

Lower Platte River

landscape includes the Platte River channel and its floodplain from the river's confluence with the Loup River in Platte County eastward to its mouth in Sarpy County. The lower Platte River is a large, shallow, braided river. Sandbars and wooded islands are

common within the channel. Much of the stream-bank is wooded, with the dominant species being cottonwood and eastern red cedar. Sand-pits are common along the river, and in many areas the riverbank is lined with cabins. Most of the river floodplain is now cropland, though there are scattered wet meadows and marshes.



The lower Platte River receives water from the Loup and Elkhorn rivers and has a more stable flow than the central Platte River. The lower Platte River is unique in that its sandbars support numerous colonies of the federally and state listed piping plover and interior least terns. The construction of dikes and levees has constricted the natural channel and eliminated or isolated most of the floodplain sloughs, backwaters and wetlands. The narrowing of the channel has resulted in higher flow stages after heavy rain events that wash away tern and plover nests. The lower Platte also supports many rare large river fish including the lake sturgeon, blue sucker, sturgeon chub, and pallid sturgeon. Protected areas along this reach of the Platte River include Two Rivers SRA, Louisville SRA, Platte River State Park, and Mahoney State Park.

Natural Legacy Demonstration Site

Schramm Park State Recreation Area - Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Schramm Park State Recreational Area is a relatively small but surprisingly biologically-rich area on the lower Platte River. Uplands are covered with oak forest with small patches of prairie. The floodplain has a large area of mature riparian forest. Natural communities at the area include dry-mesic bur oak forest and woodland and upland tall-grass prairie. One of the main needs at this park is cedar tree removal and invasive species management. Limited resources have restricted habitat management.

Stresses Affecting Species and Habitats

- ❖ European phragmites and other exotic plant invasion of stream-banks, sandbars, meadows, marshes and woodlands
- ❖ Invasive tree encroachment of woodlands and meadows (e.g., eastern red cedar)
- ❖ Alteration of natural flows that otherwise would maintain sandbars and fish habitat
- ❖ Dike and levee construction
- ❖ Armoring of stream-banks
- ❖ Water withdrawal
- ❖ Continued cabin and house development adjacent to the river
- ❖ Excessive recreational use of the river (e.g., air boats, 4-wheelers), which disturbs tern and plover nesting
- ❖ Sandpit development, which eliminates native meadows, woodlands, and river channel.
- ❖ Conversion of wet meadows to cropland, including wetland drainage and dewatering resulting from lower groundwater levels
- ❖ Nutrient loading from septic tanks

Conservation Strategies

- ❖ Seek to maintain natural hydrology necessary to sustain ecosystem function and biodiversity
- ❖ Coordinate with landowners interested in placing conservation easements on key undeveloped reaches of the river, wet meadows, and woodlands to protect them from development
- ❖ Undertake invasive tree clearing programs, focused on eastern red cedar, Russian olive, exotic buckthorns and honeysuckles, on selected stretches of the river to protect woodlands.
- ❖ Work with sand and gravel companies to site gravel pits away from ecologically-sensitive areas of the floodplain and to restore pits to wetland habitat after sand and gravel extraction has been completed
- ❖ Work to restore and maintain natural wetland hydrology
- ❖ Maintain and widen river corridor
- ❖ Install waste management facilities that reduce the number of individual septic tanks

Tier I At-risk Species

Plants:

Western Prairie Fringed Orchid

Animals:

River Otter

Bell's Vireo
Interior Least Tern
Piping Plover
Wood Thrush
Blandings Turtle
Massasauga³
Blue Sucker²
Lake Sturgeon³
Pallid Sturgeon³
Plains Topminnow
Sturgeon Chub²
Pimpleback
Regal Fritillary
Married Underwing
Whitney Underwing

Aquatic Communities:

Mid-order, Warm Water River

Terrestrial Communities:

Eastern Riparian Forest*
Cottonwood-Peachleaf Willow Riparian Woodland*
Red Oak-Basswood-Ironwood Forest
Oak-Hickory-Ironwood Forest
Mesic Bur Oak Forest and Woodland*
Dry-Mesic Bur Oak Forest and Woodland*
Dry Upland Bur Oak Woodland*
Sandbar Willow Shrubland
Riparian Dogwood-False Indigobush Shrubland
Freshwater Seep
Eastern Cordgrass Wet Prairie*
Eastern Sedge Wet Meadow*
Eastern Bulrush Deep Marsh
Reed Marsh
Eastern Pondweed Aquatic Wetland
Upland Tall-grass Prairie
Lowland Tall-grass Prairie*
Perennial Sandbar*
Sandbar/Mudflat
Eastern Sandstone Bluff and Cliff

* 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