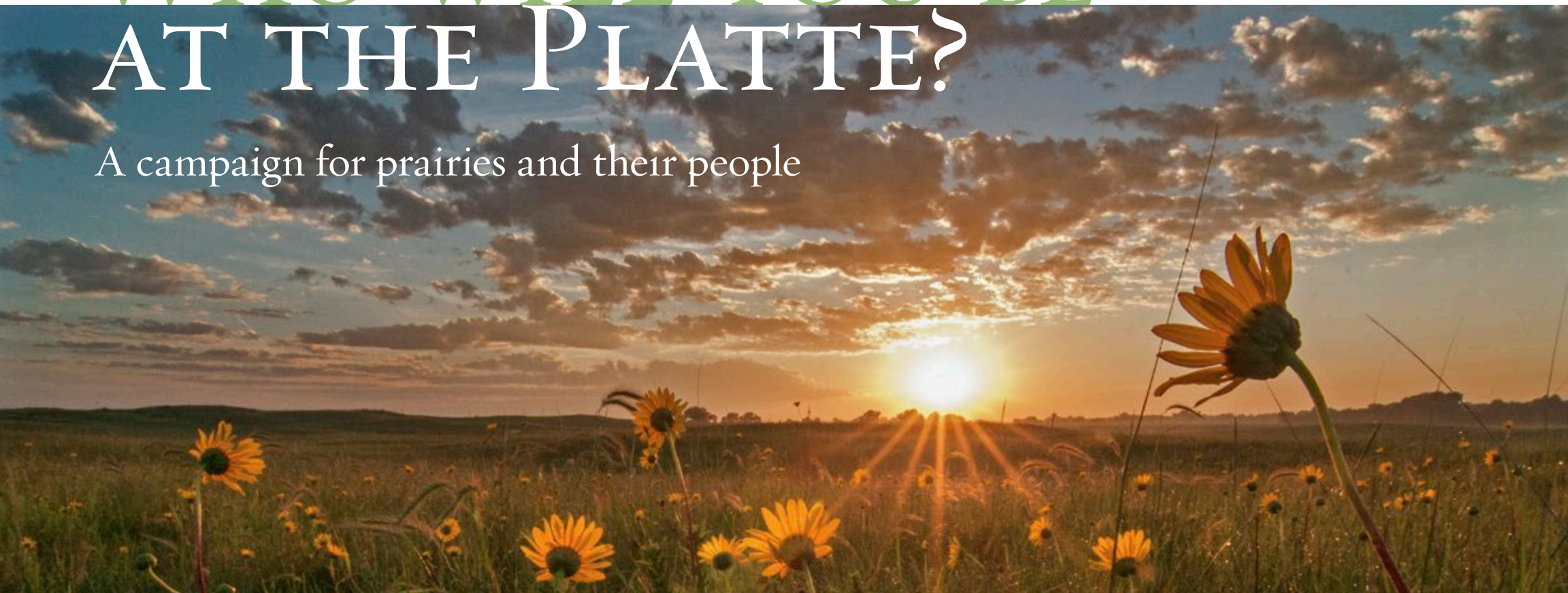




WHO WILL YOU BE AT THE PLATTE?

A campaign for prairies and their people



Who will you be at the
Platte River Prairies?





1971:

The Nature Conservancy first devoted resources to conserve the migratory flyway on Nebraska's Platte River. TNC purchased the 2,100-acre Mormon Island to ensure its long-term protection, later transferring it to the Crane Trust. It remains the largest contiguous tract of wet meadow along the Platte River yet today.

In some ways, this campaign is about the past.

It's about the land we've protected. It's about what teams of biologists and land stewards have learned in five decades of caring for and restoring prairies. It is about the relationships we've built with our fellow conservationists, farmers, scientists, and neighbors. It's about species like whooping cranes, pulled back from the brink of extinction. It's our foundation.

It's also about the future. Fifty years later, the scope and pace of our work on the Platte Prairies is beyond what was ever imagined. We are in a deciding decade for nature. Conservation always starts with people; people who are part of nature, not holding it at arm's length. It's tough, and it's complex, but this community knows a vital truth: that a deep connection to nature has the power to change how we see the world, what we value, and who we are.

Who will you be at the Platte River Prairies?

