



Cherry County Wetlands landscape occurs

in Cherry County in the northern Sandhills. The area consists of high, mostly long linear dunes, with interdunal valleys. Many valleys contain numerous lakes, marshes, wet meadows, and fens that form one of the Sandhills largest wetland complexes. The upland dune grasslands are intact with only limited cropland, primarily center pivot irrigated, in drier valleys.

The North Loup River and its tributaries headwater in this region. The Snake River flows through the northern portion of the landscape. This BUL is important for nesting and migratory water birds, and the wetlands support large populations of reptiles and amphibians. Wet meadows support a large population of the federally and state threatened western prairie fringed orchid. The area is also habitat for several other federal and state listed species including the American burying beetle and whooping crane. The area's numerous high-quality smaller streams support assemblages of rare fish including the pearl dace, the state and federally listed Topeka shiner, the state listed northern redbelly dace, blacknose shiner, and finescale dace. The Valentine National Wildlife Refuge is one of the largest protected areas.

Stresses Affecting Species and Habitats

- ❖ Specific livestock grazing and haying practices that may reduce native plant diversity and promote uniform habitat structure (e.g., season-long grazing, annual mid-summer haying)
- ❖ Invasive species, primarily reed canary grass, smooth brome, European phragmites, Garrison creeping foxtail, narrow-leaf cattail, purple loosestrife, and carp
- ❖ Loss of active blowouts on dunes as habitat for the blowout Penstemon. Lack of fire and some present-day range management practices have greatly reduced blowouts.
- ❖ Wetland drainage, which can also lead to lowered groundwater levels and stream channel down-cutting
- ❖ Stream channelization and in-stream structures barring fish movement
- ❖ Stocking of exotic and game fish in streams with rare fish species
- ❖ Loss of native riparian vegetation from excessive grazing leads to increased run-off, sedimentation, and a lack of stream shading that results in altered water temperatures harmful to fish
- ❖ Poorly-sited utility-scale wind turbines and cellular/television towers

Conservation Strategies

- ❖ Improve implementation of biodiversity management, including increased use of prescribed fire and planned livestock grazing, on wildlife management areas and federal lands. This is especially critical in meadows and wetlands where excessive thatch accumulation causes exotic cool-season grass dominance and loss of diversity.
- ❖ Work with private landowners to develop and implement creative methods of forage utilization on wet meadows that avoid ditching to facilitate haying. Also, work with private landowners to implement strategic grazing on uplands.
- ❖ Restore the natural hydrology of wet meadows and other wetlands through ditch plugging and water control structures (ensure that in-stream structures allow for fish passage)
- ❖ Maintain the natural hydrology of Sandhills streams
- ❖ Reduce the number of culverts on small streams containing rare fish populations by installing bridges
- ❖ Implement integrated noxious weed control strategies that do not negatively impact western prairie fringed orchid populations nor wetland plant diversity
- ❖ Work with extension and agronomy groups to prevent the promotion and planting of exotic forage grasses, such as Garrison creeping foxtail and reed canary grass, and forbs in Sandhills wet meadows
- ❖ Where feasible, create and maintain blowout complexes on public lands as habitat for the blowout Penstemon through use of prescribed fire and intense livestock grazing
- ❖ Work with the USDA to ensure that wetlands enrolled in their programs allow occasional moderate grazing, burning, or haying to reduce vegetative litter accumulation and to promote biodiversity. Presently, some program wetlands are fenced and not actively managed.
- ❖ Discontinue game fish stocking in streams with rare fish species
- ❖ Work with wind energy companies to select turbine sites that minimize fragmentation and impacts to native species. Avoid placing wind turbines in native prairies or sites used or inhabited recently by threatened and endangered species (e.g., American burying beetle, whooping crane). Wind farms should not be located within the recommended radius of prairie grouse leks and nesting grounds. Turbines can be halted temporarily during peak migration periods for bats and birds. Pre- and post-construction monitoring should be implemented. See Nebraska Game and Parks Commission guidelines for wind energy development.

Tier I At-risk Species

Plants:

Blowout Penstemon
Western Prairie Fringed Orchid
Wolf Spikerush⁴

Animals:

Bell's Vireo
Burrowing Owl
Greater Prairie Chicken
Loggerhead Shrike
Long-billed Curlew
Short-eared Owl
Trumpeter Swan
Whooping Crane
Blanding's Turtle
American Burying Beetle
Finescale Dace
Regal Fritillary
Married Underwing
Whitney Underwing
Mottled Duskywing⁴
Blacknose Shiner⁴
Northern Redbelly Dace
Plains Topminnow
Topeka Shiner²
Ghost Tiger Beetle

Aquatic Communities:

Alkaline Lake*
Freshwater Lake*
Headwater, Cold Water Stream*
Headwater, Warm Water Stream
Mid-order, Warm Water Stream
Mid-order, Cold Water Stream

Terrestrial Communities:

Chokecherry-Plum Shrub Thicket
Freshwater Seep
Sandhills Fen*
Sandhills Wet Meadow*
Spikerush Vernal Pool*
Cattail Shallow Marsh*

Sandhills Hardstem Bulrush Marsh*
Reed Marsh*
Western Alkaline Marsh
Northern Pondweed Aquatic Wetland*
Water-lily Aquatic Wetland*
Saline/Alkaline Aquatic Wetland
Eastern Sand Prairie
Sandhills Mesic Tall-grass Prairie*
Sandhills Dune Prairie
Sandhills Dry Valley Prairie
Perennial Sandbar
Sandbar/Mudflat

* Priority for conservation in this BUL

¹ This is the only BUL where the species is known to occur

² Known to occur in only one other BUL

³ Known to occur in only two other BULs

⁴ Known to occur in only three other BULs