



STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (SCORP)

.....
A GUIDE TO AN ACTIVE NEBRASKA

2016-2020



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2016-2020



Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

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Lincoln, Nebraska 68503-0370

OutdoorNebraska.org



Pete Ricketts
Governor

STATE OF NEBRASKA

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December 3, 2015

My Fellow Nebraskans and Visitors:

Nebraska has a rich outdoor heritage and some of the most scenic landscapes in the country. From the buttes of Scottsbluff, across the unique Sandhills, through the Platte River Valley, up to Niobrara's canyons, and down the Missouri River Bluffs, Nebraska has a wealth of outdoor recreation opportunities. It is a goal of the State of Nebraska to provide its citizens and visitors with ample opportunities to enjoy everything being outside has to offer and to teach our children to be good stewards of the land so that future generations can have the same incredible experiences in Nebraska's most beautiful places.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Stateside Assistance Grant Program has provided over \$46 million in assistance to the State of Nebraska over the past 50 years. Ninety of ninety three Nebraska counties have benefited from these funds through the over 1,000 completed projects. From land acquisition for parks, to development of ball fields, picnic shelters, aquatic facilities, trails and playgrounds, the LWCF Stateside Assistance Program has helped provide Nebraskans a better quality of life since 1965.

This plan was developed by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's Planning and Programming Division and represents the current status of recreation trends, demands and supply in our state. Public participation, including a statewide survey of residents, committee meetings, state park surveys, and review of the plan by individuals and organizations has been influential in the development of this plan. I am pleased to approve the *2016 Nebraska Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* as the guide for outdoor recreation planning and management in Nebraska for the next five years.

As Governor of Nebraska, I recognize the positive impacts that parks, open space, and outdoor recreation opportunities have on creating a healthier state and a better place to live. I believe that the quality of life and economic well-being of all Nebraskans will be enriched by the recommendations in this plan.

Sincerely,

Pete Ricketts
Governor



2200 N. 33rd St. • P.O. Box 30370 • Lincoln, NE 68503-0370 • Phone 402-471-0641

October 14, 2015

Dear Outdoor Recreation Enthusiasts:

Nebraskans have a deep-seated passion for the outdoors, which is evident in our great parks and outdoor recreation resources. We value our natural environment and park areas because they help sustain an excellent quality of life. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is pleased to present the 2016-2020 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan: A Guide to an Active Nebraska (SCORP). This plan provides the supply and demand of recreation in the state, issues Nebraska faces providing outdoor recreation, and recommendations on how to improve our state's recreation infrastructure.

SCORP is a guidebook for outdoor recreation providers looking to expand or improve their recreation infrastructure. Great care was taken to receive public opinion to understand the needs and desires of the public when providing for future outdoor recreation. Analysis on the current state of outdoor recreation and how it can be improved was completed as a part of this plan.

Parks and outdoor recreation areas play a major role in promoting public health, livable communities, economic vitality, and conservation of our natural resources. Nebraska's outdoor recreation resources are invaluable assets to our public and those visiting the state, and we are pleased to provide recommendations on how to protect these resources for future generations. We hope that this planning document and its recommendations will better operate and manage our state's recreation resources in the long-term interests of the people and the environment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James N. Douglas".

James N. Douglas
Director
State Liaison Officer

TIME OUTDOORS IS TIME WELL SPENT

OutdoorNebraska.org



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ONE	Introduction to SCORP Process 6	SIX	Action Plan for Nebraska 78
	a. History of the Program		a. Boost Economic Vitality
	b. Program’s Assistance in Nebraska		b. Promote a Healthy Lifestyle Through Outdoor Recreation
	c. Planning Process		c. Properly Use and Conserve Natural Resources
TWO	State of Nebraska Demographics 14		d. Promote Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Planning
	a. General Descriptions		e. Provide Outdoor Recreation Education and Programming
	b. General Demographics		f. Understand the Opportunities and Threats in Developing Urban Areas and Areas of Rapid Population Growth
	c. Regions		g. Wetland Priorities
THREE	Benefits of Recreation 46		h. LWCF Priorities
	a. Quality of Life		
	b. Health		
	c. Economic		
	d. Educational		
	e. Environmental		
FOUR	Supply of Recreation in Nebraska 54		
	a. Providers of Lands		
	b. Comparison of Data from 2010 SCORP to Present		
	c. Local Facilities		
	d. Wetlands Complexes		
FIVE	Demand for Recreation in Nebraska 68		
	a. National Trends		
	b. Nebraska Trends		
			Acknowledgements 90

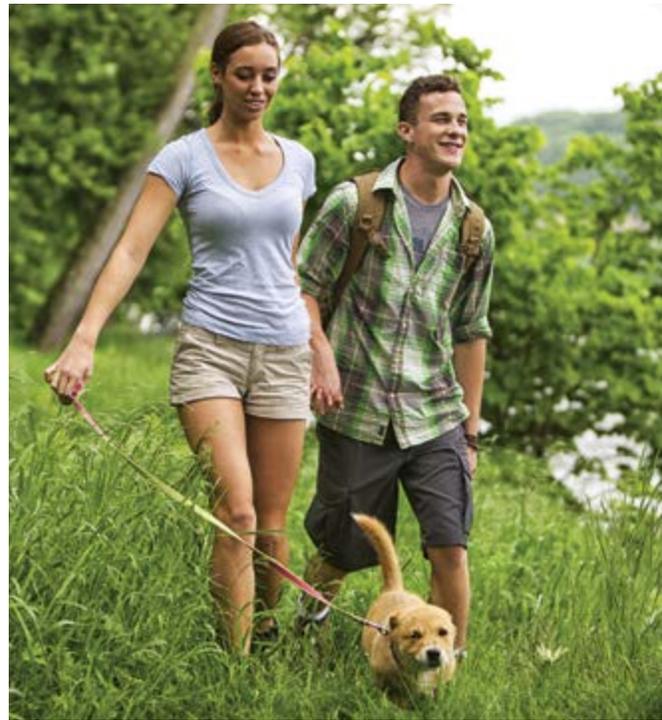


Indian Cave State Park has breathtaking autumn colors and scenic views of the Missouri River. (Nemaha County)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO SCORP

Nebraskans are used to working long hard hours; be it in the field, the office, the plant, or wherever their careers take them. It is a way of life, but so is enjoyment of the amazing outdoor recreation resources Nebraska has to offer. While almost no one has enough time to fully enjoy all that Nebraska's park and recreation areas have to offer, those who pursue outdoor recreation, find it to be Time Well Spent.



Outdoor recreation in Nebraska is time well spent.

This plan, SCORP (Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan), is required by the National Parks Service for the State to receive Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) State Assistance Program funding. This federal program provides grant funds to states, counties, and municipalities for outdoor recreation related acquisitions and developments. The SCORP sets priorities based off sound planning principles for the evaluation and funding of grant requests.

The State of Nebraska, Natural Resource Districts, counties and communities use this plan to develop, improve, renovate, and acquire park land all across the state. The information within the plan characterizes the supply and demand for outdoor recreation amenities, state and regional demographics, and provides an action plan that serves as a guidance and recommendation tool for park lands sustainability and future development.

HISTORY OF THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND PROGRAM

In 1961, the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission reported key elements for an effort to make outdoor recreation opportunities available to the general public. Based largely on these recommendations, President John Kennedy proposed legislation in February 1962, that would establish a



“Land and Water Conservation Fund” to assist states in planning, acquisition and development of recreation resources and to finance new federal recreation lands.

With bipartisan support in both houses of Congress, a bill was passed and signed into law on September 3, 1964, (Public Law 88-578, 16 U.S.C. 460/-4). The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 was created with the following purpose:

“The purposes of this part are to assist in preserving, developing, and assuring accessibility to all citizens of the United States of America of present and future generations and visitors who are lawfully present within the boundaries of the United States of America such quality and quantity of outdoor recreation resources as may be available and are necessary and desirable for individual active participation in such recreation and to strengthen the health and vitality of the citizens of the United States by: (1) providing funds for and authorizing Federal assistance to the States in planning, acquisition, and development of needed land and water areas and facilities and; (2) providing funds for the Federal acquisition and development of certain lands and other areas.”

Funding for the LWCF program is based on the principle that when the federal government sells

the finite, irreplaceable Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) resources, a portion of the proceeds from the sale should be reinvested into open space and recreational opportunities all people need. While the majority of funding is derived from OCS mineral leasing receipts, it is supplemented with the sale of surplus federal property, motorboat fuel taxes, and fees for recreational use of federal lands.

Since the first appropriation in 1965, more than \$3.9 billion has been allocated to states under the LWCF State Assistance Program. The investment in local outdoor recreation provides matching grants to state and local governments for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. These federal funds have leveraged more than \$3.9 billion from grant sponsors, bringing the total investment to more than \$7.8 billion.

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND STATE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM IN NEBRASKA

The LWCF State Assistance Program has provided funding across Nebraska for 50 years. Federal contributions of more than \$46 million have assisted community outdoor recreation projects that were matched by state and local sponsors. Sponsors are required to provide at least a 50 percent match of the total project cost, which has resulted in over



*Boy playing on merry-go-round
in Wilson Park, Chadron.
(Dawes County)*



Pitching a strike on a baseball diamond at Tranquility Park in Omaha. (Douglas County)

\$92 million being invested in outdoor recreation projects in Nebraska.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission has been designated by the Nebraska Legislature to carry out the purpose and objectives of the LWCF Act on behalf of the State of Nebraska. Per Nebraska Statute §37-906, "Forty percent of the federal funds annually allocated to the State of Nebraska are hereby reallocated to state projects and sixty percent to the projects of political subdivisions." Annual funding requests are ranked using the Open Project Selection Process (OPSP) by an internal Game and Parks Commission committee. Staff recommendations are forwarded to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commissioners for approval to allocate the federal funds.

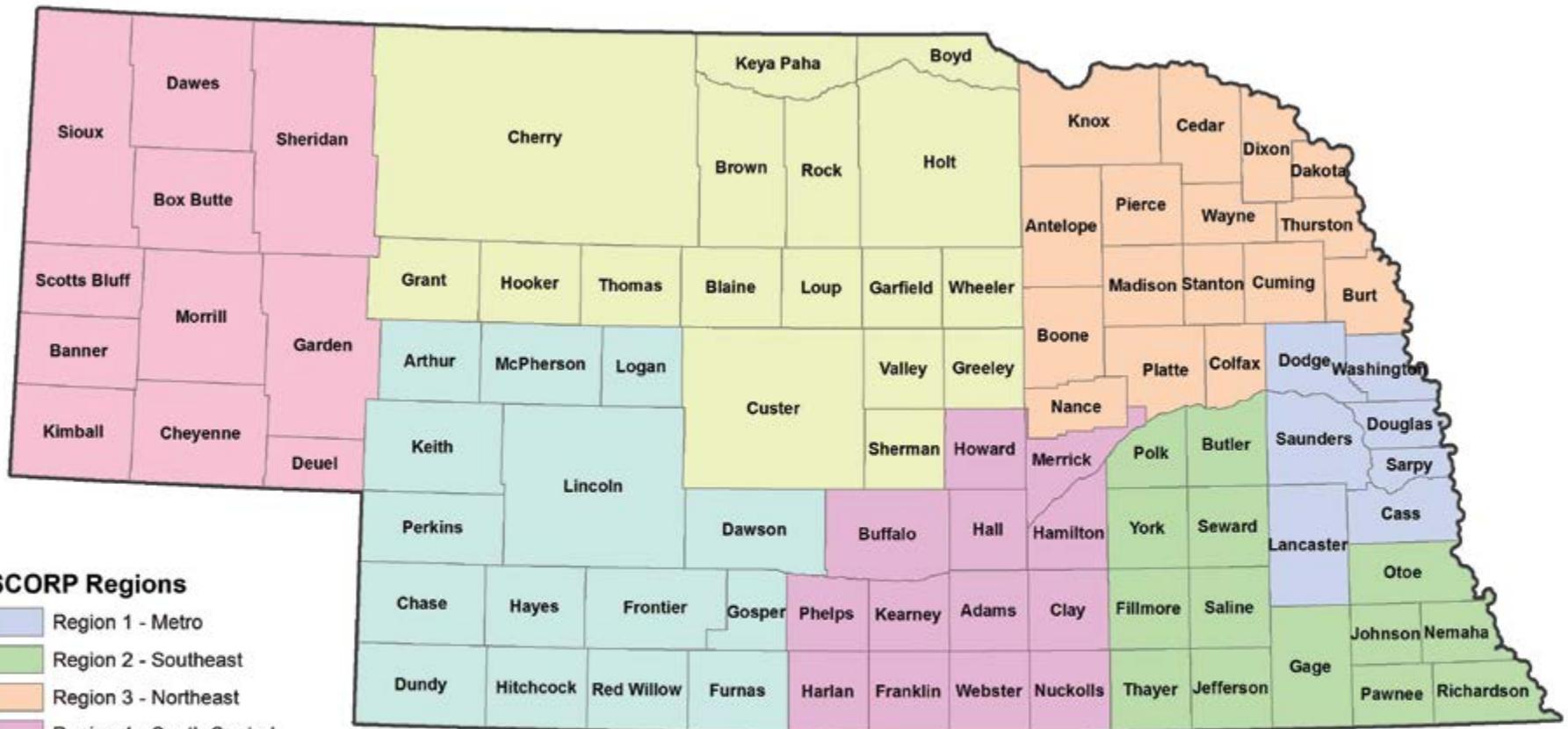
Goals of the state assistance program are to:

- Meet state and locally identified public outdoor recreation resource needs to strengthen the health and vitality of the American people.
- Increase the number of protected state and local outdoor recreation resources and ensure their availability for public use in perpetuity.
- Encourage sound planning and long-term partnerships to expand the quantity and ensure the quality of needed state and local outdoor recreation resources.

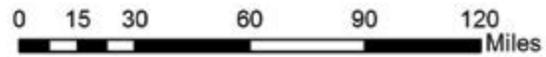
Ensuring the grant assisted sites are added permanently to the national recreation estate is a legacy of the state assistance program. Section 6(f) (3) of the LWCF Act requires all grant assisted areas be maintained perpetually in public outdoor recreation use, or be replaced by lands of equal market value and recreational usefulness. This section of the LWCF Act ensures the permanency of outdoor recreation sites across the country for future generations.

In order to properly evaluate the entire state of Nebraska and set goals and objectives for outdoor recreation across the state, this plan has divided the state into seven regions. These regions are representative of the different populations, geography, and unique landscapes that affect the needs for outdoor recreation development. Throughout this plan much of the data regarding supply and demand will be broken down by region to look for differing trends and to better identify what is needed within the seven regions of the state.

SCORP REGIONS OF NEBRASKA



- SCORP Regions**
- Region 1 - Metro
 - Region 2 - Southeast
 - Region 3 - Northeast
 - Region 4 - South Central
 - Region 5 - Southwest
 - Region 6 - Western
 - Region 7 - North Central



Planning and Programming Division
May 20, 2015

Table 1 shows the breakdown of funding per region for LWCF since its inception in 1965. It is important to note the amount of LWCF monies per person this breaks down to for each region. The Metro Region has received more than twice the funds of any other

region, yet the amount per person is the least of all the regions due to the higher population. Looking at the two different numbers together shows that the funding has been relatively well split up among the seven regions.

TABLE 1: LWCF GRANT FUNDING BREAKDOWN OF NEBRASKA REGIONS

REGION	2014 POPULATION ESTIMATE	LWCF MONIES RECEIVED 1965-2014	LWCF MONIES RECEIVED PER PERSON
1-Metro	1,120,677	\$16,328,368	\$14.57
2-Southeast	137,715	\$5,711,341	\$41.47
3-Northeast	182,660	\$7,548,794	\$41.33
4-South Central	201,177	\$5,298,691	\$26.34
5-Southwest	102,752	\$3,813,402	\$37.11
6-Western	86,747	\$5,034,582	\$58.04
7-North Central	49,775	\$2,370,384	\$47.62
Statewide Total	1,881,503	\$46,105,562	\$24.50

Source: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, US Census Bureau



A woman walking her dog at Harmon Park in Kearney. (Buffalo County)



PLANNING PROCESS

Beginning in July of 2014, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission began updating the SCORP. The planning process involved contributions from numerous entities, including several different divisions within NGPC, the University of Nebraska, several community parks departments, national recreation providers, and Nebraska's Natural Resource Districts.

One of the most important pieces of research conducted for this plan was a survey of Nebraskans. The survey was conducted in early 2015, gathering responses from all seven regions to provide a statistically valid report on outdoor recreation opinions and desires. This survey provided the planning committee a wealth of knowledge regarding preferences and demand for various outdoor recreation related topics and amenities.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission also conducted a mail survey of recreational supply to all the communities within the state. The objective of this survey was to quantify the amount of outdoor recreation in terms of acres and facilities provided by local communities. This information will assist in finding deficiencies of land and facilities for outdoor recreation throughout the state, and can be found in Chapter 5 of this plan.

After all the information was collected and analyzed it was distributed to the SCORP Steering Committee for their review before formulating an action plan. On July 15, 2015, the Steering Committee met to formulate the goals and priorities for the acquisition and development of outdoor recreation in Nebraska. This meeting took into account all the information that had been previously gathered and the expertise of all in attendance. The outcome of this meeting was the formulation of the Action Plan.



*Soccer practice at Elmwood Park in Omaha.
(Douglas County)*

After the initial meeting to formulate the Action Plan, the committee reviewed several drafts of the plan and facilitated several meetings to provide input and discuss the overall plan. Once a final draft was completed, the plan was submitted to the Governor's Office for comment and approval and then placed on

the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's website for public review and comment. Following review, comments and Governor's approval, the plan was submitted to the National Parks Service as the official Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan for the State of Nebraska.



Tennis courts at Harmon Park, Kearney. (Buffalo County)



STATE OF NEBRASKA DEMOGRAPHICS

CHAPTER TWO

Within any statewide planning document one of the first things that needs to be analyzed is the demographics of the state's population. This chapter includes the demographic information for the state as a whole and each of the seven regions. The analysis tells us the population total, gender, age, ethnicity, and education distribution, and provides a picture of who the parks are serving so that the state and communities can alter the amenities provided and tailor them to the population.

The graphs in Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5 show the population distribution of the seven regions, as defined within this plan. These regions were determined by geographic boundaries and population distribution, illustrated in Figure 1. The state has been divided into seven regions for several reasons. Because the population is not evenly distributed across the state, the regions should be looked at individually for planning purposes. Second, the state has several unique areas, such as the Sandhills and the Pine Ridge, which may be divided out regionally. Third, because the state is so large, there are certain elements that affect certain areas, for example the western half of the state is

a far more arid climate than the eastern half. Finally, these regions closely match many of the other state planning documents, so it is easier to coordinate goals and strategies among agencies.

Of the nearly 1.8 million people who live in Nebraska, 59.6 percent of them live in the Metro Region. This is intentional because of the different outdoor recreation demands in high population density areas.

FIGURE 2

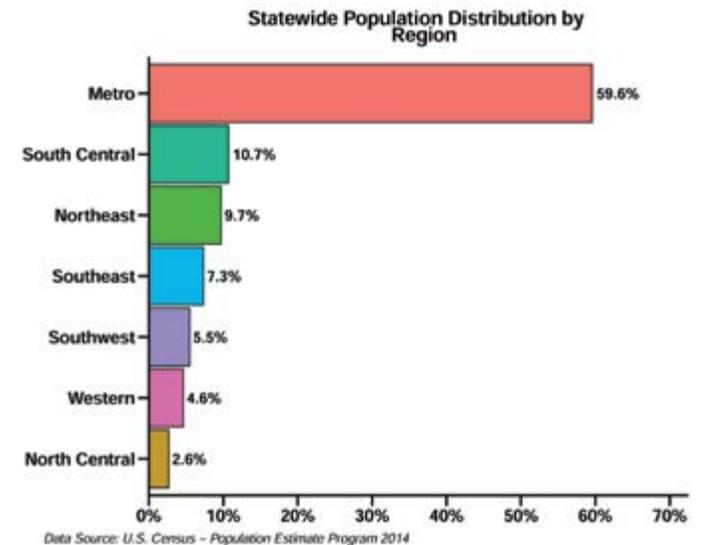
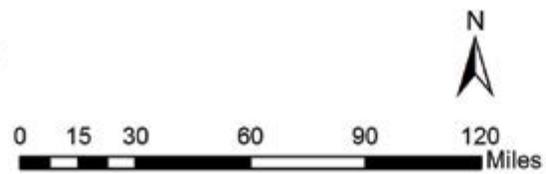
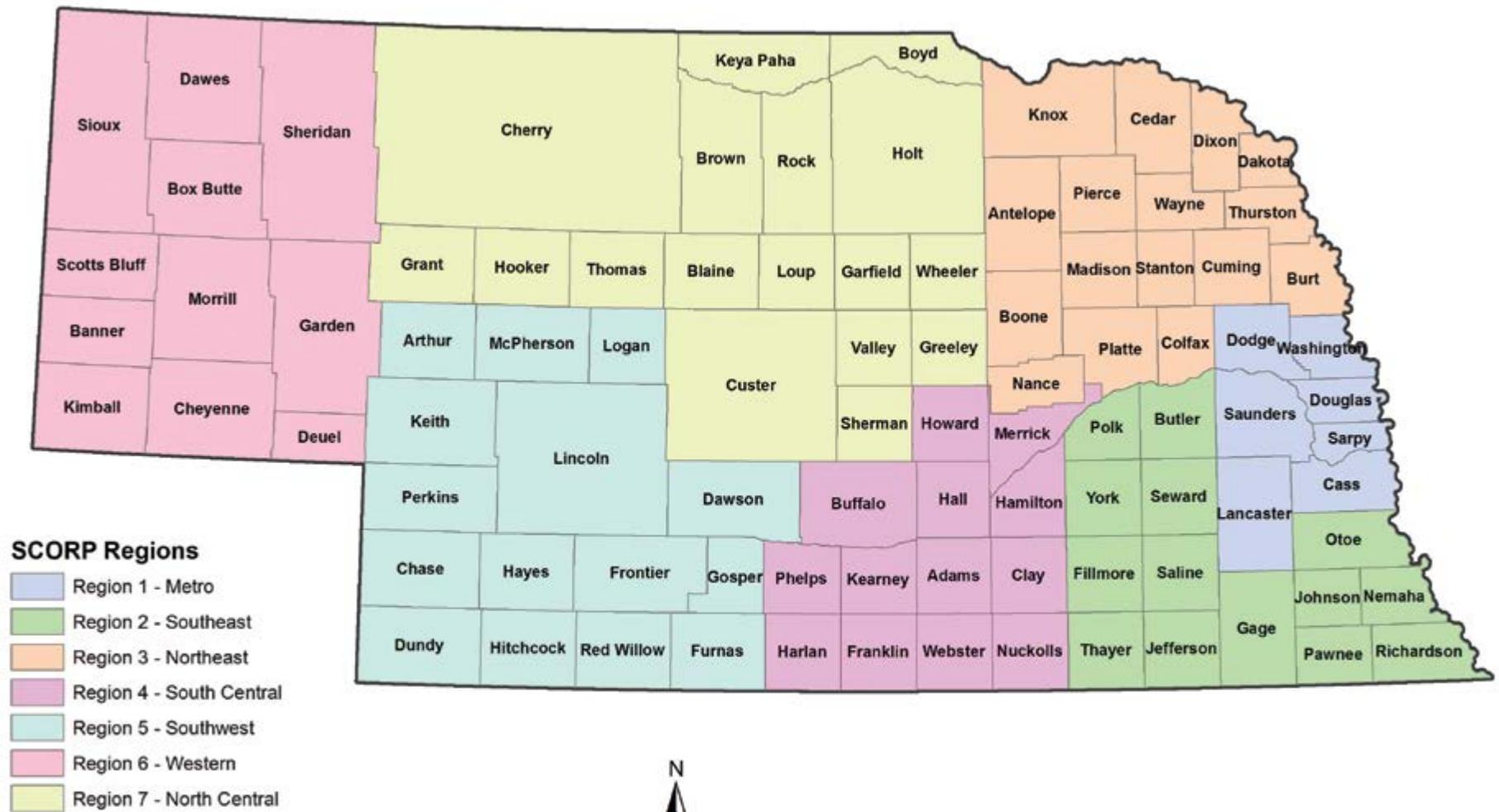


FIGURE 1

REGIONS OF NEBRASKA



Planning and Programming Division
May 20, 2015



Nebraska has various ethnic communities with differing recreational needs.

Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the age and ethnic distribution for the state. The age graph depicts an aging population, 51 percent is aged 25-54 while ages 0-24 only makes up 35 percent of the population. This is likely the result of people choosing to have smaller families.

Ethnic distribution shows us that while Nebraska is primarily Caucasian, there is a growing Hispanic/Latino community. The various ethnic communities

have differing needs for outdoor recreation and these need to be accounted for, including providing bilingual communications with regard to park and recreation amenities and programs.

Figure 6 depicts the education distribution, which shows that more than 90 percent of the state has at least a high school degree, and nearly 20 percent have a bachelor's degree.

FIGURE 3

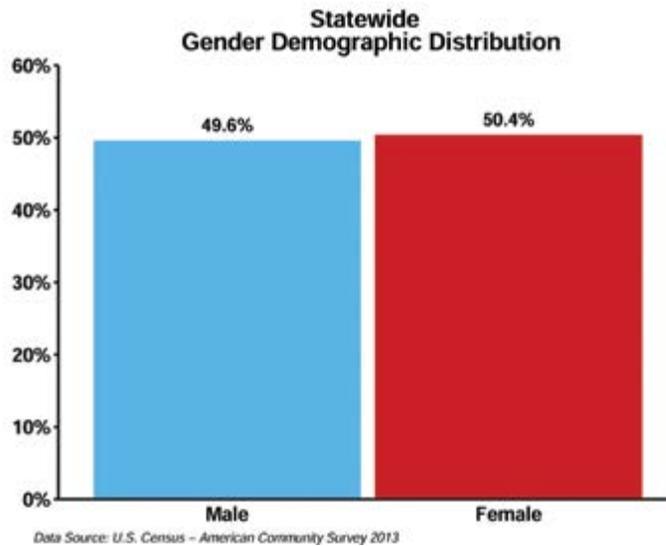


FIGURE 4

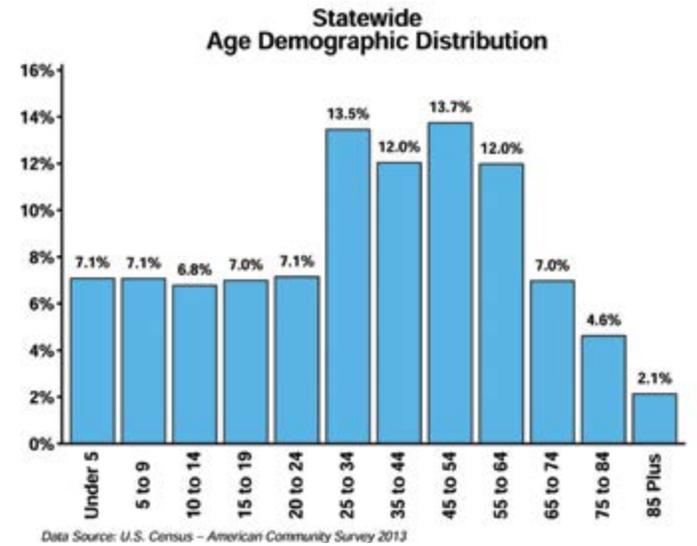
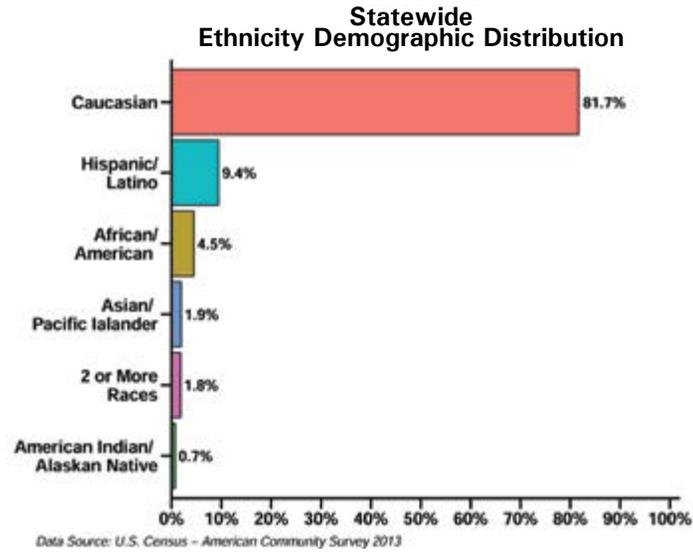
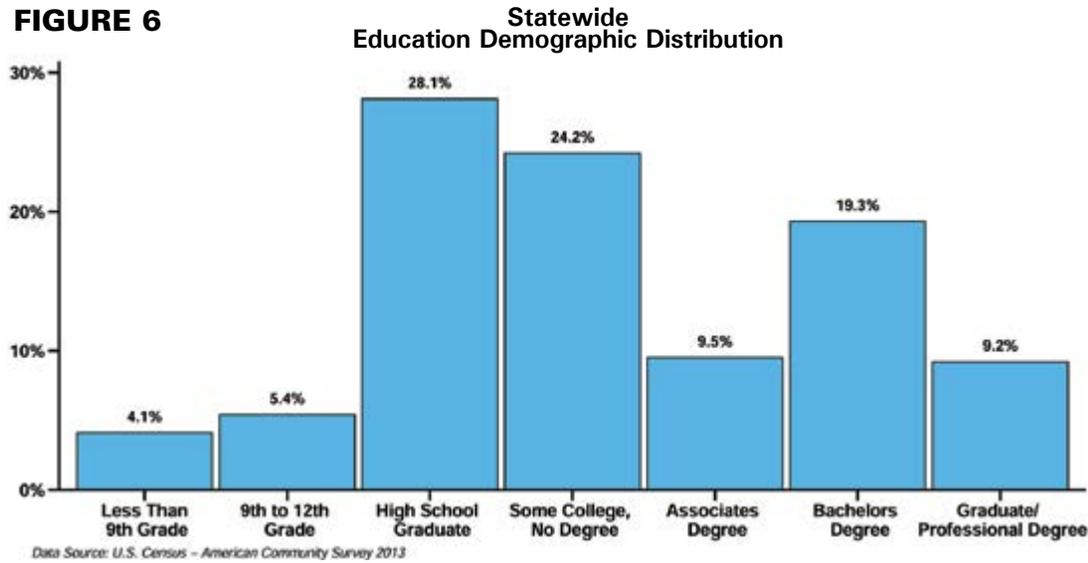


FIGURE 5



YMCA summer camp field trip at Wildcat Hills Nature Center south of Gering. (Scotts Bluff County)

FIGURE 6



REGION 1: METRO



A happy swimmer at the Eugene T. Mahoney Park Aquatic Center, Ashland. (Cass County)

This region consists of seven counties and is the most urban of all the regions. It has of 59.6 percent of the state’s population, a 1.7 percent increase from the 2011 SCORP. Because of the large population in this region, there is a need for a large amount of outdoor recreational facilities. The Missouri River borders the east side of the region and this supplies a prime recreational asset. This region has three of the four most popular attractions in the state, including the largest developed recreational facility in the state, Eugene T. Mahoney State Park, and the world-renowned Henry Doorly Zoo.

The Metro Region and has unique natural areas embedded within and proximate to the urban environment. The saline wetlands in northern Lancaster County has Nebraska’s only saline wetland complex, and these wetlands are the only known home for the endangered Salt Creek tiger beetle. Saline wetlands may be visited at Arbor Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Little Salt Creek WMA and the City of Lincoln’s Shoemaker Marsh. The region is rich in historical sites because of its proximity to the Missouri River and Platte River. The region also includes hardwood forests, three major rivers, numerous trails and outdoor recreational facilities, including DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge, the Salt Valley lakes, two state parks, a state historical park and many state recreation areas.

FIGURE 8 Metro Region Age Demographic Distribution

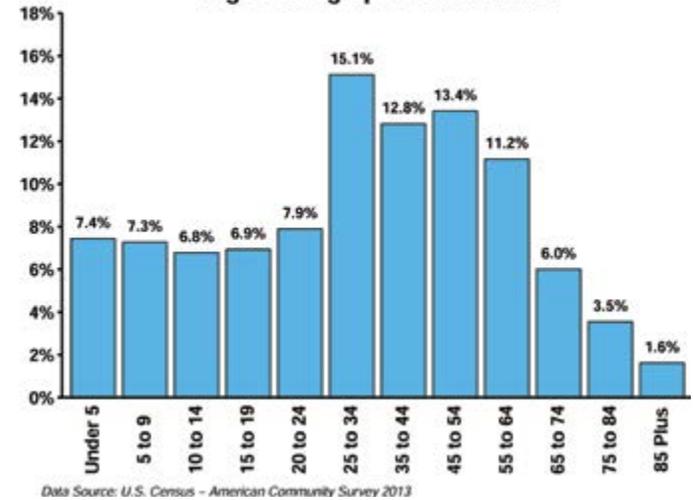


FIGURE 9 Metro Region Gender Demographic Distribution

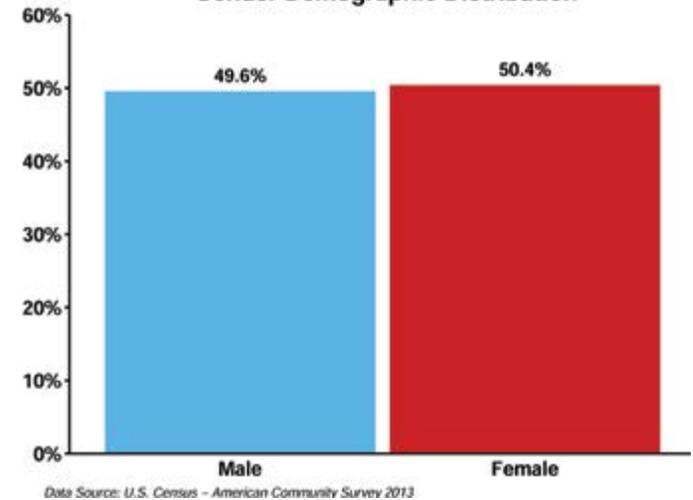
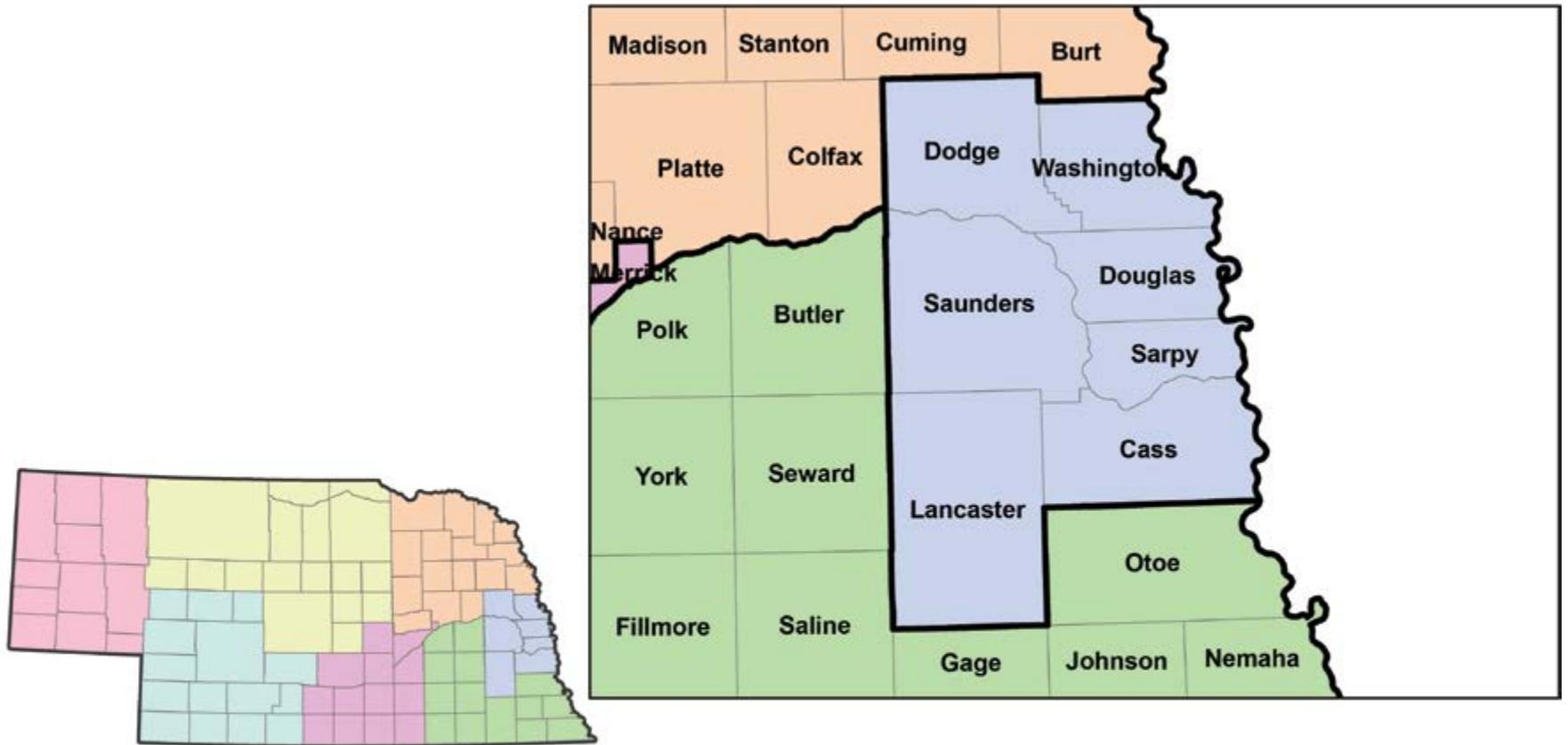
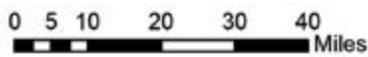


FIGURE 1

SCORP Region 1 - Metro



- SCORP Regions**
- Region 1 - Metro
 - Region 2 - Southeast
 - Region 3 - Northeast
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Shooting at aerial targets on the indoor archery range at the Nebraska Outdoor Education Center in Lincoln. (Lancaster County)



Fishing from a handicapped-accessible pier at Fremont Lake State Recreation Area of Fremont. (Dodge County)

The average age of Nebraskans in the Metro Region is 35.3 years, which will require certain types of recreational facilities. Nearly 30 percent of the region's population is younger than 19 years. This age group requires attention to certain types of recreation amenities in comparison to approximately 50 percent of the population between ages 25 and 64. Figures 10 and 11 depict the ethnic diversity and educational distribution of the Metro Region. The region is the most ethnically diverse in the state, and has a higher proportion of college degrees than the state as a whole, which means the recreational amenities must also be diverse to meet the needs of the public.

FIGURE 10 Metro Region Ethnicity Demographic Distribution

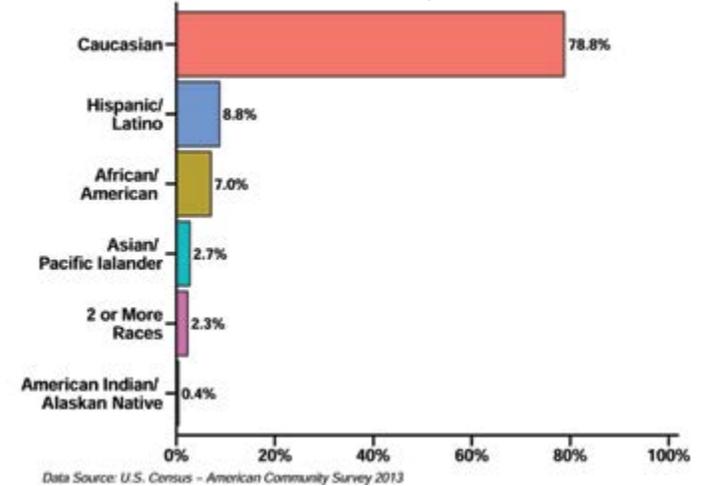
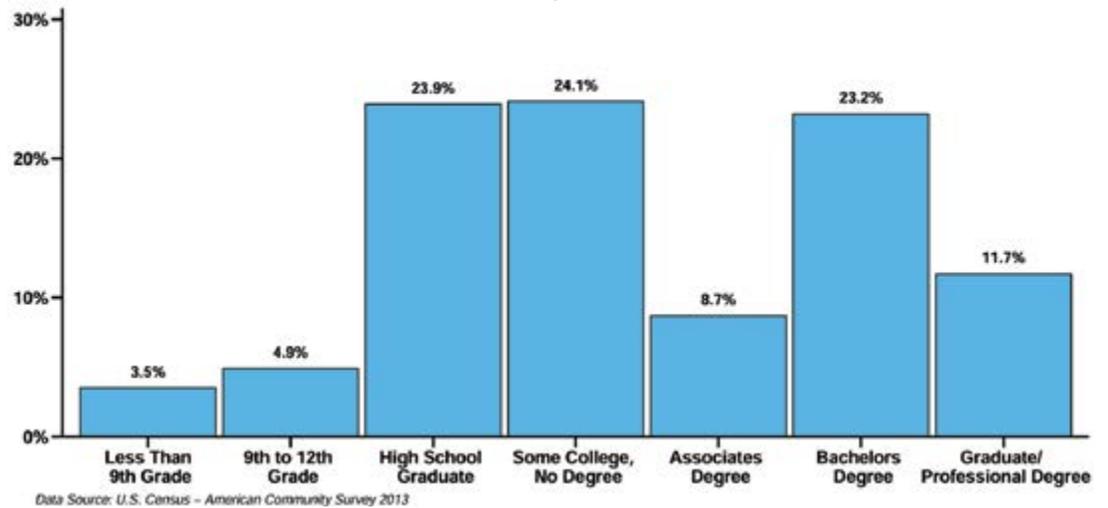


FIGURE 11 Metro Region Education Demographic Distribution





Frisbee (disc) golf tournament at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park near Ashland. (Cass County)



REGION 2: SOUTHEAST

The Southeast Region consists of 14 counties and contains 7.3 percent of the state’s population. This is a decrease of 0.4 percent from the 2011 SCORP. The region is bordered by the Platte River on the north, Missouri River on the east and Kansas on the south. This region is rich in history and includes some of the state’s oldest towns. The region has two state historical parks, a state park, seven state recreation areas, the Homestead National Monument, and the Steamboat Trace Regional Trail.

This region contains rolling hills, river bluffs, a large amount of farmland, all of which provide great hunting and hiking potential. The eastern third of Nebraska is tallgrass prairie. Early explorers described the tallgrass region as a sea of grass with open horizons and flowers rooted in rich organic soils. Although only 2 percent of the tallgrass prairie remains, the southeast is filled with rolling prairie hills intersected with wooded creeks. Public lands such as Burchard Lake Wildlife Management Area provide the public opportunities to explore tallgrass prairie, and view prairie species such as the greater-prairie chicken. Indian Cave State Park borders the Missouri River and offers wooded bluffs, which provide refuge to many migrating birds.