Platte River Prairies

Nestled among miles of cropland between Grand Island and Kearney, you can still find special places where birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects buzz, tweet, call, sing, scuttle and soar... all alongside an iconic, braided river with some of the prettiest sunsets in the world.

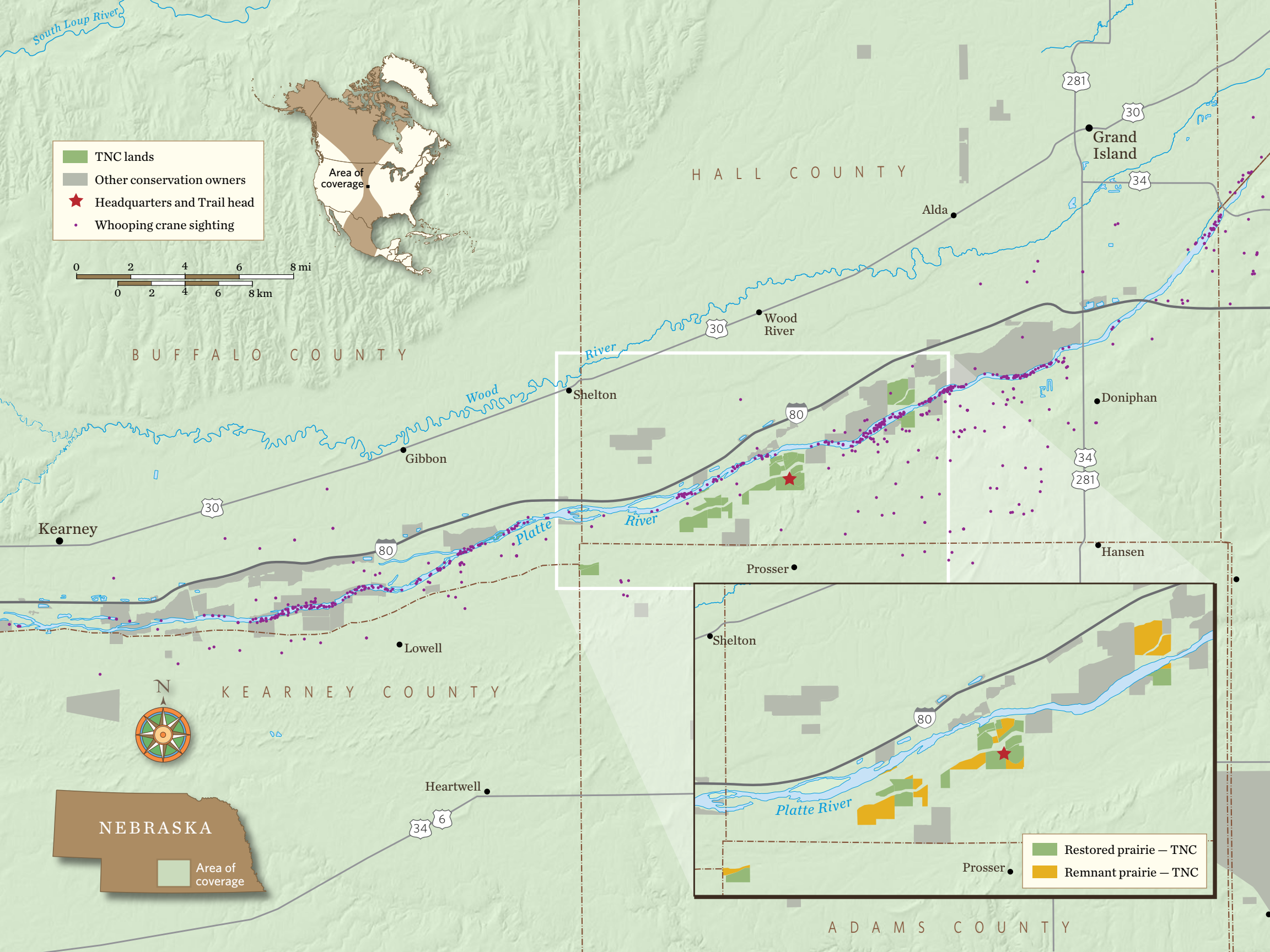
The Nature Conservancy has created a mosaic of grasslands and wetlands — carefully selected, preserved, restored, and managed — that preserves the diversity of life that makes the Platte River vital to our future.

