional resources for the state. The banks of most rivers are privately held. In addition, variable flows and wetland banks can make public access difficult. Nevertheless, river crossings can become nodes for recreation and interpretation, and some river corridors may be used for trails through negotiation of easements with property owners.

Sometimes, streams coincide with other trail resources, such as abandoned or lightly-used railroad lines or highways. These areas can become particularly valuable resources for trails development. In addition, the state park system includes many points of access to rivers and other natural waterways. Several important river segments are also designated as canoe trails. These canoe trails are considered in the inventory of existing trails.

### ■ Lakes and Reservoirs

Most of Nebraska's large lakes are reservoirs which are the result of major irrigation, flood control, or power projects. The largest of these lakes are Lake McConaughy, formed by Kingsley Dam on the North Platte River, Lewis and Clark Lake, formed on the Missouri River by Gavins Point Dam, and Harlan County Reservoir on the Republican River. These and smaller lakes offer an array of recreational opportunities: camping, boating, water recreation, fishing, swimming, and hiking. Many of the lakes include hiking trails and are included in the system of state recreation areas.

### Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations establish the role for each of these open space resources in defining resource corridors and the structure of the trails system:

**State Parks:** *The eight State Parks should be*



*included within resource corridors and the trails network. Their unusual environments, full range of services, and status as the state's most comprehensively developed recreational and open space facilities make them central to the overall system.*

**State Recreation Areas (SRAs):** *The State Recreation Areas are important parts of the state park and open space system, playing a key back-up role to the state parks and providing more localized recreational opportunities. SRAs should be viewed as support facilities to a trail network and should be integrated into it. However, resource corridors will not include every individual SRA.*

**National Forests and Grasslands:** *These unique scenic, recreational, and environmental resources will help to define resource corridors. Trail development within and outside of these properties is compatible with their overall mission of wilderness and environmental conservation. Like*

### MAJOR NEBRASKA STREAM CORRIDORS

- *The Loup River system, including the North, Middle, and South Loup Rivers draining a large part of central Nebraska and flowing southeast to the Platte River near Columbus.*

- *The Blue River system, including the Little Blue from Minden to near Steele City, the Big Blue from near Grand Island to the Kansas state line in Gage County, and the West Fork of the Big Blue from Hastings eastward.*

- *The Missouri River, forming the eastern and northern boundaries of the state.*

- *The Niobrara River, from the Wyoming state line east to the Missouri at Niobrara State Park.*

- *The Nemaha River, including the Little Nemaha from near Bennet south to the Missouri near Nemaha, and the Big Nemaha from Hallam to the extreme southeastern corner of the state.*

- *The White River in the Pine Ridge area of far northwestern Nebraska.*

*Above Left: The Republican River near Red Cloud.*

### **CORPS OF ENGINEERS LAKES**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been active in the development and administration of recreational water resources, developing 16 lakes in Nebraska. Flood control is the primary purpose of these facilities, although they offer significant recreational benefits as well.

Fourteen of the Corps lakes are leased to management agencies. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission leases ten sites in the Lincoln vicinity, the largest of which is Branched Oak SRA. The City of Omaha leases three sites on the Papio Creek system, while Wehrspann Lake in northwestern Sarpy County is leased by the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District. Each of the Omaha metro area lakes boasts extensive paved trails systems.

The Corps' Lewis and Clark Lake is on the Missouri River in northeast Nebraska. Its Visitors Center includes exhibits on the journey of its namesake explorers and the Upper Missouri River basin. A nature trail is adjacent to the center. The Corps' Harlan County Lake in south-central Nebraska includes two nature trails.

*State Parks, they have a central role in determining the location of major features of the trail system.*

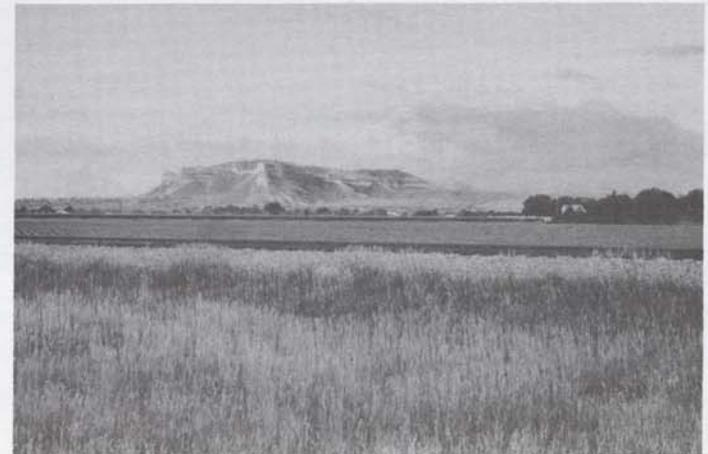
**National Monuments and National Historic Sites:** National Monuments and National Historic Sites are irreplaceable resources for the State. They should be pivotal facilities in determining the form of a trails network.

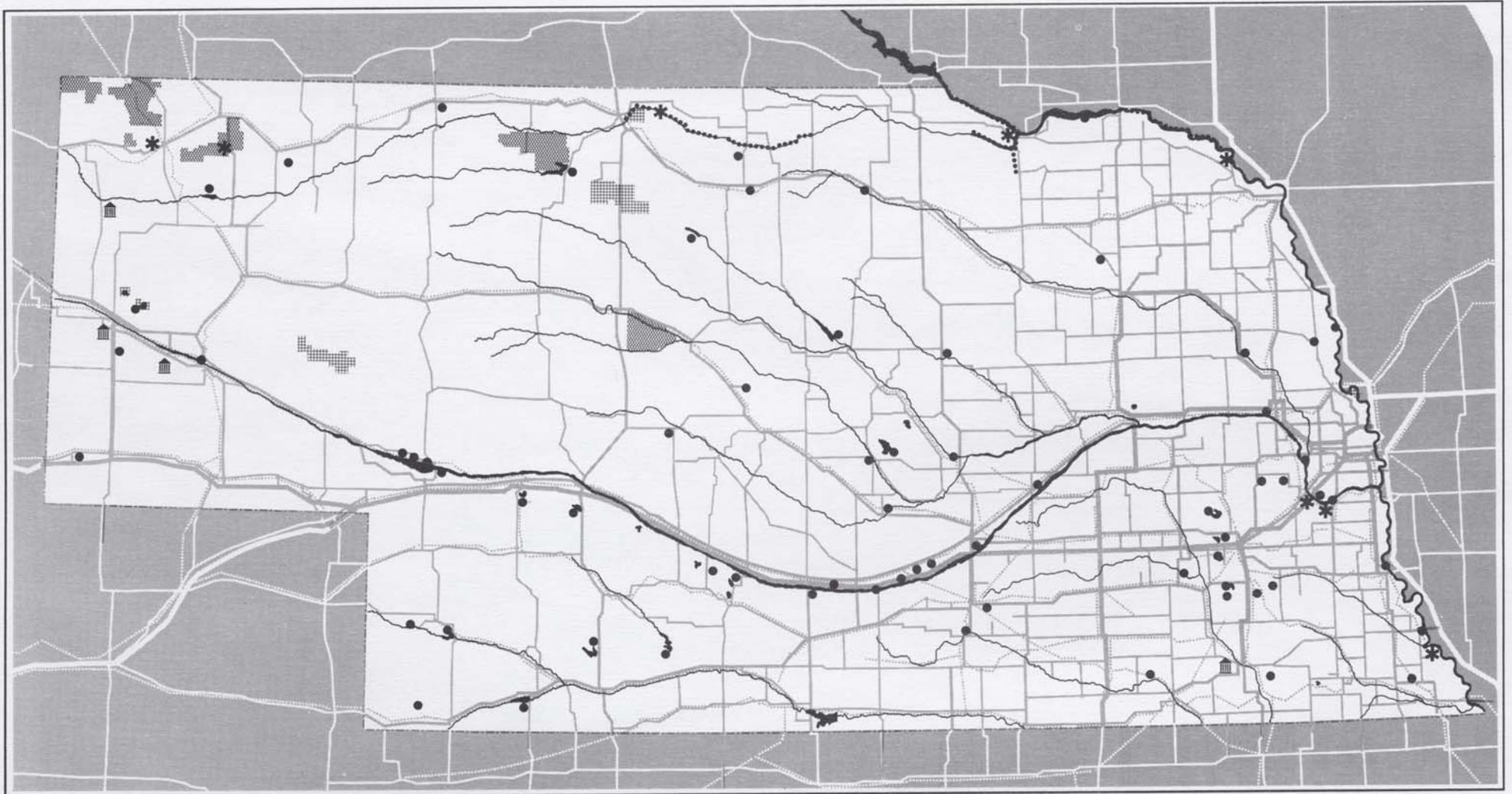
**National Scenic and Recreational Rivers:** These nationally designated rivers are major features of resource corridors. While continuous access is probably not possible, public access and low-impact trails development in these corridors should be encouraged.

**National Wildlife Refuges:** National Wildlife Refuges provide excellent opportunities for integration into a trails network where they reinforce other recreational and open space resources. However, their refuge status and limited use in remote areas suggest that the systems need not provide access to every refuge, particularly those in remote areas.

**Rivers and Streams:** Streams are important to resource corridors, especially when they permit some form of public use or are adjacent to overland trail opportunities. The trails system should maximize public access to streams without interfering with private use. In particular, potential trail corridors that follow or provide access to waterways are especially important. However, the headwaters of river corridors are frequently too remote to be utilized for trails development.

**Lakes and Reservoirs:** Lakes can be major nodes for the statewide trails system and should be integrated into the system where possible. In addition, trail opportunities should be expanded within areas of public ownership. Trails may range from low-impact wilderness and equestrian trails to multiple-use trails in heavily-used recreation areas.



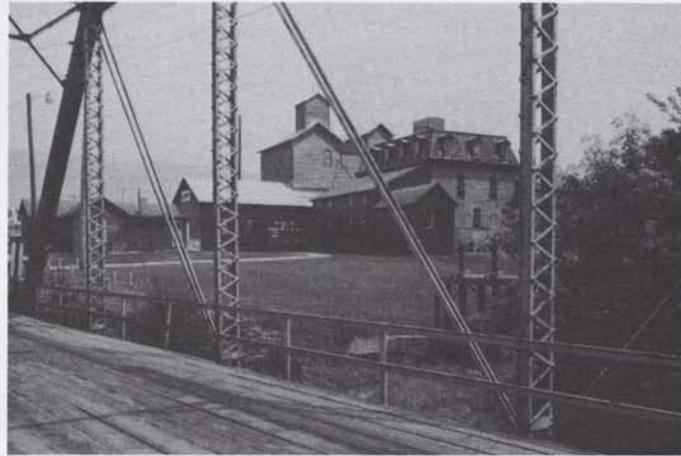


## Recreation and Open Space Resources

- |       |                                 |           |   |
|-------|---------------------------------|-----------|---|
| *     | State Parks                     | ●●●●●     | National Scenic and Recreational Rivers |
| ●     | State Recreation Areas          | ▣▣▣▣▣     | National Wildlife Refuges               |
| ▣▣▣▣▣ | National Forests and Grasslands | — — — — — | Rivers and Streams                      |
| ⌊     | National Monuments              | ●●●●●     | Lakes and Reservoirs                    |

*This page: Neligh Mill. This restored water-driven mill on the Elkhorn River interprets agricultural and industrial history in Northeastern Nebraska and is operated by the Nebraska State Historical Society. The mill is located on the proposed Cowboy Trail.*

*Opposite page: The Lewis and Clark Trail in Ponca State Park. The trail is one of Nebraska's five National Historic Trails.*



## Historic and Interpretive Resources

Trails are part of the history of our state and nation. Nebraska's Platte River Road was America's main highway of westward settlement, a route followed by four designated National Historic Trails. However, there is more to the story of Nebraska and its people than emigrants travelling through the state to reach the promised land of the West. It is also the story of the Native Americans whose relationship with the land and whose struggle with the forces of American expansion defined much of Nebraska's history; of pioneers who settled an unforgiving land; of people from many countries who established homes and communities in the new territory; and of individuals whose accomplishments have added immeasurably to the richness of our lives.

A trails system can explore this rich history by exposing users to the places that tell these and other stories. It can help interpret history, creating a greater understanding of the forces that shaped Nebraska, its people, and its towns. Integrating trails with historical features adds an educational dimension to a recreational network. Such a network can attract people with an interest in western history to the state, encouraging economic development. Therefore, historic resources are vital influences in determining the character and configuration of a statewide trails system.

Nebraska includes a rich variety of historic and interpretive resources. A review of these resources follows.

### ■ State Historical Parks

State Historical Parks are defined by statute as sites which:

- Have notable historical significance to the state in the opinion of competent, recognized authorities.
- Include adequate area to develop the full interpretive potential of the site.
- May be equipped with limited day-use facilities that neither detract from nor interfere with the primary historic and interpretive purposes and values of the site.

Nebraska has ten State Historical Parks, which cover many aspects of the state's history. Most of these facilities offer interpretive centers. Several State Historical Parks further emphasize the experiential quality of living history with historical re-enactments. Preservation of historic structures is also an important part of the program of the Historical Parks.

### ■ National Monuments and National Historic Sites

Nebraska's three national monuments and one National Historic Site incorporate over 6,000 acres and combine aspects of history, recreation, and interpretation. These sites, including Homestead National Monument near Beatrice, Scotts Bluff National Monument near Gering, Agate Fossil Beds National Monument south of Harrison, and Chimney Rock National Historic Site near Bayard, were discussed in the review of Recreational and Open Space Resources.

### ■ Historic Trails

Nebraska's role as a preferred route for western migration makes the state central to the National Historic Trail system. Five of the eleven National Historic Trails designated under the National Trails System Act of 1968 and administered by the National Park Service pass through the state. In most areas outside of State Parks or National Monuments,



segments of National Historic Trails are privately-owned, preventing continuous public access. Highways or secondary roads frequently parallel Historic Trails, providing some access. Automobile routes have been designated and signed to provide travelers with a sense of the trail experience.

*The Lewis and Clark Trail* follows the Missouri River route of that famous expedition of 1804-1805. It is designated as a water trail by the National Park Service, with the exception of land routes south of Brownville and on the South Dakota shore of Lewis and Clark Lake above Gavins Point Dam. The other four National Historic Trails follow the Platte River Road and include:

- *The Oregon Trail*, entering Nebraska near Steele City and following the south bank of the Platte westward.
- *The Pony Express Trail*, roughly following the



### NEBRASKA'S STATE HISTORICAL PARKS

■ **Rock Creek Station** (Fairbury), the first station of the Pony Express in Nebraska and the site where "Wild Bill" Hickok began his notorious career.

■ **Arbor Lodge** (Nebraska City), the estate of J. Sterling Morton, the founder of Arbor Day, and the site of the National Arbor Day Foundation's Lied Conference Center.

■ **Fort Atkinson** (Fort Calhoun), the first U.S. military post established west of the Missouri River.

■ **Ashfall Fossil Beds** (Royal), the site of the fossils from a variety of prehistoric animals covered over by ancient volcanic ash.

■ **Fort Hartsuff** (Elyria), a restored infantry outpost that acted as a buffer between settlers and Indians in the North Loup Valley.



**NEBRASKA'S STATE HISTORICAL PARKS**

■ **Arthur Bowring Sandhills Ranch** (Merriman), a working ranch that interprets the life, geology, and ecology of the Sandhills.

■ **Ash Hollow** (Lewellen), a famous stopover for travellers on the Oregon Trail after negotiating the hills between the South and North Platte Valleys.

■ **Champion Mill** (Champion), Nebraska's last working, water-powered mill in an idyllic millpond setting.

■ **Buffalo Bill Ranch** (North Platte), the home of the famous showman, scout, and promoter, Buffalo Bill Cody.

■ **Fort Kearny** (Kearney), a major fort developed to protect westward emigrants and the point of convergence of westward trails into the Platte River Road to the West.

Oregon Trail route, with the exception of a divergence into northeastern Colorado.

- *The Mormon Pioneer Trail*, generally proceeding along the north bank of the Platte River westward from Omaha (Florence Winter Quarters).

- *The California Trail*, with several eastern points of entry into Nebraska converging at Fort Kearny, then following the Platte River Road westward.

In addition, other trails crossed Nebraska that have important regional significance, but are not designated as part of the National Trail System. These include the Sidney-Deadwood Trail in western Nebraska, the Texas-Ogallala Cattle Trail, and the Oxbow Trail in Eastern Nebraska.

**Nebraska State Historical Society Properties**

The Nebraska State Historical Society operates the Museum of Nebraska History in Lincoln. It also owns and operates branch museums in historically important sites around the state. These museums preserve important Nebraska landmarks and establish them as key resources for historic interpretation and study.

The Historical Society's properties and branch museums in the state include:



Above: *The George Norris House in McCook.*

- Kennard House in Lincoln.
- Fort Robinson Museum, Fort Robinson State Park.
- Neligh Mills in Neligh.
- Neihardt Center in Bancroft.
- Chimney Rock National Historic Site near Bayard.
- Senator George W. Norris Home in McCook.
- Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud.

**National Register Of Historic Places**

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's official list of historic and cultural resources. Through the statewide program, buildings, sites, and districts are listed on the National Register through a nomination process administered by the Nebraska State Historical Society. The Register recognizes properties which:



Above: Gage County Courthouse in Beatrice.

- Retain their historic character and, generally, are at least 50 years old.
- Are associated with events that have contributed significantly to the broad pattern of the state's history, or with the lives of persons significant in national, state, or local history, or embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, represent the work of a master, possess high artistic values, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- Have yielded, or are likely to yield, information important in history and/or prehistory.

By late 1993, the National Register in Nebraska included over 725 entries. Together, they form a quilt of the history of Nebraska's human and built environments. In addition, some

National Register sites are designated as National Historic Landmarks, denoting a high level of national historic significance.

### ■ Museums and Other Historic Sites

The local histories of Nebraska communities are considered in city and county historical museums and other interpretive facilities around the state. This diverse system of museums and facilities ranges from high technology facilities like the Hastings Museum's new IMAX Theater to storefront museums in small villages. All provide a wealth of information about the forces, places, and personalities that shaped the history of the state's regions and communities.

### Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations establish the role for each of these historic resources in defining resource corridors and the structure of the trails system:

**State Historical Parks:** *The State Historical Parks are among Nebraska's most significant and well-developed historic resources. They have an integral role to play in the interpretive aspects of a state trails system and become defining components of the resource corridors.*

### NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS IN NEBRASKA

- Walker Gilmore Site (Cass County)
- Fort Robinson and Red Cloud Agency (Dawes County)
- Father Flanagan's Boys' Home (Douglas County)
- Ash Hollow Cave (Garden County)
- Coufal Ridge Site (Howard County)
- Palmer Site (Howard County)
- Fairview, William Jennings Bryan Home (Lancaster County)
- Nebraska State Capitol (Lancaster County)
- Arbor Lodge (Otoe County)
- Senator George Norris House (Red Willow County)
- Leary Site (Richardson County)
- Robidoux Pass (Scotts Bluff County)
- Signal Butte (Scotts Bluff County)
- Schultz Site (Valley County)
- Pike-Pawnee Site (Webster County)
- Willa Gather House (Webster County)
- Fort Atkinson (Washington County)
- U.S.S. Hazzard (Douglas County)
- Captain Meriwether Lewis Dredge (Nemaha County)
- Susan Picotte Center (Thurston County)



Above: Fort Mitchell Historical Marker northwest of Scotts Bluff National Monument. The Nebraska State Historical Society's markers contribute to historic interpretation along the trails system.

Below right: Oregon Trail marker in Ash Hollow State Historical Park.

**National Monuments and National Historic Sites:** As stated earlier, these unique facilities are important determinants of resource corridors and should be integrated into the state trails system.

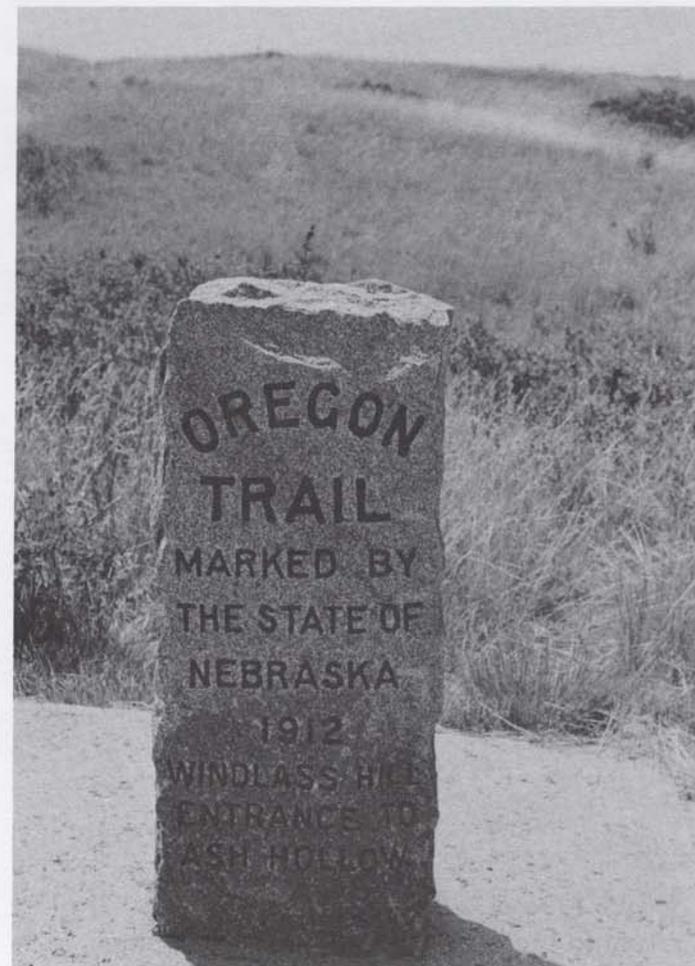
**Historic Trails:** Historic trails provide superb opportunities for interpretation and enrichment of the trail experience. Many segments of these trail routes are privately held. In some cases, negotiation of easements or acquisition of important trail segments may be possible. In most cases, crossings of designated trails and historic trails should become special locations for historic markers and interpretation. In addition, efforts should be made to improve trail access along routes that generally parallel historic trails, with trail design that is sensitive to historic and natural environs, features, and archeological sites.