Because the Southeast Region borders the Metro Region, there is significant potential for outmigration

FIGURE 13 Southeast Region Age Demographic Distribution

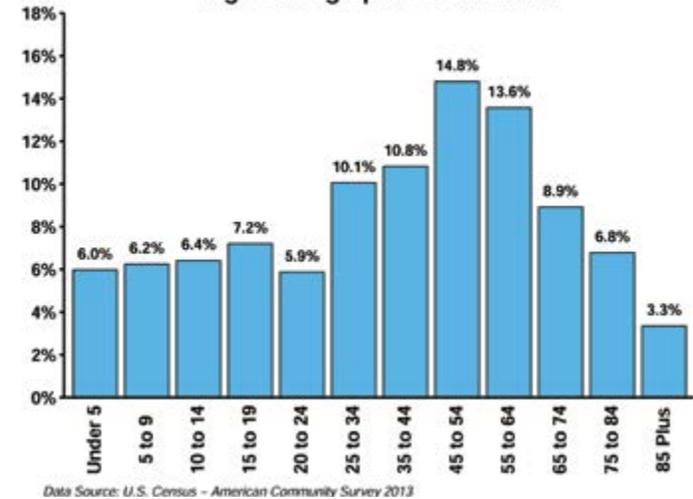


FIGURE 14 Southeast Region Gender Demographic Distribution

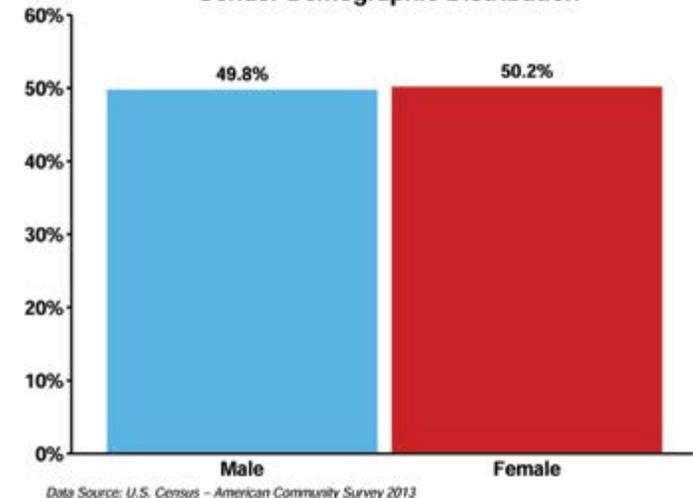
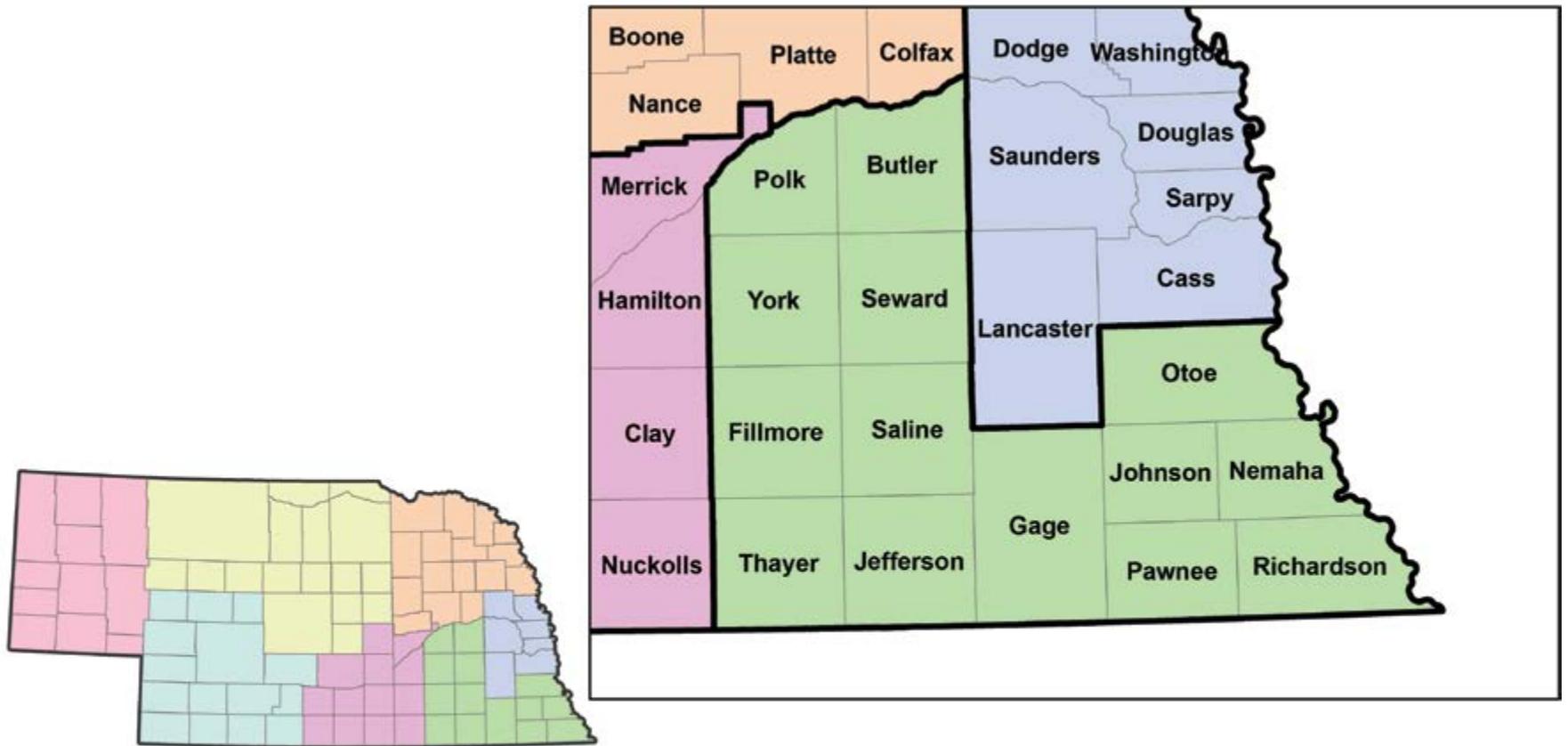


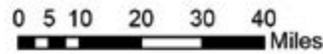
FIGURE 12

SCORP Region 2 - Southeast



SCORP Regions

- Region 1 - Metro
- Region 2 - Southeast
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- Region 5 - Southwest
- Region 6 - Western
- Region 7 - North Central





Young family searching for morel mushrooms in early spring at Indian Cave State Park. (Nemaha County)

of Region 1 population into Region 2 due to overcrowding, which will require additional recreational amenities in the future. Region 2 could also explore the option of creating additional outdoor recreational amenities to attract people from the Metro Region. Because there is less population in the area, there is more land potential for development of recreational resources.

The Southeast Region (Figure 13) has a higher percentage of people 45 and older than the state as a whole, this should be taken into account when developing outdoor recreation opportunities so as to provide the type of recreation desired by an older age demographic.

FIGURE 15 Southeast Region Ethnicity Demographic Distribution

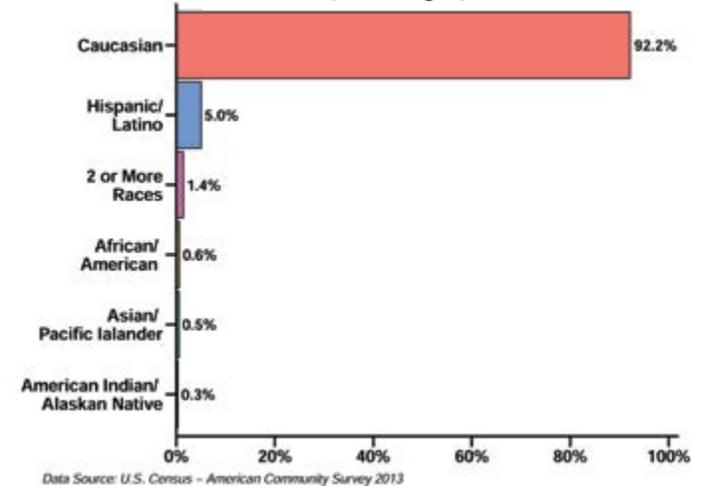
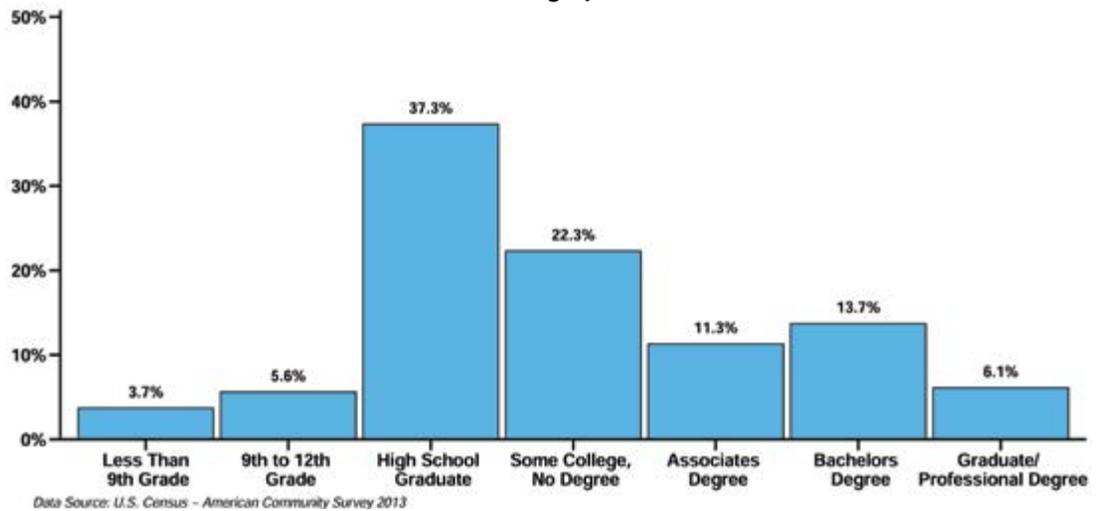


FIGURE 16 Southeast Region Education Demographic Distribution





Aerial view of the baseball, softball and soccer fields and campground at the Auburn City Recreation Complex. (Nemaha County)



REGION 3: NORTHEAST

Region 3, or the Northeast Region, includes 16 counties and has 9.7 percent of the population, which is a reduction of 0.5 percent of the population from 2011. This region has one of the larger populations of Hispanic and Latinos, at 13.4 percent of the population as seen in Figure 20, and the needs of this ethnic group need to be identified and addressed. The Missouri River borders the region on the north and east and the Platte River to the south. This region has some unique attributes, including topography and natural resources. As previously mentioned, the eastern third of Nebraska is mostly tallgrass prairie, however the Northeast region boasts the most wooded riparian areas throughout the state providing a diversity of land types within this region. The Elkhorn River meanders through hilly areas with steep slopes, woodlands and dense forested areas interspersed with farmland. The Platte River contains some of its widest points within this region, with deep channels interspersed with numerous sandbars. The Niobrara, Elkhorn, upper and lower Missouri and Cedar rivers give paddlers a variety of different experiences.

The region includes two Native American reservations, which could serve as great recreational and cultural stopping points. The region contains the only unchannelized portion of the Missouri River bordering Nebraska and abundant wildlife viewing and hunting opportunities exist throughout.

FIGURE 18 Northeast Region Age Demographic Distribution

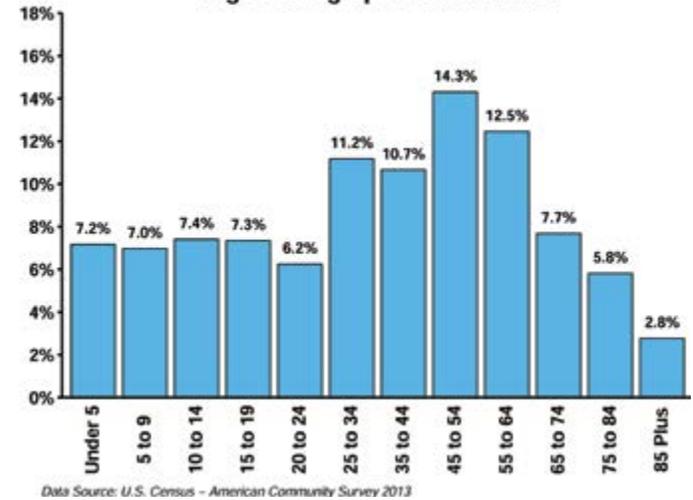


FIGURE 19 Northeast Region Gender Demographic Distribution

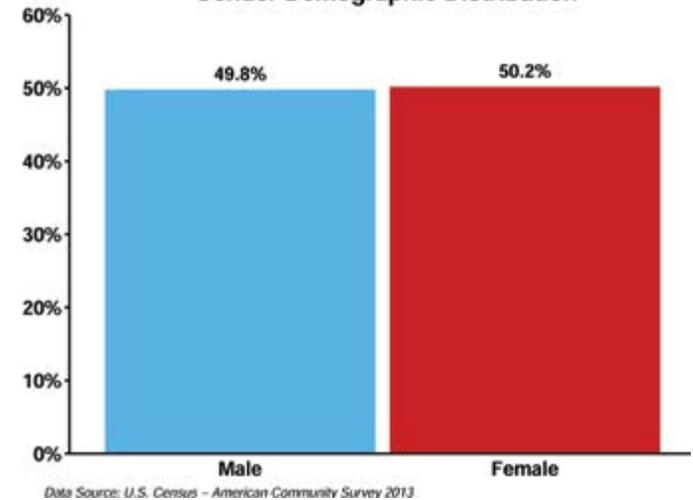
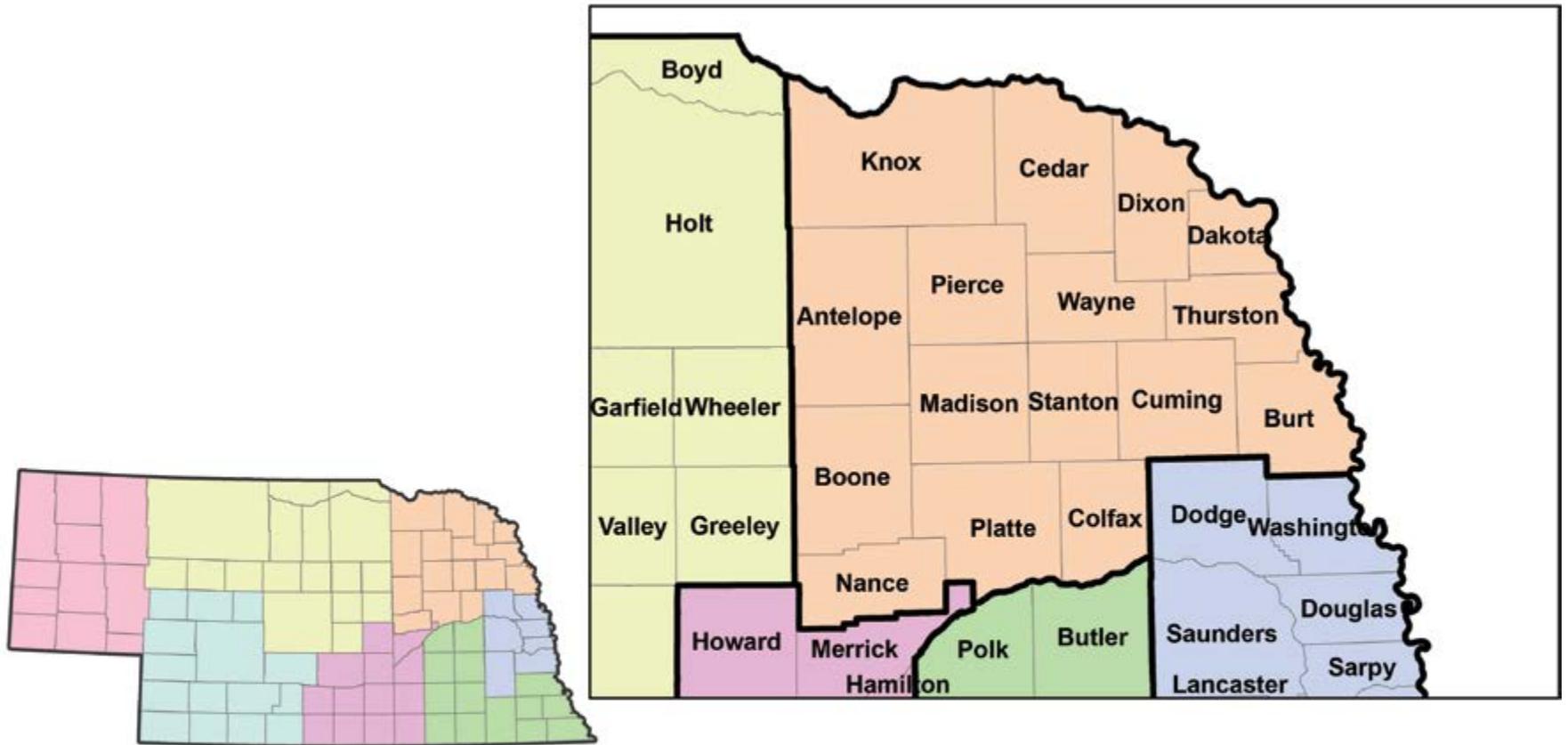
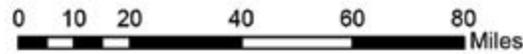


FIGURE 17

SCORP Region 3 - Northeast



- SCORP Regions**
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A bighead carp caught while bowfishing on the Missouri River at Ponca State Park. (Dixon County)

The region also includes the eastern terminus of the Cowboy Trail, which, when fully developed, will span 321 miles across Nebraska from Norfolk to Chadron. Another distinctive recreational attribute of the region is Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park, which houses numerous prehistoric skeletons of animals buried at a watering hole by volcanic ash 10 million years ago. The region has two state parks, two historical sites and two state recreational areas, along with many wildlife management areas.

Figure 19 shows that the Northeast Region is more in line with the state as a whole in terms of age distribution than the Southeast Region giving it a relatively balanced distribution. As with all of the regions other than the Metro there is a lower rate of college degrees, this is likely due to the large agriculture industry in the area that does not require a higher degree.

FIGURE 20 Northeast Region Ethnicity Demographic Distribution

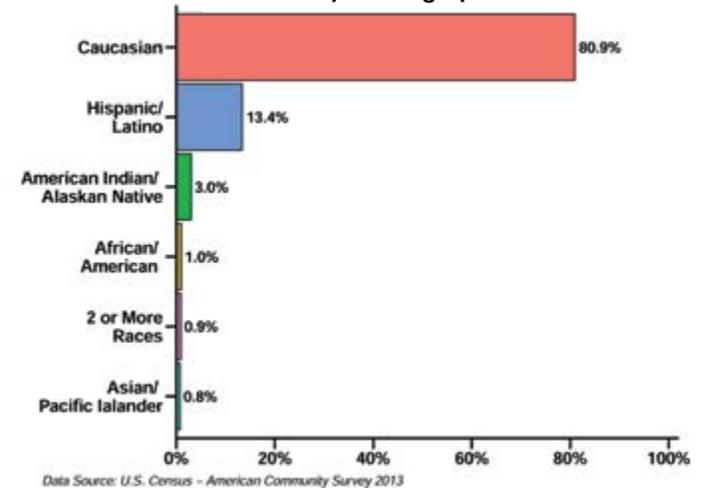
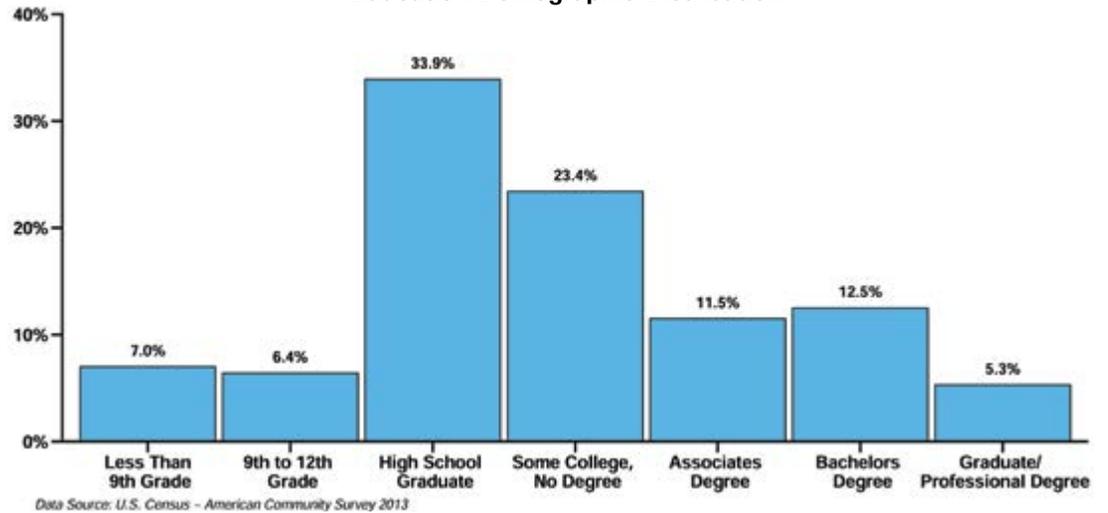


FIGURE 21

Northeast Region Education Demographic Distribution





Walking and riding bicycles on the Cowboy Recreation and Nature Trail just outside of Norfolk. (Madison County)



REGION 4: SOUTH CENTRAL

The South Central Region includes 13 counties and has 10.7 percent of the state’s population, a decrease of 0.2 percent from 2011. The region’s outdoor recreational opportunities consist of many manmade reservoirs, fishing lakes and rivers, as well as camping and outstanding wildlife viewing. This region lies between the tallgrass prairie to the east and the shortgrass prairie to the west, therefore it has characteristics of both prairie ecotypes and is named the Mixed Grass Prairie. This region contains an abundance of wetlands, including playas and wet meadows.

The region has one of the best eco-tourist activities in Nebraska with the spring sandhill crane migration. During the migration hundreds of thousands of birds stop along the Platte River to feed and rest before moving to their summer grounds. Spring waterfowl viewing and bald eagle viewing are popular outdoor pursuits, as well. The wetlands provide important habitat for amphibians and reptiles as well as important stopover sites for many other migrating birds.