While our land can be measured in acres (*3,476, to be precise!*), its impact does not stop at the fence lines. Far from it.

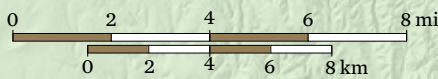
Investing in the last, best places on the Platte River remains a priority for TNC in the years ahead.

TNC and our partners have knit together a network of resilient and connected places where nature can thrive, but it's not yet complete.






- TNC lands
- Other conservation owners
- Headquarters and Trail head
- Whooping crane sighting



- Restored prairie - TNC
- Remnant prairie - TNC



“I tell people to
imagine yourself
as a mouse...
get down on the ground and
see what they see... and then
try to say it’s just grass.”

— *Mike Schrad*



I'm a Volunteer at the Platte.

"I'm a retired wildlife ecologist. I took the training to become a Nebraska Master Naturalist- there are about 500 of us all over the state – and since I'd already done some small mammal work, I thought I could help. I met with Chris [Helzer, Director of Science] and now we are in our eighth year.

I'm primarily interested in the plains pocket mouse, which is a species of concern, but we are learning a lot about all of the small mammals.

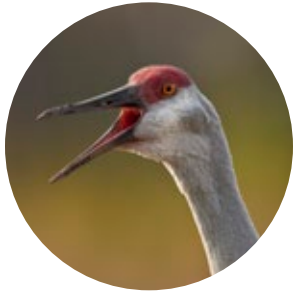
We are still learning about the impact of management on these critters and the conditions they respond to... native or restored prairie? Grazed or rested? Even though we've worked at it for eight years, I think we need eight more to really have enough data to draw conclusions and share what we learned.

My mantra is, keep it fun. And if I'm not having fun, I'm not going to do it. I'm retired. So I mean, that's the gig. And so far I'm still having fun." — Mike Schrad

There simply aren't that many places for researchers to study ecology and prairie management in Nebraska – or for that matter, the Great Plains.

TNC hosts an active science program at the Platte River Prairies. In a state ranked 48th for the number of acres of public land, dozens of college and university researchers rely on access to our grasslands.

Over the last thirty years, we have built a community of practice at the Platte River Prairies. Whether it's research we conduct ourselves, with partners, or that we simply facilitate — or sharing what we have learned with conservation-minded land managers — asking and answering the big questions matters now more than ever.



I'm a Channel Surfer at the Platte.

“Every spring, I join 650,000 other sandhill cranes on a 70-mile stretch of the Platte River. When we show up, we’re pretty beat from our journey. We stop to rest and refuel for a few weeks. When we return to the river at night, we need clear sandbars. We snooze in the water to avoid predators like coyotes.”


— *Antigone canadensis*

Maintaining river habitat and sufficient water levels along the Platte – and keeping invasive species out of the river corridor – are vital for the continued health of crane populations. Since 2007, TNC has led the charge, coordinating with the Platte Valley Weed Management Area partners and 450 landowners to make sure the runway is clear for landing for sandhill cranes and critically endangered whooping cranes.

Unchecked, invasive phragmites render the river’s sandbars unusable to many species of wildlife, including cranes.

Sandhill cranes rely on open, freshwater habitats, and they aren’t the only ones. The central flyway provides critical migration and wintering habitat for millions of waterfowl, shorebirds, and other migratory birds.






“Often appearing miraculously
from incredible heights like
celestial seraphim, our
Sandhill Cranes
are every bit
as wondrous
as the angels painted on the
ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.”

— *Dr. Paul Johnsgard*



Photo by Chris Helzer



A tall, slender yellow flower stalk with several small yellow flowers at the top stands prominently in the foreground. The field is filled with green grass and various wildflowers, including yellow and purple ones. In the background, a brown cow is grazing in the field under a soft, pinkish sky at dusk or dawn.

“When somebody asks,
‘What’s your office like?’
I can measure it in square miles
rather than square feet.”

— *Cody Miller*



I'm a Stage Manager at the Platte.

"Prairie management and restoration is a science. It's also an art. When I look at the 3,476 acres The Nature Conservancy owns, we want to make the most of every inch, and do the best we can to create a variety of habitat for pollinators, birds, small mammals... the whole diversity of life. The more intact a natural system is, the better we do with things like pollination, carbon sequestration, and resilience in the face of the impacts of climate change. My work is to set the stage."

