

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Whitefront Wildlife Management Area Property Exchange Clay County, Nebraska

Involving Lands Owned by
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Decision Relating to
Federal Assistance Grant: W-53-L-46 (F16AF00110)

Prepared January 2016

Prepared by:



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background. Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) is requesting approval from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Division of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) to transfer property originally acquired with WSFR grant funds. NGPC proposes to transfer 40 acres of the Whitefront Wildlife Management Area (WMA) (NE ¼ NE ¼ Section 26, Township 7 North, Range 7 West, Clay County) in trade for the adjacent 40-acre Schultz tract (SW ¼ NE ¼ Section 26, Township 7 North, Range 7 West). WSFR originally provided the federal grant to NGPC through the Wildlife Restoration Grant Program. NGPC used the grant to provide valuable wetland habitat for migratory waterfowl and other birds, to restore natural grassland, and to provide a recreation source for public hunting, trapping, bird watching, hiking, and nature study. In 2003, NGPC was able to restore a large Rainwater Basin playa wetland at the west side of the WMA. The proposed property transfer is being pursued because acquisition of the Schultz tract would allow NGPC to restore a second playa wetland at the east side of the WMA.

Purpose. The purpose of the property transfer is to improve the Whitefront WMA's objectives: (1) to provide valuable wetland habitat for migratory waterfowl and other birds and (2) to provide recreational opportunities. The property transfer would enable future management actions to restore and protect a second Rainwater Basin playa wetland at the east side of the WMA.

Need. Between 1867 and 1980, Nebraska experienced a reduction of an estimated 35 percent of wetlands statewide (Dahl 1990). Wetlands serve a variety of important functions, including wildlife habitat, fish breeding and foraging habitat, nutrient and sediment trapping, flood control, and recreation. The acquired property would reconnect the missing central portion of a 0.5-mile long playa, providing the link between the two ends of which are on Whitefront WMA. Once under NGPC ownership, the agency will be able to restore and manage the wetland as one feature.

Location. Whitefront WMA is located 2 miles west and 1.5 miles north of the Village of Clay Center, Nebraska. The property is located south of Road 29, and 0.5 miles north of Road 27, west of Road 28, and east and west of Road 30.

Project Setting. NGPC owns and operates the 281-acre Whitefront WMA to provide wetland habitat for migratory waterfowl and other birds. The NGPC, working with the Prairie Plains Resource Institute (Aurora, NE), restored 120 acres of playa wetlands of the Rainwater Basin Wetland Complex through sediment and tree removal. In addition, 146 acres were seeded to high-diversity, local-ecotype tallgrass prairie and wheatgrass playa grassland, a shallow wetland community. The 40-acre Schultz tract is currently planted in soybeans.

Alternatives Considered. For the property transfer, a Preferred Alternative and No Action Alternative were evaluated to determine if the Preferred Alternative has significant impacts on the environment.

Project Description. The Preferred Alternative is the property transfer of a 40-acre tract from the Whitefront WMA for the adjacent 40-acre Schultz tract. Future restoration activities would include removing a dike between the WMA and Schultz tract; removing accumulated sediment to restore hydrology; and filling the concentration pit that currently serves as a wetland drain.

Project Impacts. This document evaluates the beneficial and adverse environmental impacts of the Preferred and No Action Alternatives on environmental and socioeconomic resources. Where needed, mitigation measures are described to avoid, reduce, or compensate for adverse impacts of the Proposed Action. Permit requirements are also noted where applicable. Of the 12 resources (including cumulative impacts) evaluated, all were found to have long-term beneficial impacts, or no effect. Findings are summarized in the adjacent table.

<i>Summary of Environmental Impacts by Alternative</i>		
Environmental Resource	Preferred Alternative	No Action Alternative
Topography & Hydrology	Beneficial, Moderate, Long-Term	No Effect
Geological Resources	No Effect	No Effect
Prime Farmland	Beneficial, Minor, Long-Term	No Effect
Landscape	Beneficial, Moderate, Long-Term	No Effect
Vegetation	Beneficial, Minor, Long-Term (net)	No Effect
Wetlands & Waters	Beneficial, Minor, Long-Term	Adverse, Minor, Long-Term
Fish, Wildlife & Other Aquatic Species	Beneficial, Moderate, Long-Term	No Effect
Threatened & Endangered Species	Beneficial, Moderate, Long-Term	No Effect
Raptors & Migratory Birds	Beneficial, Moderate, Long-Term	No Effect
Recreational Resources	Beneficial, Moderate, Long-Term	No Effect
Archeological, Historical & Cultural Resources	No Historic Properties Affected	No Effect
Cumulative Impacts	Beneficial, Moderate, Long-Term	No Effect