The region includes 11 state recreation areas, a state historical park, a federal reservoir, and several Nebraska historical sites. The Platte River spreads across this region into multiple channels and is the last braided river of notable length in the western United States. There are many private landowners

FIGURE 23 South Central Region Age Demographic Distribution

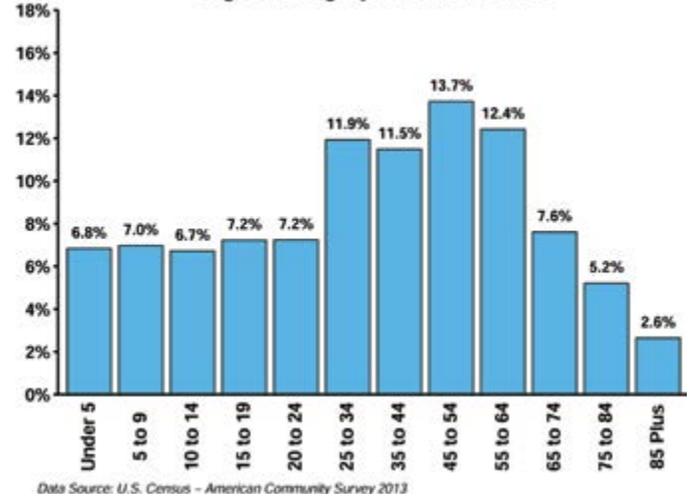


FIGURE 24 South Central Region Gender Demographic Distribution

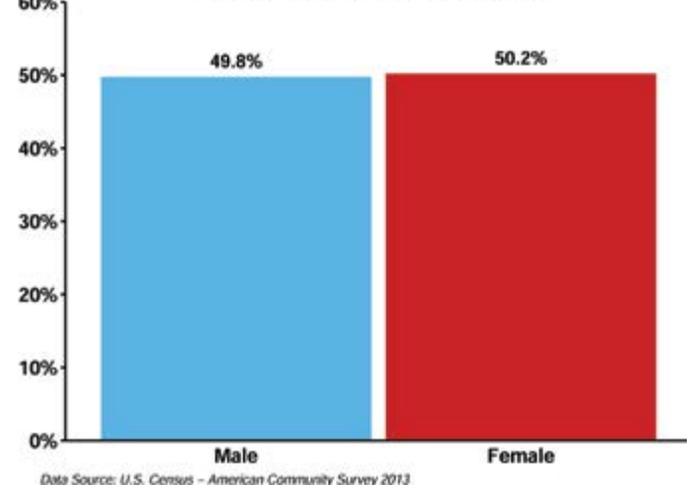
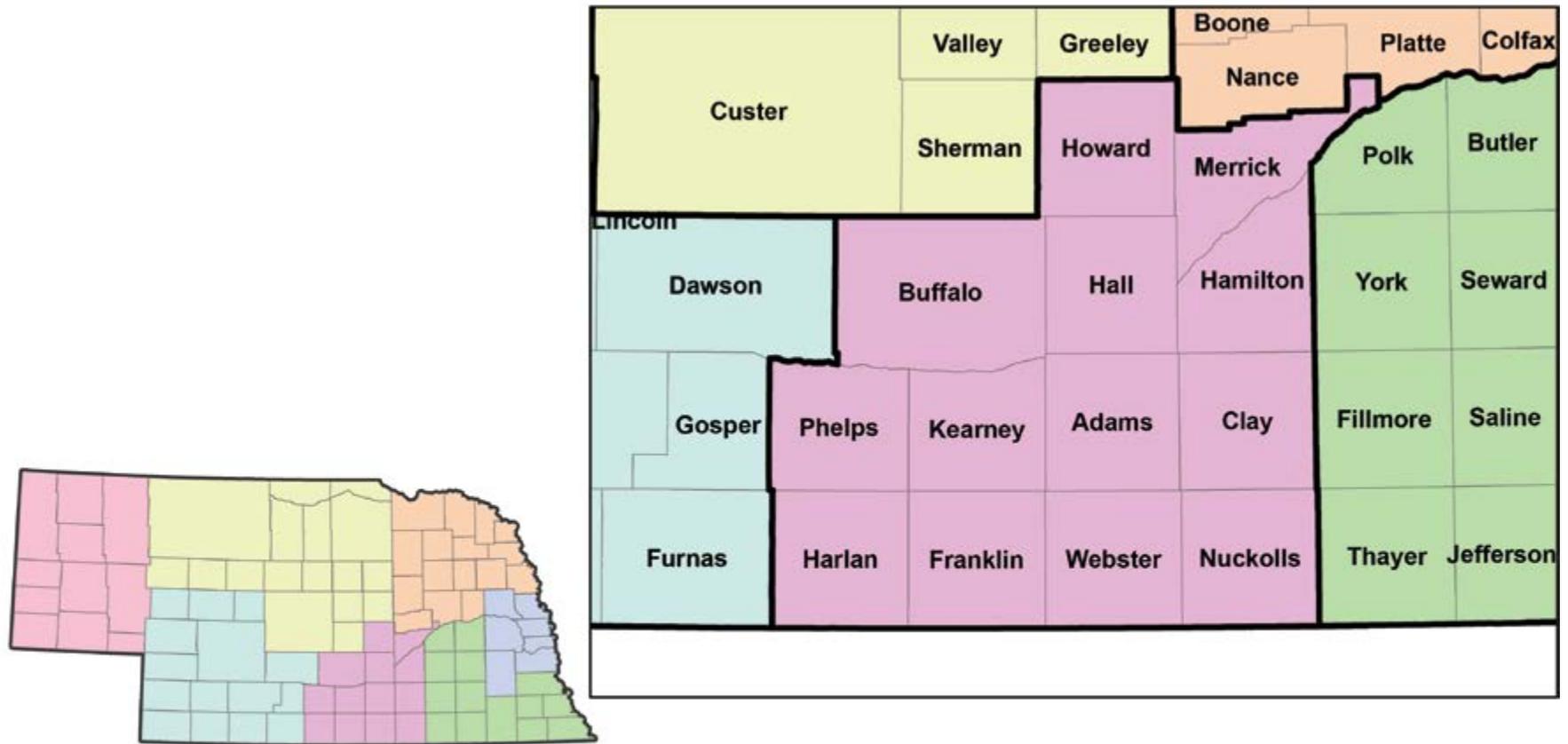


FIGURE 22

SCORP Region 4 - South Central



SCORP Regions

- Region 1 - Metro
- Region 2 - Southeast
- Region 3 - Northeast
- Region 4 - South Central
- Region 5 - Southwest
- Region 6 - Western
- Region 7 - North Central





Paddleboating on the water at Cottonmill Park in Kearney. (Buffalo County)

who allow and encourage the public to use their land for recreational activities. Residents do an impressive job with the resources and partnerships they have created to increase visitation.

The South Central Region is on par with the state in terms of age distribution as seen in Figure 23. There is a larger percentage of Hispanics/Latino population, at 11.5 percent, creating more diversity in the region.

FIGURE 25 South Central Region Ethnicity Demographic Distribution

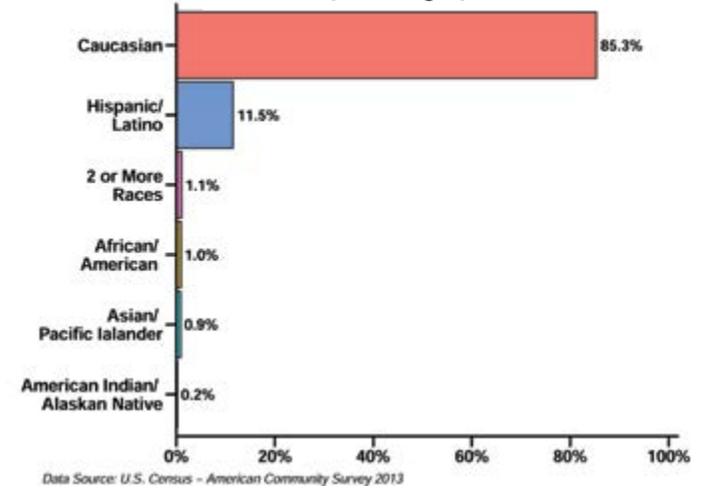
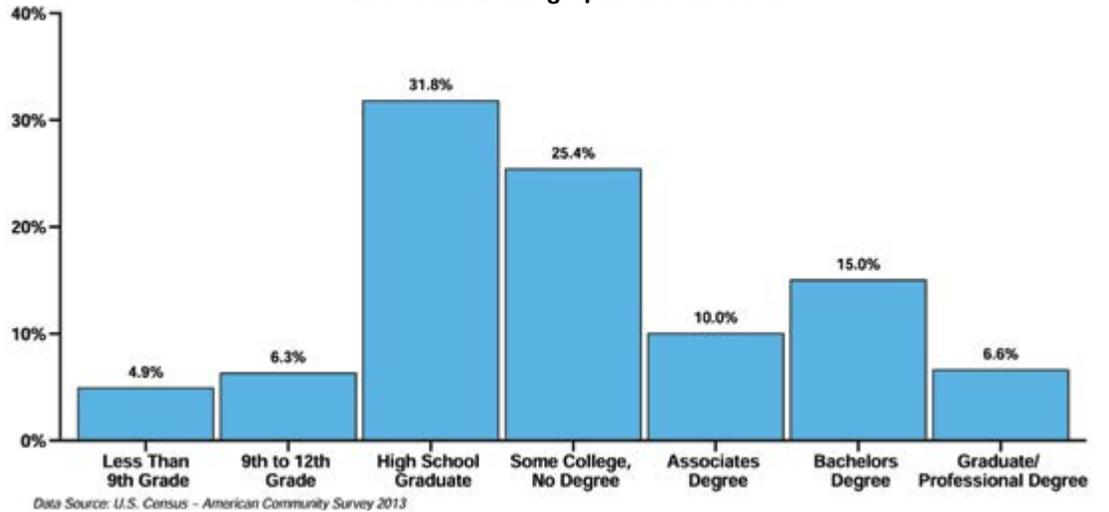


FIGURE 26 South Central Region Education Demographic Distribution





The skateboarding park and basketball courts at Harmon Park in Kearney. (Buffalo County)



REGION 5: SOUTHWEST

The Southwest Region includes 15 counties and has 5.5 percent of the state’s population. The region includes vast amounts of farmland, rolling hills, open spaces, deep valleys, scenic rivers, massive manmade lakes, and the Sandhills, a stabilized sand dune complex.

This region has a mix of shortgrass prairie, rolling loess canyons, sands age prairie and the confluence of the North and South Platte rivers. The loess canyons consist of step loess hills and canyons south of the Platte River. Traditionally, they were grass covered, but now are covered primarily with eastern red cedar. The sands age prairie has low rolling sand dunes and stream breaks, and is significant because it contains some of the last remnants of sands age prairie. There have been more than 340 bird species recorded and supports trophy-sized bass and walleye.

Historical markers may be found across the region and several historical sites and historical parks are in this region. Recreational opportunities for hunting, fishing, boating, wildlife viewing, hiking, biking, and camping are available. The Nebraska National Forest and 13 state recreational areas are also located in this region, which include excellent water activities. The Dismal River also offers some challenging canoeing/ kayaking opportunities in the Southwest Region.

FIGURE 28 Southwest Region Age Demographic Distribution

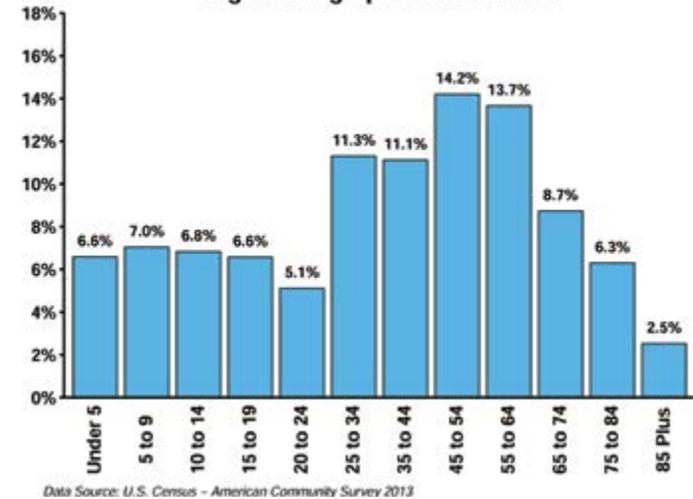


FIGURE 29 Southwest Region Gender Demographic Distribution

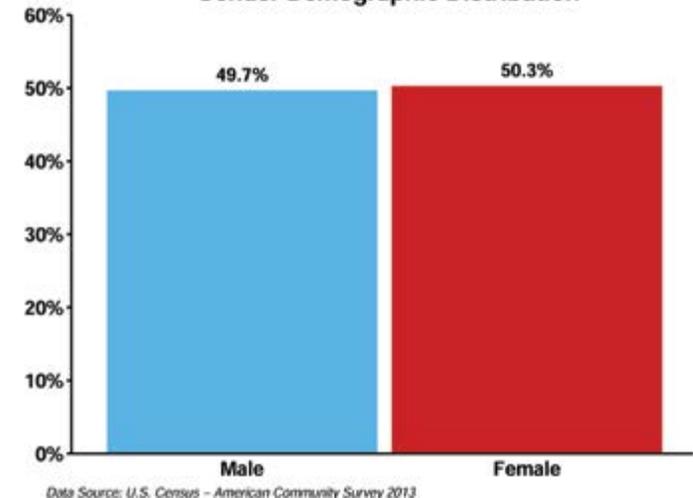
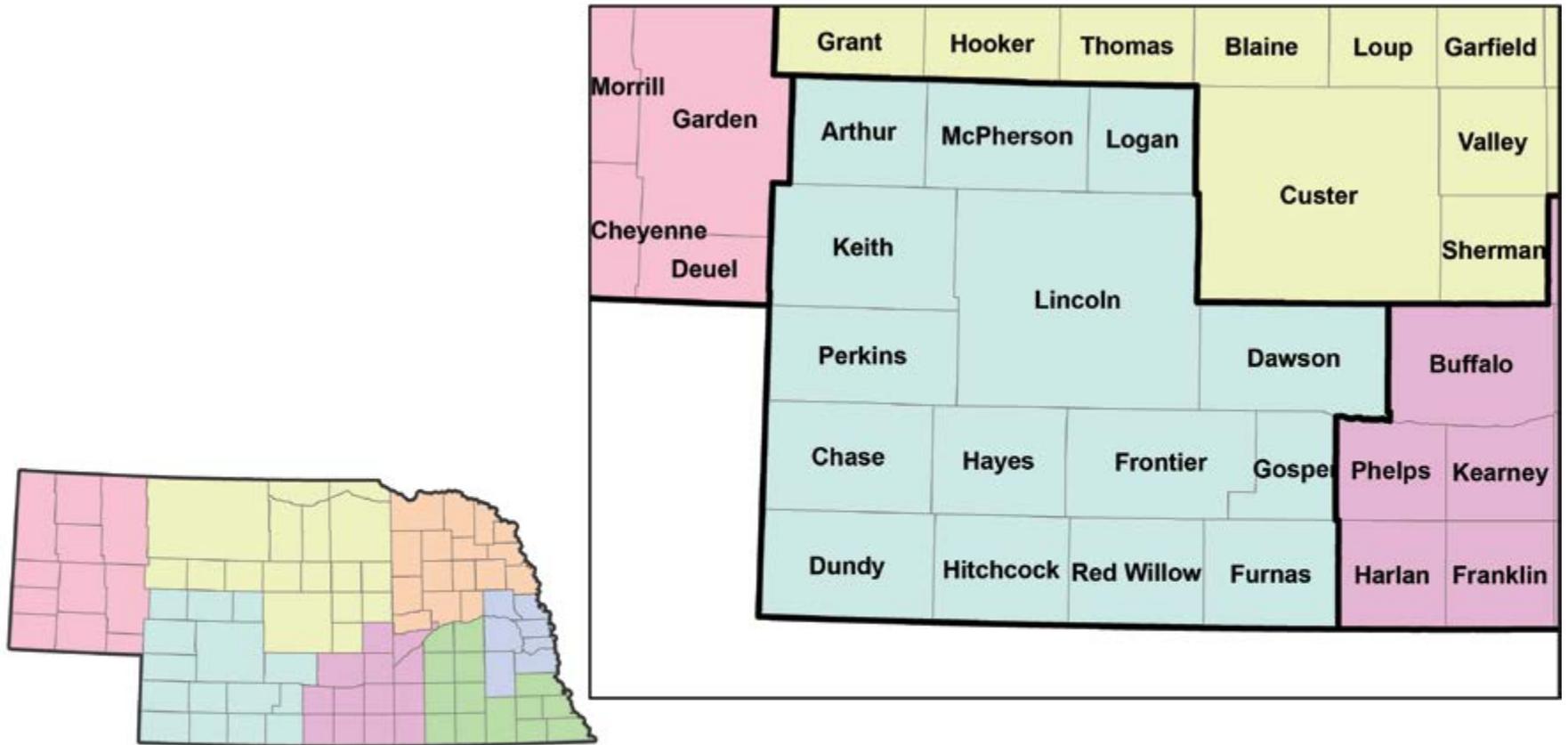
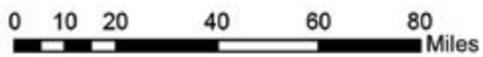


FIGURE 27

SCORP Region 5 - Southwest



- SCORP Regions**
- Region 1 - Metro
 - Region 2 - Southeast
 - Region 3 - Northeast
 - Region 4 - South Central
 - Region 5 - Southwest
 - Region 6 - Western
 - Region 7 - North Central





Children enjoying the playground equipment at Barnett Park in McCook. (Red Willow County)

Figure 28 again shows an aging population similar to the Southeast Region with higher percentages in the 55 and older categories than the state. The region also has a higher Hispanic/Latino population than the state, at 12.1 percent, as seen in Figure 30.

FIGURE 30 Southwest Region Ethnicity Demographic Distribution

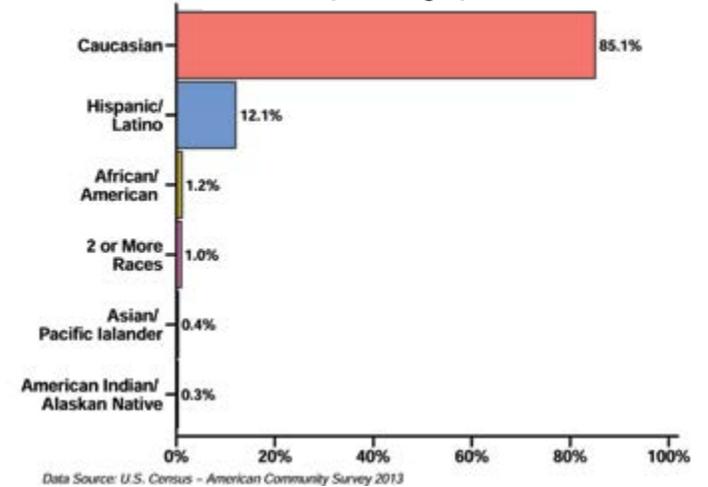
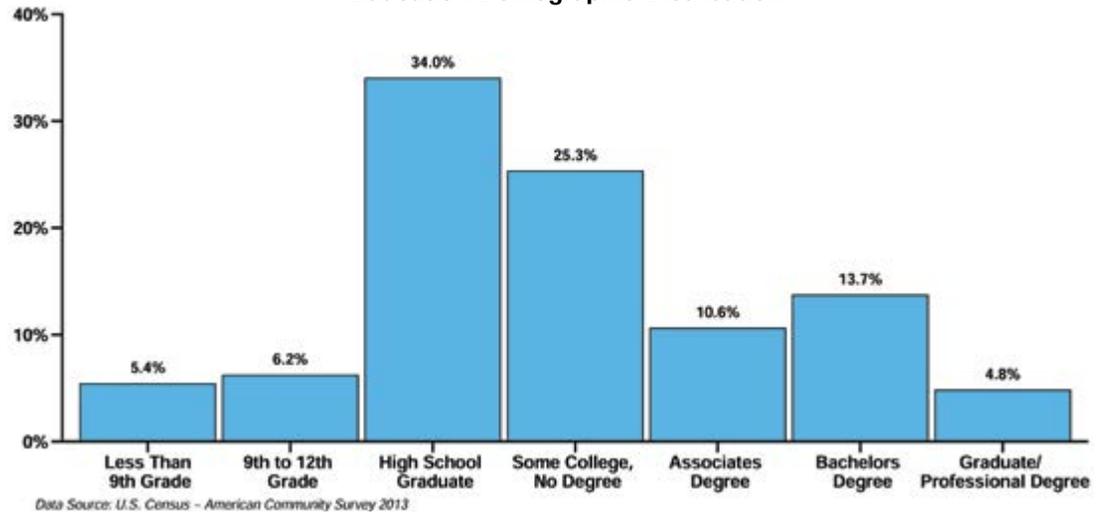


FIGURE 31 Southwest Region Education Demographic Distribution





Cooling off in the splash pad at Memorial Park in North Platte. (Lincoln County)



REGION 6: WESTERN

The Western Region includes 11 counties in the westernmost portion of Nebraska. The region has 4.6 percent of the state’s population, which is a decrease of 0.2 percent since the last SCORP. Similar to other regions in the state approximately 13 percent of the population is Hispanic/Latino. It is bordered by Colorado to the south, Wyoming to the west and South Dakota to the north. The location of this region provides outstanding tourism and recreational potential, including a good infrastructure to support a tourism base. The region is one of the most diverse in topography and has a rich history regarding the American expansion in the West.

This region contains shortgrass prairie with notable rocky outcrops of badlands and coniferous forest. The shortgrass prairie has a mix of prairie species that are more drought-tolerant than other regions in the state. The Pine Ridge area offers some of the most scenic vistas in the state, with cliff-like escarpments covered in ponderosa pine. Bighorn sheep have been reintroduced and are flourishing in the Pine Ridge and Wildcat Hills. The Wildcat Hills, near Scottsbluff, primarily are composed of sandstone, siltstone and volcanic ash. They are similarly covered with a mosaic of pine woodlands and with large expanses of public land, the recreation opportunities have made the Wildcat Hills a destination for many tourists.