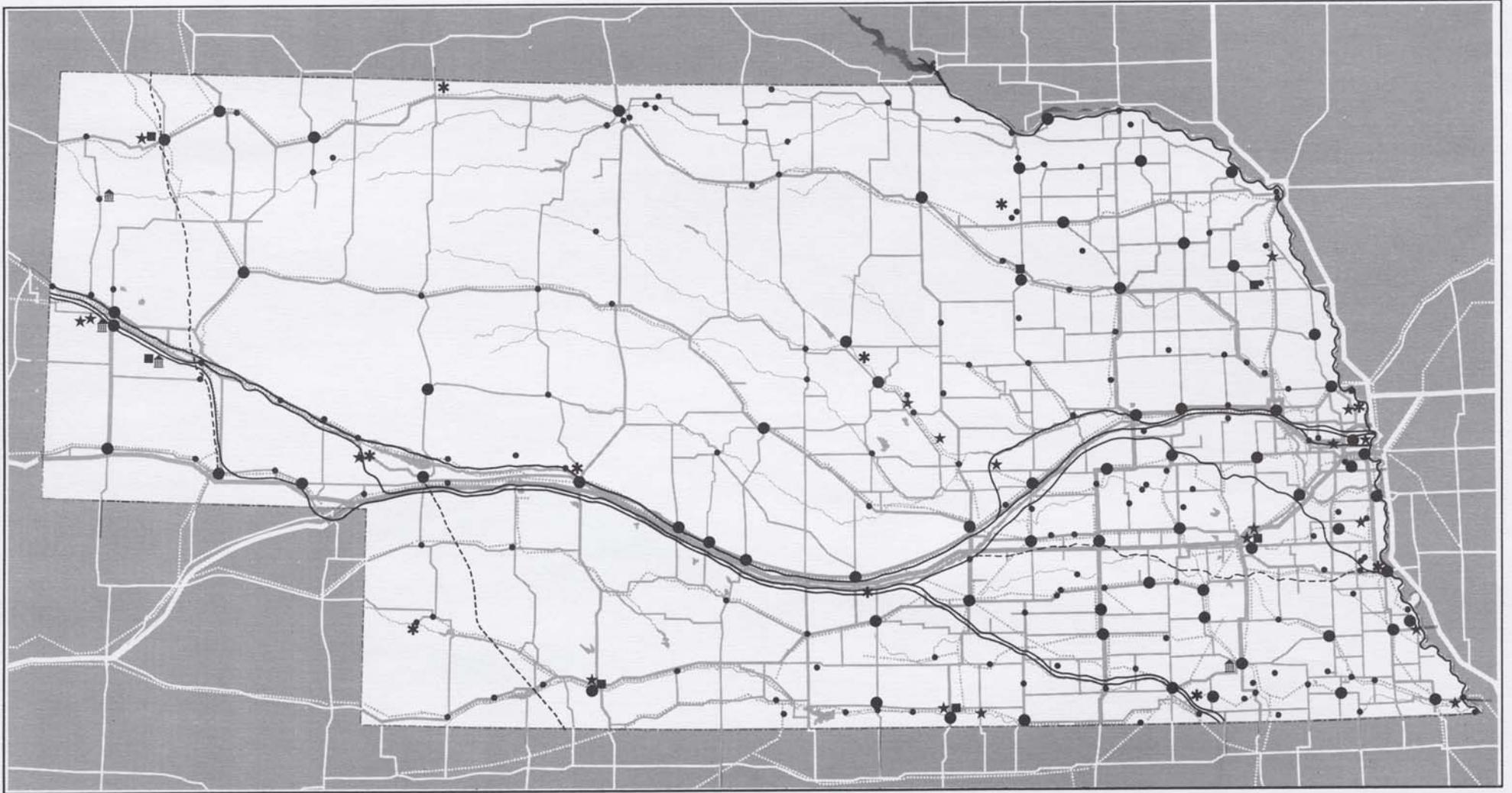
**Nebraska State Historical Society Properties:** Nebraska State Historical Society sites are vital interpretive facilities which help to define and reinforce trail corridors. They should generally be incorporated as supporting elements of the statewide trails system.

**National Register Properties:** National Register properties should be viewed as important interpretive nodes on a state trails network. A trails system cannot provide access to all properties, many of which are located in urban areas, are privately owned, or are sensitive to unrestricted or unsupervised access. However, the system can integrate them where possible and can provide directional information to sites that are located off

trail corridors. Where possible, trail routes should incorporate National Register properties.

**Museums and Other Historic Sites:** Local museums and historical sites should be viewed as contributing elements to the trails system, facilities which enhance the multi-faceted experience of the system. In addition, the trails system should become a method of marketing these valuable but often underpublicized resources.





## Historical and Interpretive Resources

*	State Historical Parks
🏠	National Monuments/Historic Sites
—	National Historical Trails
- - -	Other Historic Trails

■	State Historical Society Properties
●	Multiple National Register Sites
●	Single National Register Site
★	National Historic Landmarks

*This page: Mo Pac East Trail, looking east toward the village of Walton.*

*Opposite page: The Fort Kearny Rail-Trail. This 1.8-mile trail begins at Fort Kearny State Recreation Area and includes a major crossing over the Platte River.*

## Existing Trail Resources

Existing and planned trails are the starting points of an emerging state trails network. An inventory of these current trail developments is important to this assessment of resources. Even though Nebraska's trails development program is still young, the state has a large number of both informal and formal trails. While a complete inventory is not presented here, this section will provide a general overview of the state's current and presently planned trails network.

Existing trail resources fall into three groups: exclusive trails, on-road trails including scenic byways, and water trails. Exclusive (or off-road) trails accommodate recreational and commuter uses on facilities that are separate from (but in some cases parallel to) existing roadways. On-road trails include the joint use of roadways for recreational or commuter use, or the designation of roads for auto-oriented recreational uses such as sightseeing. Water trails include the use of linear waterways for recreational purposes. This section will concentrate on exclusive land and water trails.

### ■ Exclusive Trails

Generally, Nebraska's exclusive (off-road) trails can be placed in four functional groups:

- *Inter-Nodal Trails.* These relatively long-distance trails are the spines of trail networks.



They connect points or trailheads separated by rural areas and are usually ten miles or more in length. Trailheads include communities, parks and recreational areas, major attractions, or other physical features. These trails often follow railroad, waterway, or road corridors and provide for multiple uses. Examples of inter-nodal trails are the Mo Pac East Trail from Lincoln to Wabash, and the Pine Ridge Trail, a 50-mile trail between Crawford and Chadron through the Nebraska National Forest's Pine Ridge National Recreation Area and Chadron State Park. The Norfolk to Chadron Cowboy Trail, extending about 350 miles, will be the longest of Nebraska's inter-nodal trails when completed.

- *Connecting Trails.* These trails typically link a town or trailhead with a major attraction or recreational facility outside of that town. Connecting links are usually less than ten miles in length. Connecting trails help establish the town as a "home base" for visitor services.



Connecting trails may be incorporated into an inter-nodal trail. An example of a connecting trail is the 1.8 mile rail-trail connecting a trailhead near Interstate 80 to Fort Kearny State Recreation Area. Other proposed connecting links include planned trails from Halsey to Nebraska National Forest, Ponca to Ponca State Park, and Niobrara with Niobrara State Park.

• *Intra-Park Trails.* These trails are generally located completely within a park, recreation area, or open space preservation area. These systems are part of the recreational offerings of the park facility. Nebraska's state parks and many of its recreational areas include trails or trail systems, usually devoted to pedestrian or equestrian activities. The Nebraska National Forest also provides internal trails systems within its two Ranger Districts. Intra-park trails are also found within private nature preserves, such as Fontenelle Forest in Bellevue

and The Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Preserve.

Typically, intra-park trails are isolated and not tied into other trails systems. However, they should be integrated into the overall network where possible.

• *Community Trails Systems.* These systems meet the recreational and transportation needs of individual cities, towns, and villages. In smaller towns, community trails may follow a single route, while in larger cities, they may include a complex network of facilities. These trails often are hard-surfaced and host multiple uses. Community trails may connect with inter-nodal or other regional trails, as in the link between Lincoln's trails network and the inter-nodal Mo Pac East Trail.

Community trails play a number of roles. While their primary use is recreational, trails also serve important transportation functions. For example, strategically located trails can encourage workers to commute to work on foot or by bicycle. In addition, these trails can fill a community development role by providing amenities that help new neighborhoods develop, connect residential and commercial areas, and provide internal linkages among city neighborhoods.

As of October, 1993, towns with a population of less than 2,500 reported 35.8 miles of existing trails, with an additional 74.6 miles

### **CANDY SALES PAVE WAY FOR BIKE TRAIL**

*"The sounds of sweet success were heard in Dannebrog as a cement mixer rumbled through town.*

*The sale of hundreds of candy bars helped pave the way for the first mile of the Dannebrog bike trail, which was laid along an abandoned railroad line.*

*About six volunteers worked in the afternoon sun, smoothing cement, dragging a burlap sheet across the surface for texture and marking lines in the wet pavement. . .*

*Among the volunteers were employees of the Farmers Union Co-op, the head of the local branch of the Sherman County Bank, two nurses, and the city's maintenance man.*

*Amy Schwenk of St. Libory said she came to help because 'I live around here and I'm always biking through.'*

*Cliff Edmondson of Denver was visiting his sister and volunteered to help. He said he enjoyed working with friendly Nebraskans who had an 'unusual habit' of smiling. . ."*

*- News Item  
The Grand Island Independent  
October 1, 1993*



*Above: The Keystone Trail in Omaha. This trail is located on a levee along the Little Papio Creek. When completed, it will connect Glenn Cunningham Lake in Northwest Omaha and Haworth Park in Bellevue, a distance of about 25 miles.*

planned. Cities over 2,500 have 143.3 miles of existing trails as of October 1993, with an additional 217.6 miles planned. If all currently planned trails are developed, Nebraska's community trails will provide a network of about 470 miles. Pedestrian and bicycling trails account for the largest share of these proposed trails. Currently, Nebraska's communities provide 110 miles of pedestrian trails and about 70 miles of bicycle trails. They plan to develop an additional 218 miles of pedestrian trails and 156 miles of trails that will accommodate bicycles.

The accompanying tables summarize the

inventory of existing and planned exclusive trails in Nebraska. Appendix One includes a community-by-community inventory of current and planned trail development activities. Omaha and Lincoln account for the largest percentage of these totals. Lincoln has Nebraska's largest existing community trails system at 53 total miles. The city plans to develop an additional 50 miles as part of its trails master plan. In 1993, Omaha had 13.8 miles of existing trails, with an additional 80 miles planned. Together, the state's two biggest cities will account for about 50% of Nebraska's existing and planned community trails.

While Omaha and Lincoln have dominated trails development, cities and towns of all sizes have begun to implement effective trails programs. Case studies can help explain the scope of trails planning and development as part of the growth of Nebraska's communities. The case studies will examine the role of trails planning in Alliance, Aurora, Beatrice, Columbus, Dannebrog, Grand Island, Kearney, Lincoln, Omaha, Scottsbluff/Gering, and Stromsburg. While not an inclusive list of efforts in Nebraska's communities, these cities and towns display a range of community trail activity.

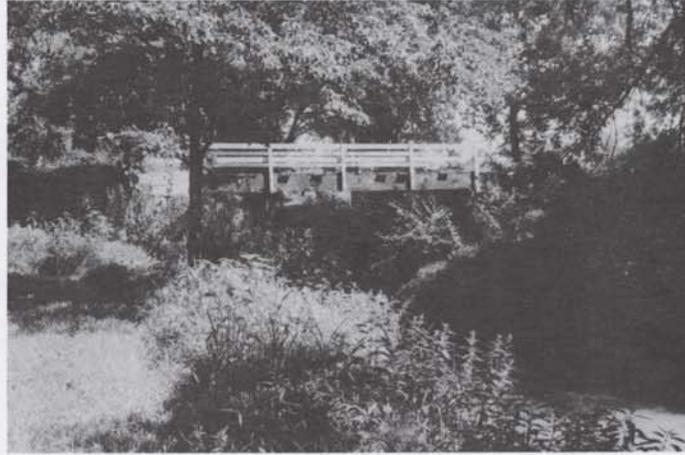


## Alliance

Trail planning in Alliance, a city of 9,600 in the Nebraska Panhandle, began with the development of a paved trail along a drainage way in beautiful City Park, a linear open space developed during the 1930s. In the 1970s, trails were developed in Laing Park, a new facility featuring a lake in the developing northwestern part of the city.

In 1990, the Peter Kiewit Foundation commissioned an urban design plan for Alliance. One of the plan's key recommendations was to take advantage of the drainage corridor to connect Laing Park, City Park, and other parts of the city by an improved, barrier-free, multi-use trail. The proposed trail would link the two major parks through property owned by the school district.

Since 1991, the city has received funding through the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum to make open space improvements and develop its trails system. The completed trail will extend for about 3.3 miles and unify new and old parts of the city. Future plans may link the in-town trail system to Carhenge, one of the city's most famous visitor attractions, just north of the city on US Highway 385.



## Aurora

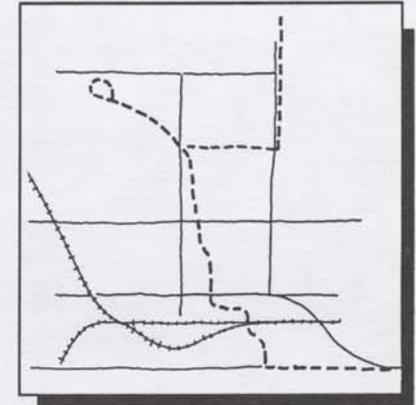
Aurora, a central Nebraska city of 3,800, has developed a trails plan based on two levels - a network of on-street walking routes and major trails development in its largest public open space, Streeter Park.

The city's on-street program routes users on streets around the perimeter of the city. An east-west route connects this perimeter network with Aurora's historic downtown and Courthouse Square. The system, which is informally designated but not officially signed, links the city's schools, major parks, and the central business district.

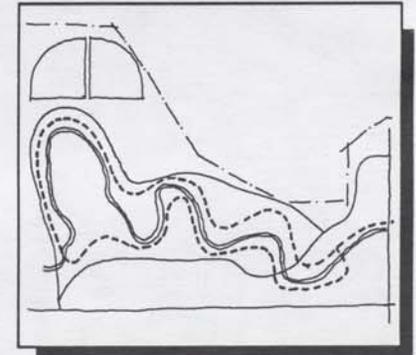
Aurora's plan for its superb Streeter Park calls for a pedestrian and bike trail along meandering Lincoln Creek, linking all of the park's main features. The Lincoln Creek Parkway plan of Aurora's Prairie Plains Resource Institute calls for continuing the Streeter Park Trail east and north to the Pioneer Trails Recreation Area. Here, the Lower Big Blue Natural Resources District plans an additional one mile trail around the recreation area's lake. Realization of the trails system plan will provide Aurora with an excellent trails network, linked to all parts of the city.

## Case Studies

### Trails Programs of Nebraska's Communities



**Alliance**

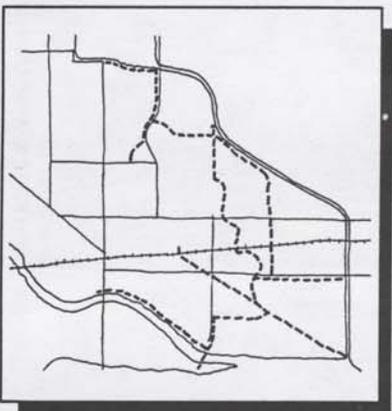


**Aurora**

**Case Studies**  
*Trails Programs of  
 Nebraska's  
 Communities*



**Beatrice**



**Columbus**



**Beatrice**

Trails planning in Beatrice, a city of 12,300, emerged as a priority in the city's 1992 comprehensive plan. The plan called for the use of trails and street improvements to connect the city's four main neighborhood districts, divided from one another by the Big Blue River, Indian Creek, and railroad corridors. Trails became integral to the plan's goal of creating a physically unified city and linking growing areas back into the established city.

An important trails segment will link Chautauqua and Riverside Parks, two historic open spaces along the south bank of the Big Blue River. A farsighted program by the city to acquire flood-prone property along the Blue for public open space will help this corridor become a multi-use recreational center for the city.

Additions to the trails system will extend this "Big Blue Bikeway" north along Indian Creek to major shopping areas on the northern edge of the city, and to northeast Beatrice via a new east side bridge. This will connect South Beatrice neighborhoods to the YMCA, potential development sites, and new neighborhoods in northeast Beatrice. Beatrice received ISTE A Enhancement Funds in 1994 to begin implementation of its system.

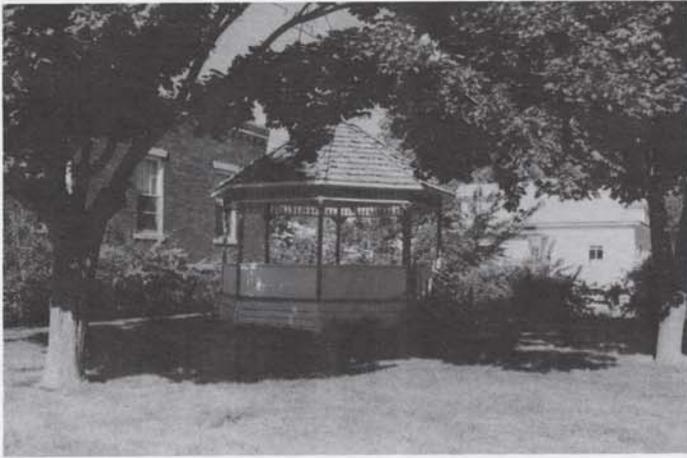


**Columbus**

Trails planning and development in Columbus, a booming industrial community of 20,000, grew out of a comprehensive planning process. A trail link will lead from the center of the city to proposed new southeast growth areas along an abandoned railroad right-of-way. Trail extensions will lead to Tailrace Park, at the confluence of the Platte River and the Loup Power Canal.

Trails development will also provide a transportation alternative to workers in plants on the east edge of the city. A proposed trail will give commuters an alternative to the city's two congested east-west through streets. Trails are also proposed along new roads that will improve traffic flow around the south, east, and north edges of the city. This trail will continue along the Loup River to Columbus' unique Pioneer Park. Another trail segment will also link the center of the city to Lake Babcock and Lake North north of the city.

Ultimately, these trail links could connect to a regional trail along the Loup Power Canal. Future development will demonstrate the recreational, transportation, and development potentials of trails for Columbus.

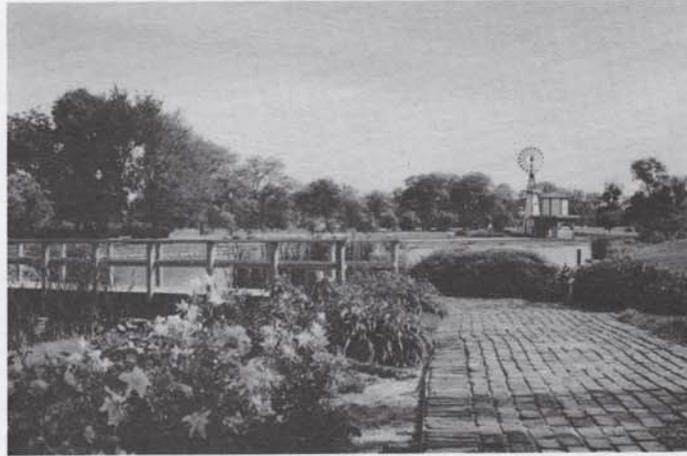


## Dannebrog

Dannebrog, a central Nebraska community of 324, demonstrates that trails development works in villages as well as cities. Led by Shirley Johnson, a tireless local community resident, the village planned a trail surrounding the town. A portion of the trail uses an abandoned Union Pacific right-of-way, returning along Highway 58 and Oak Creek to City Park and the village center.

Dannebrog began its trails system with a Nebraska Trail Development Assistance Act grant. The town solicited and received in-kind assistance, including the use of a concrete slip-form machine, to construct the trail and raised a major share of matching funds through the sale of candy bars. Subsequently, Dannebrog received an ISTEA Enhancement grant to extend its first mile of trail.

The first segment of the proposed system is now complete. Dannebrog is looking forward to completing its system. In addition, village leaders are considering the possibility of a trail link north along the abandoned railroad corridor to St. Paul.



## Grand Island

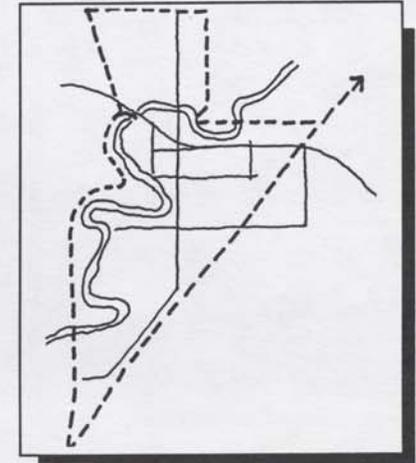
Trails planning in Grand Island, Nebraska's third largest city with a population approaching 40,000, accelerated with preparation of a new comprehensive plan. The city's program calls for a combination of on-street routes and exclusive trails, making use of both road and waterway routes.

The first segment of the trails plan calls for completion of a 2.5 mile segment between Gates School and Pier Park. Extensions of this trail will connect to Central Community College and the Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer in southeastern Grand Island. This trail will eventually continue south along the Locust Street corridor and across the Platte River, continuing west along the Platte to the US 281/I-80 interchange and Mormon Island State Recreation Area.

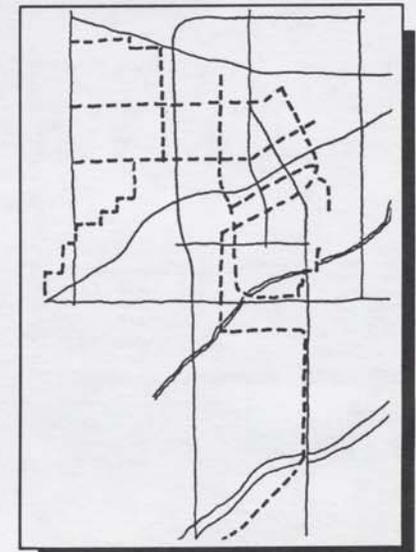
Other segments of the trails network will serve downtown Grand Island and will continue through neighborhoods on the western side of the city.