Recommendation for Finding of No Significant Impact. This Draft EA indicates that the Preferred Alternative would have no significant impact on the human or natural environment; therefore, a FONSI is recommended for the proposed property transfer of 40 acres from the Whitefront WMA for the adjacent 40-acre Schultz tract, and the future wetland restoration that it will facilitate.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BGEPA	Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act
CAA	Clean Air Act
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CWA	Clean Water Act
DEA	Draft Environmental Assessment
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EO	Executive Order
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
FPPA	Farm Protection Policy Act
MBTA	Migratory Bird Treaty Act
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NDEQ	Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NESHPO	Nebraska State Historical Preservation Office
NGPC	Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Officer
T&E	Threatened and Endangered Species
USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
WMA	Wildlife Management Area
WSFR	Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration

1.0 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

1.1 Background

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) is requesting approval from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Division of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) to transfer property originally acquired with Wildlife Restoration Program Grant Funds in 1998 (W-. NGPC proposes to transfer 40 acres of the Whitefront Wildlife Management Area (WMA) (NE ¼ NE ¼ Section 26, Township 7 North, Range 7 West, Clay County) in trade for an adjacent 40-acre tract (SW ¼ NE ¼ Section 26, Township 7 North, Range 7 West) belonging to Larry Schultz. WSFR originally provided the federal grant to NGPC through the Wildlife Restoration Grant Program, with NGPC using the grant to provide valuable wetland habitat for migratory waterfowl and other birds, to restore natural grassland, and to provide a recreation source for public hunting, trapping, bird watching, hiking, and nature study. In 2003, NGPC was able to restore a large Rainwater Basin playa wetland at the west side of the WMA. The land trade is being pursued because acquisition of the Schultz tract would allow NGPC to restore a second playa wetland at the east side of the WMA.

The WSFR approval of the proposed trade constitutes a federal action subject to provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA). Therefore, the Service is required to prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze the effects on the human and natural environment and to document the findings. The Service will use this Draft EA (DEA) to determine if the Preferred Alternative is likely to result in significant impacts to the human and natural environment. If it is determined that there are no significant adverse impacts, the Service will issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). If it is determined that significant adverse impacts might occur, the Service will be required to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

1.2 Project Location

Location. Whitefront WMA is located 2 miles west and 1.5 miles north of the Village of Clay Center, Nebraska. The property is located south of Road 29, and 0.5 miles north of Road 27, west of Road 28, and east and west of Road 30 (Figures 1 and 2).

Project Setting. The NGPC owns and operates the 281-acre Whitefront WMA to provide wetland habitat for migratory waterfowl and other birds. The NGPC, working with the Prairie Plains Resource Institute (Aurora, NE), restored 120 acres of playa wetlands of the Rainwater Basin Wetland Complex through sediment and tree removal. In addition, 146 acres were seeded to high-diversity, local-ecotype tallgrass prairie and wheatgrass playa grassland, a shallow wetland community.

Land surrounding the Whitefront WMA is cropland planted in soybeans and corn. Four rural residences are present within one mile. The 40-acre Schultz tract is currently planted in soybeans. At the time of the July site visit, standing water was present across an estimated 10 acres of the property.