FIGURE 33 Western Region Age Demographic Distribution

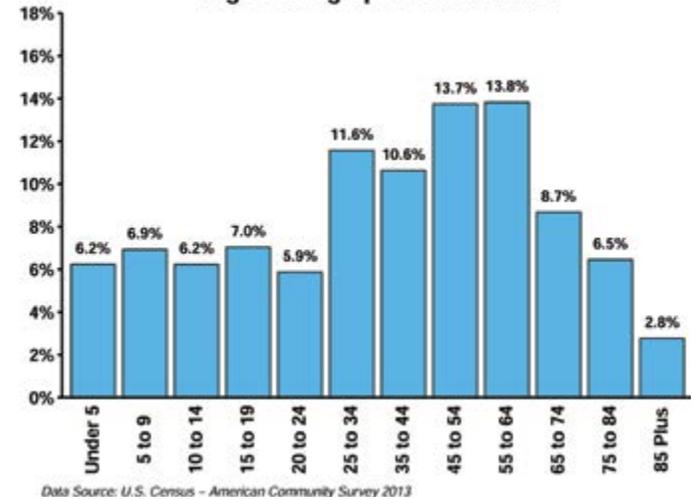


FIGURE 34 Western Region Gender Demographic Distribution

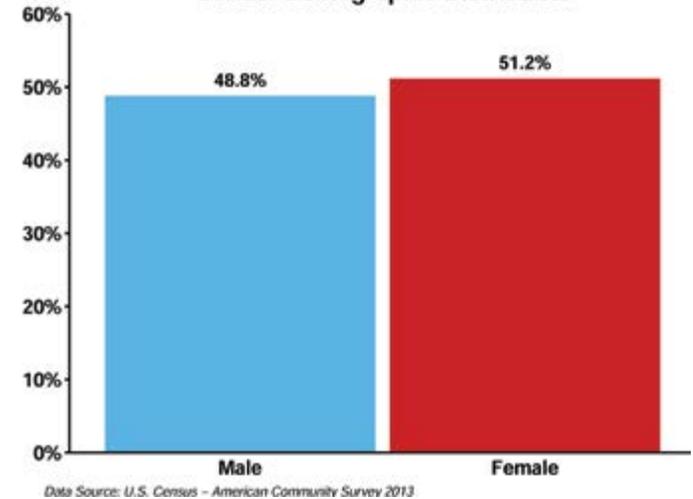
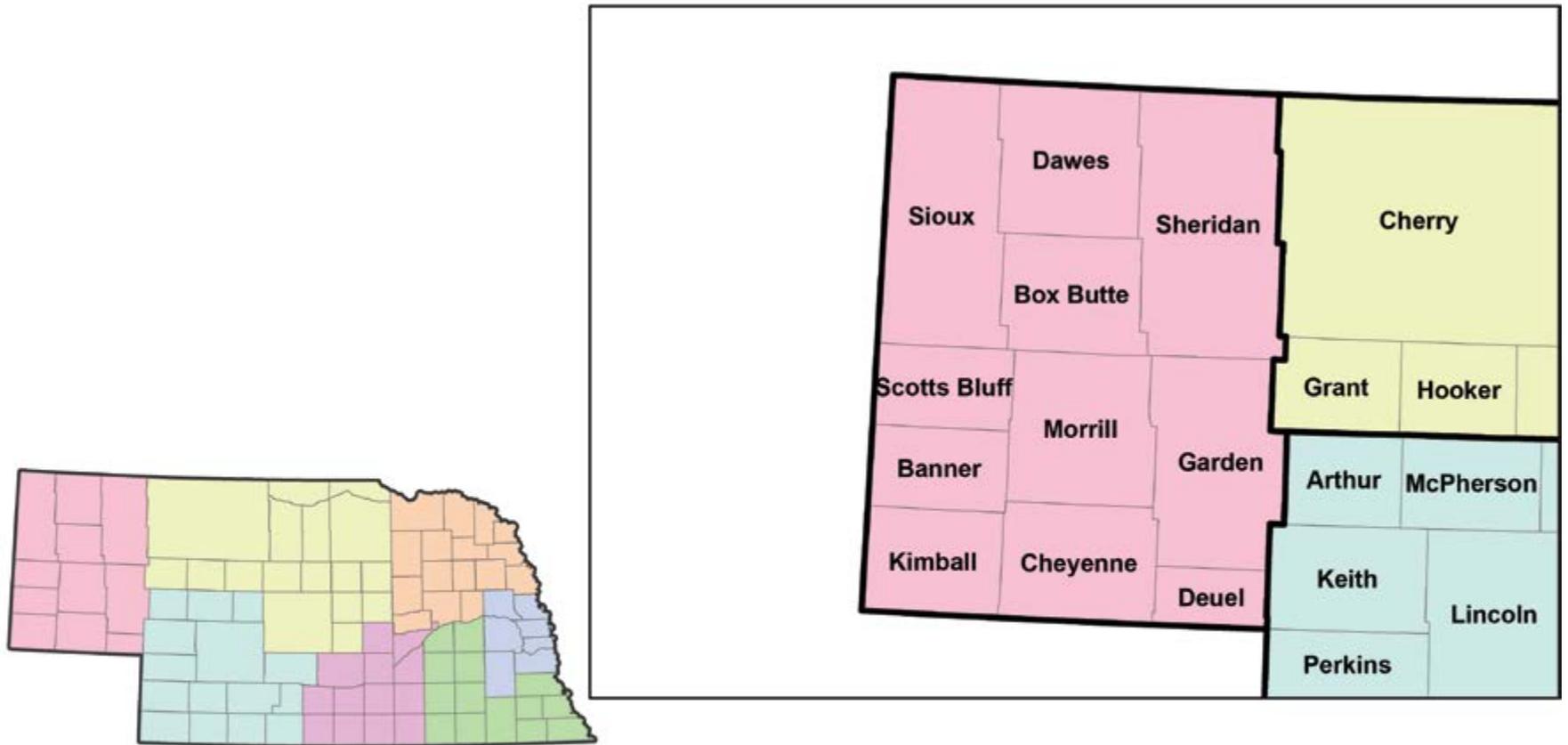


FIGURE 32

SCORP Region 6 - Western

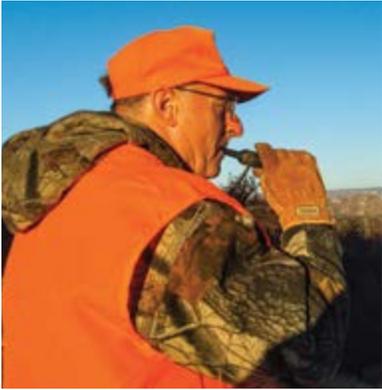


- SCORP Regions**
- Region 1 - Metro
 - Region 2 - Southeast
 - Region 3 - Northeast
 - Region 4 - South Central
 - Region 5 - Southwest
 - Region 6 - Western
 - Region 7 - North Central



0 12.5 25 50 75 100 Miles





Man calling elk during a hunt in the Pine Ridge National Recreation Area. (Dawes County)

The Western Region has tremendous outdoor recreation potential. Due to the small population, however, development should occur wisely to meet the needs of the people. The region has excellent hunting, wildlife viewing, hiking, biking, and many lakes for fishing and boating. It has several federal recreational facilities, including Soldier Creek Wilderness, Pine Ridge National Recreation Area, Nebraska National Forest, Oglala National Grassland, Hudson-Men Bison Bone bed Research and Education Center, Agate Fossil Beds National Monument, North Platte National Wildlife Refuge, Scotts Bluff National Monument, and Chimney Rock National Historic Site. There are two state parks, several state recreational areas and wildlife management areas in the region.

FIGURE 35 Western Region Ethnicity Demographic Distribution

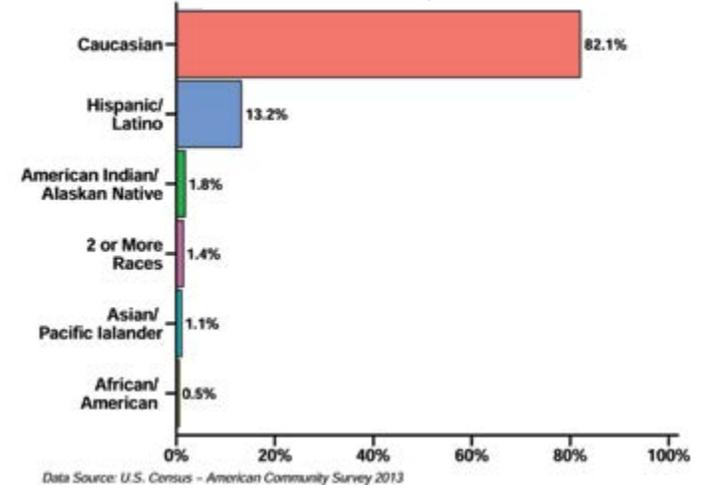
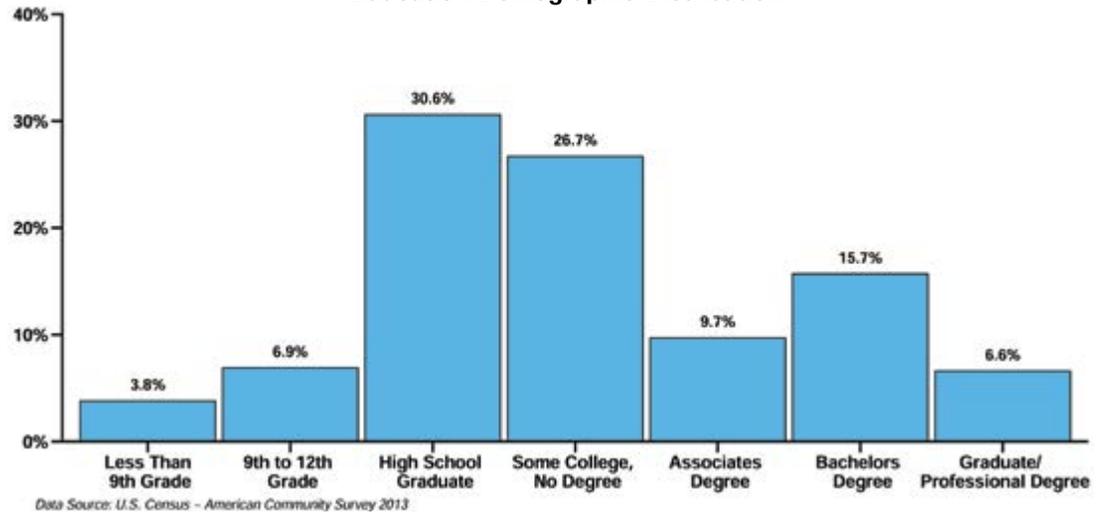


FIGURE 36

Western Region Education Demographic Distribution





Children spinning on the merry-go-round at Wilson Park in Chadron. (Dawes County)



REGION 7: NORTH CENTRAL

The North Central Region consists of 17 counties and includes 2.6 percent of the population. Region 7 has the oldest population, with 11.7 percent of the people over the age of 75. There also is a large proportion of people age 55 to 74, thus recreation needs should be tailored to an older generation. This region is made up of mostly grass-stabilized sand dunes that sit atop the Ogallala Aquifer, the nation's largest source of groundwater. The region is the largest in land mass but is the smallest in percentage of population of all regions. The development of local parks should meet the needs of the local population.

The Sandhills areas of this region is the largest of its kind in the world, renowned for gentle rivers, pine-studded canyons, constant springs, natural lakes, waterfalls and an enormous expanse of prairie grasses. This region is also one of the least developed areas in Nebraska and can provide visitors a glimpse of what the Plains states were like before western settlement. The Sandhills, which encompasses more than 19,300 square miles, is one of the largest grass-stabilized dune regions in the world. Much of the Sandhills remains relatively intact, under the care of generations of ranchers. The Sandhills contain a variety of native plant communities ranging from wetlands to dry upland prairie. There have been nearly 700 plant species documented in the Sandhills.

FIGURE 38 North Central Region Age Demographic Distribution

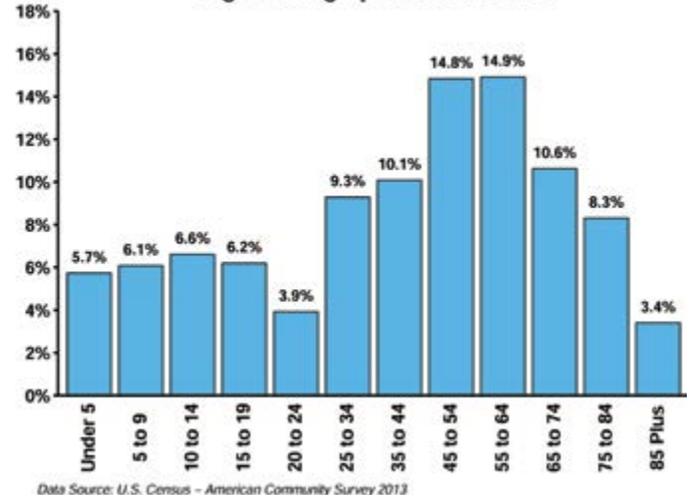


FIGURE 39 North Central Region Gender Demographic Distribution

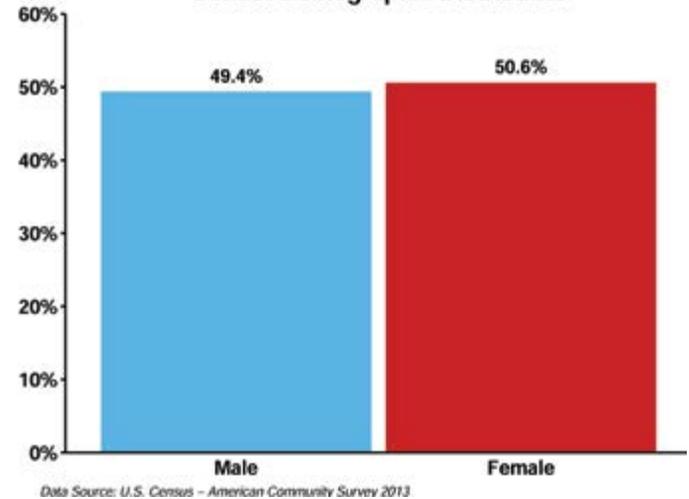
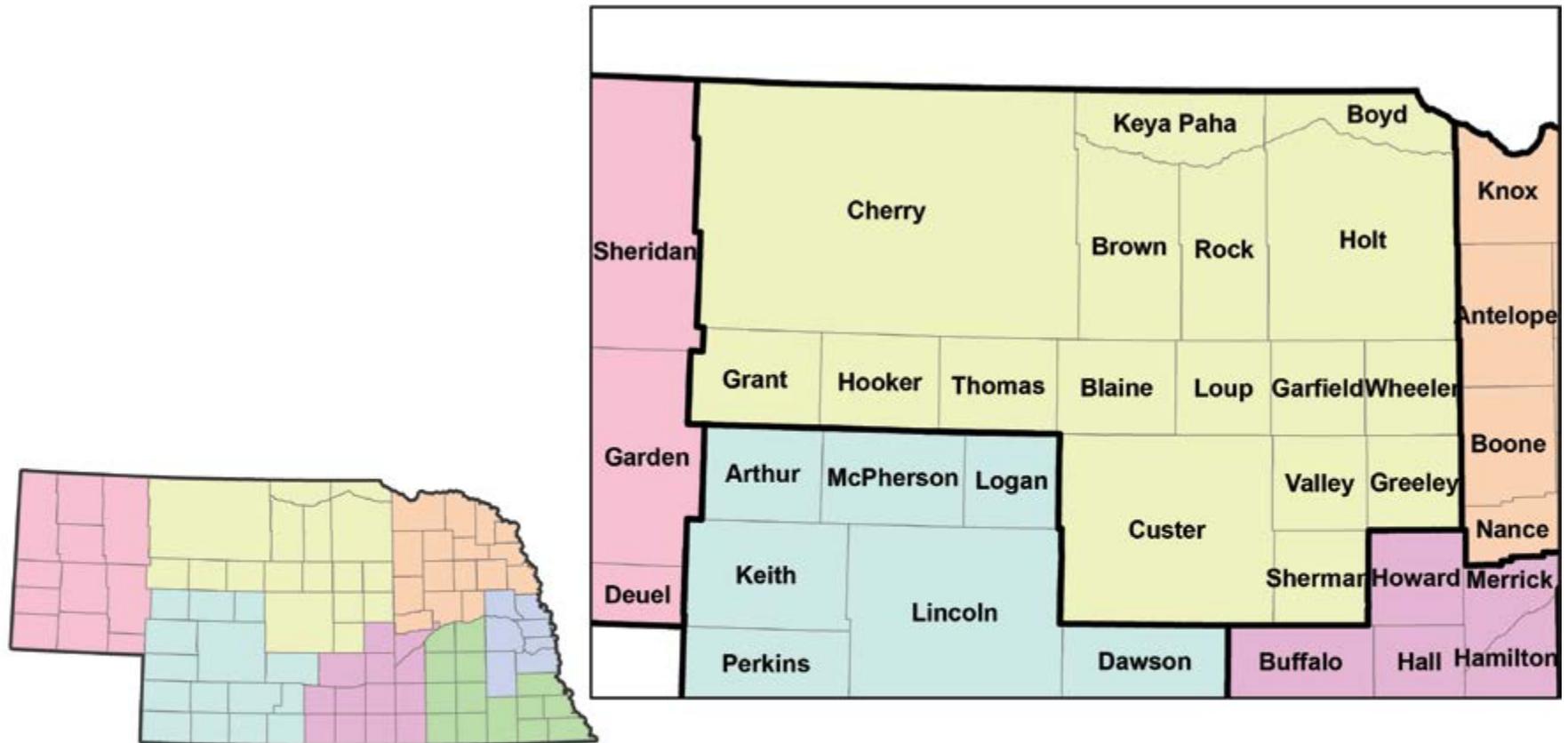


FIGURE 37

SCORP Region 7 - North Central



SCORP Regions

- Region 1 - Metro
- Region 2 - Southeast
- Region 3 - Northeast
- Region 4 - South Central
- Region 5 - Southwest
- Region 6 - Western
- Region 7 - North Central





This common snipe was observed near the Calamus River south of Ainsworth. (Brown County)

Wet meadows and lakes are interspersed with the dunes creating habitat for many species.

The region offers portions of the Niobrara and Loup rivers, which provide good fishing, canoeing and wildlife viewing. The Calamus and Upper Missouri rivers also offer canoe trails and access. The Niobrara River is classified as a National Wild and Scenic River by the National Parks Service, which is visited by thousands of people every year. The region has the highest waterfall in the state, as well as a large segment of the Cowboy Trail, and many state recreation areas. The region also includes one (Samuel R. McKelvie) national forest, two state historical parks and two national wildlife refuges.

FIGURE 40 North Central Region Ethnicity Demographic Distribution

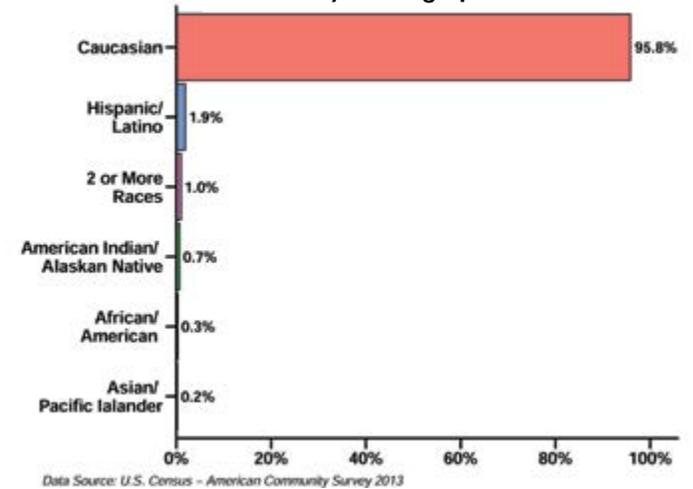
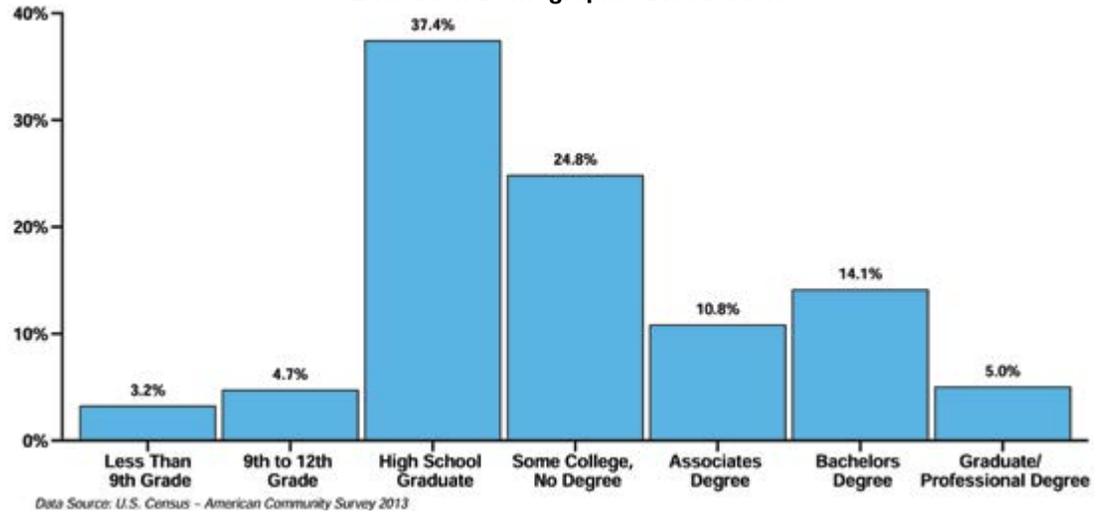


FIGURE 41 North Central Region Education Demographic Distribution





Aerial view of pool, soccer and ball fields of Broken Bow. (Custer County)



BENEFITS OF OPEN SPACES AND RECREATION

CHAPTER THREE

Parks, trails and open green space provide countless benefits to Nebraskans. They improve public health, enhance quality of life, increase tourism, contribute to the economy, and provide a sense of community. Below are some of the benefits of open space and recreation.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Quality of life is the general well-being of individuals and societies. Retirees regularly rate quality of life as a major reason they move to or stay in a community. One of the top considerations for a high quality of life is the amount of outdoor recreation available. Accessible outdoor recreation facilities are vital to the quality of life for the residents of a community. They add to the quality of the local environment and are a source of community pride. Fostering team building, self-esteem, cooperation, creativity, imagination, and communication skills, outdoor recreation activities bring people together and allow them to bond with others of similar interests. Corporate CEOs routinely say employee quality of life is one of the most important factors in locating a new business, and small company owners say recreation, parks and open spaces are a top priority in choosing a new location for their business.