— Cody Miller, Platte River Prairies Preserve Manager

The Platte River Prairies are home to multiple habitat types, all within a few miles of each other.

Some folks think protecting land is about building a fence and locking out the world. This couldn't be further from the truth. Prairies *need* disturbance to be healthy. That means we burn them and graze them.

Cody plays a lot of parts. He can identify most of the plant and animal species in his prairies and understand how they interact. He collaborates with outside researchers and develops his own experiments. He builds fences and fixes chainsaws and skid steers.

Make no mistake: in the next ten years, more will be asked of Cody, his team, and his colleagues as they take action to prepare these lands — these strongholds for wildlife — for a changing climate.

Cody knows that if you build intact stages — composed of a mosaic of habitat types and conditions — that birds, bees, butterflies, small mammals, and countless other actors will find their places.

That's a show worth seeing.



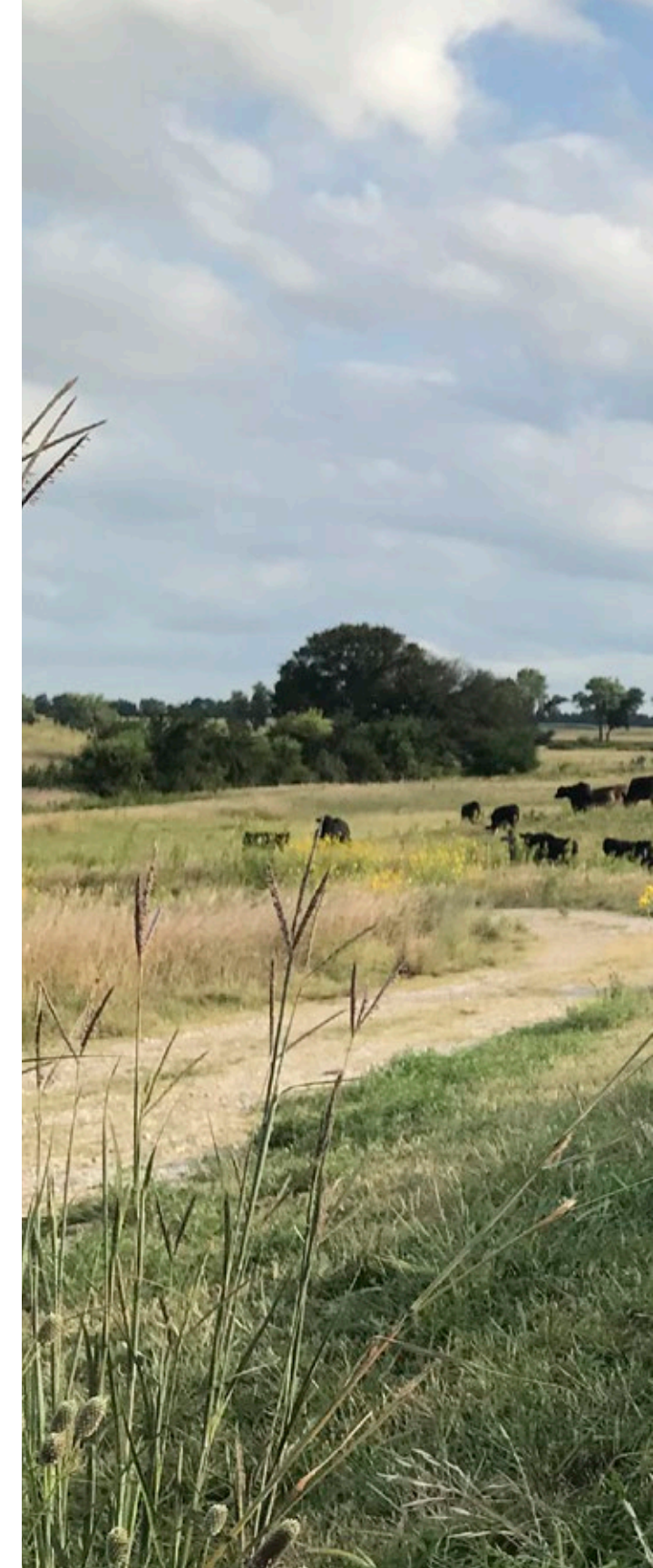
I'm an Explorer at the Platte.