1.3 Purpose and Need

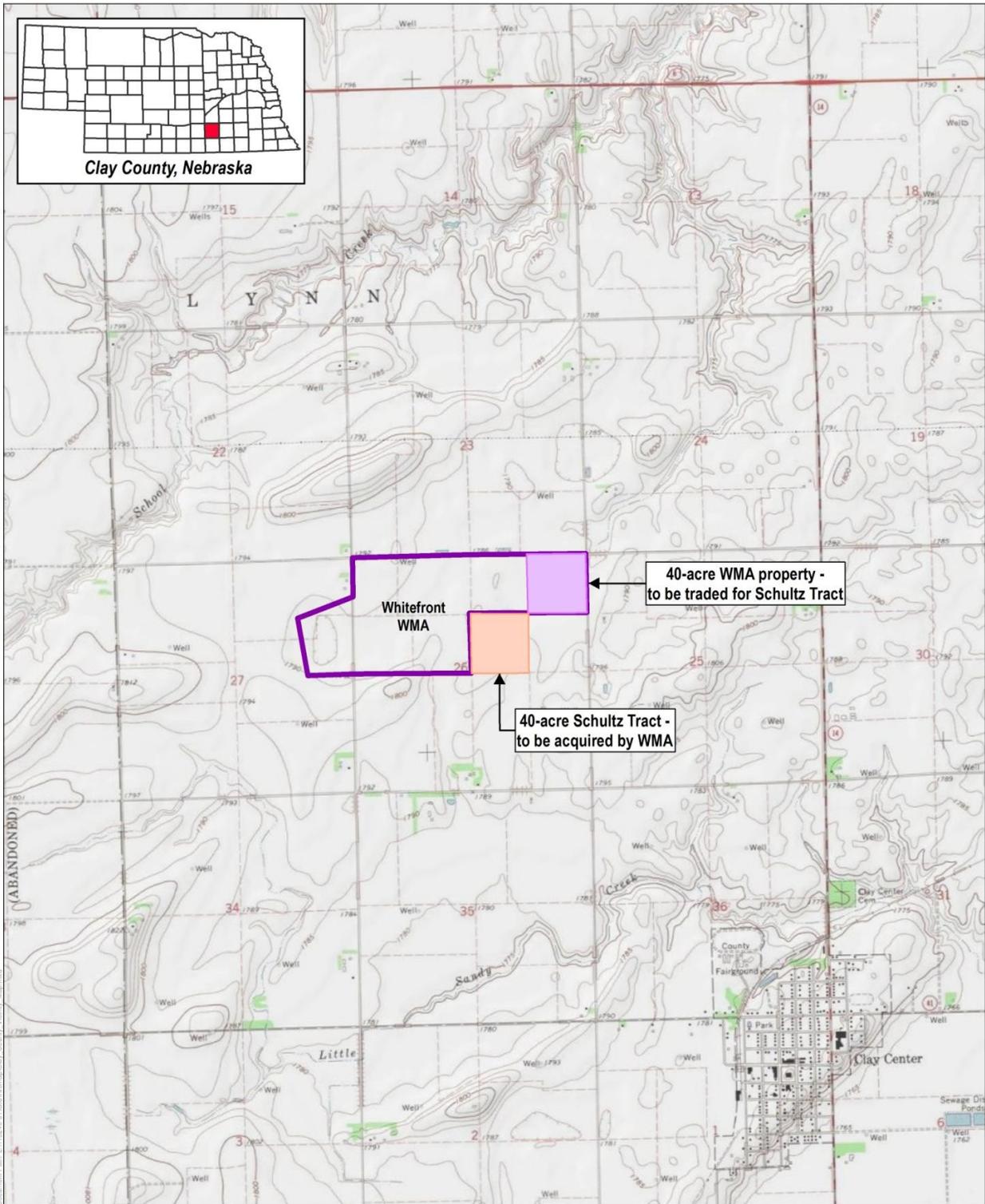
Purpose. The purpose of the property transfer is to improve the Whitefront WMA's objectives: to provide valuable wetland habitat for migratory waterfowl and other birds, and to provide recreational opportunities. Specifically, the acquired property would reconnect the missing central portion of a 0.5-mile long playa wetland, providing the link between the two ends of which are on Whitefront WMA.

Need. Between 1867 and 1980, Nebraska has seen a reduction of an estimated 35 percent of wetlands statewide (Dahl 1990). Wetlands serve a variety of important functions including wildlife habitat, fish breeding and foraging habitat, nutrient and sediment trapping, flood control, and recreation. The property transfer would enable future management actions to restore a second Rainwater Basin playa wetland at the east side of the WMA.

The Whitefront WMA was purchased in three tracts. The first tract was acquired on 1 July 1998 with 160 acres purchased from Royce East; 75 percent of the cost was provided by federal funds derived from Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Funds; 25 percent came from state funds. The 40 acres to be traded was part of this 160-acre purchase. The second tract was acquired 16 November 1999 with 40.83 acres purchased from Devlin Dane; 75 percent of the cost was provided by federal funds derived from Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Funds; 25 percent came from state funds. The last tract was acquired on 24 July 2000 with 80 acres purchased from Hans Ehlers entirely with state funds.