In the past, economies grew largely by a process in which business investment, often in a resource-

extraction or manufacturing industry, created jobs that attracted workers and their families. Economists call this growth process “jobs-first-people-follow,” where the availability of jobs is the primary determinant of a household’s decision about where to locate. Over the past several decades, another process of economic growth has emerged. Called “people-first-jobs-follow,” it materializes when workers and their families locate in a community even though they have no immediate job prospects, instead basing their location decisions largely on the quality of life the community offers (*Natural-Resource Amenities and Nebraska’s Economy: Current Connections, Challenges, and Possibilities; Prepared by ECONorthwest, August 2006, p. 18*). Nebraska has seen some of this trend, especially with former residents that have moved back to Nebraska to raise a family. Nebraska is rich in recreational activities and resources, so people will look to move here to improve their quality of life.

HEALTH BENEFITS

Physical inactivity is at an epidemic level and contributing to an obesity crisis and increased chronic disease rates nationally and in Nebraska. Regular physical activity reduces people’s risk for chronic diseases, such as heart disease and stroke (high blood pressure and high cholesterol), Type 2 diabetes and several forms of cancers, including colon and breast. An active lifestyle also helps to control weight



Fall canoeing brings stunning autumn color during the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshop held at the Nebraska State 4-H Camp at Nebraska National Forest-Bessey Ranger District near Halsey. (Thomas County)





Boy on playground equipment
at Barnett Park in McCook.
(Red Willow County)

and body composition and contribute to healthy bones, muscles and joints. Active individuals also have improved mental health outcomes related to reducing symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression.

Outdoor recreation promotes physical health and improves psychological well being. Relaxation, rest and renewal occur when people are active outdoors. The influence of a natural environment and the opportunity to escape the monotony of everyday life contribute to a person's ability to deal more productively with the world around them.

Nearly one in three Nebraska adults did not meet the recommended guidelines for physical activity (2009 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey [BRFSS]). Obesity in the state has more than doubled since 1990 to 27.2 percent, ranking Nebraska 15th among the states as having the highest percentage of obese adults. One in every three deaths in Nebraska is attributed to heart disease and stroke (2008 Nebraska Mortality Data). The relationship between inactivity and chronic diseases has been well documented throughout the years. Providing a variety of outdoor recreational activities increases the opportunity for the public to be physically active, which has been proven repeatedly to reduce the economic strain spent on health care costs.

The total estimated annual cost of medical bills and lost productivity in Nebraska from obesity was \$506.6 million, and the cost of physical inactivity was \$641.9 million in 2009 (CDC Obesity Calculator and East Carolina university Physical Inactivity Calculator, 2010). More opportunities to be physically active can reduce the risk for obesity and other chronic diseases. If only 5 percent of inactive people in Nebraska became physically active, it could save the state approximately \$32 million in health care costs annually. Having parks, recreational areas and trails within communities will help to lower these estimated costs of future health care and lost productivity. Outdoor recreation should be viewed as an investment in preventative health care.

Many studies show that physical activity drops as children grow into adolescents. One in five Nebraska high school students responded that they were physically active for 60 or more minutes daily in the last week (2009 Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance Survey [YRBSS]). Only 30 percent reported attending physical education classes daily during an average school week (2009 YRBS). During the 2012/2013 academic school year, one in six Nebraska students in grades K-12 (16.2 percent) was identified as obese, while an additional one in six (17.1 percent) was overweight. This generation of children may or may not outlive their parents as their habits have become

increasingly sedentary and they continue to be unhealthy. Supplying good areas for play and recreation can help children feel free to activate their imaginations and move their bodies. Having a disconnect from nature has serious long-term implications for the health and well-being of Nebraska and to the future stewardship of our public lands. Research shows that those who do not participate in outdoor recreation as youths



*Biking over the bridge at Cottonmill Park in Kearney.
(Buffalo County)*

are less likely to participate in those activities as adults and will have a diminished appreciation for the resources.

It is well-documented that an increase in physical activity leads to a healthier lifestyle, and outdoor recreation promotes physical health and improves the psychological well-being of people. Relaxation, rest and renewal all occur when people are active outdoors. Outdoor recreation can reduce stress and improve the way a person deals with the world around them. Outdoor recreation can also improve a person's posture, flexibility, muscular endurance, strength, and balance. It can stimulate circulation and create muscle tone. It helps combat the aging process and contributes to a much happier demeanor.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Outdoor recreation is the largest contributor to tourism within Nebraska. According to the Nebraska Tourism Commission, in 2013, Nebraska generated \$4.4 billion in domestic traveler spending that supports 43,900 jobs related to tourism industry. Annual spending in Nebraska on these trips has increased by more than \$2.5 billion since 1990. Tourism is Nebraska's third largest earner of revenue from outside the state, after agriculture and manufacturing. The American Automobile Association (AAA) consistently names Nebraska



one of the top five most affordable vacation destinations in the United States, with average daily vacation costs for a family of four well below the national average.

Outdoor recreation activities can be a catalyst for tourism, motivate business and residential choices and encourage investment in natural resource

protection. Visitors choose vacationing spots that have a wide range of activities, with a large portion of those activities attributed to outdoor recreation. Nebraska is lucky to have a strong background in recreation and cultural history that can provide something for everyone to participate in outdoors. Visitors will go to the outdoor recreation attraction, as well as the community it is in or nearby and spend



Participants follow the horse-drawn sleigh carrying the log located during the 3K Yule Log Quest. Ponca State Park's Winterfest includes fun outdoor activities which occur during this late-December festival. (Dixon County)

money at restaurants, hotels/motels, convenience stores and other businesses. These facilities are a strong supporter of local economies.

According to a study completed in 2014 titled “Economic Contributions of Nebraska’s State Parks,” Nebraska’s state parks and recreation areas support more than 7,200 full- and part-time jobs and \$235 million of income from direct and indirect spending. This spending contributes more than \$393 million to the state’s Gross Domestic Product and \$42.5 million in local and state tax revenue. These numbers illustrate just how strong an economic impact outdoor recreation has on Nebraska’s economy.

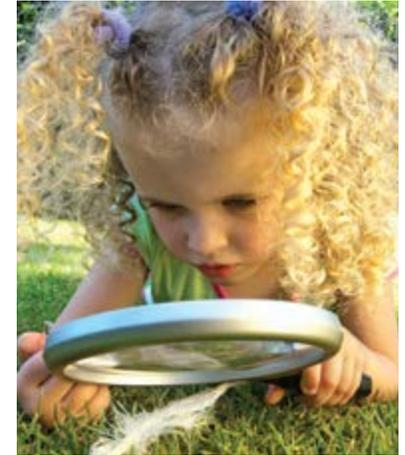
Recreation also benefits the economy by reducing health and insurance costs for residents, and in certain locations, raises the property value of homes and businesses. Municipal tax revenues increase as property values increase, which allows a city to do more for its people. Parks under construction or renovation can infuse dollars into the local economy by hiring local contractors and using local materials. Since people are retiring at earlier ages, they are more active with their lifestyle practices necessitating additional park land for nontraditional users. According to a number of surveys, earlier aged retirees are highly educated and have more disposable income than other socioeconomic groups. They also seek areas rich in

outdoor recreation in which to visit and re-locate. This shows that good park and recreation systems can attract more residents to a city.

Nebraska is slowly becoming a mixed economy based on farming, light industry, services, and new technology businesses. Nebraska communities, such as Lincoln, Columbus, Norfolk, and Omaha, have been able to attract new businesses at least partly due to having impressive park and recreation infrastructure. Nebraska will need to be aware that if new businesses come to the state, it will not be strictly for the location, but will also be for the amenities offered at those locations for their employees.

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

Learning about and connecting to nature and the outdoors benefits Nebraskans. It provides children the opportunity to engage in unstructured play and gain an appreciation for their natural environment. It helps them understand the critical importance of preserving our natural systems for everyone’s use and enjoyment, as well as for the survival of all living things. Outdoor recreation includes organized sports and natural resource-based recreation, such as hiking, camping, hunting and fishing. It is widely believed that athletes develop certain skills and habits that help them function better in an academic environment due to the sports they play. Those who participate in



A girl examining a feather with a magnifying glass. Children can spend hours observing and learning about nature when playing outdoors.



“Explore Nebraska’s Biodiversity” exhibit on display at the Lincoln Children’s Museum in Lincoln. (Lancaster County)

outdoor recreation as a youth retain their interest in the environment as an adult and are more likely to be knowledgeable and concerned about environmental issues. Studies have also shown that children who are actively engaged in the outdoors perform better on standardized tests and develop problem solving skills.

Naturalist programs that teach good conservation practices have become popular in Nebraska, not only through the school system but also at many state parks and private nature centers. There are also local municipalities that offer naturalist programs to encourage youth and adults to be good stewards of the environment. There are many youth organizations focusing on the outdoors; including, but not limited to Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H, and Campfire Boys and Girls. These groups provide many opportunities for youth to get outside and learn various outdoor skills.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission continues to stress retention and development of youth and adults. The agency provides numerous activities, such as outdoor expos, Becoming an Outdoors-Family and Project WILD programs, to teach people about the outdoors and introduce them to things they have never experienced. There are private, nonprofit organizations that offer environmental education opportunities, such as the

National Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, Nebraska Wildlife Federation, and Prairie Plains Resource Institute. These groups provide opportunities for people to visit and care for rare and declining habitat, thus increasing people’s knowledge and conservation of these threatened areas.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

When people spend time outdoors, they begin to have a strong appreciation of the natural environment. Spending time in nature is a popular, traditional, family-oriented pastime and in doing so, encourages good stewardship of the state’s resources. People who have that connection to the environment tend to become stewards of those resources. When people recognize the importance of the natural environment, it often leads to the investment of time and money on the protection, conservation and/or maintenance of parks, natural areas and open spaces.

Preserving green space offsets the negative environmental impacts of development. For example, storm-water retention ponds create wildlife habitat and the potential for several types of recreation. There are also rare and declining habitats in Nebraska, such as tallgrass prairie and saline wetlands, that are at risk and vulnerable. These habitats benefit from the population being aware of and caring for the habitats. The diversity of the plant and animal life in these

areas could be lost if the areas are not protected and managed. There are private, nonprofit organizations in Nebraska that actively manage rare and declining habitats and either make these areas open to the public or provide opportunities for public involvement in management activities of the areas.

Parks and open spaces improve air quality by reducing carbon dioxide and producing oxygen. Parks can

enhance water quality and reduce flooding impacts. More communities are becoming “green” in their practices. Some ways to do this include natural buffers, creation of rain gardens, storm-water retention ponds/wetlands, and planting trees. Parks also conserve and properly use the natural resources for purposes that are not harmful to the environment.



The playground, picnic area, walking, jogging and biking trail, and a fishing lake make Barnett Park of McCook inviting for visitors. (Red Willow County)



Children engage in hands-on activities during the Outdoor Discovery Program events held each spring. Families also have educational opportunities at the expos and workshops held throughout the year across Nebraska.

SUPPLY OF RECREATION IN NEBRASKA

CHAPTER FOUR

Nebraska has more than 1.4 million acres of land and water available to the public for outdoor recreation. Some of those lands are protected for their high-quality natural resources, such as birding habitat in the Rainwater Basin, and thus they offer somewhat limited recreational opportunities. Many of those 1.4 million acres have been developed as parks, by either the state or local communities, thus providing opportunities for lots of different outdoor recreation activities. Whether it is kayaking down a river, primitive camping in the bluffs, kite sailing on a lake, hiking in remote forests, cross country skiing in the north, mountain biking through ravines and hills, or horseback riding through thousands of acres of parkland, Nebraska can provide quality outdoor recreational experiences for all ages and abilities.

The state's supply of recreational lands and facilities is categorized in the SCORP according to management type. Federal, state and natural resource district lands offer more nature-based outdoor recreation; municipalities and schools offer community-based outdoor recreation; and nonprofit and private organizations offer nature- and community-based facilities.

PROVIDERS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION LANDS

- FEDERAL: National forests, national wildlife refuges, national scenic and recreational rivers,

national grasslands, national monuments, and lakes/reservoirs.

- STATE: State parks, state recreation areas, state historical parks, state recreational trails, state historical sites, state fish hatcheries, and state wildlife management areas; areas owned by Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.
- NATURAL RESOURCE DISTRICTS: Recreational areas as part of reservoir projects and several regional trails.



Scout's Rest Ranch at the Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park, North Platte. (Lincoln County)

- **COMMUNITY:** A variety of parks, trails, open lands and outdoor recreational facilities, managed by municipalities.
- **SCHOOLS:** Playgrounds, athletic fields, walking tracks, and other facilities available for community use. The data in the table includes information from colleges across the state and some Nebraska public and private schools for primary/secondary education (420 schools out of 1,273).
- **NONPROFIT:** Youth camps, equestrian facilities, hunting, fishing and related areas, preserves and prairies that are selectively available to the public.
- **OPEN FIELDS AND WATERS (OFW) PROGRAM:** Privately owned areas that allow hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing and are maintained primarily for wildlife habitat and ecological restoration.

Public Recreation

Nebraska encompasses 49,506,368 acres, of which 1,439,898, or 3 percent, is open to the public for outdoor recreation in some form. Figure 42 shows the programs or entities that control outdoor recreation land and what percent of the total they represent. For example, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission owns/manages 25.3 percent of the available outdoor recreation land in the state, while communities only



*Cross-country skiing at Pioneers City Park in Lincoln.
(Lancaster County)*



Elementary students watch a bird banding demonstration held at Chadron State Park. (Dawes County)

account for 2.1 percent. Not all recreational land can be considered the same. A large majority of the lands open for outdoor recreation are undeveloped and intended for hunting, fishing and wildlife watching. These areas include all the state wildlife management areas, the vast majority of federal lands, and all of the Open Fields and Waters lands.

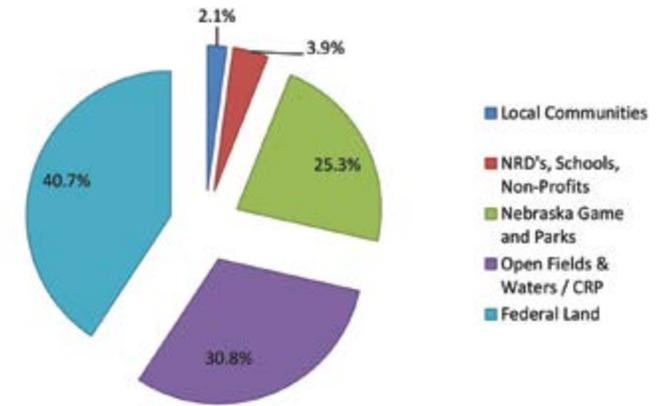
Private Recreation

There are also privately owned areas that offer recreation to the public for a fee. Private commercial areas include campgrounds, golf courses, hunting and fishing areas among other activities. It is very difficult



Playing golf on the Highland Oaks Golf Course near Ponca State Park. (Dixon County)

FIGURE 40 Public Recreation In Nebraska



to get and maintain information on private recreation providers. Most private hunting and fishing areas are used for agricultural purposes, as well as recreation, making them very difficult to track, and many private enterprises don't wish to share their information, feeling it is of little to no benefit to them.

All Recreation

One type of recreation should not be considered more important than another. When making determinations on what should be focused on in the future for adding to the state's recreational resources, the general public's perceptions and opinions should be a driving factor. Other factors considered should include participation rates and current supply in the area and/or region.

Data collection for the supply of recreation is an ongoing process. Communities, nonprofit organizations, private commercial entities, NRDs, and the state are continuously adding acreage to the totals they offer to meet the needs of their constituents. This data is a snapshot in time from 2015 and will be updated as often as possible. Some communities did not return the inventory survey sent out in 2009 or 2015, however, all of those communities had populations less than 500. The tables below do not include acreage on the historical markers in the state because that

information is not available through the Nebraska State Historical Society. The tables only include college and some primary/secondary school information that has been received by this office. Many schools do not keep track of the amount of acreage they offer for recreation. It is difficult, because of limited resources, to capture all of the recreational opportunities in a state as large as Nebraska.

Table 2 shows the public recreational land and water acreage offered per region. The regions with the



Archery is taught in several schools across the state with the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP), and at regional shooting ranges.

TABLE 2: TOTAL PUBLIC RECREATIONAL LANDS AND WATER IN ACRES BY REGION

	REGION 1	REGION 2	REGION 3	REGION 4	REGION 5	REGION 6	REGION 7	STATE TOTAL
Local	19,657	1,780	2,630	2,905	1,272	1,332	952	30,528
Regional	1,153	2,796	1,356	622	81	1,210	304	7,522
State	27,256	27,887	21,285	12,388	97,044	57,953	79,985	323,798
Federal	11,140	219	37,669	31,010	--	206,136	300,018	586,192
Schools	1,600	409	326	371	1,305	390	74	4,474
Nonprofits	2,904	1330	40	11,240	--	24,144	5,020	44,678
OFW	2,813	46,354	18,556	10,876	122,823	192,005	49,370	442,797
Total Acres	66,523	80,775	81,862	69,412	222,525	483,169	435,723	1,439,989

Source: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission 2015 Surveys, Internet searches, personal contact and existing supply data



TABLE 3: PUBLIC RECREATIONAL LANDS AND WATER IN ACRES PER PERSON IN NEBRASKA

	REGION 1	REGION 2	REGION 3	REGION 4	REGION 5	REGION 6	REGION 7	STATE
Acres Per Person	0.056	0.577	0.448	0.289	2.166	5.292	8.653	0.742

Source: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission 2015 Surveys, Internet searches, personal contact and existing supply data



Informative hike with a naturalist at the Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area and Nature Center south of Gering. (Scotts Bluff County)

most recreational lands are Regions 6 and 7; these are also the regions with the smallest population. The federal government provides the most recreation in Regions 6 and 7 due to the location of the national forests and the state provides the most recreational acres in Region 1. It is interesting to look at who the major providers are in each region since each region is unique in its breakdown of suppliers. Providers may want to look at the regions in which they do not provide as much recreation and determine if it would benefit them to pursue opportunities there.

Table 3 shows the recreational lands and water acres per person in Nebraska per region. Region 7 has the most acres per person for recreation, due to the large tracts of public land and the smallest population total of all the regions. This region is best suited to encourage tourism and show off the magnificent lands and opportunities to people from both in and out of the state of Nebraska.

Region 1 is the most populous region in the state, with the smallest amount of land and water acres per

person available. This means it can be difficult to develop new green space, parks or places to recreate unless it is at a high cost. Several communities are now requiring new developments to include park lands and/or park funding prior to approval of new residential development, this is one of the ways communities have addressed the need to develop new recreational infrastructure.

Only three regions provide more than an acre per person of recreation and these are the three regions with the least amount of population and the largest amounts of land and water available due to the amount of federal property within their boundaries.

COMPARISON OF DATA FROM 2010 SCORP AND PRESENT

Based on information collected in 2009 and 2015, there was an overall increase in public outdoor recreation lands of 273,137 acres. In comparing the tables from the 2009 SCORP to this SCORP, we see some areas losing acres while others are gaining acres. This could be due to a shift in management from one entity to another or a recalculation of the amount of acres held due to updated technologies. All all 7 regions saw an increase in the number of acres in outdoor recreation, mostly due to additional acres enrolled in the Open Fields and Waters program. It's important to note that these programs

are not publicly owned land, they are land that is in private ownership and maybe used for other purposes such as agriculture but are also open to at least some form of hunting, fishing or wildlife watching at some time during the year.

In terms of acres per person the numbers were very similar to the previous SCORP, with mild increases in Regions 5, 6, and 7. These are the sparsest regions for population so any additional acres added to the region will have a more significant effect on the acres per person ratio. The state and federal governments provide for a tremendous amount of the recreational acreage in the regions that offer more than one acre of recreation per person in its boundaries. The local numbers are actually quite small compared to those offered by the state and federal providers.

LOCAL FACILITIES

Another important component to analyze is the types of facilities currently being provided by local communities within their park areas. The current supply can help identify deficiencies for various facilities that can then be encouraged through grant scoring for funding. Table 4 gives a breakdown of several common outdoor recreation facilities found in community parks, and Table 5 is a listing of trails within local park areas broken down by trail surface type.



Catching channel catfish from an air boat on the Platte River near Louisville. (Cass/Sarpy Counties)

TABLE 4: COMMUNITY PARK AMENITIES

SCORP AMENITY	METRO	SOUTHEAST	NORTHEAST	SOUTH CENTRAL	SOUTHWEST	WEST	NORTH CENTRAL	STATE TOTAL
Parks	608	238	202	204	121	125	115	1,613
Outdoor Acres	19,657	1,780	2,630	2,905	1,271	1,332	952	30,528
Picnic Shelters	366	236	228	167	162	74	154	1,387
Picnic Tables	2,257	1,742	2,806	2,864	1,288	1,009	738	12,704
Playgrounds	476	206	208	189	108	92	87	1,366
Restrooms	204	173	195	166	108	75	105	1,026
Ballfields	416	211	211	214	134	89	100	1,395
Soccer Fields	146	48	59	56	35	20	15	379
Courts	613	261	279	222	145	113	123	1,756
Public Golf Courses	19	18	23	18	14	17	15	124
PDisc Golf Courses	13	8	8	12	11	6	7	65
Climbing Walls	5	4	3	2	2	3	2	21
Skateboard Parks	9	6	4	5	4	5	1	34
Swimming Pools	52	29	45	32	27	21	21	227
Water Parks	3	3	4	5	0	1	0	16
Splash Pads	21	2	3	7	4	1	1	39
Horseshoe Pits	196	121	186	91	78	89	107	868
Camping	254	450	568	160	211	130	231	2,004
Lakes or Ponds	1,590	110	164	281	163	134	83	2,528
Archery Ranges	3	3	2	3	2	1	1	15
Shooting Ranges	2	6	2	5	6	6	5	32



Trails have become increasingly popular among communities as both transportation corridors and recreational amenities. With multiple user groups and widespread support among the general public trails have become an important component to any outdoor recreation setting.