## Case Studies

### Trails Programs of Nebraska's Communities

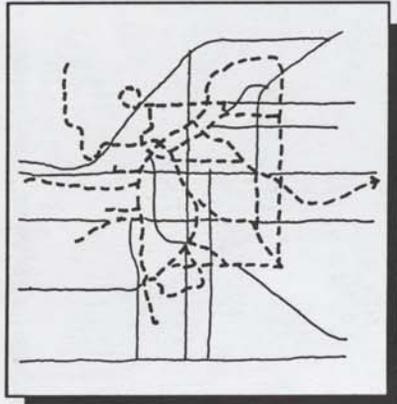


**Dannebrog**

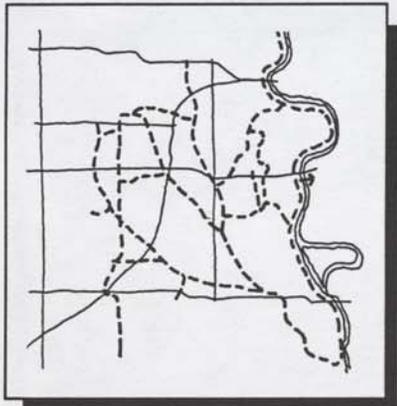


**Grand Island**

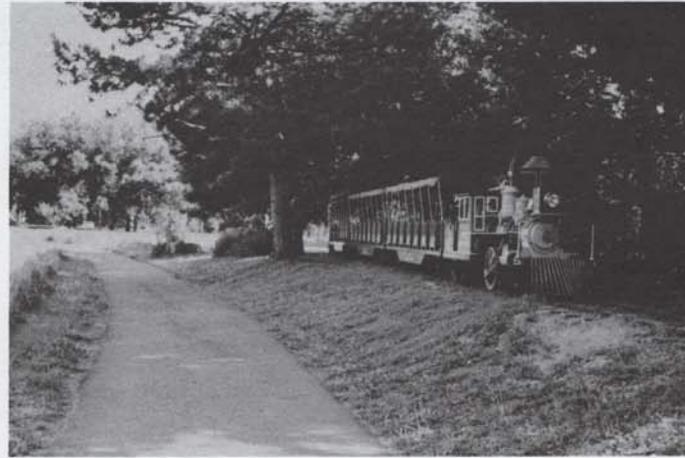
**Case Studies**  
*Trails Programs of  
 Nebraska's  
 Communities*



**Lincoln**



**Omaha**



**Lincoln**

Nebraska's capital, a city of over 200,000, has been the state's leader in trails planning and development. The city developed Nebraska's first major multi-use trail, the 4.4-mile Billy Wolff Trail, between Downtown and Holmes Lake Park in 1978. During the 1980s, other major trail segments were completed. These included the John Dietrich Trail, a neighborhood trail that used a portion of a route that was originally proposed for a major arterial road and the Highway 2 Trail, demonstrating joint use of a major highway corridor. Lincoln also purchased 6.5 miles of an abandoned Rock Island railroad right-of-way in 1985; the Rock Island Trail, developed between 1990 and 1992, has since become the city's most popular trail.

In 1989, Lincoln approved the Lincoln Area Trails Plan, creating a network using drainageways, road corridors, and railroad rights-of-way. One of the city's most significant steps has been the development of the east-west Mo Pac Trail east to 84th Street. East of 84th, the Great Plains Trails Network mounted a successful fund-raising campaign to acquire a corridor for the 25-mile Mo Pac East Trail, which is owned and managed by the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District.



**Omaha**

Omaha is implementing an ambitious effort that will produce a 100-mile metropolitan system. The city's program began in 1983 with a decision to begin acquiring land for a trail along the Little Papillion Creek. In 1985, a parks plan called for the development of a comprehensive trails network based on six open space corridors - three branches of the Papillion Creek system, the Missouri River, the historic boulevard system, and a suburban parkway. Detailed planning and implementation of the system has occurred as a result of a close working relationship between the City, the Papio-Missouri River NRD, and Douglas County. The P-MRNRD completed a detailed plan for the Omaha metro trails system in 1989.

The first segment of the Keystone Trail opened in 1990. By 1994, this trail will extend for 12 miles from Northwest Omaha to Sarpy County. A future extension will connect to the 10-mile Bellevue Loop Trail, producing a 25-mile continuous trail. Other segments are complete along the West Papio Creek. The city's 144th Street parkway includes a trail as an integral part of a road project, financed with Surface Transportation Program funds.



## Scottsbluff/Gering

The Twin Cities of Scottsbluff and Gering, an urban area of about 25,000 in western Nebraska's scenic North Platte River Valley, is implementing a major trails program. A private, nonprofit group, Monument Valley Pathways (MVP), planned a 26-mile network of trails, following the North Platte and linking the two cities with Scotts Bluff National Monument. The Pathways plan uses river and road corridors and federal lands to create a unique trails network. In 1992, the creation of the Twin Cities Partnership for the Environment united the public and private sectors behind the MVP project. In 1993, MVP received ISTEA Enhancement funds to complete the first phase, a paved, multi-use trail along the North Platte from the YMCA to Riverside Zoo.

While the MVP is the area's largest trail effort, it is not alone. A grant from the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum resulted in major improvements to Scottsbluff's Frank Park, including trails. An urban design plan, completed in 1992, also proposed a plan for an in-city network of trails and designated routes to link with the MVP. This network will use road and canal corridors to link all parts of the urban area.



## Stromsburg

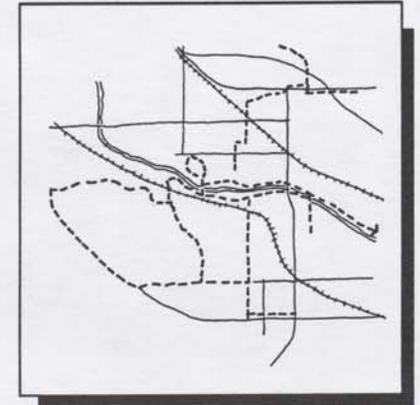
Stromsburg, a central Nebraska town of 1,241 with a strong Swedish heritage, has undertaken an active trail development program. The effort began with a community design effort, assisted by the University of Nebraska. Among the plan's proposals was a circumferential trails system, utilizing the Blue River, two road corridors, and a greenbelt.

Stromsburg received ISTEA Enhancement funding in 1993 to develop the first part of this system. This phase will link the community's Buckley Park and its campground along the Blue River to the town center along US Highway 81. Stromsburg's new comprehensive plan will further integrate trails into the community's development program. An element of this will be the greening and reuse of the US 81 corridor after an expressway bypass is built in the medium-term future.

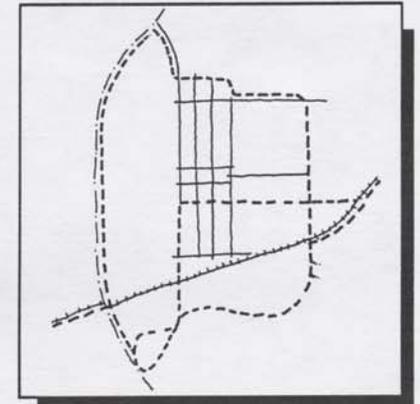
Stromsburg's trails program is also a part of a community marketing plan that will utilize the city's heritage and special features to attract visitors and create additional economic growth.

## Case Studies

### *Trails Programs of Nebraska's Communities*



**Scottsbluff/Gering**



**Stromsburg**

### ■ Canoe Trails

Trail activities can follow waterways as well as land. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has designated and mapped six canoe trails. These trails include Commission leases for camping and picnicking with neighboring landowners. These canoe trails include:

- The North Platte River from the Wyoming State Line to Bridgeport.
- The Dismal River from Highway 97 to Dunning.
- The Platte River from Fremont to US Highways 34/75 northwest of Plattsmouth.
- The Republican River from Harlan County Dam to Guide Rock.
- The Calamus River from Highway 7 to Highway 183 at the north edge of Calamus reservoir.
- The Missouri River from Fort Randall Dam to Ferry Landing State Recreation Area.

In addition, the Niobrara National Scenic River from Cornell Dam to the Norden Bridge and the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District's Tri-County Supply Canal from North Platte to Johnson Lake, provide opportunities for canoeing. While the Niobrara

is the state's most popular canoeing environment, it is not a "state canoe trail" because support facilities are provided by private businesses.

Nebraska's canoe trails provide important long-distance resources. They are especially important in defining trail corridors when a surface trail opportunity exists in parallel. These special corridors are especially important resources because of their ability to combine land and water recreation.

**Existing and Planned Trails : Inter-Nodal and Connecting Links**

Trail Type/Name	Existing Mileage	Proposed Mileage	Walking Hiking	Exercise Jogging	Bicycling	Equestrian	Cross-Country Ski	Interpretive	Snow-mobile	OHV
<b>■ INTER-NODAL TRAILS</b>										
Mo Pac East Trail Lincoln to Wabash	26.0		E	E	E	P	E	P		
White River Trail Crawford to Harrison		28.0	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	
North Loup Trail Burwell to Ord		16.0	P	P	P		P	P	P	
C&NW Cowboy Line (1) Norfolk to Chadron		320.0	P	P	P	P	P	P		
Pine Ridge Trail Chadron to Crawford	17.0	33.0	E		E (3)	P	E			
<b>■ CONNECTING LINKS</b>										
Kearney to Fort Kearny State Park	2.0	4.0	E	E	E		E	E		
Gering to Scotts Bluff National Monument (2)	3.0		E	E	E			E		
Halsey to Nebraska National Forest		1.5	P	P	P			P		

**NOTES:**  
 1- Include joint trail-with-rail use between Chadron and Merriman.  
 2- To be incorporated into Monument Valley Pathways system.  
 3- For all-terrain bicycle use.

**E = Existing Condition**  
**P = Proposed Condition**

**Existing and Planned Trails : Connecting Links and Intra-Park**

Trail Type/Name	Existing Mileage	Proposed Mileage	Walking Hiking	Exercise Jogging	Bicycling	Equestrian	Cross-Country Ski	Interpretive	Snowmobile	OHV
<b>■ CONNECTING LINKS</b>										
Ponca to Ponca State Park		3.0	P	P	P	P				
Niobrara to Niobrara State Park		2.0	P	P	P		P	P		
Ogallala to Lake McConaughy (4)		10.0	P	P	P					
<b>■ INTRA-PARK TRAILS (5) (State Lands)</b>										
Fort Robinson State Park	(6)		E		E	E	E	E		
Chadron State Park	(6)		E			E	E	E		
Smith Falls State Park	(6)		E			E	E	E		
Niobara State Park	(6)		E			E	E	E		
Ponca State Park	(6)		E			E	E	E		
Indian Cave State Park	20.0		E				E	E		
Eugene Mahoney State Park	(6)		E		E	E	E	E		
Platte River State Park	(6)		E		E	E	E	E		

**NOTES:**

- 4- Includes off-road trail and highway shoulder to Lake McConaughy.
- 5- Does not include trails within State Recreation Areas.
- 6- Trails are present but total mileage is uncompiled.

**E = Existing Condition**  
**P = Proposed Condition**

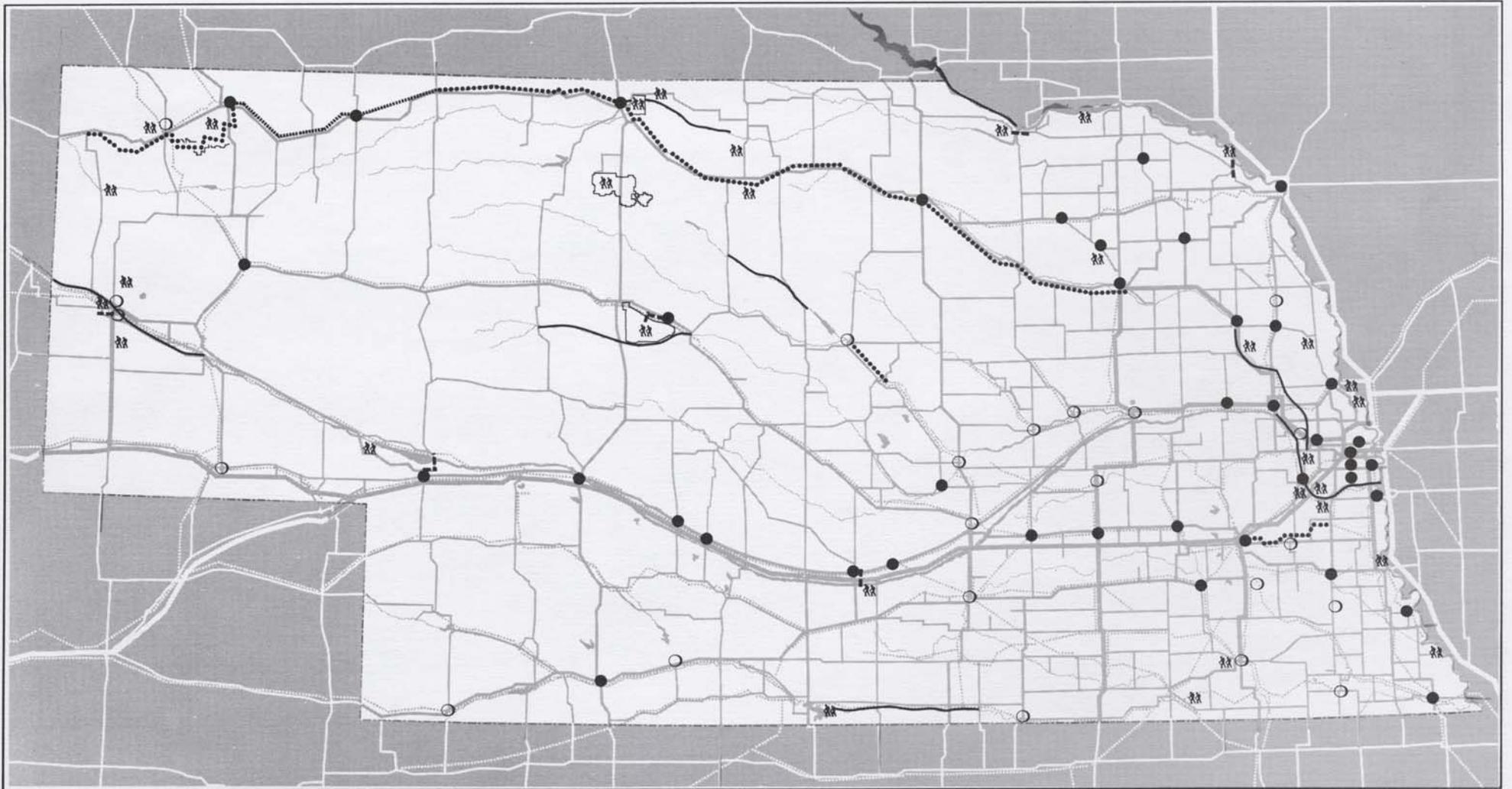
**Existing and Planned Trails : Intra-Park**

Trail Type/Name	Existing Mileage	Proposed Mileage	Walking Hiking	Exercise Jogging	Bicycling	Equestrian	Cross-Country Ski	Interpretive	Snow-mobile	OHV
<b>■ INTRA-PARK TRAILS (Federal Lands)</b>										
Nebraska National Forest Pine Ridge Ranger District	16.0		E		E	E	E	E	E	E
Bessey Ranger District	11.0		E			E	E	E	E	E, P
McKelvie National Forest									E	E
North Platte NWR	(6)		E			E		E		
Valentine NWR	(6)		E			E		E		
Fort Niobrara NWR	(6)		E			E		E		
Homeslead NM	3.0		E					E		
Scotts Bluff NM	(6)		E		E	E		E		
Agate Fossil Beds NM	(6)		E			E		E		
DeSoto NWR	(6)		E		E					

E = Existing Condition  
P = Proposed Condition

### Community Trail Inventory: All Community Trails by Mileage

Trail Type/Name	Existing Mileage	Proposed Mileage	Walking Hiking	Exercise Jogging	Bicycling	Equestrian	Cross-Country Ski	Interpretive	Snowmobile	OHV
<b>■ EXISTING TRAILS</b>										
Communities under 2,500	35.8		12.3	5.6	3.4	0	0	8.5	0	3.5
Communities 2,500 and over	143.3		97.7	70.5	66.1	20.8	19.8	9.1	0	0
<b>Total Existing Trails</b>	<b>179.1</b>		<b>110.0</b>	<b>76.1</b>	<b>69.5</b>	<b>20.8</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>17.6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3.50</b>
<b>■ PLANNED TRAILS</b>										
Communities under 2,500		74.6	42.0	29.8	43.5	9.9	14.5	13.3	0	0
Communities 2,500 and over		217.6	176.0	109.4	112.3	10.5	7.5	3.0	0	0
<b>Total Planned Trails</b>		<b>292.2</b>	<b>218.0</b>	<b>139.2</b>	<b>155.8</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>22.0</b>	<b>16.3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>■ EXISTING AND PLANNED TRAILS</b>										
Communities under 2,500	35.8	74.6	54.3	35.4	46.9	9.9	14.5	21.8	0	3.5
Communities 2,500 and over	143.3	217.6	273.7	179.9	178.4	31.3	27.3	12.1	0	0
<b>Total Community Trails</b>	<b>179.1</b>	<b>292.2</b>	<b>328.0</b>	<b>215.3</b>	<b>225.3</b>	<b>41.2</b>	<b>41.8</b>	<b>33.9</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3.5</b>



## Existing and Planned Trails

- Inter-Nodal Trails

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- — — Connecting Links

---

- 🚶 Parks with Trail Systems

---

- — — — — Trails-with-Rails

- Communities with Existing Trails

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- Communities with Planned Trails

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- Water and Canoe Trails



*Above: The Burlington Northern Railroad near the historic town of Table Rock. Joint trail-with-rail development along this corridor could connect many communities and features in Southeastern Nebraska.*

## Trail Development Opportunities

This section considers trail development opportunities, linear open spaces that provide potential routes for trails development. In Nebraska, the most important opportunities include railroad corridors and water routes, notably the routes of power and irrigation canals. When considered along with trail resources, these opportunities can help to suggest potentially rewarding resource corridors and specific trail projects.

## Railroad Corridors

Abandoned and lightly-used railroad corridors provide some of Nebraska's best potential trails. They travel through some of the most beautiful and unique parts of Nebraska, along rivers and through remote valleys, near highways and through farmland. Railroad corridors have very manageable grades, which provide ideal conditions for multiple-use trails and accommodate people with disabilities. Abandoned railroad rights-of-way provide economical trail development opportunities because of their good subsurface conditions. In addition, railroad corridors placed in trail use provide economic development and historic preservation benefits through the reuse of depots, historic railroad bridges, and related features. Because of the importance of railroads to the development of the state and the founding of communities, corridor preservation also offers superb opportunities for historical interpretation.

These attributes of rails-to-trail development have made such conversions extraordinarily popular across the country. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) is a national organization that has effectively mobilized to preserve these valuable corridors. Nationwide, the number of rail-to-trail conversions is approaching 600. Examples of rail-trails include the Lincoln-to-Wabash Mo Pac East Trail, and southwestern Iowa's Wabash Trace Nature Trail, from Council Bluffs to

Shenendoah. Completed rail-trails in Nebraska include the 2-mile Fort Kearny Hike-Bike Trail and the 1.5-mile Dannebrog Trail. On a larger scale, the RTC has entered into an agreement to create a recreational trail by purchasing the Chicago and North Western's Norfolk to Chadron "Cowboy Line" along with the NEBKOTA shortline railroad serving western Nebraska and South Dakota. Following salvage of rails and ties, the RTC will transfer the Norfolk to Merriman section of the line as a turnkey trail operation to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, along with revenues to cover some of the initial expenses of development and maintenance. Game and Parks Commission acquisition was authorized by LB 739, approved by the Unicameral and signed by Governor Ben Nelson in 1993. The NEBKOTA Railroad will operate on the Merriman to Chadron segment. With continuation of the trail along this operating railroad, the Cowboy Trail will create a 320-mile rail-trail, the nation's longest.

Nebraska lost many rail-trail opportunities during the 1980s, a period of very active railroad abandonment. Significant obstacles have prevented the conversion of railroad abandonments to trail use. Titles to some railroad corridors include reversionary clauses, which cause ownership of rights-of-way to revert to adjacent landowners in the case of abandonment. In other cases, opposition by landowners has prevented trail development. At present, Nebraska state government cannot

purchase or accept donations of abandoned rail rights-of-way without specific legislative approval. These problems and delays can result in the disappearance of these fleeting opportunities, as corridors are frequently absorbed by neighboring properties.

There are solutions to these problems. Two pieces of Federal legislation provide for corridor preservation. These include:

- *Section 8(d) of the National Trails System Act*, creating the railbanking program, giving public and private agencies the ability to negotiate with railroads to preserve corridors for possible restoration of rail transportation with interim trail use; and
- *Section 809(c) of the 4R Act*, allowing for the filing of Public Use Conditions (PUC) that prevent railroads from selling off corridors without offering the property for public use.

In the meantime, other rails-to-trails efforts are continuing. A private trails group, Friends of the White River Trail, has railbanked and secured title to a segment of the Cowboy Line from Crawford, Nebraska to Crandall, Wyoming. Other local and regional trails groups are promoting trail use on an abandoned segment of the Burlington Northern from Burwell to Ord in the North Loup Valley, and railbanking of a Union Pacific segment between Valparaiso and Brainard.

### **THE COWBOY LINE**

*The Cowboy Line from Norfolk to Chadron will undoubtedly become one of the nation's most distinctive rail-trails. The line dates from 1869, when the Fremont, Elkhorn, & Missouri Valley Railroad was incorporated to build a railroad from Fremont to the confluence of the Niobrara and Missouri Rivers. By 1871, the line extended to Wisner, only to be shut down by the Panic of 1873.*

*The discovery of gold in the Black Hills restored the push for completing the line. The line reached Long Pine in 1881 and Valentine in 1883. In 1884, the railroad's assets were sold to the Chicago & North Western.*

*Rails reached Chadron by 1885 and pushed northward from there to Rapid City, spurred by Federal decisions which prevented rail access across reservation lands in the Dakota Territory. Rail construction also proceeded west into Wyoming, reaching Casper in 1888.*

### RAILS-WITH-TRAILS DEVELOPMENT

*Most trails in rail corridors to date have been developed along railbeds after tracks were removed. However, the joint use of rail corridors by trails and active rail lines is an increasing trend in America. A 1993 survey of joint trail-rail use corridors by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy found that:*

- *Joint operations have been extremely safe. Of 16 trails surveyed, only one experienced a single user/train accident. This occurred on the 27-year old Illinois Prairie Path and involved a bicyclist who ignored warnings and rode around a lowered crossing gate to beat a train to a crossing.*
- *Joint use corridors include two categories: industrial spurs and branch lines, and mainline and mass transit corridors.*
- *Typically, trails operating jointly with branch lines are usually less than 30 feet away from the tracks and have minimal barriers. Where barriers exist, they include vegetation or slight grade changes. In most cases, peak rail and peak trail use occur at different times.*
- *Most railroads have not opposed joint trail development.*



*Above: The Kearney & Black Hills trace from Callaway to Arnold.*

In addition, evidence gathered by trail experiences in Nebraska, the Midwest, and around the nation suggests that trails are good neighbors that have little negative impact on adjacent properties. Good communications that involves neighboring landowners in the early stages of trail planning can reduce the level of opposition. These issues are discussed later in Chapter Four, considering the concerns of trail constituencies.