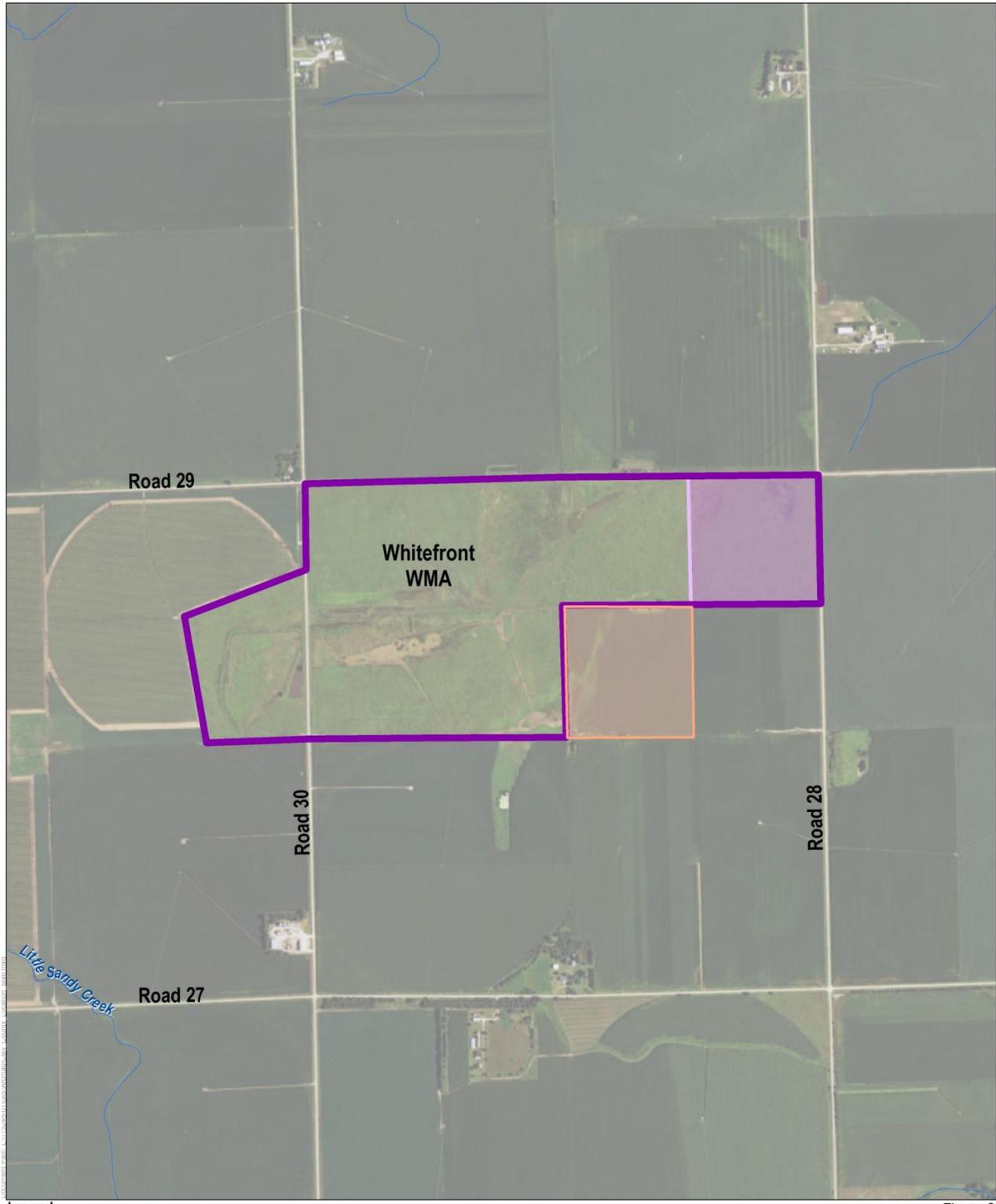
In 2003, the restored wetland was re-named Ackles Marsh in honor of a longtime sportsman and Ducks Unlimited volunteer, Robert D. Ackles of Hastings, who passed away in 1996.





Topographic Source: 2013 National Geographic Society, i-cubed, ESRI; USGS 1:100,00 scale metric Topographic Map; Grand Island 1970

Figure 1
Vicinity Map
NW of Clay Center, NE 1/4, NE 1/4, Section 26, T7N, R7W
Clay County, Nebraska



Legend

-  NHD Streams
-  Whitefront WMA
-  40-Acre Schultz Tract - To Be Acquired By WMA
-  40-Acre WMA Property - To Be Traded For Schultz Tract



Figure 2

Location Map
NW of Clay Center,
NE 1/4, NE 1/4, Section 26, T7N, R7W
Clay County, Nebraska

2.0 ALTERNATIVES

NEPA requires consideration of reasonable and feasible alternatives, including a No Action Alternative to be used for comparison purposes. For the property transfer, a Preferred Alternative and No Action Alternative were evaluated to determine if the Preferred Alternative has significant impacts on the environment.