"People are drawn to the Fellowship because it goes beyond a singular task... the experience is designed to allow you to improve on your strengths and to challenge yourself. The Platte River Prairies is well-suited for it because it is so multi-faceted. It draws in researchers, volunteers, species experts, families, farmers... and you see unexpected connections. You can bring almost any area of interest to the Platte and find a way to understand it better."

— Kate Nootenboom

The Claire M. Hubbard Young Leaders in Conservation Fellowship is a one-year program for selected recent college graduates in conservation-related fields. It is designed to provide a comprehensive set of experiences working with a conservation organization and to bridge the gap between school and career. Fellows are housed at The Nature Conservancy's Platte River Prairies Preserve.

Fellows have designed volunteer programs, written comic books, researched grasshoppers, recorded and preserved the sounds of the prairie, studied prairie corners in crop fields, explored policy... and many other pursuits. The Nature Conservancy is proud to help develop the next generation of conservation leaders. Talk about brain gain!





“On my 24th birthday, we set up camp
chairs out in the prairie and
watched cranes fly overhead
as the sun set and the full moon appeared.”

— *Kate Nootenboom*



Photo by Chris Helzer





The Platte River Prairies gives people a place
that they can come to gain a deeper knowledge
of birds or plants or butterflies.

It's a place for discovery.”

— *Chris Helzer*



I'm an Amplifier at the Platte.

“The Platte River Prairies is a really good place for people to come to learn. First of all, it’s a fragmented landscape, which is common across a lot of the Midwest and Great Plains. TNC and partners working to re-connect as much habitat as possible. We’ve restored corn fields to prairie and sand and gravel pits to wetlands, for example. Then we can bring people in to help us study how it’s working. Is it acting as a bigger landscape now? Are all the plants that we put in as seed showing up?”

We bring all kinds of people to the Platte River. We have university folks that are either coming to do research as graduate students, or as professors. We have students that are coming here as part of a class or a lab. We have enthusiasts like Nebraska Master Naturalist Program participants who are coming to learn about plants, insects, birds... we bring farmers and ranchers. We bring acreage owners and land managers who are either working in the agricultural industry or working in natural resources or conservation. If there’s something that we’ve learned here on the Platte River, we can share it with a few people who share it with a whole bunch of people and all of a sudden, something that we’ve figured out or have learned, gets transmitted out to a really large group and has a much bigger impact.”

— Chris Helzer, Director of Science

With an exemplary spirit only devotion to a shared mission can spark, TNC and partners have assembled a toolbox of effective strategies: land acquisition and restoration, prescribed burning and grazing, native seed collection, long-term monitoring of species health, and the ambitious work of keeping the river channels cleared for crane take-offs and landings.

We’ve learned so much. And we will need every bit of that knowledge to face the challenges of the next ten years.

We've cultivated partnerships with farmers, state and federal partners, other nonprofits, neighbors, policymakers, and colleges and universities... an interconnected community of people who care deeply about the Platte's future. This web is facing some of the most difficult tests of any lifetime, as the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss make this the deciding decade.

We are launching this campaign because this iconic landscape is facing serious threats. From invasive species to climate change, the Platte River needs the Conservancy's science, solutions, and people now more than ever.

It's not hopeless. We have hope because we have you.

Together, we can safeguard and steward the last great places on the Platte River.

Together, we can connect people to the joy and peace nature can provide.

Together, we can feed a growing world without sacrificing our water.

Together, we can decide:

Who will we be at the Platte?