Joint development of recreational trails along rail lines that remain in operation also presents important opportunities. Though vital to the agricultural economies of the communities and regions that they serve, many branch line railroads have infrequent and sometimes seasonal service, with trains operating at low speeds. These operations are usually much

safer for trail users than roads. In many cases, the normal 100-foot right-of-way limit provides ample opportunity for development of "trails with rails."

Heritage passenger rail operations can also contribute to the state's trail system. Heritage rail provides tourism-related passenger service, often along otherwise unused rights-of-way. Opportunities exist for joint railroad and recreational programs and tourism packages, and for joint development of trail and rail passenger service.

Potential railroad corridor resources are classified in the following discussion.

### ■ Abandonments Since 1980

Absorption by agricultural and other uses has effectively removed traces of many railroads abandoned before 1980. Even more recent abandonment opportunities can disappear rapidly, making their reclamation as trail corridors very difficult. However, some post-1980 abandonments preserve significant traces of railbeds and bridge structures, allowing for their potential use as trail corridors. These corridors tend to be best preserved parallel to highways because they are less likely to be absorbed by neighboring farmland.

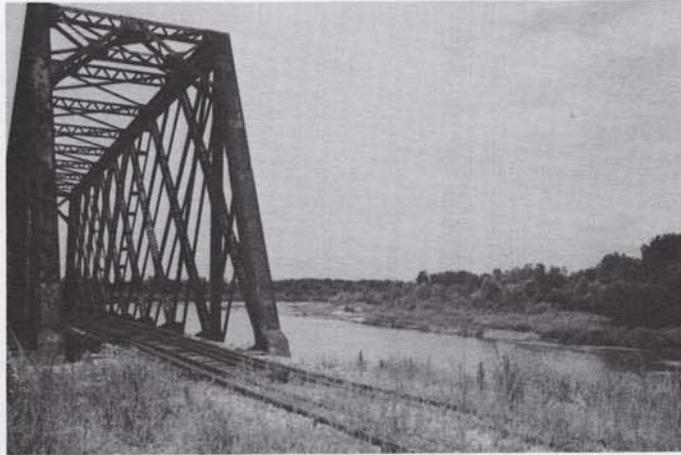
Some abandonments that still retain good potential for trails development include:

Elkhorn River, and State Highway 24 from Hooper to Norfolk.

- The former Chicago and North Western line, paralleling US 75 from south of Fort Calhoun to Blair.
- The former Union Pacific segment, from Boelus to St. Paul through Dannebrog.
- The former Burlington Northern segment, paralleling Highway 11 from Ord to Burwell.
- Portions of the former Missouri Pacific and Rock Island segments from Louisville to Omaha.
- The former Union Pacific (ex-Kearney and Black Hills) segment paralleling a county road from Callaway to Arnold and State Highway 40 from Kearney to Callaway.

### ■ Current And Probable Abandonments

Abandonment proceedings are in progress or pending for several segments of railroad in the state. Railroad segments with pending abandonments are indicated on system maps. Public agencies or trail groups in potential trail corridors should organize in advance to railbank these lines when abandonments are announced. This process resulted in the preservation of the Chicago and North Western Cowboy Line for trail use.



Above: The C&NW Elkhorn River bridge west of Norfolk.

Recent or pending abandonments are especially important because they retain their integrity without yet reverting to neighboring owners. In addition, major structures such as bridges are still standing and are reusable with minor repair and redecking. Finally, acquisition costs can be reduced through charitable contributions by railroads to public agencies, or by trade-offs involving salvage rights of rails and ties.

Major segments that fall into this important resource category include:

- A Burlington Northern segment from Red Cloud to Franklin.
- Segments of the Burlington Northern from DeWitt to Blue Hill.

### FILINGS ON RAILROAD ABANDONMENTS

*Prompt public or private action is needed to file for public use of abandoned railroad corridors. Federal law creates two possible routes to public use filings: railbanking and Public Use Conditions.*

*Under railbanking [Section 8(d) of the National Trails System Act], a qualified private organization or public agency must make a railbanking request by filing a Statement of Willingness to Assume Financial Responsibility. In the case of a "regulated abandonment" (an abandonment that is requested while the railroad is still operating), this filing must occur within 30 days of the railroad's filing of an Application to Abandon. Railbanking requires the railroad's approval and negotiation with the railroad for purchase of the corridor.*

*Deadlines are somewhat different in the case of "exemption abandonments" (lines that have been out of service for at least two years). In these cases, railroads must file documents that provide thirty day warning of a Notice of Exemption. Railbanking requests must be filed within 10 days of the publication of this Notice.*

*Through filing a Public Use Condition [Section 809(c) of the 4R Act], railroads cannot dispose of property or structures without first offering the property "on reasonable terms" for public use. This moratorium extends for 180 days from the effective date of the abandonment.*

*In the case of a regulated abandonment, the PUC must be filed within 30 days of the Application to Abandon. In exemption abandonments, the PUC filing deadline is 20 days after the publication of the Notice of Exemption in the Federal Register.*

*In Nebraska, the Nebraska Trails Council has a practice of filing for railbanking on every potential abandonment. Local agencies should also be involved in this process.*

*An excellent and complete guide to the acquisition and conversion of rail-trails is Secrets of Successful Rail-Trails published in 1993 by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy in cooperation with the National Parks Service.*

- The Burlington Northern line from Nebraska City to Brownville. A purchase agreement has been concluded on this segment for heritage trail operations.
- A segment of the Union Pacific northwest of Kearney, and of the Burlington Northern east of Kearney.
- A 12.8-mile Union Pacific segment between Valparaiso and Brainard, being acquired by the Lower Platte South NRD.

### ■ Lightly Used Railroads

Rail lines that carry annual traffic of less than 3 million gross ton-miles can be classified as lightly used railroads. Many of these corridors are branch lines that serve grain elevators and other agricultural shippers along their routes. Rail service along these lines is generally infrequent (sometimes involving one train weekly), seasonal, and low-speed in operation.

Most rail service in Nebraska is provided by two major railroad systems, the Union Pacific and the Burlington Northern. In recent years, both systems have reduced branch lines and concentrated on the development of high-density main line operations. As a result, many branches have been abandoned, sold, or leased for short-line operations.

These lines become potential resources for trails development in two ways:

- *They provide long-term predictors for future abandonment petitions.* As a result, these segments should be monitored for future railbanking actions in strategic corridors.
- *The operating characteristics of these lines are generally compatible with safe trail use.* As a result, they provide opportunities for joint rail and trail development. Potential concerns over liability could be addressed by legislation extending recreational immunity to branch line operators who permit joint trail use on their rights-of-way.

### ■ Heritage Rail

Heritage rail operations have proven popular in Nebraska and in the United States. These heritage lines combine the natural attraction of rail travel with dinner and special programs to create a memorable experience for their passengers. They also take passengers through areas that might otherwise be inaccessible. Finally, they provide significant consumer business to their end-point communities.

In addition to their integral role as part of a statewide trails system, heritage passenger railroads have applications to recreational trail use. These include:

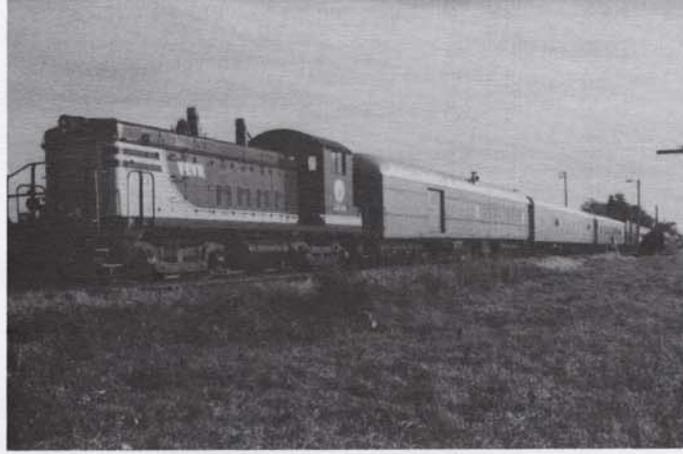
- *Providing accommodations on trains for bicycles and other recreational equipment.* Joint rail and trail excursions can extend the experience beyond the end of the tracks and provide



additional business for both the rail enterprise and towns along the route.

- *Joint right-of-way use.* Passenger operations are relatively infrequent (with a focus on weekends) and low speed (20 miles per hour or less). As with light-use branch lines, joint right-of-way use by heritage railroads and recreational trails is feasible.

- *Right-of-way preservation.* Operation of heritage rail lines preserves railroad corridors. If the heritage service, often operated by a nonprofit organization, ends, railbanking or assumption of corridor ownership by a public agency becomes possible. Generally, ownership arrangements for a heritage corridor should preserve its integrity, either through maintaining the corridor as an active railroad subject to future railbanking or conveying ownership to a public agency, such as a natural resources district, with operating rights leased back to the heritage railroad.



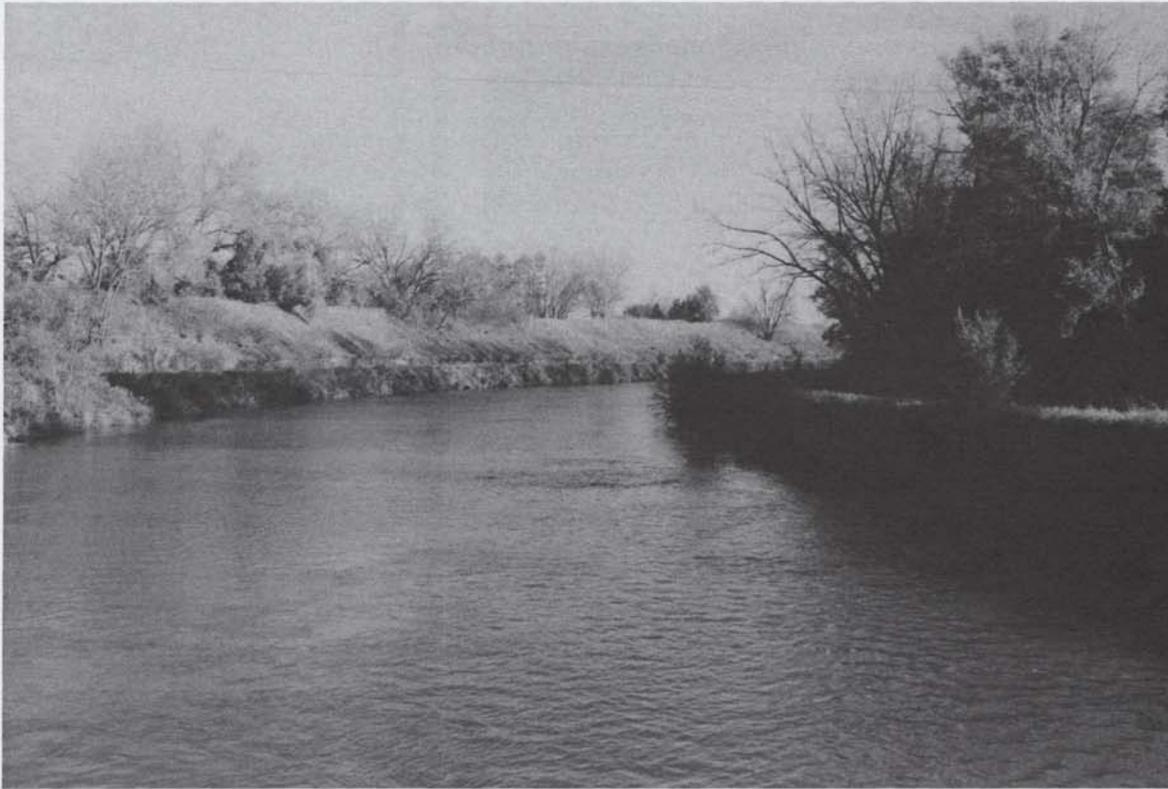
Nebraska currently has one heritage rail line, the Fremont and Elkhorn Valley Railroad between Fremont and Hooper. A second line between Nebraska City and Brownville is also proposed.

### ■ Passenger Rail

Amtrak carries bicycles and accommodates checked baggage on its trains, providing a means for recreationalists to reach trailheads without automobiles. Passenger rail service is provided across Nebraska by Amtrak's *California Zephyr*, utilizing the Burlington Northern mainline connecting Omaha, Lincoln, Hastings, Holdrege, and McCook. A second Amtrak service that has been studied is an Omaha to Kansas City service using Union Pacific trackage through Nebraska City, Auburn, and Falls City. This service would require state subsidization by Nebraska, Kansas, and Missouri, under Amtrak's 403(b) program. This program provides for Amtrak

*This page far left: The Union Pacific Stromsburg Branch approaching Osceola.*

*Left: The Fremont and Elkhorn Valley Railroad. This popular heritage passenger line operates between Fremont and Hooper.*



*Above: The Loup Power Canal between Columbus and Genoa. Canal maintenance roads provide excellent opportunities for joint trails use.*

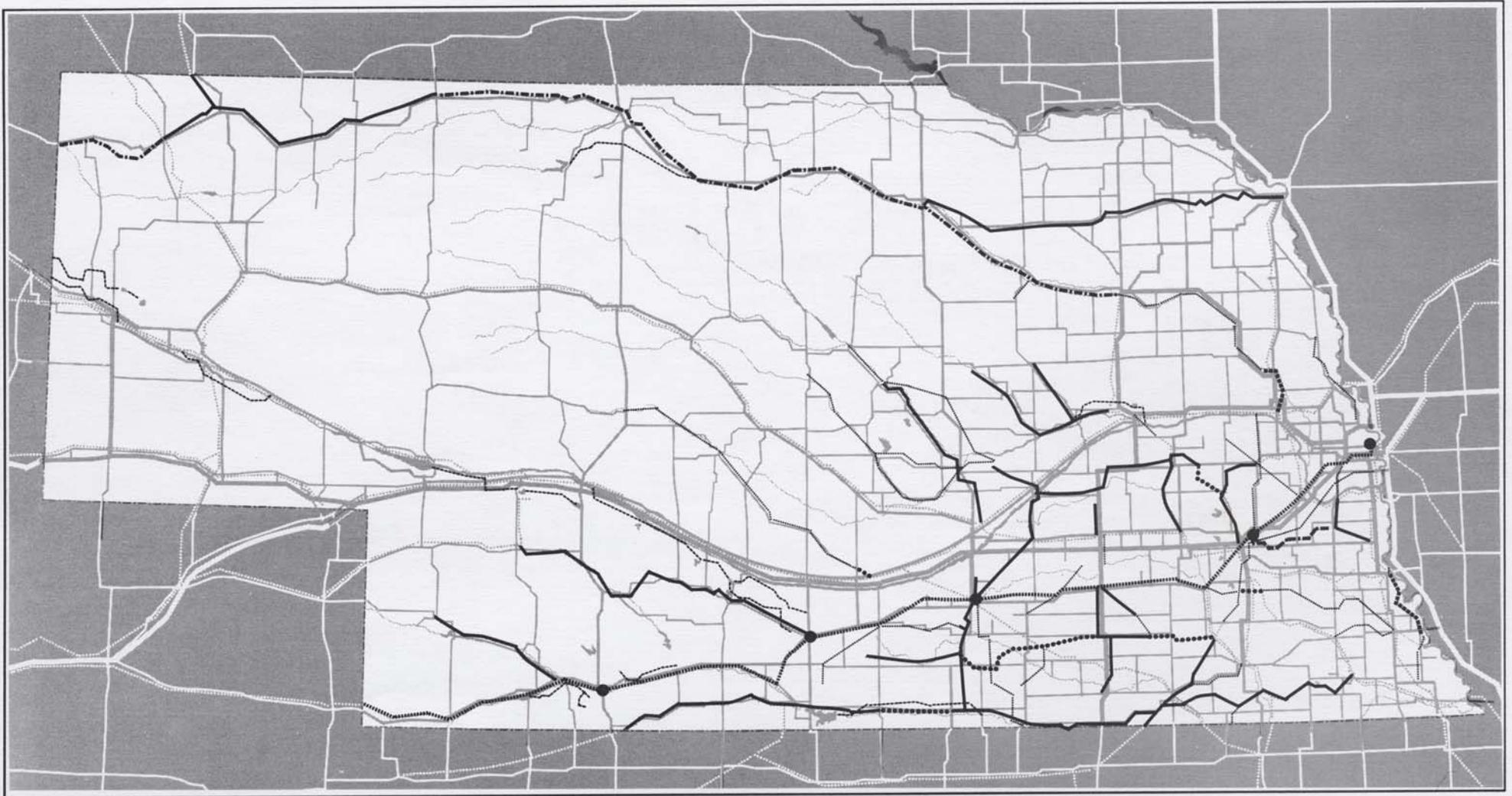
operation of state-subsidized passenger services.

### **Irrigation and Power Canals**

Irrigation and power canals represent an unusual potential trails resource. These inland waterways are most frequently found in western parts of the state, often diverting river flows to provide water supplies to irrigated fields. The canals are operated by private companies, cooperatives, and public agencies. Other canals, such as the Loup Power Canal between Genoa and Columbus, provide

hydroelectric power by gravity flow. Many of the larger canals have improved service roads, some of which are paved. These lightly travelled roads can also accommodate trail users. In addition, one of the state's largest canals, the Central Public Power and Irrigation District's Tri-County Supply Canal, also provides canoe and rafting facilities.

Canal corridors are used frequently for trails development in other parts of the country. Colorado's Highline Canal Trail is a good example of joint canal-trail use. Legislation to extend the recreational immunity provided by the Nebraska Recreation Liability Act would provide the assurances needed for canal operators to open this important resource to recreational use.



## Trails Development Opportunities

..... Railroad Abandonments since 1980

●●●● Recent or Pending Abandonments

———— Lightly-Used Rail Lines

— — — — Secured Trail Corridors

— — — — Heritage Rail Lines

— — — — Amtrak Passenger Rail

● Amtrak Stations

— — — — Irrigation and Power Canals

## On-Road Resources

By far Nebraska's largest capital investment in transportation facilities is its road network. This network can accommodate such important trails user groups as bicyclists experienced in road riding. They also provide public corridors that can be used for trails development. Roads that provide resources for recreational use include:

- Expressways
- Highways with shoulders.
- Lightly travelled roads.
- Scenic routes.

### ■ Expressways

The Nebraska Department of Roads has established a program to upgrade heavily travelled two-lane highways to four-lane divided facilities. These corridors have high traffic volumes and include heavy truck traffic. As a result, they do not provide a good environment for most recreational users.

However, expressway projects may be viewed as intermodal facilities in key corridors. This view suggests the possible development of exclusive trails as part of an expressway corridor. Trails development can also benefit communities along expressway routes that may be bypassed by limited access roads. An example of such an application may be the improvement of US 275, paralleling the

Elkhorn River between Norfolk and Fremont.

### ■ Highways with Shoulders

The Nebraska Department of Roads' policy is to provide paved surfaced shoulders, typically eight feet wide, on highways designated on the Priority Commercial System. While these highways may have relatively high traffic volumes, the shoulders can accommodate bicyclists. Segments of the priority commercial system with relatively low traffic volumes are particularly attractive for on-road bicycling. In addition, some highway segments located off the Priority Commercial System also have surfaced shoulders. These shoulders range from four to eight feet in width.

Several other state and federal highways are located off the Priority Commercial System and lack surface shoulders, but have traffic volumes in excess of 3,000 vehicles per day. State policy designates these segments for eventual shoulder construction. These roads can also provide a future resource for experienced bicyclists.

Whenever possible, bicycle traffic should be physically separated from motorized traffic. Methods of accomplishing separation include green space, rumble strips, or other means of sufficient width and definition to minimize risks to users. The intent of these improvements should be to accommodate the increased demand for trails use without detriment to motorists.

## ■ Lightly Travelled Roads

Paved roads with relatively light traffic loads are potential routes for designated trail segments, especially for bicyclists experienced in road riding and safety practices. As a rule, lightly travelled roads carry fewer than 1,000 vehicles per day (VPD). Assuming that most traffic is concentrated during a fourteen-hour period, this is equivalent to an average of one vehicle every two minutes in each direction, or one vehicle per minute on the highway. Paved county roads with light traffic also provide potential recreational routes.

Many parts of the state are crossed by unpaved section-line or other county roads. With proper maintenance, these roads are suitable for hiking or all-terrain bicyclists; however, they are generally poorly suited to the needs of long-distance road bicyclists. Nevertheless, unpaved roads provide an alternative to parallel highways for many recreationalists.

## ■ Scenic Routes

Scenic routes may help direct travelers or visitors onto roads with special visual distinction through resource corridors. Sometimes, scenic roads may provide designated routes for bicyclists. Scenic byways can be designed for lower speeds than normal highways if they have only minor traffic loads.

Scenic highways and byways are designated following a visual assessment process and



according to specific criteria. In 1974, staff from the Nebraska Department of Roads and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission designated twenty scenic highway routes, encompassing both state highways and county roads. This 1974 process was Nebraska's last effort at scenic highway designation. The Nebraska Department of Roads has begun a scenic byways study that should use this Statewide Trails Plan and work to provide linkages among resource corridors.