2.1 Preferred Alternative

The Preferred Alternative is the property transfer of 40 acres from Whitefront WMA in trade for the adjacent 40-acre Schultz tract.

Whitefront WMA Tract. The 40-acre tract to be transferred from the Whitefront WMA is primarily upland that has been restored to native grasses (see photo below). It contains 35 acres of Prime Farmland and 5 acres of Prime Farmland if drained (in comparison, the Schultz tract contains 28 acres of Prime Farmland (<http://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/WebSoilSurvey.aspx>)). Land use for the Whitefront WMA tract will remain a pasture and cropland for the Schultz property since the entire property is upland grass habitat.



40-acre Whitefront WMA tract to be transferred supports restored upland prairie.

Schultz Tract. As currently managed, the Schultz tract has 28 acres planted in soybeans, and 12 acres of soils that are frequently ponded (<http://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/WebSoilSurvey.aspx>). At the time of the site visit, the frequently ponded soil area was open water (see photo below). This area is part of the same wetland feature on the Whitefront WMA. The property transfer would enable NGPC to restore the fragmented playa wetland by increasing connectivity and eliminating a relict dike. This will improve wetland function and increase wetland surface area on the Whitefront WMA. Soybean activity on the parcel will continue at a diminished rate but will including best management practices suitable for maintaining the WMA wetland for NGPC.



Schultz Tract showing ponded water within planted soybean field.

2.2 **No Action Alternative**

Under the No Action Alternative, the 40 acres from the Whitefront WMA property would not be traded for the 40-acre Schultz tract.

Whitefront WMA Tract. The Whitefront WMA property would remain in its current configuration with the 40-acre tract maintained in upland prairie grasses. As a result, the missing central portion of the 0.5-mile long playa wetland would remain separated from its two ends, which are on the Whitefront WMA. NGPC would not be able to restore and manage the playa wetland as one feature, and the WMA would not be improved by further wetland restoration.

Schultz Tract. The central portion of the wetland would continue to be farmed by the adjacent landowner, despite its less suitable soils for crop production in wetter years.

Therefore, the No Action Alternative does not meet the purpose and need of restoring wetland hydrology and improving the overall functionality of wetlands on the Whitefront WMA.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter discusses the beneficial and adverse environmental impacts of the Preferred Alternative and No Action Alternative on environmental and socioeconomic resources. Each section includes information on existing conditions of the resource and expected consequences or impacts on each of the two tracts in the proposed property transfer. Impacts include direct impacts from the property transfer, and indirect impacts that would occur at a later point in time, such as restoration of the wetland. Where needed, mitigation measures are described to avoid, reduce, or compensate for adverse impacts of the Proposed Action. Permit requirements are also noted where applicable.

Impacts are described as either beneficial or adverse and are quantified where possible. When it is not possible to quantify, impacts are qualitatively described as no effect, minor, moderate, or major. They are also described as short-term or long-term whenever possible.

3.1 *Issues Eliminated from Further Study*

Air Quality. Air quality is protected under the Clean Air Act (CAA) of 1963, as amended, with regional ambient air quality regulated in relation to National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). In accordance with the CAA, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) set NAAQS for pollutants considered harmful to the environment and public health. Counties where the levels of a particular pollutant exceed EPA standards are deemed “non-attainment counties”; these locations are required to implement plans to meet the standards or risk eligibility for some forms of federal financial assistance. Currently, there are no counties in non-attainment for any air quality pollutant within the State of Nebraska.

Other Resources. This EA addresses all other components required in Attachment A, NGPC Work Specifications, and contracted for this project.

3.2 *Topography and Hydrology*

Existing Conditions. The general physiography of Clay County is that of an almost level southeastwardly-sloping depositional plain, the original surface of which has been slightly modified by stream erosion and wind action. The topography of the 281- acre Whitefront WMA is consistent with these conditions and is characterized by 0 to 3 percent slopes.

