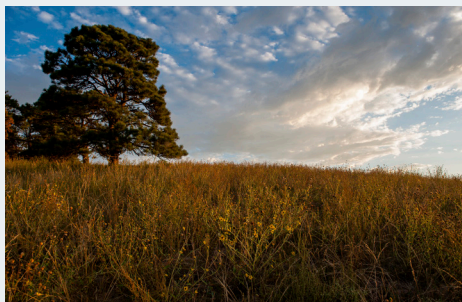


STATE OF NEBRASKA: CHAT CANYON

The Chat Canyon Wildlife Management Area was the first Forest Legacy project in the State of Nebraska. It opened in 2014 as the state's first Forestry and Wildlife Management Area acquired through the USDA Forest Service Forest Legacy Program. To achieve this, the project brought together the USDA Forest Service, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Nebraska Environmental Trust, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. It was the culmination of a 12-year effort by the Nebraska Forest Service to implement the Forest Legacy Program in the state.

"It's an absolute gem, frankly. Literally, the river runs through it, and there's a whole array of environments: prairies, wet meadows, riparian forests, ponderosa pine forest and mixed pine bluff."

— **Scott Josiah, Former Nebraska State Forester and Director**



Chat Canyon was threatened by conversion to non-forest uses when it was put up for sale by the property owner. Due to the location along the Niobrara River and proximity to Nebraska's only designated "Wild and Scenic River," there was a high probability that the property would be subdivided into river lots, leading to forest fragmentation.

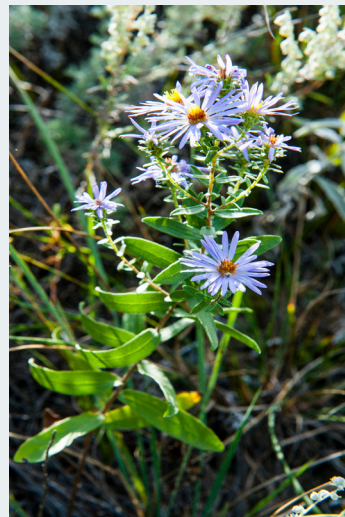
Sandhills Prairie and Chat Canyon evolved under a

disturbance ecosystem in which the primary driving force was periodic fire and intermittent grazing by native ungulates. The conservation of Chat Canyon ties into the area's management plan, which focuses on mimicking these disturbances to increase the productivity and enhancing wildlife habitat, wildlife populations and wildlife-related recreational opportunities while keeping this working forest working. The overall management objectives include outdoor recreational and educational opportunities while conserving, enhancing, and sustaining the diverse wildlife, fish, and plant resources. The Samuel R. McKelvie National Forest protects approximately 116,079 acres in the area adjacent to the 456-acre Forest Legacy Chat Canyon property.

Environmental benefits of this project include the protection of both animals and plants. Chat Canyon is essentially a remnant ecosystem from the Ice Age. As a result, it is home to an incredible diversity of plant and avian species that are not found widely in the rest of north-central Nebraska. The property hosts high numbers of nesting Yellow Breasted Chats, an at-risk songbird that is increasingly uncommon and has virtually disappeared from eastern Nebraska. Other species of concern protected by the acquisition include Ovenbird, Brown Bog Sedge, northern redbelly dace, and Plains topminnow. The area is also home to one of the few intact ponderosa pine forests in the state.

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Economic benefits focus on recreation. The project lands provides public access to the Niobrara River,



which attracts visitors for canoeing, kayaking, rafting, fishing, photography, and primitive camping. The Niobrara River is a popular destination for floaters who start by Chat Canyon and continue downriver to the designated Wild and Scenic Area.

Current wildlife management is geared towards game species with an emphasis on providing recreational opportunities involving youth and special-needs hunts. These species include greater prairie chicken, sharp-tailed grouse, and wild turkey. Big game includes

white-tailed deer, mule deer, and elk. The Nebraska Forest Service is working to develop and support markets for small diameter forest products that may be produced by the property's mixed coniferous and mixed hardwood forests.

Chat Canyon is now a permanent addition to protected public lands in Nebraska. It clearly demonstrates how the Forest Legacy Program can be used successfully to combine forestry and wildlife management objectives in the biological crossroads of the Midwest.

The project lands support public access to the Niobrara River, which attracts visitors for canoeing, kayaking, rafting, fishing, photography, and primitive camping.



AT-A-GLANCE



Tract size **456 acres**.



2 1/4 miles of scenic frontage along the Niobrara River.



First Forest Legacy project in the State of Nebraska.



Habitat for three "tier 1" at-risk bird species: **Bell's vireo, piping plover, and interior least tern.**



Chat Canyon is now a **permanent addition** to protected public lands in Nebraska.



Area is home to one of the few **intact ponderosa pine forests** in the state.

Top L: Chat Canyon Sunrise. (Photo: Eric Fowler); Bottom L: (Photo: NEBRASKAland Magazine/Nebraska Game and Parks Commission); Top R: (Photo: NEBRASKAland Magazine/Nebraska Game and Parks Commission); Middle R: Chat Canyon Niobrara. (Photo: NFS staff)

For more information, visit <https://nfs.unl.edu/forest-legacy>.