## LOESS HILLS SCENIC BYWAYS

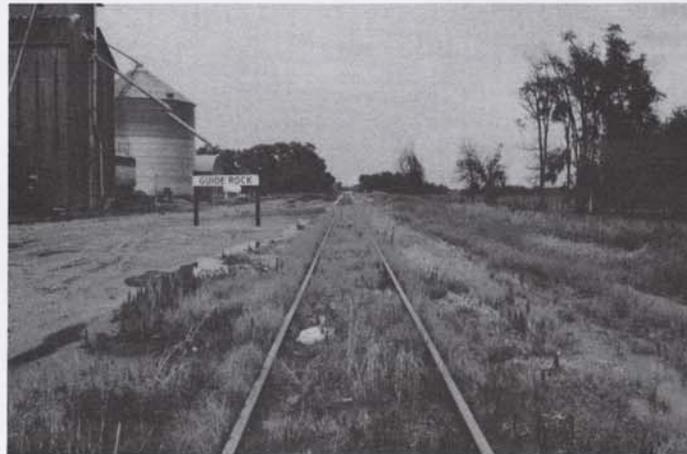
*A model scenic byway process was recently completed by the Soil Conservation Service for Iowa's Golden Hills Resource Conservation and Development Agency. The process enlisted over 200 volunteers to perform visual assessments and route designations in western Iowa's scenic Loess Hills district. The result was the Loess Hills Scenic Byway system, a network of designated routes consisting of a 221-mile spine between Hamburg and Akron, Iowa with thirteen excursion loops. This process received a Planning and Urban Design Award from the American Society of Landscape Architects in 1993. A similar process, involving local and regional participation, is adaptable to Nebraska.*

*Above left: A county road through the Seven Valleys between Cozad and Callaway.*

### SCENIC ROUTES

*Designating scenic routes is a subjective process that can benefit from establishing outline criteria. The Rand McNally Company has established six criteria by which it designates scenic routes for inclusion in its road atlases. These include:*

- 1. 60 miles of roadway that is 80% free of significant commercial or industrial development other than towns.*
- 2. A minimum of two lanes, paved and maintained in good repair, and a numbered US, State, or county route.*
- 3. Scenic value of natural rather than man-made attractions, with the exception of artificial lakes and reservoirs.*
- 4. Exceptional value to the region.*
- 5. Some representation of each region, without requiring equal treatment of all regions.*
- 6. No dead ends that would require retracing of a route, although continuous loops are permitted.*



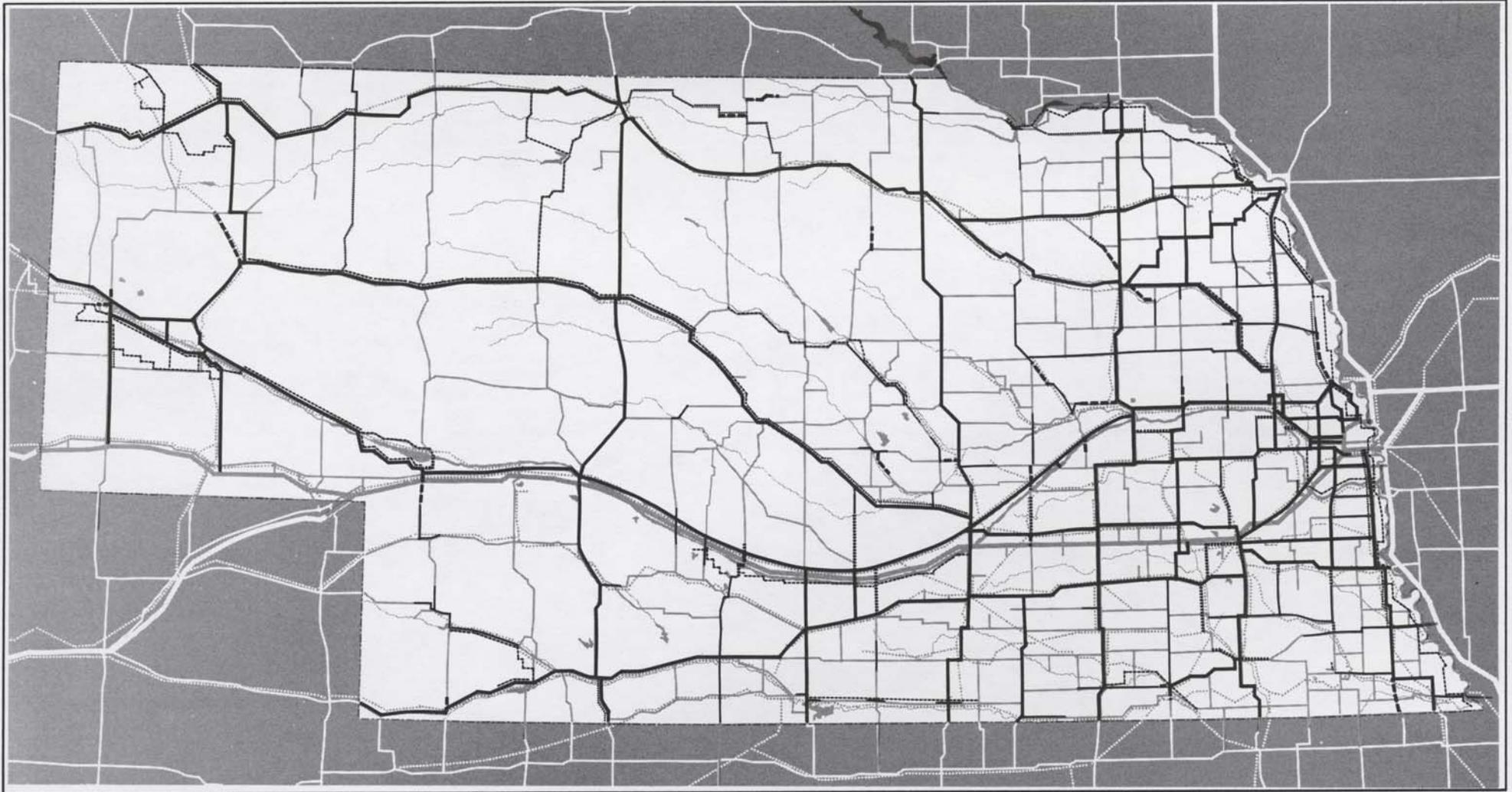
*Top: The Burlington Northern Railroad near Royal. Trail-with-rail development along this corridor, combined with the Cowboy Trail, could produce a cross-state route along the state's northern tier.*

*Bottom: The Burlington Northern Railroad near Guide Rock in the Republican River Valley.*



*Top: The Tri-County Supply Canal. The canal, owned by the Central Nebraska Irrigation and Public Power District, extends from North Platte to Lexington, generally parallel to the Platte River. The canal corridor can combine overland use on maintenance roads with a canoe trail.*

*Bottom: Bicycle tourists on US 30 near Brule.*



## On-Road Resources

- Priority Commercial System With Surfaced Shoulders
- Other Highways with Surfaced Shoulders
- Other Highways with over 3,000 vpd Lacking Shoulders

- Highways with Less than 1,000 vpd
- 1974 Scenic Route Designations
- ..... Other Scenic Route Designations



*Downtown Broken Bow, the site of one of ten focus group meetings conducted during this planning process.*

## Focus Groups

A central part of this planning process included ten focus group meetings, held in Broken Bow, Chadron, Hastings, Mahoney State Park, McCook, Nebraska City, Ogallala, Scottsbluff, Valentine, and Wayne. Over 400 people participated in these meetings, including local economic development professionals, business representatives, recreationalists, members of local governments, representatives of state and federal agencies, museum directors, residents, and citizen volunteers. The participants provided diverse perspectives on recreational and trail needs and opportunities across Nebraska.

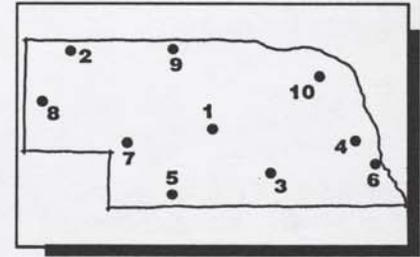
Participants completed an evaluation of the adequacy and demand of regional recreational features. In addition, participants rated local features and considered the current and potential impact of tourism on local economies. The focus groups then examined trail concepts, assessed major regional resources, and considered recreational needs. Finally, the groups provided comments on where trail emphasis should be placed in their respective regions and on special concerns that the trails plan should address.

The focus group meetings were critical to the development of this plan and its concepts. In addition, they raised extraordinary public interest and local media coverage,

underscoring the attraction of trails development in all parts of the state. This section summarizes the proceedings and perceptions of each regional meeting which, together with the previous review of resources and opportunities, helps to define a system of resource corridors.

During the meetings, many common themes emerged:

- Trails development is the most significant recreational need in most parts of Nebraska.
- Trails should accommodate a variety of user groups and should incorporate the history and sense of place of each individual region of the state.
- Tourism can play a greater role in the strength of local economies. Of all participants, 51% believed that tourism had a "high" or "very high" local economic impact. However, 71% believed that the industry had the capability of having a "high" or "very high" economic impact. Only 8% believed that tourism's potential impact was limited.



### Focus Group Locations

- 1 Broken Bow**
- 2 Chadron**
- 3 Hastings**
- 4 Mahoney Park**
- 5 McCook**
- 6 Nebraska City**
- 7 Ogallala**
- 8 Scottsbluff**
- 9 Valentine**
- 10 Wayne**

### SURVEY SCALE

*In focus groups, participants were asked to grade local features, the demand for different types of recreation, and the adequacy of recreational facilities. These grades were given on a "1" to "5" scale. The higher score reflected a stronger demand or higher ranking for a given feature.*

## Broken Bow

Participants at the Broken Bow focus group included people from the central Nebraska region. Communities represented included Custer County, Broken Bow, Ord, Burwell, Lexington, Callaway, Gothenburg, Grand Island, Elwood, and Gibbon.

### Highlights:

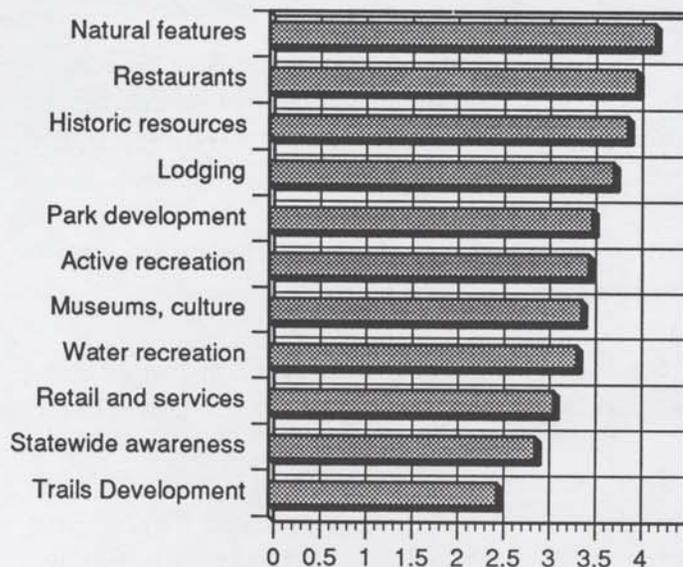
- **Trails development is the area's most important recreational need.**

- **Historical and cultural resources are very strong and should be integrated into the trail system.**

- **Scenic resources include the region's rivers and canyons, the Nebraska National Forest, and the Platte Valley.**

- **Camping facilities are in high demand.**

### Rating of Local Features



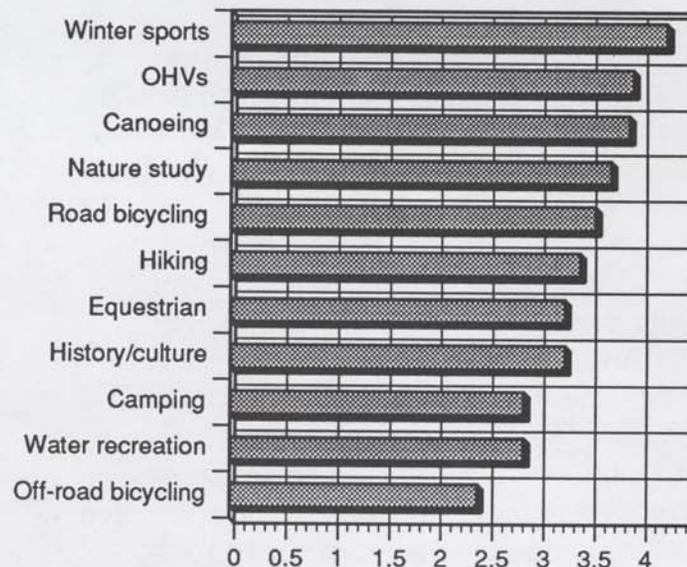
### Major Resources

Historic and cultural resources are viewed as the area's strongest trail-related assets. Especially important are museums and historical features, including the Stuhr Museum in Grand Island, Gothenburg's Pony Express Station, and Fort Hartsuff State Historical Park between Ord and Burwell.

Water and scenic features are also of major importance. Water resources include Johnson Lake and the unique Sandhills streams: the Loup, Calamus, and Dismal Rivers. The area's superb canyons and the Seven Valleys are also among Nebraska's most beautiful areas.

Recreation and park resources in the region include the Bessey Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest, the area's municipal parks, and several state recreation areas.

### Demand for Facilities



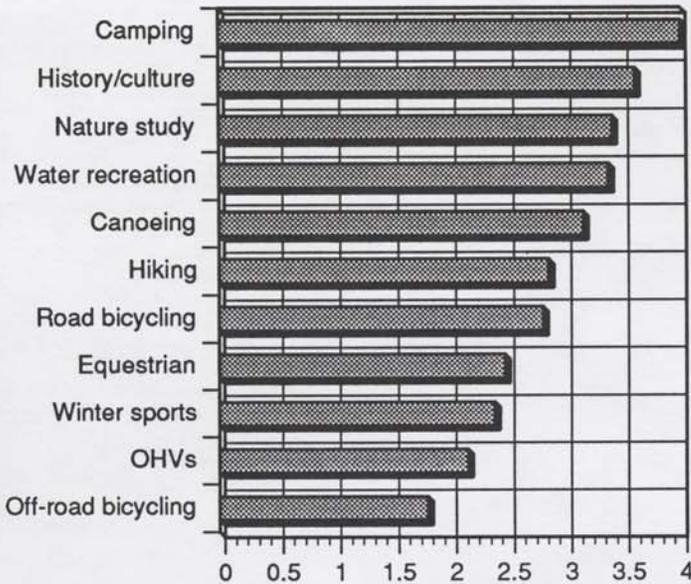
### Recreational Needs

Focus group participants considered trails to be the area's most important recreational need. Trails should provide better hiking, bicycling, and equestrian facilities, trail rides, access for people with disabilities, and improved public access to recreational, natural, and historic areas. Other recreational needs include:

- Improved fishing and hunting facilities.
- Camping.
- Water recreation.

Additional effort is also needed to market tourism, getting information out about the area's attractions. The region can help connect the eastern and western parts of the state.

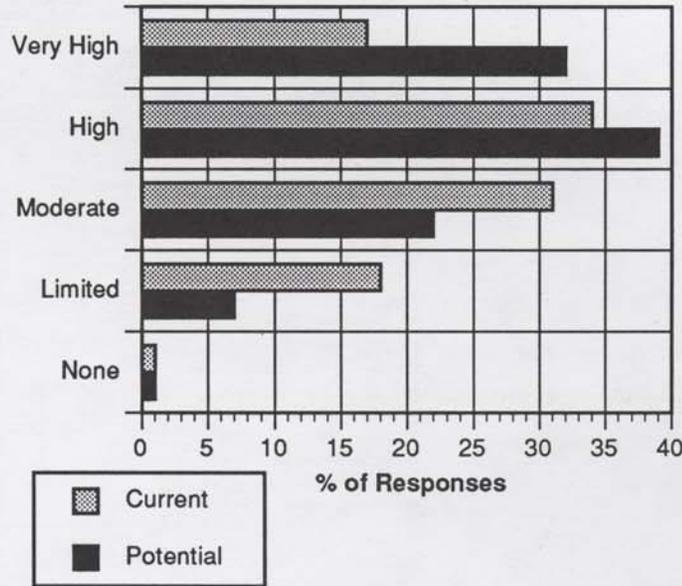
**Adequacy of Facilities**



**Trails Plan Emphasis**

- Locational interpretation, telling the story of features such as the Sandhills and interpreting and providing access to historic trails.
- Use of a railroad abandonment between Burwell and Ord to develop a North Loup Valley Trail.
- Access and awareness of environmental features, including the rivers and canyons, the Platte Valley, and the Nebraska National Forest.
- Multiple use trails, with support facilities for tourism.

**Tourism Impact**



**Special Trails Issues**

- Improved river access.
- Development of a trails system that establishes Broken Bow as a hub for the surrounding area.
- Connections to significant existing historical facilities, including the popular Pony Express Station at Gothenburg.
- Improved marking and surveying of historical trails and use of trails for education and interpretation.
- Protection of landowner rights and continued participation by user groups as the network is developed.

*Trails development efforts in the region include:*

- Interpretive bicycle loops on local roads, developed by Custer County Tourism.
- Gothenburg's Lake Helen Trail and plan to develop a recreational trail along an abandoned two-mile canal in conjunction with Nebraska Public Power District.
- Promotion of an Ord to Burwell Trail in the North Loup Valley.
- Interest in a trail, including equestrian use, between Callaway and Arnold.
- Extension of the Fort Kearny Hike and Bike Trail into Kearney and to Cottonmill Park.
- Proposal of a trail from Halsey to Nebraska National Forest.
- Development of additional ATV and off-road motorcycle trails in the Nebraska National Forest.

## Chadron

Participants at the Chadron focus group included people from the Pine Ridge and Panhandle regions.

Communities represented included Chadron, Alliance, Gordon, Whitney, Harrison, Rushville, and rural Dawes County.

### Highlights:

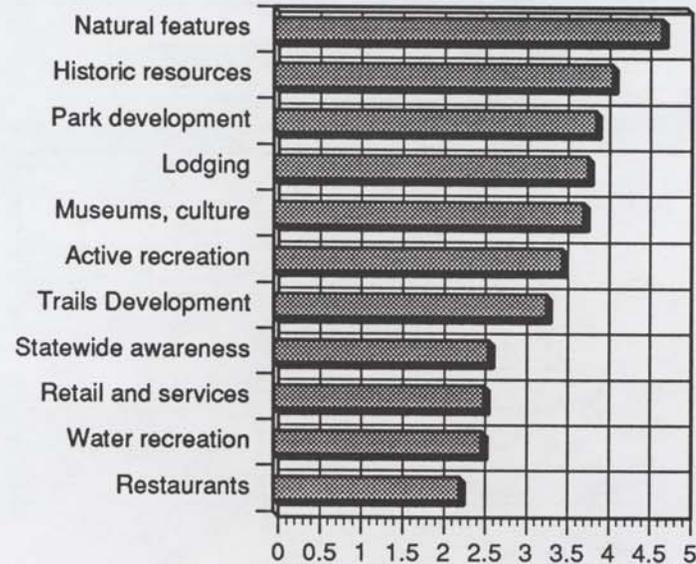
- *Trails development is the area's most important recreational need.*

- *Scenic and cultural/historical assets are very important and should be integrated into the system.*

- *Publicity for the area, including mapping and marketing, is important. Trails can make a large economic impact.*

- *Equestrian activities are a priority in the area, where the adequacy of facilities lags behind demand.*

### Rating of Local Features



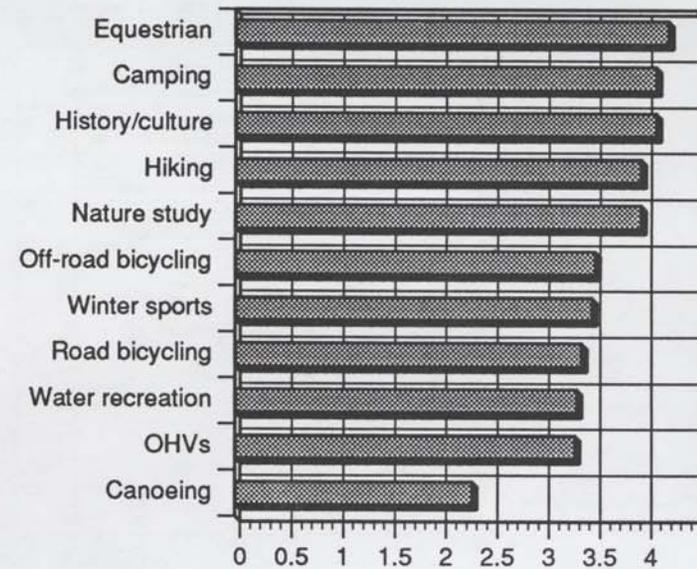
### Major Resources

Scenic resources are one of the area's strongest assets, although land and history are closely associated. Especially important are the Fort Robinson area, the Pine Ridge country, and the Soldier Creek Wilderness, as well as the larger vistas and quality of the environment.

Historical and cultural resources are important and are developing. They include the region's museums, such as the Museum of the Fur Trade in Chadron and the Knight Museum in Alliance, the visitor's center at Agate Fossil Beds National Monument, the literary history of the Mari Sandoz interpretive exhibits, and interpretation of the role of the area in westward settlement.

Regional recreational resources include two major state parks, Fort Robinson and Chadron, and significant land and water resources such as Box Butte Reservoir. Carhenge is also a unique area attraction.

### Demand for Facilities



### Recreational Needs

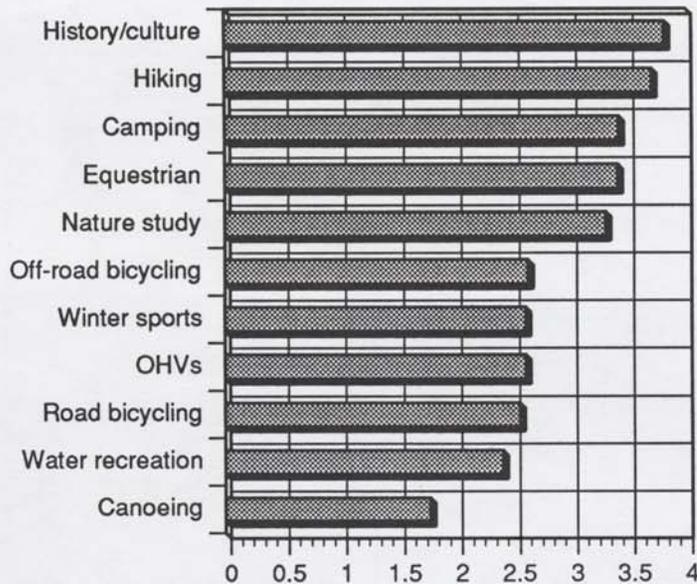
Participants considered trails to be the area's most important recreational need. Trails should integrate equestrian, hiking and bicycling facilities, and should take advantage of the region's abundant public lands.

The use of tourism as a tool for economic development is key to the region. Increased knowledge and promotion of features is vital. Tourists should use the area as a stopping point on their way to more famous attractions such as the Black Hills.

Other needs include:

- Improved and expanded camping facilities.
- Stronger emphasis by public agencies on recreation management rather than grazing and hunting.