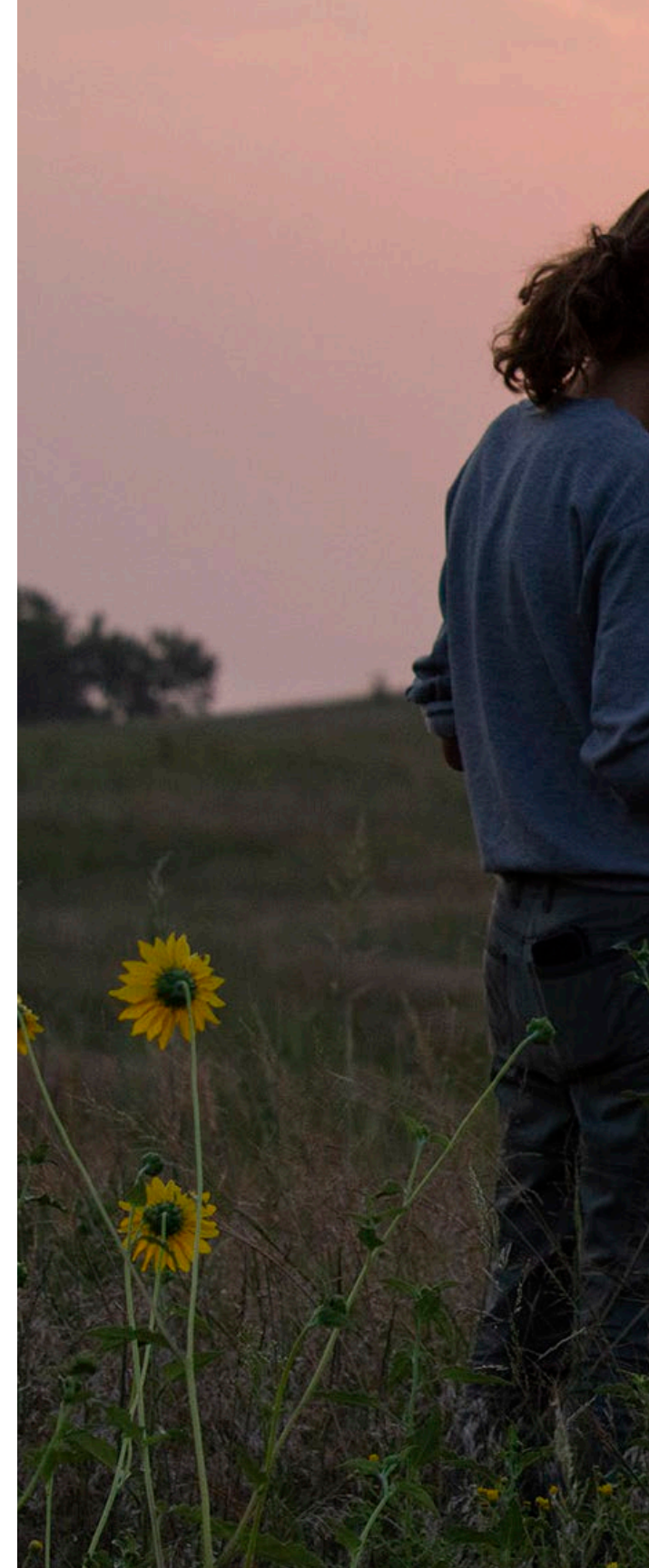




Photo by Chris Helzer





Where will you invest in the Platte River Prairies?

Habitat.

Climate change is driving increases in invasive species in a landscape already facing threats to its survival. With so few prairies remaining – and with each one relying on the others to fight the losses of fragmentation – we cannot afford to lose a single acre. Your investment will:

- ✓ Fully fund and outfit a stewardship team, including tractors and equipment.
- ✓ Build a new workshop/research facility to serve those who are working to understand grasslands and their residents.
- ✓ Prepare TNC for once-in-a-generation opportunities to secure new acres that will protect and expand conservation ownership. Expanded blocks of land are vital for maintaining species diversity and ecological function.
- ✓ Renovate the existing seed barn for restoration projects in the areas most crucial to wildlife.

Nature for All.

People will protect what they know. This campaign includes investments in a new educational center, hiking trails/visitor amenities, a dedicated outreach coordinator, funds for field days, and crane blinds, because building a constituency for nature isn't a luxury – *it's mission critical.*

Science.

We have years, not decades, to take on the interconnected crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. Invest in the people to make ambitious change:

- ✓ Director of Science Chris Helzer is impacting the conservation of hundreds of thousands of acres. Demand for his teaching and advising is outstripping what TNC can provide. With your investment, Chris's time and travel will be fully funded, amplifying the best available art and science of prairie and wetland protection across the country.
- ✓ Funding for The Claire M. Hubbard Young Leaders in Conservation Fellowship Program – a one-year program for outstanding recent college graduates in conservation-related fields – develops the next generation of conservation leaders.
- ✓ To support Fellows, researchers, landowners, and conservation practitioners, new housing is desperately needed.



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