While there are no stream courses or drainages on the Whitefront WMA or Schultz tract, there are shallow depressions where water ponds. These depressions are considered playa wetlands of the Rainwater Basin Wetland Complex (hereafter referred to as Rainwater Basin). Playas are wind-formed, nearly circular depressions located in semi-arid areas. They have a clay layer in the soil under the wetland that slows runoff water from seeping into the ground.

Impacts of the Preferred Alternative.

Whitefront WMA Tract. Future impacts to the 40 acres traded from the Whitefront WMA are unlikely to affect its topography or hydrology. The area contains Prime and Unique Farmlands (35 acres) and will be managed as an upland pasture once transferred.

Schultz Tract. Future restoration plans to rejoin and restore hydrology to a second playa wetland would result in moderate, long-term beneficial impacts to topography and hydrology. Restoration activities would include removing a dike that holds back water; removing accumulated sediment to increase water depth; and filling the concentration pit that currently serves as a wetland drain.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative would have no effect on topography or hydrology.

Mitigation. None required.

3.3 *Geological Resources*

Existing Conditions. Clay County is in the southwestern part of the loess-plains of Nebraska and is immediately west of the glaciated region of the state. Sand and gravel and associated silt and clay deposits of Quaternary (Pleistocene) and Tertiary age mantle the area. Pleistocene sands and gravels yield an aquifer that is the principal source of groundwater in the county. Deposits of Tertiary age, which consist principally of partly consolidated fine-textured continental deposits, also are saturated and yield water to some wells.

The deposits of Quaternary and Tertiary age rest on an eroded, uneven bedrock surface of rocks of Cretaceous age. The Ogallala formation of Tertiary age overlies truncated northwestward-dipping strata of Cretaceous age—in ascending order, the Niobrara formation, Carlile shale, Greenhorn limestone, and Graneros shale (Keck and Dreeszen 1959).

Impacts of the Preferred Alternative. There would be no effect on geological resources with the property transfer.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative would have no effect on geological resources.

Mitigation. None required.

3.4 Prime Farmland

The Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) was established to avoid significant, irreversible losses of farmland. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), requires the use of a rating form to ensure that prime farmlands are protected from large development projects that would convert a significant number of acres, especially in areas with contiguous, valuable agricultural lands.

Existing Conditions. The USDA's Web Soil Survey identified five soil types that occur on the Whitefront WMA and 40-acre Schultz tract (**Exhibit 1**). **Table 1** lists these soils, along with their Prime Farmland classification and number of acres of each Prime Farmland type:

Table 1: Prime Farmland Soils on the Whitefront WMA Tract and Schultz Tract

SOIL TYPE	PRIME FARMLAND SOIL	PRESENT ON WHITEFRONT WMA	PRESENT ON 40-AC SCHULTZ TRACT
Butler silt loam	Yes, if drained	X	
Crete silt loam	Yes	X	X
Hasting silt loam	Yes	X	
Scott silt loam	No, due to frequent ponding	X	X
Filmore silt loam	Yes	X	X
Prime Farmland Soils on the 40-acre tracts		35 acres	28 acres
Prime Farmland Soils, if Drained, on the 40-acre tracts		5 acres	0 acres
Frequently Ponded Soils on the 40-acre tracts		0 acres	12 acres

Impacts of the Preferred Alternative.

Whitefront WMA Tract. The Preferred Alternative is likely to have minor, long-term beneficial impacts to Prime Farmland as 35 acres of Prime Farmland on the Whitefront WMA would either be (1) converted from upland habitat and put back into crop production or (2) maintained as upland pasture or hayland. The remaining 5 acres (Prime Farmland if drained) would likely be treated similarly.

Schultz Tract. The Schultz tract includes 28 acres of Prime Farmland which would be converted from cropland and managed as upland habitat.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative would have no effect on Prime Farmland.

Mitigation. None required.

3.5 Landscape

Existing Conditions. The landscape of the Whitefront WMA consists of restored playa wetlands and upland grassland habitats. The Schultz tract is in agricultural production, planted in soybeans.

Impacts of the Preferred Alternative.

Whitefront WMA Tract. The Preferred Alternative is likely to have long-term impacts on the 40 acres to be traded from the Whitefront WMA due to changes in land use. However, it is not known if the 40 acres of restored upland grassland will be converted to cropland or whether the landowner will use the area for pasture or hayland, thereby maintaining the area as upland habitat.