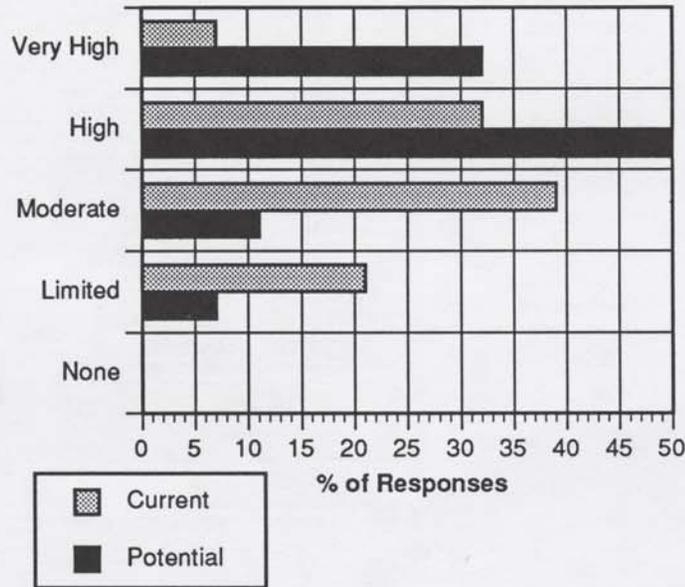
### Adequacy of Facilities



### Trails Plan Emphasis

- Continuing the Chadron to Crawford Pine Ridge Trails. Improvement of facilities for equestrians.
- Linking major features, including Box Butte Reservoir, Carhenge, and Agate Fossil Beds, and Chadron and Harrison through the forests, parks, and river valleys.
- Utilizing the opportunities provided through the Crawford to Crandall railbanking and joint trails and rails development on the Cowboy Line east of Chadron.
- Creating multi-use, non-motorized trails and mapping historic trails. Mapping of mountain bike trails should be emphasized with the increasing popularity of this activity in the area.
- Improving management of potential conflicts between user groups.

### Tourism Impact



### Special Trails Issues

- Development of multi-use trails, providing access to the area's history and scenery.
- Incorporating bicycle access into new road development, including the proposed Heartland Expressway.
- Using roads and railroad corridors to establish and market continuous journeys for trail users.
- Balancing trail use with the sensitive nature of this unique environment. Maintaining the natural quality of the area and providing for erosion control. Maintaining current levels of OHV opportunities in Nebraska National Forest.
- Marketing and developing the system as an inviting resource for visitors.

*Trails development efforts in the region include:*

- *The development of the White River Trail between Crawford and Harrison (with extension to Crandall, Wyoming). A private trail support group has completed a railbanking agreement of this corridor with the Chicago and North Western Railroad.*
- *Continuing development of Chadron to Crawford Pine Ridge Trail by the Forest Service. Much of this trail follows easements negotiated with private property owners.*
- *Continued trail expansion within parks and National Forests.*
- *The organization of Ride the Ridge, working to improve equestrian trails in the area.*
- *Aggressive community trail development by the City of Alliance.*

# Hastings

Communities represented at the Hastings Focus Group included Hastings, Kearney, Fairfield, Grand Island, and Fairbury.

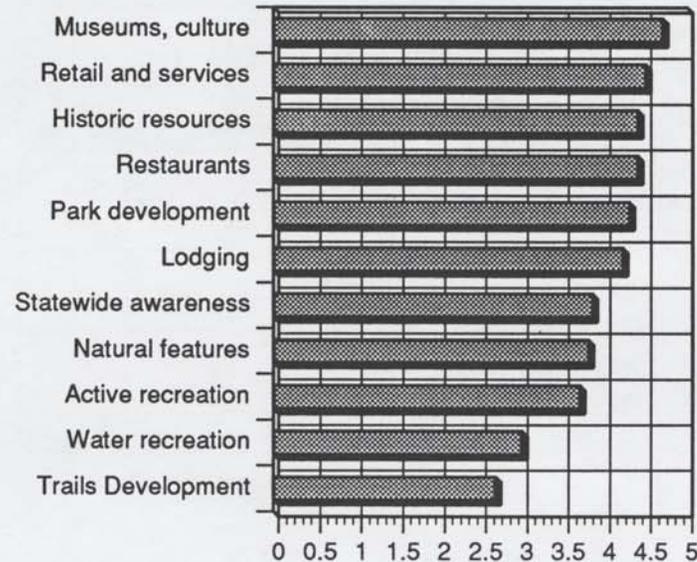
## Highlights:

- *Water-based recreation is the area's most important recreation need. It is considered high in demand, but relatively low in the adequacy of facilities.*

- *Historical/cultural and tourism-oriented features are the area's strongest assets.*

- *Interpretation of historical trails is an important priority.*

## Rating of Local Features

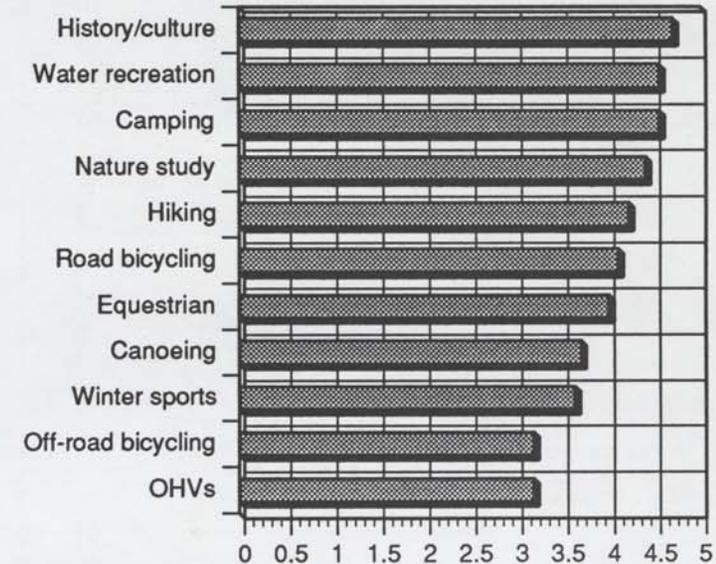


## Major Resources

Historical and cultural resources are the greatest assets of this south-central Nebraska region. These included extensive museum offerings such as the Stuhr Museum, the Hastings Museum with its new IMAX theater, Kearney's Museum of Nebraska Art, the Plainsman Museum in Aurora, the Willa Cather thematic district in Red Cloud, and Pioneer Village in Minden. The relationship of the region to the historic trails that passed through the area and converged near Fort Kearny is also a major asset.

The area's scenic and environmental resources are also important. The ecology of the Platte River and the area's status as the seasonal habitat of the sandhill cranes is a unique asset. The area's other water resources, including Harlan County Lake, Johnson Lake, and the Republican River also are major strengths.

## Demand for Facilities

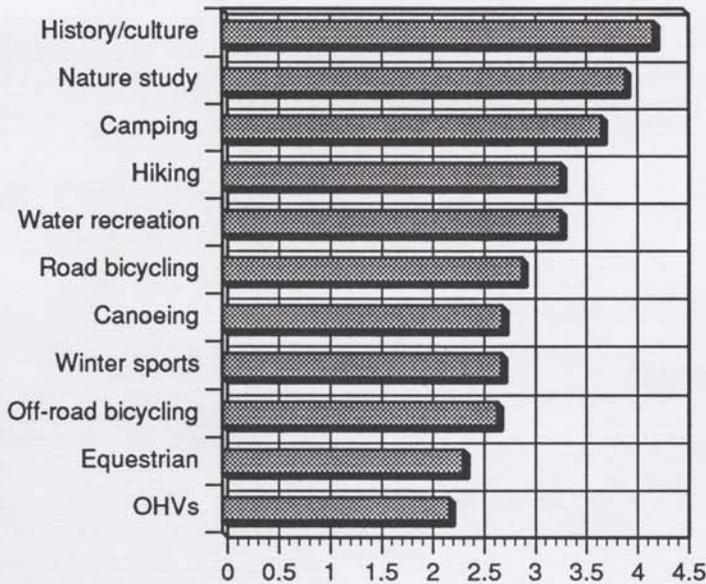


## Recreational Needs

Water-based recreation is one of the greatest recreational needs of the region. Priorities include improved facilities for boating and other water sports, canoeing facilities, and a public beach. Supporting campsites are also needed.

Trails were viewed as another recreational priority. Trails should be designed for all-season use and should be integrated into the history of central Nebraska. Hiking and bicycling facilities were seen as high priorities.

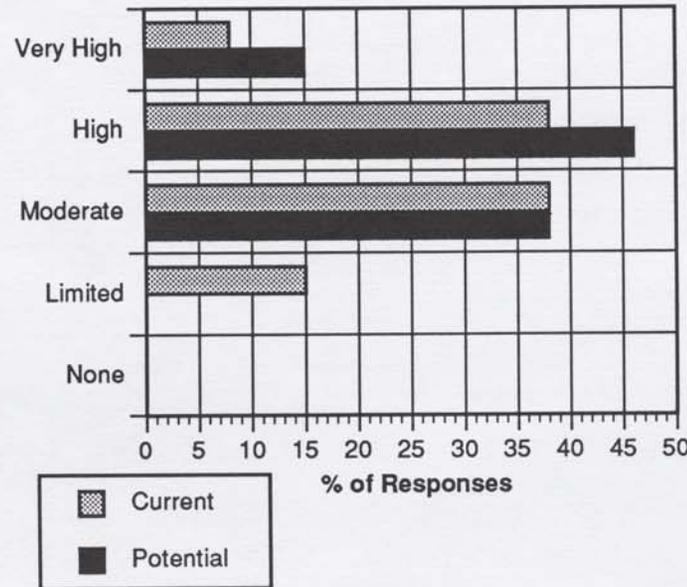
**Adequacy of Facilities**



**Trails Plan Emphasis**

- Reinforcement of historic trail routes along the Blue and Platte Rivers. Feeder trails could be provided which lead to the Platte River corridor.
- North-south trails development that links the Hastings area to St. Paul.
- Trails development in the Republican River Valley.
- A strong emphasis on historic interpretation and linking scenic and historical resources.
- Incorporating multiple uses, ranging from hiking to off-highway vehicles.

**Tourism Impact**



**Special Trails Issues**

- Balancing environment and use, avoiding over-development of trails while providing corridors that preserve wildlife habitats.
- Developing a system that has minimum impact on the ecosystem while providing expanded recreational access. Trails should not threaten the environment that people wish to experience.
- Providing easy off and return access to areas not directly along Interstate 80, such as paved roads south of the Platte along the Oregon Trail corridor.

*Trails development efforts in the region include:*

- *Reuse of abandoned railroad corridors within the City of Hastings.*
- *Increased public interest and promotion of the Oregon Trail.*
- *Plans for extending the existing trail from Fort Kearny State Recreation Area to the east and west, providing access to Cottonmill Park and to prime viewing areas of sandhills crane migration between Kearney and Grand Island.*
- *Development of Dannebrog's trail system, including the completion of a one-mile paved segment in 1993, and consideration of extensions to St. Paul and Ord.*
- *Incorporation of trails development into Grand Island's comprehensive plan.*
- *Probable abandonment of BN route from Franklin to Red Cloud and trail conversion to support historical and scenic attractions in the Republican River Valley.*

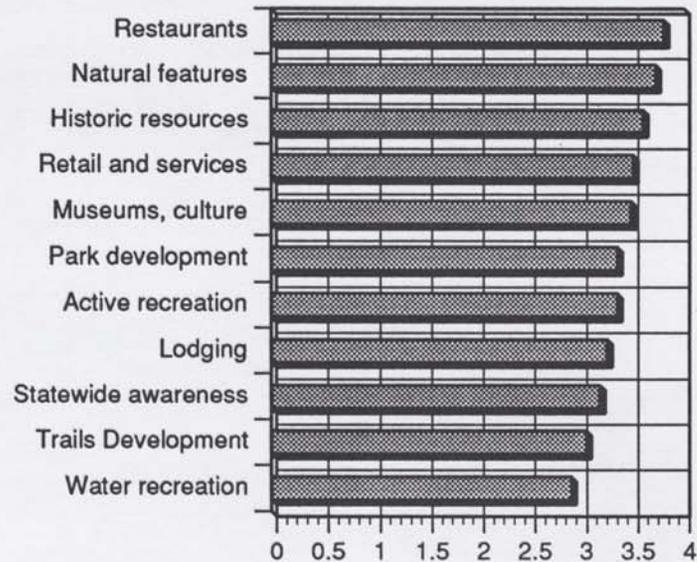
# Mahoney Park

*This focus group concentrated on the needs of the most densely populated parts of the state, including the two metropolitan areas. Communities represented included Omaha, Lincoln, Ashland, Nebraska City, Wahoo, Brownville, Fremont, Waterloo, York, and David City. Representatives of the state's Native American community also participated.*

## Highlights:

- **Trails development clearly emerged as the area's dominant recreational need.**
- **The region's vast historical, cultural, tourism, and recreational resources are major assets.**
- **Long-distance road bicycling is a high priority in the region, linking activity centers together.**

## Rating of Local Features

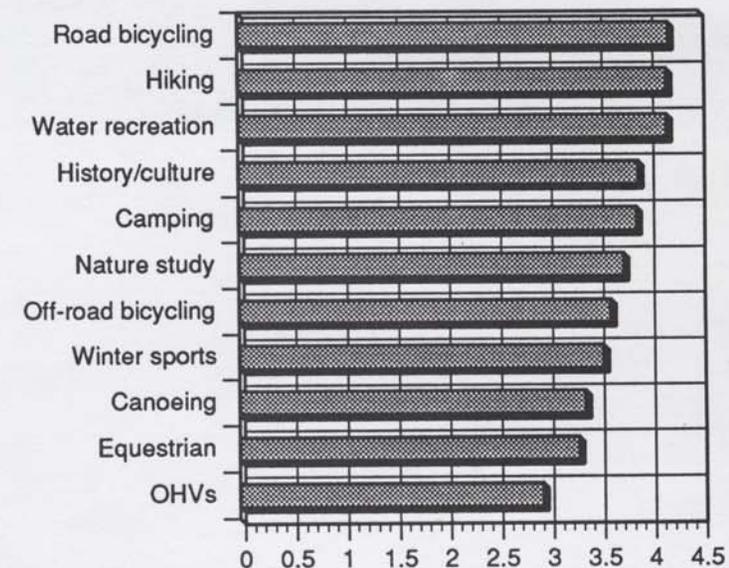


## Major Resources

The eastern Nebraska region provides a vast variety of historical and cultural features. These include both the large museums of Omaha and Lincoln and less well-known facilities such as the Howard Hansen home in Wahoo, which commemorates one of America's greatest composers. Eastern Nebraska also includes many historical and interpretive features, including the Lewis and Clark and Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trails and Homestead National Monument.

Recreational resources are also important, including three state parks, numerous state recreation areas, and other important public and private recreational resources and environmental preserves. Visitor attractions, especially concentrated in and around Omaha, Lincoln, and Nebraska City, are other major assets.

## Demand for Facilities

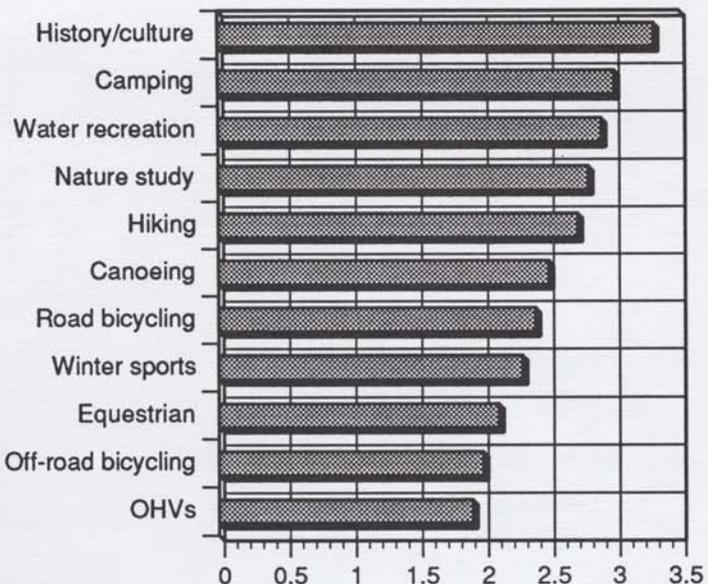


## Recreational Needs

Participants overwhelmingly identified trails development as the area's dominant recreational need. Trails should provide for multiple uses, accommodating all potential user groups. In addition, trails in eastern Nebraska should provide good access and connections to major recreational and historic sites.

Water-based recreation is another high-demand priority for the region. Needs include improvements in canoeing facilities, and provision of new settings for water sports.

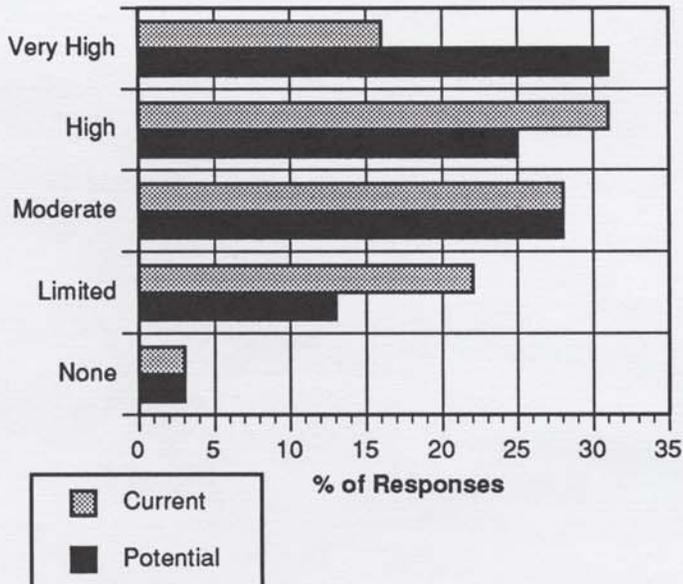
**Adequacy of Facilities**



**Trails Plan Emphasis**

- Linkages between major facilities. Examples of critical links include a trail connection from Omaha to Lincoln, interstate connections between Omaha and Nebraska's trails system and Iowa's Wabash Trace Nature Trail south from Council Bluffs, a greenway connecting the two major metropolitan area state parks and Ashland, and links between Nebraska City, Brownville, and Indian Cave State Park with its internal trail system.
- Increased use of rivers and waterways.
- Establishment of reliable funding mechanisms for trail development and a recognition of the role of trails in overall regional economic development.
- Accommodation of multiple uses in the system.

**Tourism Impact**



**Special Trails Issues**

- Providing trail designs that provide access for all user groups, including people with disabilities.
- Locating and developing trails that serve basic community transportation needs as well as recreation.
- Taking advantage of corridor opportunities to link major facilities and features.
- Building an Omaha to Iowa crossing over the Missouri River.
- Incorporating Indian reservations into the trails plan, providing opportunities for trails to interpret Native American history and provide tourism and economic development opportunities within the reservations.

*Trails development efforts to date in the region include:*

- *Organization of two active trails development and advocacy groups, the Great Plains Trails Network and the Eastern Nebraska Trails Network.*
- *Evolution of significant urban trails systems in the Omaha and Lincoln areas.*
- *Successful fund-raising for purchase and beginning development of the Mo Pac East Trail from Lincoln to Wabash.*
- *The beginning of development of Ashland's Salt Creek Trail.*
- *Probable development of the Park Highway (Highway 66 between Mahoney and Platte River State Parks through South Bend) as a scenic route with bicycle safety shoulders.*
- *Organization of the Nebraska Trails Council and support for its cooperative efforts with the National Park Service and the Rails to Trails Conservancy to file for railbanking on railroad corridor abandonments.*

## McCook

*This focus group included representation from the southwestern part of Nebraska. Communities represented included McCook, Gothenburg, Palisade, Trenton, North Platte, Stratton, Imperial, Cambridge, and rural Dundy County.*

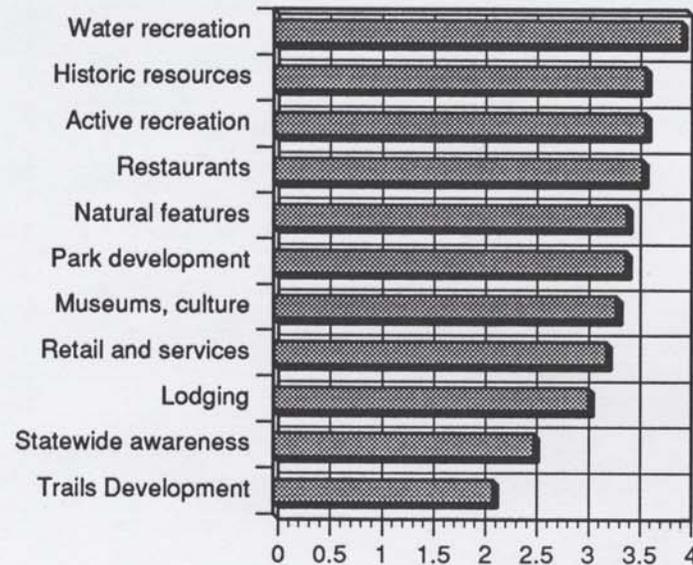
### Highlights:

- **Trails development and improved roads were seen as being the region's most important recreational needs.**

- **Historical and recreational resources, including extensive water resources, are primary assets for the region.**

- **Trails development should open up water resources and highlight sites of historic importance.**

### Rating of Local Features



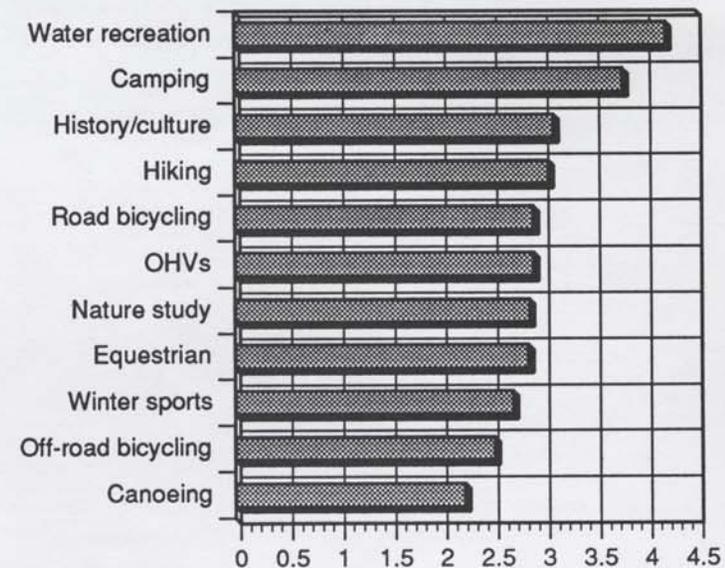
### Major Resources

The Southwestern Nebraska region's water resources are among its greatest assets. The system of southwest reservoirs, including Swanson Lake and the Medicine Creek, Red Willow, and Enders Reservoirs, provide excellent water recreation facilities. The region's waterways, including the Platte, Republican, and Frenchman Rivers and the related canyon country are also important natural resources.