*Tent camping at Fort Kearny State Historical Park.
(Kearney County)*

TABLE 4: COMMUNITY PARK AMENITIES

SCORP AMENITY	METRO	SOUTHEAST	NORTHEAST	SOUTH CENTRAL	SOUTHWEST	WEST	NORTH CENTRAL	STATE TOTAL
Concrete Trails	328.47	22.79	52.63	57.56	41.51	19.25	8.5	530.71
Asphalt Trails	25.45	5.35	1.75	5.769	10.56	0.5	8	57.379
Limestone Trails	28.79	46.55	4.83	9.8	5	1.5	10.1	106.57
Natural Trails	21.5	5	12.8	21.3	8.8	4.7	12.64	86.74
Water Trails	0	0	1	0	1	0	8	10
ATV Trails	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	3
TOTAL	404.21	78.19	76.66	91.68	58.87	30.53	47.24	787.38

WETLANDS IN NEBRASKA

The State of Nebraska has adopted the federal definition that wetlands are “those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a



*Kayaking at Danish Alps State Recreation Area.
(Dakota County)*

prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs and similar areas.”

Wetland delineation in Nebraska is based on the 1987 Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation Manual. This manual uses three diagnostic environmental characteristics to delineate wetlands. The three characteristics are:

- 1) Vegetation** — Defined by a prevalence of hydric (water-loving) plants adapted to growing in inundated or saturated conditions.
- 2) Hydric soils** — The presence of soils that developed under inundated or saturated conditions that limit oxygen (anaerobic conditions).
- 3) Hydrology** — Defined by inundation or saturation by water at some time during the growing season (the time when plants are actively growing).

Nebraska’s wetland resources are as diverse and dynamic as those of any state. They include marshes, lakes, river and stream backwaters, oxbows, wet meadows, fens, and seep areas. These wetlands vary greatly in nature and appearance due to physical

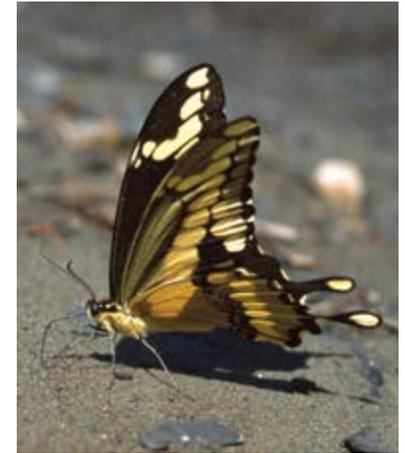
features such as geographic location, water source and permanence, and chemical properties. Some wetlands hold water for only a few weeks or less during the spring while others never go completely dry. Many wetlands receive their water from groundwater aquifers while others are totally dependent on precipitation and run-off. The water chemistry of wetlands ranges from fresh to saline, and from acidic to basic. These descriptions identify the extremes of wetland characteristics. Nebraska's wetland resources possess these extremes and virtually every combination in between.

At the time of statehood in 1867, Nebraska contained an estimated 2,910,000 acres of wetlands. Wetlands have been impacted directly by filling, ditching, tiling, digging concentration pits, channelization, and declining water tables, and indirectly by changes in the surrounding uplands that caused increased sedimentation or the diversion of surface runoff away from wetlands. Wetlands and water areas also were created in some regions due to the construction of farm and livestock ponds, and locally rising water tables due to irrigation canal and reservoir seepage. However, the net result of all of these activities statewide was a reduction in wetlands by an estimated 35 percent, to 1,905,000 acres. The destruction of wetlands was much higher in some regions of the state, reaching more than a 90 percent

loss, but the statewide figure is buffered by the large wetland resource still remaining in the Sandhills.

Wetlands provide many recreational opportunities, including hunting, trapping, wildlife watching, photography, and enjoyment of the serenity that a wetland can offer. Anglers also benefit from wetlands because many species of fish use these areas for spawning, hiding, or because the foods used by the fish are produced in wetlands. Wetlands provide an excellent setting for environmental education because of the many unusual life forms present and because they are unique features of the landscape. Wetlands also serve a heritage function because they represent a landscape as it once appeared in the past.

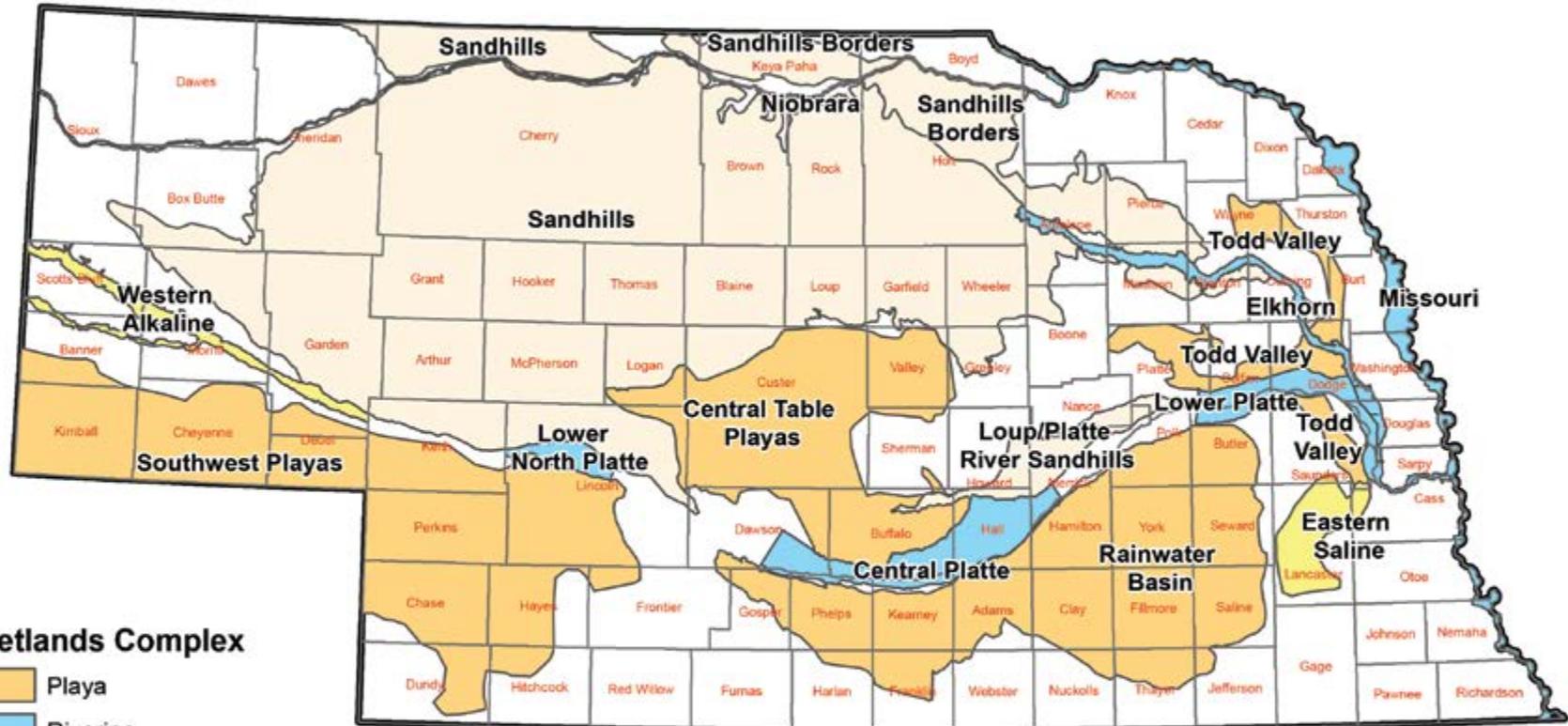
Any wetland has the potential to provide for recreation, either through direct use or because of the fish and wildlife that they support. Many organizations and agencies have put much effort into conserving and managing some outstanding examples of Nebraska's wetland resources. These entities have acquired or in other ways protected approximately 50,000 acres of wetlands in Nebraska and most of these are open to public use. However, privately owned wetlands also provide tremendous recreation opportunities, but landowner permission is needed to access private property.



A tiger swallowtail butterfly rests on the beach along the Missouri River at Ponca State Park. (Dixon County)

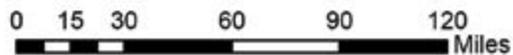
FIGURE 43

WETLAND COMPLEXES



Wetlands Complex

- Playa
- Riverine
- Saline/Alkaline
- Sandhill



Planning and Programming Division
September 2015

There is a need for continued conservation because of the importance of wetlands. This is especially important for some areas due to past wetland losses and continued threats to the wetlands. These approaches should be tailored to meet the unique needs of each regional wetland complex. See Figure 43 for the wetland complexes in Nebraska. The following list provides some general statewide recommendations for wetland conservation.

- **Protection** — Since a vast majority of Nebraska’s wetlands are privately owned, the conservation of these areas requires understanding and meeting the unique needs of landowners. A variety of tools are already available to allow this to happen, but new ones also need to be developed. There is a need to develop alternative ways to protect our remaining wetlands. These should include



Trumpeter swans and their young, called cygnets, can be seen on Sandhill lakes and marshes.



*Northern River Otter in
a small pond near Brea.
(Box Butte County)*

the use of easements to protect areas while allowing them to remain in private ownership, and seeking ways to help landowners generate income from their wetlands. Efforts to acquire important wetland areas also must continue.

- **Restoration** — Simply protecting our remaining wetland areas will not adequately ensure the conservation of our wetlands and the functions they provide. This is especially true for some wetland complexes where more than 90 percent of the wetlands have been eliminated or severely degraded. Efforts to restore wetlands on public and private land must be increased.
- **Management** — Given that wetlands are dynamic systems that historically were disturbed frequently, it may not be adequate to simply put a fence around a wetland and “walk away” from it. In the absence of natural processes and disturbances, wetlands need some management. Management might include water-level changes, tree removal, burning, prescribed grazing and haying, and sediment removal. There is a need to provide management assistance, especially to private landowners.

Although the destruction of wetlands has been greatly reduced due to laws and conservation efforts, the remaining wetlands in Nebraska continue to face threats that must be addressed. The greatest threats include human-accelerated sedimentation into wetlands, alteration of streams and rivers, drainage and filling, lack of proper management, and invasive species. The conservation priority for wetlands varies by wetland complex and for many of the specific complexes detailed conservation plans have been developed. The priorities include protection, restoration, management, inventory, and research needs.

There are tremendous opportunities available for the conservation of Nebraska’s wetlands. The Guide to Nebraska’s Wetlands, printed in 2005, lists a variety of actions that individuals and groups may take. Many conservation opportunities may be met by working with local conservation partnerships that are working in many wetland complexes.



Tubing the White River at Fort Robinson State Park. (Dawes County)



DEMAND FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION IN NEBRASKA

CHAPTER FIVE

In order to best plan for future outdoor recreation we must first understand what people want. There is no point in providing amenities for people if those amenities don't get used. Because demand changes over time we need to constantly stay up to date with what those changing demands are. For example, within the State of Nebraska there are unused tennis courts that are deteriorating at an alarming rate within small towns across the state.



Hiking on a trail during a gentle snowfall at Platte River State Park. (Sarpy County)

At the time those courts were built tennis was very popular and people wanted access to courts. Now very few people play tennis and unless the community has taken steps to repurpose them, they are not a priority to maintain.

This chapter provides information regarding the demand for outdoor recreation from both a national and state perspective. The Outdoor Industry Association annually conducts a comprehensive survey of national outdoor recreation participation and spending so as to establish trends that businesses and governments can use to make decisions regarding outdoor recreation. The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission also conducted a survey of Nebraska's in 2014/2015 to see our state's specific participation rates and what is important to Nebraska residents regarding outdoor recreation.

NATIONAL TRENDS

According to a report from the Outdoor Industry Foundation, in 2013 approximately 143 million people, or 49.2 percent of the population, participated in at least one outdoor activity. Running, including jogging and trail running, was the most popular activity when measured by number of participants and by number of total outings. Walking for fitness was the top crossover activity, with 53 percent of outdoor recreationalists walking as well as some other

activity. Hispanic Americans who participate in outdoor activities averaged the most annual outings per person of any ethnic group.

MOST POPULAR OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES BY PARTICIPATION RATE

- 1. Running, Jogging and Trail Running**
20 percent of people, 57.5 million participants
- 2. Biking; Road, Mountain and BMX**
16 percent of people, 46.6 million participants
- 3. Fishing; Freshwater, Saltwater and Fly**
16 percent of people, 45.9 million participants
- 4. Camping; Car, Backyard, Backpacking and RV**
14 percent of people, 40.1 million participants
- 5. Hiking**
12 percent of people, 34.4 million participants

FAVORITE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES BY FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPATION

- 1. Running, Jogging and Trail Running**
82 average outings per runner
- 2. Biking; Road, Mountain and BMX**
58 average outings per cyclist
- 3. Bird Watching/Wildlife Viewing**
39 average outings per person
- 4. Fishing; Freshwater, Saltwater and Fly**
20 average outings per angler
- 5. Camping; Car, Backyard, Backpacking, and RV**
15 average outings per camper

In evaluating these national trends we can see that the most popular outdoor activities involve trails. Running, walking, biking, and bird watching all utilize trails in some form or another. In order to properly prepare for future needs, development should include not only trails but related support services to those activities. Coincidentally those support services include some of the other more popular activities such as camp pads and other camping related infrastructure.

NEBRASKA TRENDS

In 2014 the State of Nebraska contracted with Responsive Management, a survey firm, to complete a telephone/Internet survey of general Nebraskan's to find out participation rates and opinions regarding outdoor recreation in Nebraska. The survey was set up to be statistically valid for all seven regions and similar to the survey that was conducted in 2009 so that results could be compared. The following tables are the result of that survey.

In 2014 the majority of Nebraskan's (79 percent) visited a public recreation site within the state. In 2009 that number was 86 percent, so in the past five years there has been a slight decrease in visitation. Looking at these same numbers broken down by region in Table 6, shows the Metro region has the highest visitation at 83 percent and North Central has the lowest at 69 percent. There could be multiple



Having a picnic outside a cabin at Ponca State Park. (Dixon County)



TABLE 6: VISITATION OF RECREATION SITES IN NEBRASKA BY REGION

	METRO	SOUTHEAST	NORTHEAST	SOUTH CENTRAL	SOUTHWEST	WEST	NORTH CENTRAL
Yes	83	75	73	72	72	77	69
No	17	24	26	27	26	23	31
Don't Know	0	1	1	1	2	0	1

reasons for both the overall decline and the variance between regions, but what is certain is if this trend continues parks and public lands will come under more scrutiny when it comes to funding as they could be seen as less necessary infrastructure.

In looking at the participation rate among activities in Table 7, what most park and recreation professionals call passive uses make up the top 10 aside from swimming or boating. This is not unusual nor has it changed dramatically from the 2009 survey what it illustrates is that natural or passive areas are the most common ways that participants utilize parks.

In contrast to the numbers in Table 7, Table 8 shows the mean days of participation for various activities. In this list we see walking as the only repeat in the top ten, most of the other activities would be considered more active than passive. This would indicate that, while more people participate in passive activities,

those who participate in active activities do these more often. In Table 9 we have the same info as Table 8 only we have added nonparticipants as zeros which produces a similar list to Table 7 with the passive uses being more predominant again.



Riding bicycles at Two Rivers State Recreation Area near Waterloo. (Douglas County)



TABLE 7: PARTICIPATION RATE BY PERCENTAGE IN THE STATE

ACTIVITY	PARTICIPATION RATE %
Outdoor Exercise, Play or Hobbies	88
Sightseeing or Driving for Pleasure	77
Picnicking, Having a Cookout	73
Walking	72
Nature, Wildlife or Other Outdoor Recreation	69
Driving for Pleasure	69
Swimming or Boating	66
Sightseeing	65
Fishing	59
Fishing From Shore	50
Gardening	49
Going to a Playground With Children	49
Swimming at an Outdoor Pool	45
Outdoor Field, Court or Team Sports	45
Hiking	44
Bicycle Riding	43
Hunting, Shooting or Trapping	41
Swimming or Wading at a Beach	41
Visiting a Historical Site	39
Observing or Photographing Wildlife/Nature	37
Hunting with Firearms or Archery	35
Tent Camping	34
Snow or Ice Activities	33
Fishing From a Boat	31
Motor Boating	30
Running or Jogging	29
Shooting Firearms, Not Hunting	26
Sledding or Playing in Snow	25

ACTIVITY (CON'T.)	PARTICIPATION RATE %
Playing at a Splash Park	24
Visiting a Nature Interpretive Center	23
Riding an ATV	22
Baseball	17
Jet Skiing	16
Basketball	15
Equestrian Activities	15
Soccer	14
Football	14
Water Skiing	13
Canoeing	13
Golf	12
Ice Skating	11
Softball	11
Climbing, Indoors and Outdoors	10
Non-power Boating	10
Kayaking	10
Archery, Not Hunting	10
Volleyball	9
Ice Fishing	7
Geocaching	6
Trapping	6
Skateboarding	4
Tennis	4
Snow Skiing	2
Sailboating	2
Snowmobiling	2
Kiteboarding	Less Than 1



A sailboat cruises across Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area. (Keith County)



Ice skating at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park near Ashland. (Sарy County)

TABLE 8: MEAN DAYS OF PARTICIPATION AMONG THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE ACTIVITY

ACTIVITY	MEAN DAYS PARTICIPATED
Walking	104.34
Running or Jogging	71.18
Gardening	65.01
ATV Riding	48.98
Skateboarding	47.70
Baseball	36.98
Soccer	35.21
Softball	34.86
Basketball Outdoors	32.53
Observing/Photographing Nature	31.37
Bicycle Riding	30.31
Football	30.23
Equestrian Activities	29.71
Volleyball Outdoors	27.86
Golf or go to a Driving Range	26.59
Going to a Playground with Children	26.05
Tennis Outdoors	22.54
Swimming at an Outdoor Pool	20.64
Trapping	19.58
Driving for Pleasure or Leisure	18.44

TABLE 9: MEAN DAYS OF PARTICIPATION AMONG EVERYONE (NON-PARTICIPANTS CODED AS 0 DAYS)

ACTIVITY	MEAN DAYS PARTICIPATED
Walking	69.81
Gardening	31.91
Running or Jogging	19.84
Bicycle Riding	12.72
Going to a Playground with Children	12.35
Driving for Pleasure or Leisure	12.00
Observing/Photographing Nature	11.24
ATV Riding	10.10
Swimming at an Outdoor Pool	9.18
Picnicking, BBQing, Cookout	8.33
Sightseeing Specifically	8.04
Fishing From Shore	6.71
Baseball	6.29
Swimming or Wading at a Beach	5.91
Hunting	5.84
Hiking	5.02
Soccer	4.87
Basketball Outdoors	4.60
Shooting Firearms or Guns	4.56
Fishing from a Boat	4.29

The main reasons people participate in outdoor recreation is for fun or to simply get outside, away from things and enjoy nature. Most people feel there are enough outdoor recreation activities available to them but there is still a significant number 36 percent who believe there needs to be more.

TABLE 10: MAIN REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

REASON	PERCENTAGE
Get Outside/Enjoy Nature/ To Get Away	34
For Fun in General	28
To Be Active/Healthy	15
Be With Family/Friends	16
Other	5
No Answer/Don't Know	2



A father and son walk a field in search of pheasants near Lake Wanahoo near Wahoo. (Saunders County)



Great blue heron wading on the bank of the Middle Loup River near Halsey. (Thomas County)

TABLE 11: DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THE COMMUNITY YOU LIVE IN HAS TOO MANY, ENOUGH, OR NOT ENOUGH OUTDOOR RECREATION ACTIVITIES?

STATEWIDE	REGIONS	PERCENTAGE
Too Many 1%	Western	0
	North Central	1
	Southwest	1
	South Central	1
	Northeast	1
	Metro	0
	Southeast	2
Enough 58%	Western	52
	North Central	67
	Southwest	59
	South Central	50
	Northeast	54
	Metro	61
	Southeast	56
	Not Enough 36%	Western
North Central		28
Southwest		34
South Central		43
Northeast		39
Metro		34
Southeast		36
Don't Know 6%	Western	7
	North Central	4
	Southwest	6
	South Central	7
	Northeast	6
	Metro	5
	Southeast	6

TABLE 12: WHAT RECREATION FACILITIES ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOUR HOUSEHOLD?

FACILITIES	PERCENTAGE
Trails	21.6
Fishing Access	15.3
Campsites	15.2
Outdoor Swimming and Beach Areas	14.8
Playgrounds	14.7
Picnic Areas	11.2
Parks in General	8.8
Fields and Courts	7.4
Hunting Areas	7.3
Boat Access	7.1
Wildlife Observation Areas	6.2
Don't Know	12.6

TABLE 13: WHAT ACTIVITIES ARE YOUR MOST INTERESTING IN PARTICIPATING?

ACTIVITY	PERCENTAGE
Fishing	18
Hunting	12
Camping	11
Hiking	10
Gardening/Landscaping	7
Boating	6
Bicycling	5



Shooting at the Nebraska Outdoor Education Center's indoor shooting range in Lincoln. (Lancaster County)

Tables 12, 13, and 14 show that trails, fishing access/opportunities, camping/lodging opportunities and playgrounds are some of the activities most important to people and what they would like to participate in and see expanded upon.

TABLE 14: WHAT SERVICES OR AMENITIES WOULD YOUR HOUSEHOLD LIKE TO SEE ADDED OR EXPANDED?