Schultz Tract. The transfer of the Schultz Tract to the WMA would have moderate, long-term beneficial effects on the landscape of the Whitefront WMA because the flooded soybean field would be reconnected to the two ends of the playa and restored to a playa wetland. Surrounding upland soils would be taken out of crop production and replanted to native grasses, creating a buffer around the playa wetland, thereby restoring the area to its more native condition. The net effect will result in the restoration of 12 acres of wetlands and revegetation of these frequently flooded soils, which are unsuitable for crop production.

Impacts of the No Action. The No Action Alternative would have no effect on the landscape.

Mitigation. None required.

3.6 Vegetation

Existing Conditions. The 40-acre portion of the Whitefront WMA to be traded has been seeded to high-diversity, local-ecotype tallgrass prairie. During the July 2015 site visit, observed grasses and forbs were characteristic of a high-quality prairie restoration and included the following species:

- Canada wild rye (*Elymus canadensis*)
- smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*)
- reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*)
- barnyard grass (*Echinochloa crusgali*)
- sedges (*Carex* spp)
- nut sedge (*Cyperus* sp.)
- bulrush (*Schoenoplectus* sp.)
- Canada milk vetch (*Astragalus canadensis*)
- western yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)
- wooly verbena (*Verbena stricta*)
- prairie coneflower (*Ratibida columnifera*)
- plains coreopsis (*Coreopsis tinctoria*)
- giant ragweed (*Ambrosia trifida*)
- common ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*)
- Canada goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*)
- arrowhead (*Sagittaria latifolia*)
- dogbane (*Apocynum canibinum*)
- common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)
- whorled milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*)
- smartweed (*Polygonum* sp.)
- mint leaf bee balm (*Monarda fistulosa*)
- white penstemon (*Penstemon digitalis*)
- velvetleaf (*Abutilon theophrasti*)
- curly dock (*Rumex crispus*)
- annual sunflower (*Helianthus annus*)

Very few trees are present on the WMA or the Schultz tract; however, scattered white mulberry (*Morus alba*), American elm (*Ulmus americana*), and cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) were observed. The Schultz tract was planted in soybeans.

Impacts of the Preferred Alternative.

Whitefront WMA Tract. There could be minor, long-term adverse impacts to native vegetation with the Preferred Alternative as the 40 acres of the restored upland prairie on the WMA could be converted back into crop production or used for pasture or hayland. (If converted to cropland, the property transfer could have minor, long-term beneficial impacts on crop production by reducing crop loss due to ponding.)

Schultz Tract. Native upland prairie impacts on the land traded from the WMA would be offset by minor, long-term beneficial impacts as the Schultz tract would convert the cropland to an estimated 12 acres of playa wetlands and 28 acres of a surrounding upland grassland. The net effect will be moderately beneficial and result in the restoration of 12 acres of wetlands, reconnection of the playa wetland, and revegetation of these frequently flooded soils, which are unsuitable for crop production.

No trees removals are anticipated with the property transfer.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative would have no effect on vegetation.

Mitigation. None required.

3.7 Wetlands and Waters

Wetland resources are afforded protection under the Clean Water Act (CWA), as amended, and EO 11990 of 1977 (Protection of Wetlands). Wetlands serve a variety of important functions including wildlife habitat, fish breeding and foraging habitat, nutrient and sediment trapping, flood control, and recreation.

Existing Conditions. The Whitefront WMA was developed for the purpose of wetland restoration and waterfowl production. The restoration plan involved taking frequently ponded lands out of agricultural production, and revegetating them in native species. The result was the restoration of 120 acres of wetlands, 7 acres of permanent open water, and 153 acres of surrounding upland buffer. There are no streams or drainages on the WMA.

Impacts of the Preferred Alternative.

Whitefront WMA Tract. The proposed property transfer would have no impact on wetlands because the 40 acres is entirely upland. The Preferred Alternative would have a minor, long term beneficial impact on the remaining Whitefront WMA wetlands by reconnecting the two ends of the 0.5 acre long playa wetland and enabling future restoration.

Schultz Tract. The Preferred Alternative would have minor, long-term beneficial impacts on wetlands with the net increase of a minimum of 12 acres of wetlands to be restored on frequently ponded soils currently in agricultural production. The property transfer reconnects the two ends of the 0.5-acre long playa wetland and would enable NGPC to manage the area as one feature. Surrounding uplands would be restored to native grasses, creating a buffer around the wetland, and, thereby, improving the landscape for waterfowl, migratory birds, and other wildlife.