The area's historical and cultural resources are of nearly equal importance. Themes of these features range from the promotional genius of Buffalo Bill to the tragedy of Massacre Canyon to the political vision of George W. Norris. In addition, features like Champion Mill State Historical Park, while little known, are magical places in Nebraska.

The region's active tourism community is another

### Demand for Facilities



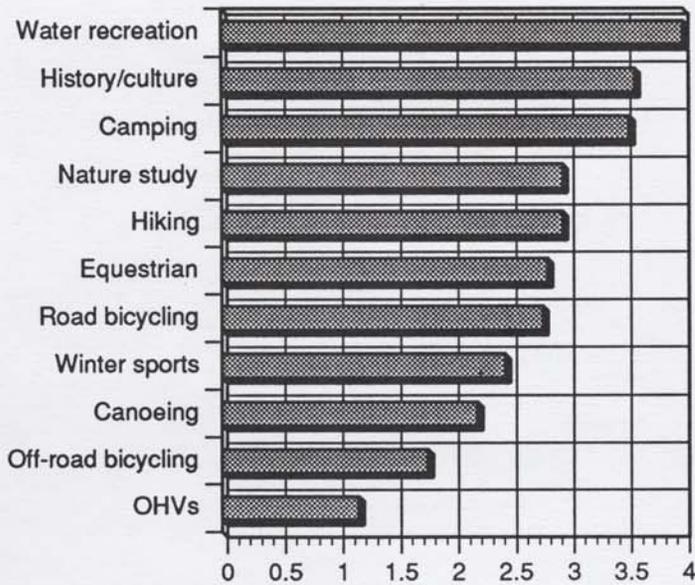
### Recreational Needs

Participants viewed trails as the region's most important recreational need. Facilities should accommodate hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians. Opportunities include the development of trails associated with the reservoirs, a scenic trail along the Frenchman River, and further development and enhancement of Swanson Reservoir. Improvement of access roads to recreational resources is another major recreational need.

Other key recreational issues include:

- Providing more family recreational resources, including youth-oriented recreation, in the region.
- Expanding marketing and promotion efforts of the area and its visitor attractions.

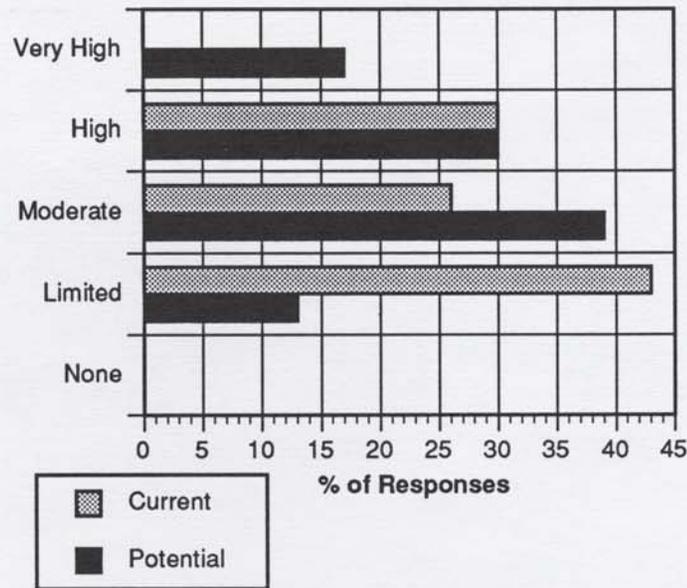
**Adequacy of Facilities**



**Trails Plan Emphasis**

- Coordinating with water resources, using the region's lakes and rivers as the backbones of local trails systems.
- Expanding opportunities for historic interpretation, including historic sites, historic trails such as the Texas-Ogallala Cattle Trail, and the Frenchman River scenic corridor.
- Opening access to the canyon country on the south bank of the Platte River.
- Providing for multiple uses of trails.
- Providing a process that will increase public involvement in trails development and promotional efforts.

**Tourism Impact**



**Special Trails Issues**

- Extending trails west of McCook, incorporating communities and features that are often underpublicized. These include places such as Trenton, Benkelman, and Champion Mill State Historical Park.
- Establishing North Platte and McCook as bases for regional exploration.
- Accommodating the needs of private landowners.
- Developing ways to finance maintenance of trails.

*Trails development efforts in the region include:*

- *Efforts to promote the Captain Eaton Trail, linking Swanson Lake with Lakeview Lodge.*
- *Development of a recreational trail in and around McCook.*
- *Consideration of trail development in Imperial.*
- *Semi-annual Volksmarch promoted by Bartley, Nebraska.*

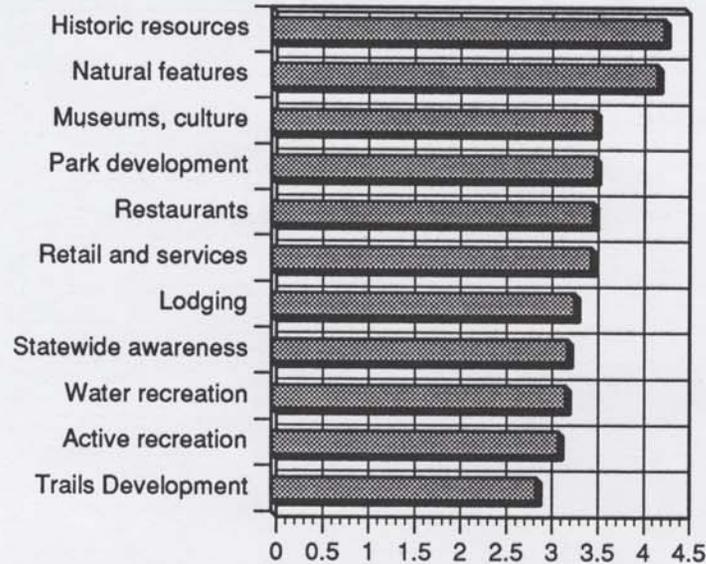
# Nebraska City

*This focus group included participants from the southeastern part of the state. Communities represented included Nebraska City, Beatrice, Fairbury, Falls City, Central City, Peru, Pawnee City and County, Brownville, Shubert, and Cook.*

## Highlights:

- **Trails development was considered the area's dominant recreational need, followed by water-based recreation.**
- **Tourism and historical resources were viewed as the area's most vital assets.**
- **Trails development should be inclusive, creating a network that provides access and interpretation to the entire southeast region.**

## Rating of Local Features

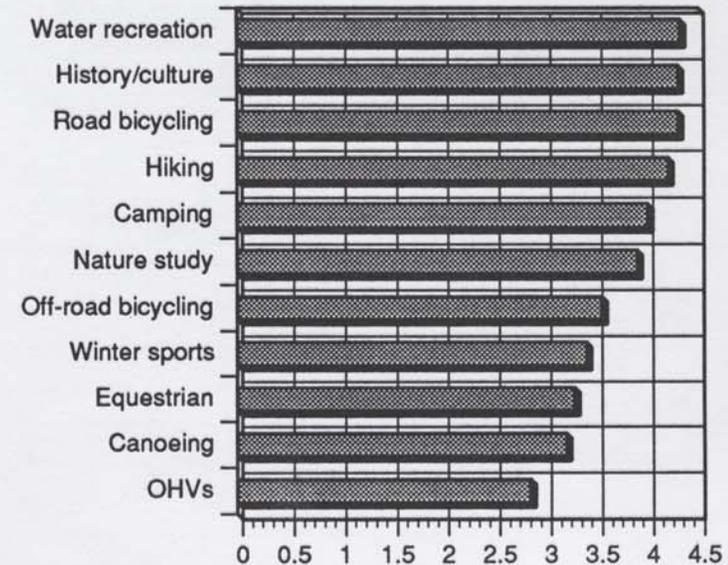


## Major Resources

Tourism and historical/cultural resources are Southeastern Nebraska's greatest visitor-related assets. Tourism assets include the Nebraska City's attractions, combining historical interpretation and preservation, recreational shopping, and the National Arbor Day Foundation's Lied Conference Center. Historic homes and districts throughout the region are also important assets. Brownville has grown as a restored historical village, a special place and retreat near to the metropolitan market. Southeast Nebraska was also the point of entry of the Pony Express and Oregon Trails, proceeding north along the Blue River system. Rock Creek Station State Historical Park interprets these trails.

Open space and recreational resources, including Indian Cave State Park and a number of state recreation areas are also important assets.

## Demand for Facilities

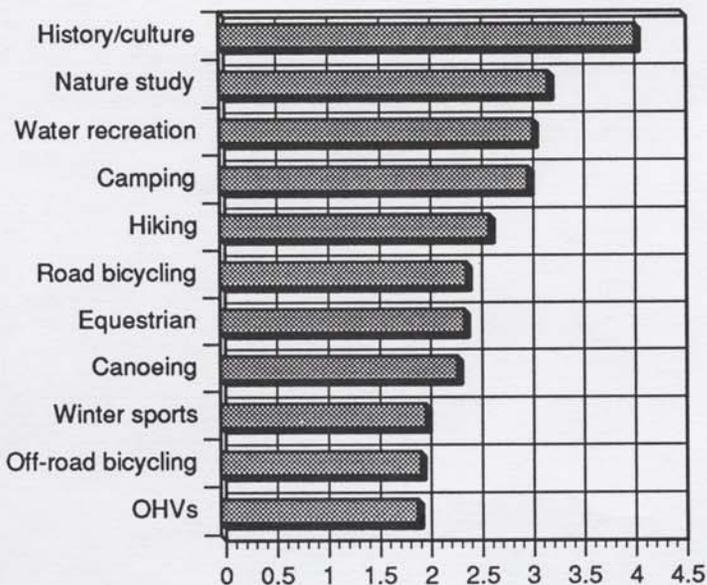


## Recreational Needs

Trails were viewed by focus group participants as the region's most important recreational need. Trails should accommodate multiple uses and provide safe areas for recreational activity. The former Burlington Northern corridor between Nebraska City and Brownville is an important opportunity for joint heritage rail and trail use. Other recreational needs include:

- Increased water-based recreation, including enhanced access to the Platte River.
- Expanded camping facilities.
- Winter recreation activities, including ice-skating and cross-country skiing.
- Development of activities with broad appeal.

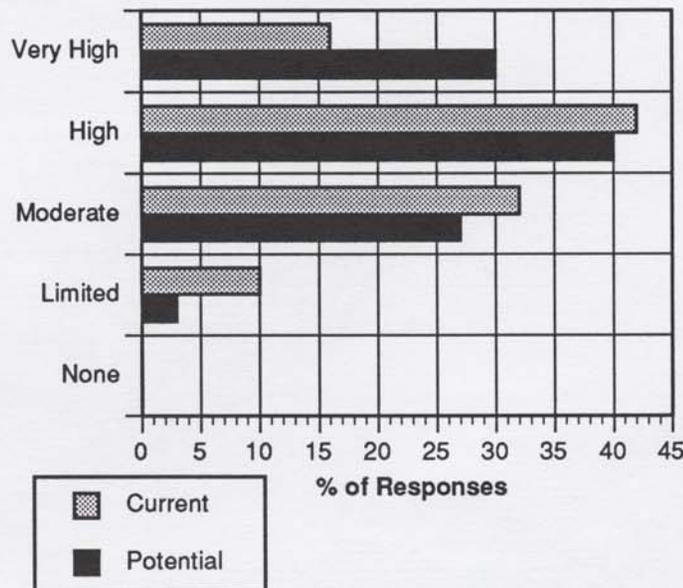
### Adequacy of Facilities



### Trails Plan Emphasis

- Linkages between major facilities. Key links include the Missouri River corridor between Nebraska City, Brownville, and Indian Cave State Park, connections among villages, and links between the Nebraska City area and south-central Nebraska.
- Increased use of railroad corridors and minimum maintenance roads.
- Capitalizing on historic resources, including the Lewis and Clark, Oregon, and Pony Express National Historic Trails. A National Trail Center is proposed for Nebraska City.
- Provision of activities for a variety of users and for people of all ages; development of trails to minimize environmental impact.

### Tourism Impact



### Special Trails Issues

- Accommodation of multiple uses in high demand corridors. Developing a joint heritage rail/trail corridor between Nebraska City to Brownville, assuring preservation of the integrity of this key corridor.
- Southern connection linking the Fairbury area with the east through Rock Creek Station, the Pawnee prairies, Iron Horse Trail Lake, Shubert, and Indian Cave.
- Protection of landowners' rights, with attention to adequate policing of the area.
- Provision of improved support facilities, including trailheads, parking, lodging, and restaurants.

*Trails development efforts in the region include:*

- Significant organizational efforts, including Pioneers Trail Council, the Southeast Nebraska Railroad Association, the Pawnee County Promotional Network, and other groups.
- Development of a nature and educational trail along the Missouri River at Peru.
- A trails development program in the master plan for the National Arbor Day Farm.

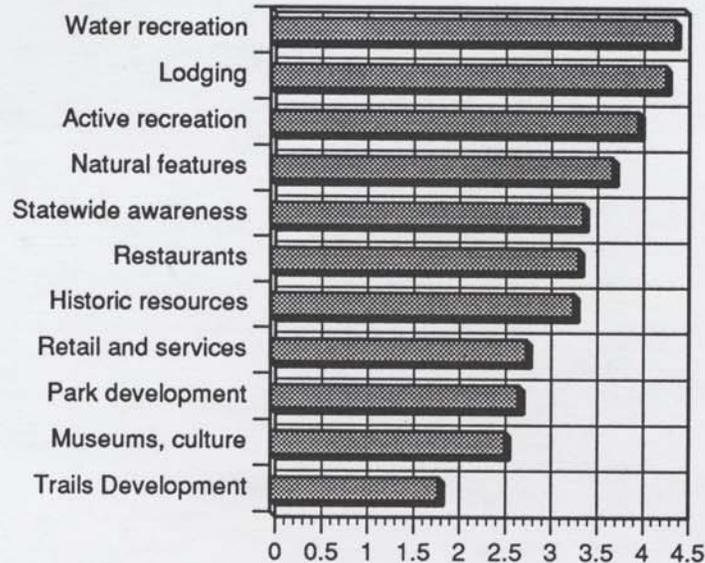
# Ogallala

This focus group included participants from Ogallala and Lake McConaughy area. Communities represented included Ogallala, Lewellen, North Platte, and Keith County.

## Highlights:

- **Water recreation and enhancement of Lake McConaughy is the area's dominant recreation priority.**
- **Recreation, scenery, and historical resources were viewed as the area's most vital assets.**
- **Trails development can enhance the recreational offerings of the area and tie water recreation with the history of Ogallala, Ash Hollow, and the Oregon Trail.**

## Rating of Local Features



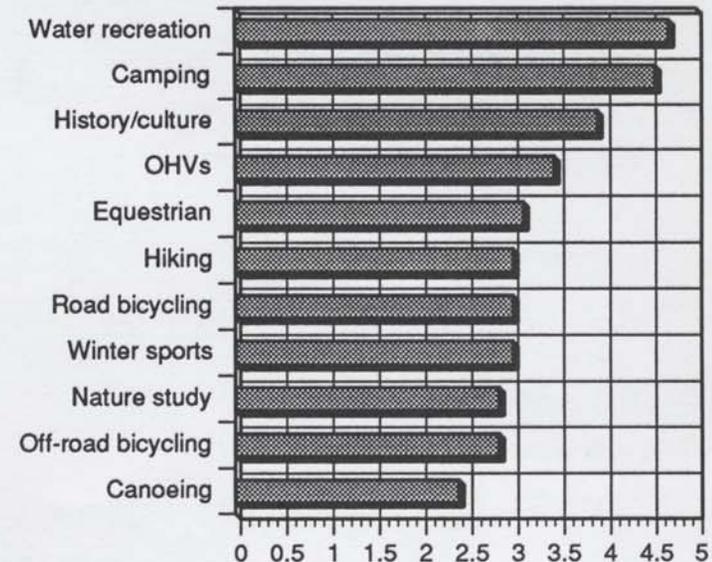
## Major Resources

The Ogallala area is extremely rich in recreational, scenic, and historic resources. Water resources, featuring Lake McConaughy, the state's largest body of water, were rated the area's greatest assets. The lake provides a wide variety of recreational options, from swimming to wilderness hiking. Other water resources include additional lakes, and the North and South Platte Rivers.

Historic resources and parks are also major assets. The region's historical association with the Oregon Trail is extremely important, and includes such famous places as Ash Hollow and California Hill. Ogallala itself presents the history of cowboy life and is the terminus of the historic Texas-Ogallala Cattle Trail.

The planned development of the National Trails Center near Brule will add another important asset.

## Demand for Facilities

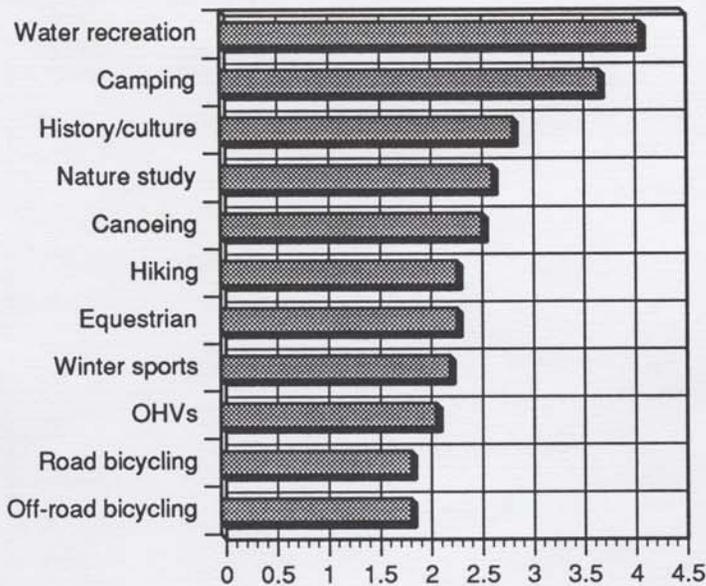


## Recreational Needs

Focus group participants viewed improvements at Lake McConaughy as the area's most vital recreational need. Specific recommendations include more boat ramps, improved maintenance of facilities, more support facilities at the lake, and a children's playground. Improved management of human impact on the lake environment, including law enforcement and habitat preservation, is another priority.

Trails development was seen as a way of enhancing the other resources of the region. Trails could link recreational and historical features and should accommodate hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians.

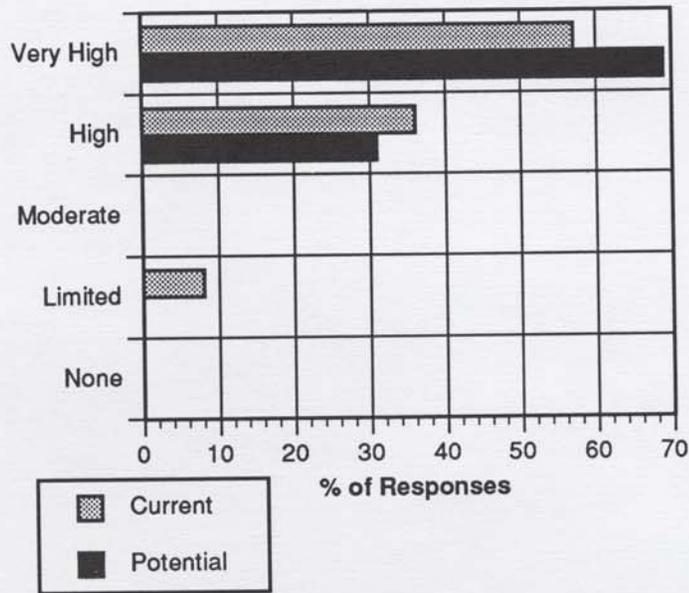
**Adequacy of Facilities**



**Trails Plan Emphasis**

- Enhancing Lake McConaughy's trails, including linkages between Ogallala and the Lake and connections with the beaches and lake environments.
- Fostering a stronger relationship to the region's historical trails.
- Building trail links to and through Lake Ogallala and Ash Hollow.

**Tourism Impact**



**Special Trails Issues**

- Development of trails for a variety of uses, including short day-use trails combining scenic, historic, interpretive, and recreational resources.
- Improvement of marketing and promotional efforts.
- Support for the proposed Nebraska National Trails Museum for interpretation of the Platte Valley National Historic Trails and their relationships to the Platte crossings, California Hill, and Ash Hollow. Relationship of the regional trails system to the Museum.
- Preservation of wildlife habitats, including those of threatened species like the piping plover.