FACILITY/ACTIVITY	PERCENTAGE
Trails	15
Infrastructure (Roads, Signs, Restrooms, Showers)	10
Fishing Opportunities	9
Playground Facilities	8
Picnic Shelters/Tables	6
Swimming Areas and Opportunities	6
Tent Campsites	5
Cabins	5
Hunting Opportunities	4
Shooting Sports Activities	4
Wildlife Observation Areas	4
Naturalist Programs	4
RV Campsites	3
Other	7
Nothing	28
Don't Know	17



Children blow bubbles as their grandmother watches during their visit to Lake Minatare State Recreation Area's RV campground. (Scotts Bluff County)

TABLE 15: PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO STATED IT WAS EITHER VERY OR SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN TO PARTICIPATE IN THESE ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY	PERCENTAGE
Family Vacations	99
Reading Books	97
Participating in Unstructured Outdoor Play, Such as Swimming	95
Hiking or Running	94
Bicycling	92
Playing Outdoor Games (Frisbee, Croquet, Marbles, etc.)	92
Family Car Rides	92
Making Money Working at a Part-Time Job	89
Participating in Visual Arts, such as Drawing, Painting	85
Building and Playing With Models, Such as Model Cars	81
Participating in Performance Arts, Such as Music, Theater	81
Playing Board and Card Games	81
Playing Competitive Sports	80
Fishing	80
Non-Power Boating	78
Snow Skiing and Sledding	77
Cruising in a Car	77
Going Skating or Skateboarding	74
Shooting at Targets Using Archery Equipment, a Shotgun or Rifle	73
Power Boating	71
Participating in Competitive Sports in a Support Role	65
Horseback Riding	62
Hunting	61
Bird Watching	56

ACTIVITY (CON'T.)	PERCENTAGE
Communicating With Others Via Social Media	47
Shooting Paint Balls	36
Trapping	26
Watching Television	20
Playing Video Games	16

Table 15 shows what Nebraskans believe are important for children to participate in. Six of the top 10 are likely to occur in a park setting. Of those scoring 70 percent or greater 13 will utilize a park/ recreation facility. Parks are immensely important for a person's wellbeing be they 1, 10, or 100, a park can offer some activity that will satisfy all ages.



Photographing wildflowers at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park near Ashland. (Sarpy County)

ACTION PLAN FOR NEBRASKA

CHAPTER SIX

One of the requirements of SCORP is to identify issues of statewide importance based on input from public participation. Some issues may be addressed through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and are documented at the end of this chapter. There are two perspectives on outdoor recreation: one from a provider of outdoor recreation and one from a participant in outdoor recreation. This

plan attempts to look at outdoor recreation from the perspective of a user in order to inform the providers as to what types of amenities and services need to be provided.

The action plan was developed through the input of the SCORP advisory committee, a review of the survey of Nebraskans completed in 2015, and



Baseball game at Tranquility Park in Omaha. (Douglas County)

public comment. Recommendations will take time to execute, so it will be important for recreation providers to plan proactively to make these recommendations a reality.

BOOST ECONOMIC VITALITY

Outdoor recreation plays a key role in the economic stability and growth in communities and the state as a whole. When companies are looking for places to locate their business one of the major factors they evaluate is quality of life for their employees. Parks, trails and outdoor recreation are major components in determining the quality of life in a community and should be addressed in any major community or regional planning effort.

Actions to Boost Economic

Vitality through Parks:

- Rehabilitate, update and upgrade existing outdoor recreation facilities to maximize functionality and marketability.
- Promote outdoor recreation events, programs and facilities that attract day travelers and overnight visitors.
- Strengthen marketing for outdoor recreation in Nebraska.
- Research the economic benefits of outdoor recreation in Nebraska and supply this information to decision- and policy-makers.

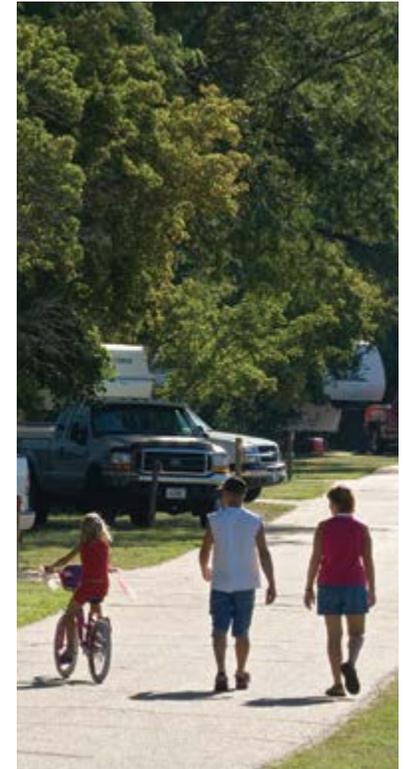
- Create partnerships with businesses, such as convention and visitor bureaus, recreation equipment vendors and guide services that provide materials or services for outdoor recreation.
- Create partnerships that carry out multiple activities, such as fund-raising, and promoting outdoor recreation events, activities and programs.

PROMOTE A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE THROUGH OUTDOOR RECREATION

Numerous studies have shown spending time outside recreating not only promotes physical fitness but also improve mental health. More and more doctors are prescribing walks in the park or nature-based relaxation to treat symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as a recommendation for exercise and staying physically active. Parks and trails are essential infrastructure for supporting a healthy community and need to be treated as such within communities.

Actions for Promoting a Healthy Lifestyle Through Outdoor Recreation:

- Develop a program that shows the benefits of health and outdoor recreation.
- Create more structured and unstructured opportunities for youth to engage in outdoor activities.



Family walking and biking through the campground at the Weigand-Burbach area of Lewis and Clark Lake State Recreation Area north of Crofton. (Knox County)

- Educate the public on health benefits of outdoor recreation activities, such as walking, biking, nature viewing, etc.
- Explore nontraditional funding sources, such as health agencies, local foundations and coalitions, for recreational facilities and development.
- Construct more outdoor classrooms, trails, and playgrounds featuring outdoor recreation skills.



Trout In The Classroom intergrades science, math and language arts to hatch and raise trout. This student is having one last look before the fingerling is released into a cool-water canyon pond at Schramm Park State Recreation Area in Gretna. (Cass County)

- Cultivate physical activity support groups to get people outside and recreating.
- Encourage individuals, workplaces, community groups, and schools to become physically active through engaging in outdoor sports and recreation.
- Promote the development of residential areas that retain green space or natural areas, include recreation facilities and provide safe pedestrian access to public parks from schools, businesses and retail centers.

PROPERLY USE AND CONSERVE NATURAL RESOURCES

Conservation of natural resources protects the natural environment for the future and provides outdoor recreation for Nebraskans. Outdoor recreation-related entities have the most influence and ability to protect natural resources, while utilizing them for outdoor recreation related purposes. Making the public aware of the state's biodiversity will enhance conservation by increasing knowledge and acceptance of resources that benefit all.

Actions for Using and Conserving Natural Resources:

- Create plans to manage and operate facilities to protect the biodiversity of the resources, and respond to recreation preferences and needs.

- Explore and expand partnerships with conservation organizations and land trusts to permanently protect natural ecosystems.
- Work with user groups to promote and protect natural resources.
- Create advocacy coalitions that can bring smaller groups together into one larger voice that can have a greater impact on local, state and federal officials.
- Develop multi-jurisdictional projects to coordinate land-protection efforts for connectivity and ensure resource conservation and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Provide interpretation, education and outdoor recreation programs to expand the knowledge and appreciation of our natural, cultural and recreation resources that are consistent with conservation efforts.
- Find opportunities to present environmental ethic messages, such as land stewardship, responsible use, Leave No Trace, Tread Lightly!, and Pack It In Pack It Out.
- Continue to develop Nebraska-specific resources for citizens, families and educators, including informational websites, classroom curriculums and printed materials.



Friendly reminder at Lake McConaughy to help keep our resources clean and inviting. (Keith County)



Crane watchers lining the Fort Kearny State Recreation Area bridge in anticipation of the birds swarming to the Platte River to roost for the night. (Kearney County)

- Collaborate to develop classes to help citizens, parents and families learn how to engage in nature.
- Increase funding for education projects or programs, that assist schools and teachers in meeting state standard requirements through the use of nature based concepts.
- Facilitate collaborations and partnerships for the protection of wetlands, prairies, and forest ecosystems and provision of greenway and water trail corridors.
- Provide outdoor recreation providers with best practice models and case studies for recreation planning, including models for natural resource stewardship and sustainability.

PROMOTE OUTDOOR RECREATION AND CONSERVATION PLANNING

Having a plan for expanding and maintaining outdoor recreation and natural resources is essential for every community, county and the state. This plan is merely a first step; all outdoor recreation providers should engage in a planning process either as part of a larger comprehensive plan or individually for each park or natural area. The resulting plans can then be used for justification of funding be it from grants or governmental appropriation or donors.

Actions for Promoting Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Planning:

- Identify partnerships and funding sources for parks and outdoor recreation programming.
- Utilize public meetings to gather information and ideas for future park areas and maintenance of existing parks.
- Map out areas of ecological concern for protection from future development.
- Correlate all planning documents so that they work with one another



Welcome to Danish Alps State Rec. Ar

Director Jim Douglas speaks at the 2015 grand opening/ ribbon cutting of the Danish Alps State Recreation Area. (Dakota County)

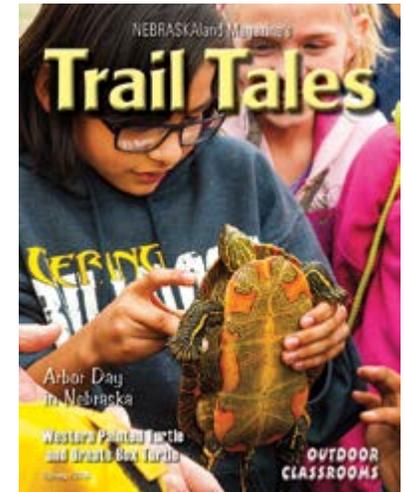
- E.g. A transportation plan does not recommend going through a naturally sensitive area, or a softball complex is not proposed in an area that is much better suited for industrial use.
- Elevate the priority of outdoor recreation with policymakers, planners, practitioners, partners and the public by providing interpretation, education, and outdoor recreation programs to expand the knowledge and appreciation of Nebraska’s recreational and natural resources.
- Advocate for the continuation of funding to states through the LWCF and other federal programs, such as the Recreational Trails Program, that support outdoor recreation in Nebraska.
- Work together through cost sharing to leverage additional funds that make resources and staff time go farther.
- Involve user and support groups in decision making.
- Consider working with multiple partners to manage resources, such as friends groups, nonprofit organizations or other governmental agencies.
- Conduct regular statewide assessments on outdoor recreation preferences by socio-demographics and modify any planning documents necessary to address the findings.

Share data with outdoor recreation providers, to use in developing local plans and programs.

- Collaborate with local entities that are not outdoor related, such as the Chamber of Commerce, to expand partnerships that benefit the local economy.
- Pursue partnerships with other communities to alleviate redundancy of facilities in a region.
- When communities and counties are creating or updating their Comprehensive Plans, inventory existing recreation sites, and map out a general location for future parks and trails.
- Stay up to date on changing recreation trends and demographics to meet the needs of your users.

PROVIDE OUTDOOR RECREATION EDUCATION AND PROGRAMMING

Outdoor education and programming is in high demand in Nebraska. Currently there are programs for youths, adults, and also educators who learn about Nebraska’s wildlife and how to teach about ecosystems, natural legacy and wildlife. Nebraska Game and Parks Commission staff provides programs and presentations, goes to festivals and offers other educational resources such as web-based education on particular subjects. Communities can take advantage of this resource and strive to provide



Trail Tales is just one of the tools used to teach fourth-grade students about nature, the outdoors, our natural resources and the importance of caring for them. Water and air quality, land differences across the state, flora and fauna that inhabit them, threatened and endangered species, non-native invaders and the risks they pose, plus outdoor events and activities across the state are a few of the topics covered in Trail Tales.

outdoor education as part of their school curriculum. It is particularly important for urban populations that have lost many of the opportunities to practice outdoor skills on a regular basis. Teaching environmental ethics is an important way to instill the “land ethic” philosophy in all outdoor users, and gives them another way to connect with the natural resource.

Actions for Providing Outdoor Recreation Education and Programming:

- Support joint outdoor recreation programs among schools, government and communities.
- Collaborate with user groups and support groups to create more outdoor educational opportunities.
- Provide more courses in natural education and ethics.
- Provide emphasis on natural play and outdoor classroom environments.
- Create volunteer activities to engage youth and young adults to create the next generation of stewards of the outdoors.
- Develop Nebraska-specific resources for citizens and educators to use when learning and teaching about the natural ecosystems.
- Provide opportunities for students and adults to engage in citizen science programs. Examples include helping gather data regarding Nebraska’s wildlife species or



A contestant prepares for a race at the ATV Jamboree held at Lake McConaughy. (Keith County)

- classroom service learning projects.
- Provide environmental education opportunities for students, educators, families, seniors, young children, and underserved populations.
 - Encourage greater collaboration between environmental education providers.
 - Increase the number of formal educators who will incorporate environmental education into their curriculum. Work with school administrators to develop a greater appreciation and consequently increased support of environmental education in the classroom.
 - Utilize mentoring programs to encourage the next generation of outdoor recreation enthusiasts.

UNDERSTAND THE OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS IN DEVELOPING URBAN AREAS AND AREAS OF RAPID POPULATION GROWTH

Most of Nebraska is rural in nature. However, rapid growth and urbanization can make it difficult to meet the outdoor recreation needs of any population. When there is a rapidly growing area, there can be difficulty protecting the natural resources of the state. Threats from urbanization include the continued loss of agricultural/outdoor recreation lands, increasing tension of user conflict, loss of

habitat, and decreasing water quality. Large-scale growth also presents opportunities for an expanded tax base and the creation of new park and recreation areas. While this mainly applies to the Metro Region there are several other cities that are experiencing growth and could be poised for large growth spurts if the right economic conditions emerge.

Actions for Rapidly Growing Communities:

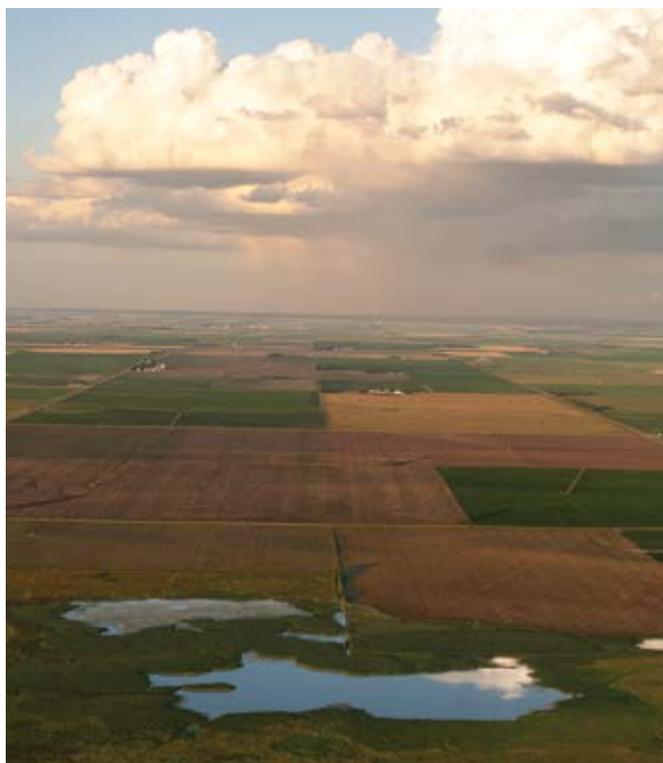
- Develop trail networks that offer easy access throughout the community and to rural areas.
- Encourage communities to develop park and open space plans that provide a balance of recreational opportunities, such as the development of various types of ballfields, and open natural areas.
- Develop and provide active outdoor facilities such as athletic fields, sports courts, and playgrounds as demand warrants.
- Provide and expand community parks for multiple uses, including both active and passive uses.
- Promote the creation of parks and trails when large neighborhood developments are proposed.
- Analyze all transportation including bicycle and pedestrian traffic when expanding commercial, industrial and residential development.



Father and son patiently roast hotdogs over hot coals at Mormon Island State Recreation Area near Grand Island. (Hall County)

WETLAND PRIORITIES

Wetlands provide many functions to society, including water quality improvement, groundwater recharge, flood reduction, fish and wildlife habitat, and recreation and education opportunities. Communities must be aware that there are several laws in place to protect existing wetlands areas and the functions



A storm is brewing near Rauscher Federal Waterfowl Production Area near Grafton. (Fillmore County)

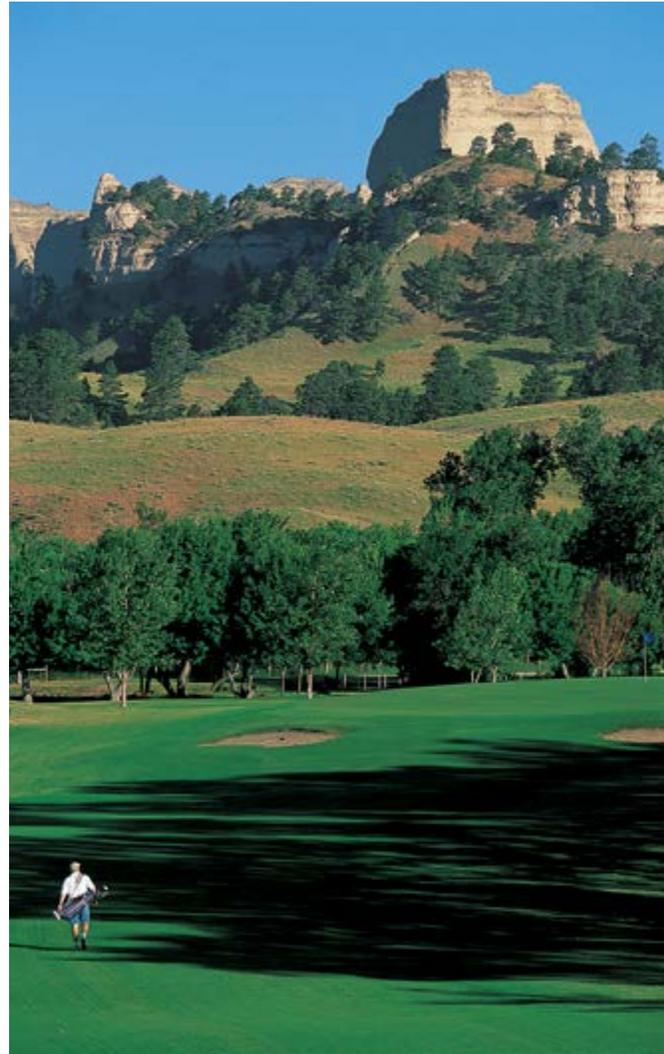
that they provide. The federal Clean Water Act may require that a Section 404 permit be obtained from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers before draining, filling, placing objects in or digging in a wetland or other water areas. The Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality considers wetlands to be waters of the state and protects them from degradation (Nebraska Surface Water Quality Standards, Title 117). Landowners who receive federal farm program benefits must follow wetland rules in the Swampbuster provision of the federal Farm Bill in order to maintain their eligibility for benefits.

Wetlands provide some benefits. Those benefits must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. More information may be found in the Guide to Nebraska's Wetlands. Many wetlands are degraded, but their quality can be improved through restoration and/or management. Wetland conservation plans must be tailored to specific wetland types. Those plans should incorporate watershed and wetland habitat protection and address opportunities for recreation and education. There is wetland conservation expertise available from agencies such as the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, organizations and consulting firms. There are many funding sources available to assist communities with wetland protection, acquisition, restoration, and management.

**Priorities identified regarding wetlands
for all providers to consider are below.**

- Nebraska has a variety of unique wetlands; some types are considered to be imperiled (such as saline wetlands). Identify those wetlands and be cognizant of their locations and what types of development are near them. For a list of Nebraska wetland types, refer to the Guide to Nebraska's Wetlands, available at nebraskawetlands.com.
- Wetlands conservation should be incorporated into a community's development plans. In the plan, wetlands can be identified, and strategies to protect them and their watersheds can be implemented.
- Many existing wetland conservation partnerships have developed plans and priorities for wetland conservation in various regions of Nebraska. These partnerships should be contacted to learn how a community's wetlands may fit into existing priorities.

If you have questions on setting priorities, need more detailed information, or have other wetland questions, visit nebraskawetlands.com or contact the Wetland Program Manager at 402-471-5436.



Golfer walking to the next shot at the Legend Buttes Golf Course near Crawford. (Dawes County)



Threatened species listed piping plover resting on a sandbar of the Missouri River at Elk Point Bend. (Dixon County)

LWCF PRIORITIES

This plan provides recommendations on general priorities Nebraska outdoor recreation providers should strive to accomplish in the next five years.

There are specific activities that may be addressed by LWCF funding priorities, based on public participation data gathered during the SCORP planning process. The activities people participate in, the recreational facilities wanted and the services and amenities to add should be used as recommendations for communities when looking to apply for LWCF funding, as well as to assist in the creation of the



The family dog joins in a soccer game at Indian Cave State Park. (Nemaha County)

Open Project Selection Process of LWCF. In Chapter 5 we examined the demand for outdoor recreation related programming and facilities and developed the following list for recommended priority projects for future LWCF appropriations:

- Camping facilities
- Wildlife habitat viewing opportunities
- Picnicking facilities
- Education related facilities and partnerships
- Fishing access
- Hiking/biking trails
- Playgrounds
- Swimming opportunities (both beach and pool)

These priorities, while important should not be the only factor in what projects are funded. This plan recognizes the importance of local planning initiatives. If a community can demonstrate through a planning process that includes public participation from a large segment of the community that their project is a high priority, it should receive similar consideration as projects that can be identified as statewide priorities. This will encourage all communities with an outdoor recreation need to plan for those needs and feel confident in applying for LWCF dollars. If statewide priorities become too heavily weighted then only communities carrying out statewide priorities apply, which could mean good projects that could greatly benefit communities are not pursued.



Children are refreshed at the splash pad sprinkler park in Seymour Smith Park near LaVista. (Sarpy County)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This plan fulfills the requirements of the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 for a comprehensive statewide outdoor recreation plan. It was prepared under the direction of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission-Planning and Programming Division. The 2016-2020 plan provides an assessment of the current supply and demand for outdoor recreation in Nebraska and identifies the critical issues related to outdoor recreation and natural resources. It includes an Action Program that provides recommendations regarding the critical issues identified in the plan.



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Time outdoors is time well spent.

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