*Trails development efforts in the region include:*

- *Development by City of Ogallala of a recreation trail linking the city to new neighborhoods on its northern edge. This trail will be incorporated into a trail link to Lake McConaughy.*
- *Probable provision of shoulders along Highway 61 to the lake during scheduled improvements by the Department of Roads.*
- *Planning of the Nebraska National Trails Museum near Brule.*
- *Interest in development of a trail link between Lewellen and Ash Hollow State Historical Park.*

# Scottsbluff

*This focus group included participants from the the North Platte Valley and the Nebraska Panhandle. Communities represented included Scottsbluff, Gering, Bayard, and Agate.*

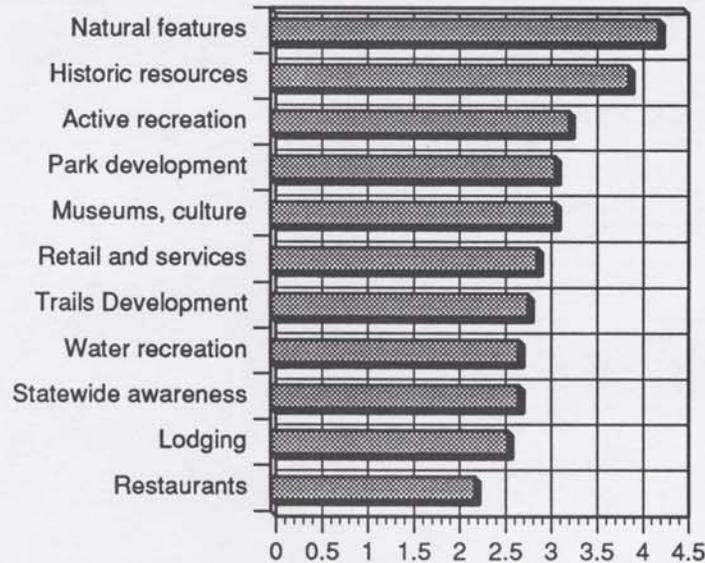
## Highlights:

- *Trails development was considered the area's most important recreational need, tied to the region's natural and historical setting.*

- *The region's distinctive scenic and historic resources provide its greatest recreational assets.*

- *Through the Monument Valley Pathways program, the region has begun a unique link between communities and environment.*

## Rating of Local Features

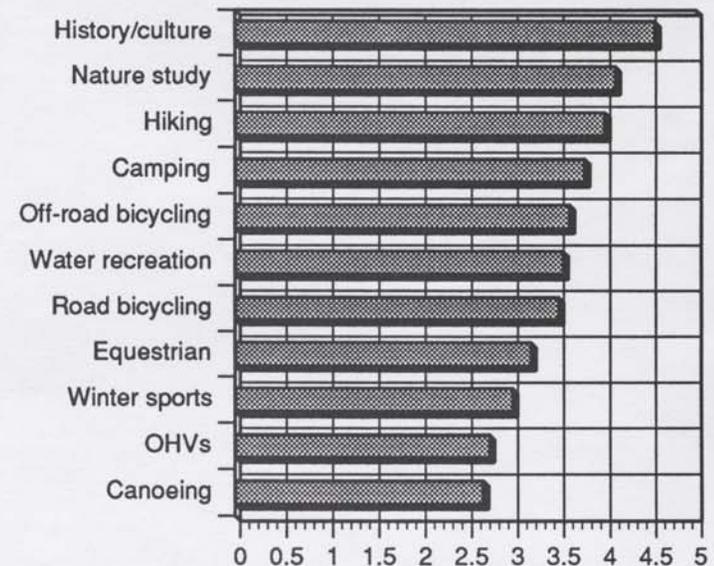


## Major Resources

The Panhandle region is extremely rich in scenic, natural, and historical resources. Major features include Chimney Rock National Historic Site and Scotts Bluff National Monument, two of the most famous landmarks of the Oregon Trail. Other important natural features include the Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, North Platte National Wildlife Refuge, and the North Platte Valley.

The historical importance of the area is represented by such features as Agate Fossil Beds, Robidoux Pass, and the National Monument. The area's museums, including the new Wyo-braska Natural History Museum and the North Platte Valley Museum, provide important interpretive and educational resources. Tourism development is a growing potential, with the completion of Gering's new convention center.

## Demand for Facilities



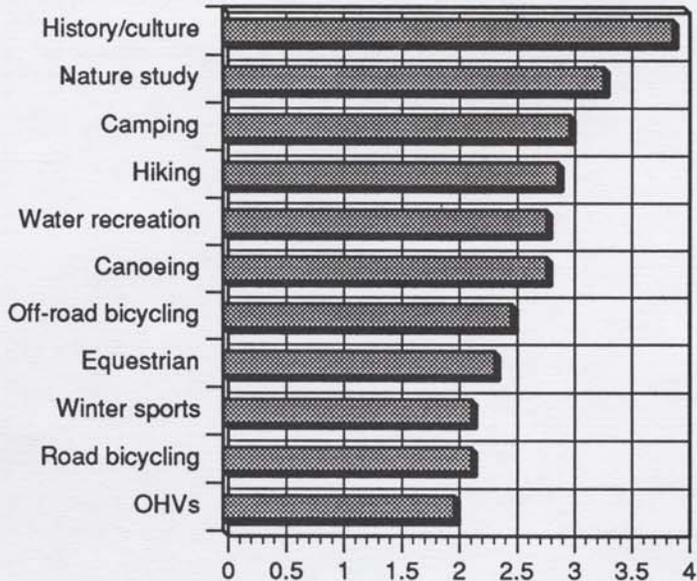
## Recreational Needs

Trails were viewed by focus group participants as the region's most important recreational need. This priority is emphasized by the organization and development of Monument Valley Pathways, a network of trails that links Scottsbluff and Gering with Scotts Bluff National Monument, Mitchell Pass, and the surrounding countryside. Trails should accommodate a variety of activities, including hikers, bicyclists, and equestrians.

Other needs include:

- Further development of water recreation.
- Expanded camping facilities to complement Gering's recently completed RV park.

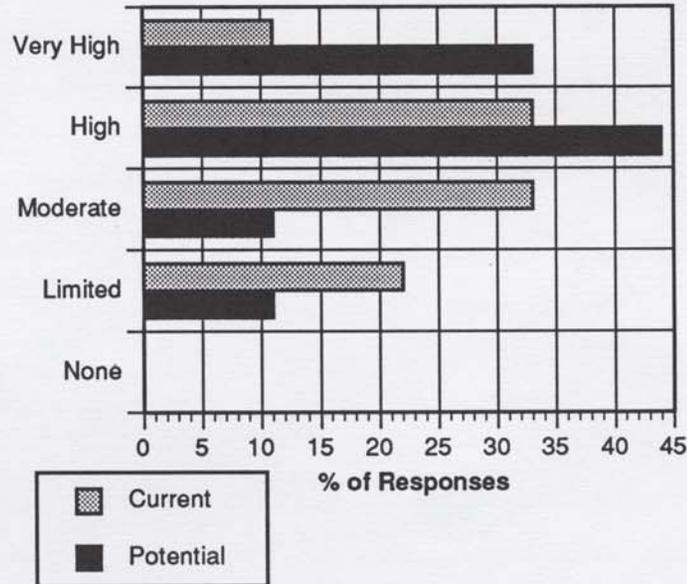
**Adequacy of Facilities**



**Trails Plan Emphasis**

- Continuing current trail efforts and enhancing the growing system.
- Locating trails that are associated with historic trails and become part of the Monument Valley Pathways system.
- Expanding cooperative efforts of groups and agencies.
- Extending the Monument Valley Pathways system into and through the cities of Scottsbluff and Gering.

**Tourism Impact**



**Special Trails Uses**

- Developing a multi-dimensional system that addresses a variety of recreational, educational, and historic interests.
- Creating a balance between conservation needs and increased tourism.
- Improving land use controls on private land adjacent to publicly owned land.

*Trails development efforts in the region include:*

- *The Monument Valley Pathways trails program. The first increment of the system, connecting Scottsbluff's YMCA with Riverside Zoo along the North Platte River, received ISTEAs Enhancement Funds in 1993.*
- *The organization of the Twin Cities Partnership for the Environment to promote urban design efforts in the region.*
- *The completion of the Twin Cities Urban Design Plan, calling for development of a community trails network in the Twin Cities region.*

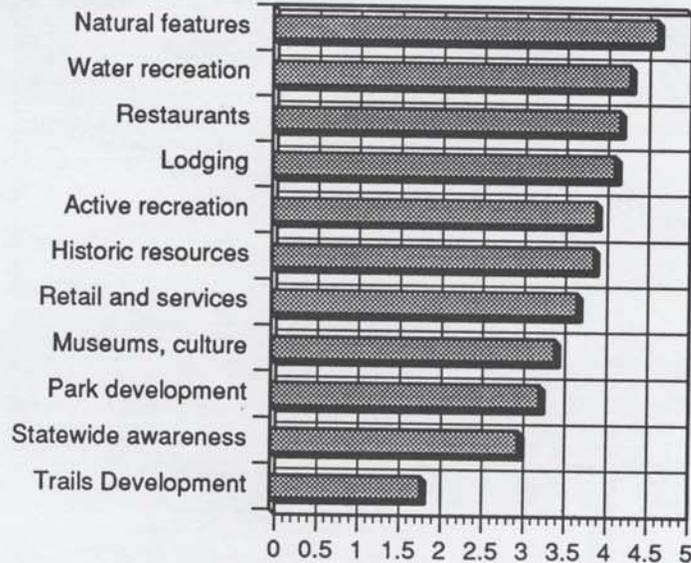
# Valentine

*This focus group included participants from the north central part of the state. Communities represented included Valentine, Niobrara, and Crookston.*

## Highlights:

- *The need to balance recreational demands and environmental protection, along with the responsible enhancement of recreational opportunities, are the area's major needs.*
- *Tourism has a dominant impact on the economy of the area.*
- *The area's extraordinary scenic and ecological resources foster a deep concern for the environment.*

### Rating of Local Features



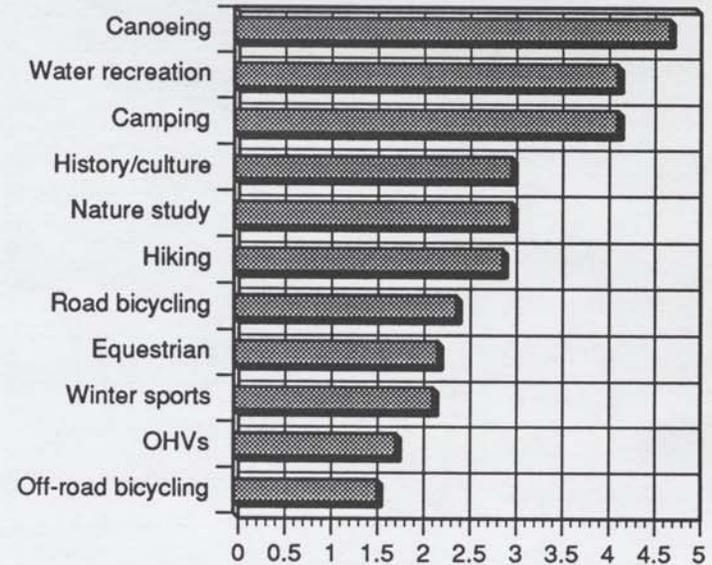
### Major Resources

The Niobrara National Scenic River region is one of the state's most important environmental resources. Focus group participants considered the area's environmental, water, and wildlife resources to be its greatest assets.

Major environmental resources include the Snake River and Smith Falls, both of which are unique in Nebraska, the Niobrara River, Merritt Reservoir, the Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge, The Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Preserve, and the McKelvie National Forest.

Regional historical and cultural resources provide other major resources. These include the Bowring Ranch State Historical Park and the Sawyer and Cherry County Museums. The City of Valentine provides many visitor support services. The city provides unique retailing and a growing array of tourist services.

### Demand for Facilities



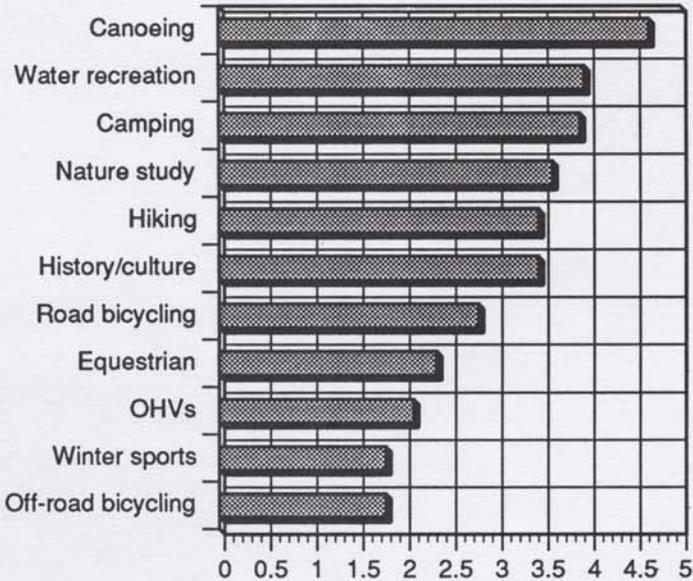
### Recreational Needs

Focus group participants considered balancing recreation demands and environmental quality to be a major concern. As a result, future recreational development should emphasize relatively low-impact uses.

Priority recreational needs also include:

- Accommodation of winter sports.
- Trails for hiking, bicycling, nature study, equestrian activities, and cross-country skiing.
- Improved management of canoeists and water recreationalists, including providing restrooms, public information, and trash disposal.

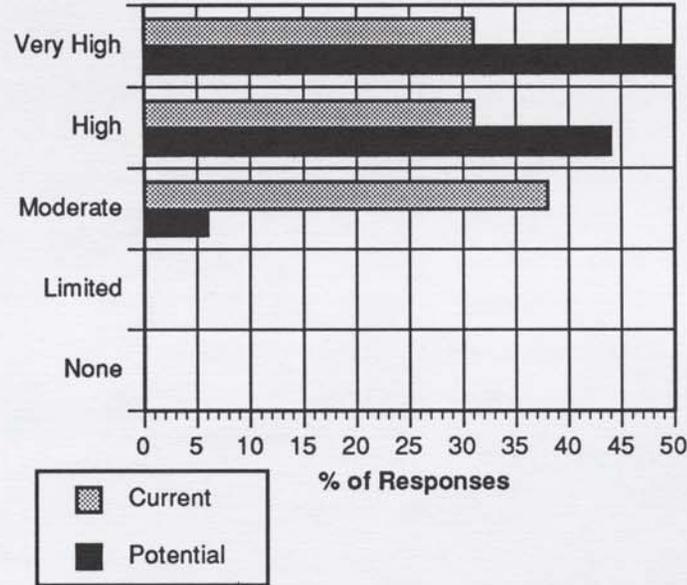
**Adequacy of Facilities**



**Trail Plan Emphasis**

- Enhancing trails development and use of the Merritt Reservoir area and of the Niobrara and other waterways.
- Developing facilities with low environmental impact.
- Developing trails in and around Valentine to serve visitors based in the city.
- Creating stronger non-automobile links between the city and surrounding features.

**Tourism Impact**



**Special Trails Issues**

- Encouragement of sound environmental practices and prevention of overdevelopment.
- Cooperative work with landowners to respect their rights.
- Attention to financing development and maintenance, including user financing.
- Co-existence with a working railroad west of Merriman along the railbanked Cowboy Line, along with development of the Cowboy Trail.

*Trails development efforts in the region include:*

- *Definition of scenic loop in Valentine area, using Highway 97, State Spur 16-B, and US 83.*
- *Local sponsorship of a trail along Minnecheduza Creek between Valentine and Cornell Bridge at the Fort Niobrara Refuge.*
- *Railbanking and reuse of CNW Cowboy Line for a rail-trail and rail-with-trail.*
- *Potential use of a maintenance road along Ainsworth Canal.*
- *Development of Smith Falls State Park, with trail access, accommodations for visitors with disabilities, bridge development, and improvement of an access road from Highway 12.*
- *Low-impact trail development in The Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Preserve.*
- *Inclusion of trails potential in the National Park Service's planning for management of newly designated scenic and recreational river segments of the Niobrara.*

## Wayne

*This focus group included participants from northeastern Nebraska. Communities represented included Wayne, Wakefield, Walthill, Scribner, South Sioux City, Hartington, and Santee.*

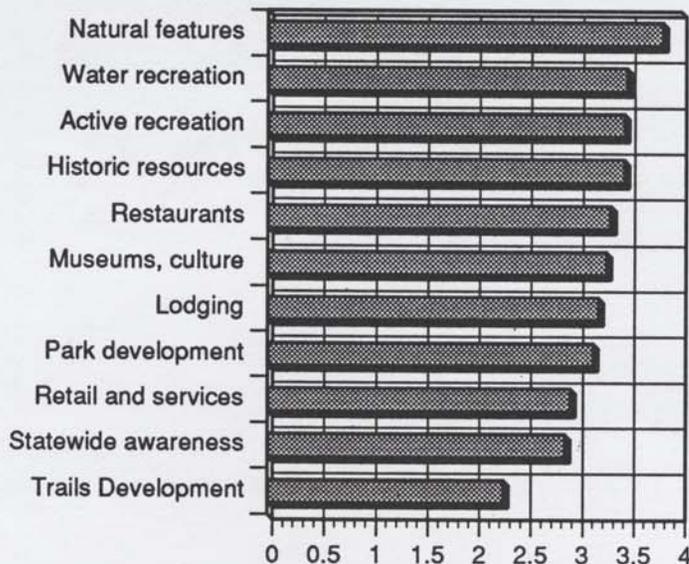
### Highlights:

- **Trails are an important recreational priority. Trails should provide looped networks rather than a point-to-point configuration.**

- **Scenery and water-based recreation are the area's leading trail-related assets.**

- **A trails system should link land and water resources together and should incorporate the area's three Indian reservations.**

### Rating of Local Features

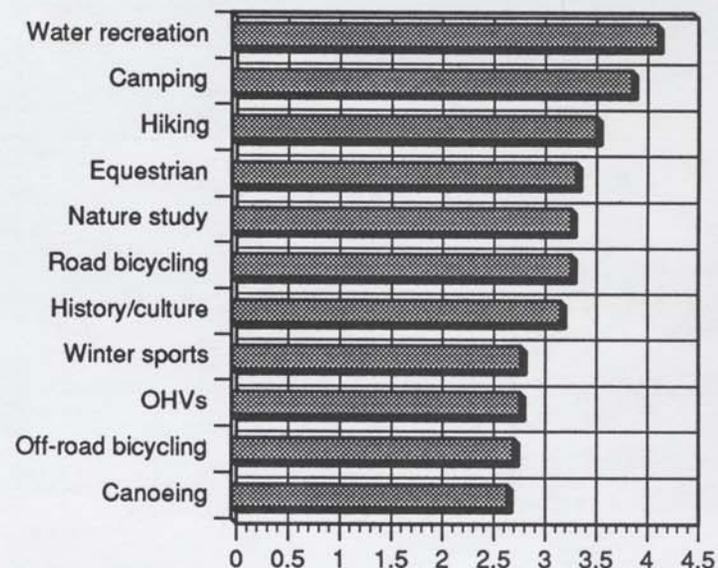


### Major Resources

Northeastern Nebraska provides many significant environmental resources. Water-related resources are particularly important. These include Lewis and Clark Lake, the Missouri River, designated along with the lower Niobrara and Verdigre Creek as a National Recreation River, the Elkhorn River, and beautiful Niobrara State Park at the confluence of the Niobrara and the Missouri.

Historical and cultural resources are also important. The region includes Nebraska's three Indian reservations, the Santee, Winnebago, and Omaha Reservations. It also contains unique resources such as the Northeast Nebraska Zoo, Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park, Neligh Mills, the Neihardt Center, and the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. Trail links to neighboring states, including South Dakota at Yankton and Iowa at Sioux City, also exist.

### Demand for Facilities



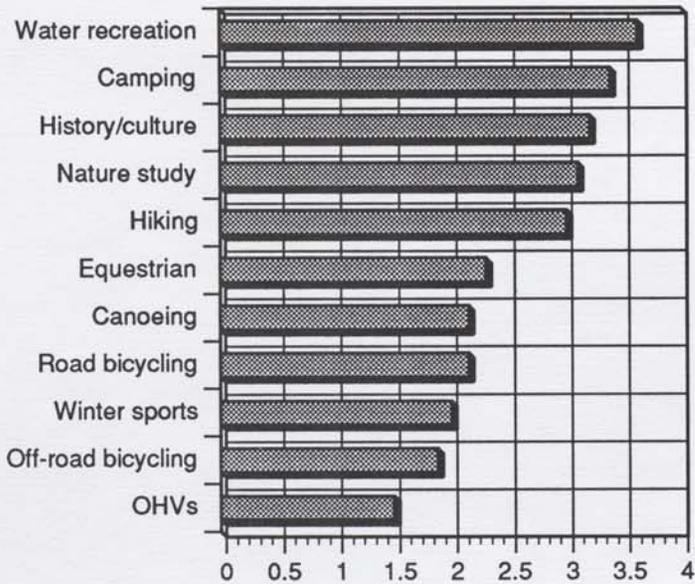
### Recreational Needs

Trails emerged as a fundamental recreational need in the area. Focus group participants proposed integration of the region's assets into a group of trail loops. In addition, the integration of historical and recreational resources provides an important opportunity for the region.

Recreational users that are underserved in the region include:

- Equestrians.
- Snowmobilers, who are allowed in parks only on open roads.
- Hikers and cross-country skiers.
- Road bicyclists.

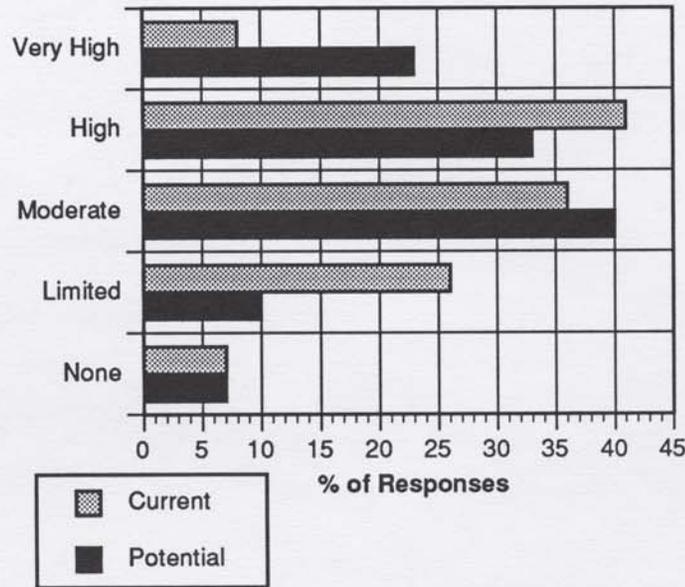
**Adequacy of Facilities**



**Trails Plan Emphasis**

- Providing looped trail routes that incorporate many of the area's resources.
- Accommodating underserved recreational activities, including snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, hiking, and road bicycling.
- Increasing and publicizing access to unusual features such as Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park and the Northeast Nebraska Zoo.
- Integrating water and land resources, including points of river access.

**Tourism Impact**



**Special Trails Issues**

- Utilizing the trails system as a tool to increase economic development on Indian reservations.
- Providing safe and affordable vacations for families.
- Using major highway projects, including the US 275 expressway and Highway 35 improvements, as vehicles for trail development.
- Providing trail links from "base towns" to state parks - Ponca to Ponca State Park and Niobrara to Niobrara State Park.
- Developing continuous routes on south side of Lewis and Clark Lake, connecting state recreation areas.

*Trails development efforts in the region include:*

- *Development of an exclusive trail from Niobrara to Niobrara State Park via an abandoned railroad bridge.*
- *Proposal for shoulder or trail connection to Ponca State Park.*
- *Development of trails system along riverfronts in South Sioux City and Sioux City, Iowa.*