The NGPC Wetland Program Manager conducted a federal-aid wetland review for the property transfer. In his opinion, the project benefits wetlands and does not negatively impact them (see **Exhibit 2**).

Impacts of the No Action Alternative. There would continue to be minor, long-term adverse impacts to wetlands due to continued agricultural use of frequently ponded soils, which are productive only in dry years.

Mitigation. None required.

Permitting. While no permit is required for the property transfer, it is possible that wetland restoration activities, specifically sediment removal and dike removal, may require a Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The activity appears to fall under Nationwide 27 for Aquatic Habitat Restoration, Establishment, and Enhancement Activities, which does not require compensatory mitigation.

The wetland restoration project is likely to also require a Construction Storm Water permit from the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ) under the National Pollutant Discharge and Elimination System (NPDES) for construction sites that disturb one acre or more of soil. This will require development of a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) and submittal of a Notice of Intent (NOI) to NDEQ.

3.8 Fish, Wildlife, and Other Aquatic Species

Fish and wildlife that are not listed as threatened or endangered are protected under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (16 USC 661-667e) and Nebraska Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act (Neb. Rev. Stat. 37-801 to 37-811).

Existing Conditions. During a two-hour site visit in July 2015, the following species or their sign were observed in the wetlands and surrounding upland buffers on the WMA:

- red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)
- dickcissel (*Spiza americana*)
- eastern meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*)
- mourning dove (*Zenaidura macroura*)
- orchard oriole (*Icterus spurius*)
- killdeer (*Charadrius vociferous*)
- great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*)
- mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
- blue-winged teal (*Anas fulvigula*)
- eastern kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*)
- ring-necked pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)
- white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)
- raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)
- spring peepers (*Pseudacris crucifer*)
- bull frogs (*Lithobates catesbeianus*)

These species are representative of the playa wetlands and surrounding tallgrass prairies of the Rainwater Basin, including upland grassland, emergent wetland, mudflat, aquatic bed, and open water habitats. (The Whitefront WMA supports 7 acres of open water; however, a tally of the fish and other aquatic species has not been conducted.)

The Schultz tract was planted in soybeans; but during the site visit was observed to have an approximately 10-acre area of standing water that did not support wetland vegetation.

Impacts of the Preferred Alternative.

Whitefront WMA Tract. Minor long-term impacts to wildlife species would occur with the property transfer as native grassland may be converted to pasture, hayland or cropland. There is no habitat for fish or other aquatic species on the 40 acres proposed for the property transfer.

Schultz Tract. Moderate, long-term beneficial impacts to fish, wildlife, and other aquatic species would occur with the property transfer as 12 acres of the Schultz tract is frequently ponded and would enable future management actions to restore the area to a wetland increasing the amount of area available for fish, wildlife, and other aquatic species to live and breed.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative would have no effect on fish, wildlife, and other aquatic species.

Mitigation. None required.

3.9 Federally-listed Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Species, and State Sensitive Species

Threatened and endangered (T&E) species are afforded protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended (16 USC §1531 et seq.), and compliance with Section 7 of the ESA assures that, through consultation (or conferencing for proposed species) with the Service, federal actions do not jeopardize the continued existence of any threatened, endangered or proposed species, or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat.

Existing Conditions. An assessment of known ranges and potential habitat for T&E species using Service and NGPC resources indicated there were two species of concern that could occur in the project area in Clay County. The lands being traded are within the ranges of the state and federally endangered whooping crane (*Grus americana*) and northern long-eared bat (USFWS NGPC 2014).

Whooping crane (*Grus americana*). Each spring whooping cranes travel north from their wintering grounds around Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas to their breeding grounds in Wood Buffalo National Park in central Canada (2,400 miles). Each fall this route is reversed. Their journey traverses eastern Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska (late March through early May and October to mid November), Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. The primary migration corridor is through central Nebraska from Grand Island to North Platte. However, they have been documented from York County in the east. High use areas include the Rainwater Basin wetlands, the central portion of the Platte River, wetlands in Custer County west of Broken Bow, the Loup River around Taylor, wetlands in Cherry, Brown, and Keya Paha counties, and the Niobrara River. They stop to rest and feed on the Platte, North and Middle Loup, and Niobrara Rivers. During the spring migration, whooping cranes feed on insects, crustaceans, and berries, while the fall migration diet includes grains, acorns, wolfberry fruit, and aquatic species.

Whooping cranes roost in wide river channels, wetlands, and farm ponds. They feed in nearby grassland and cropland. Wetlands used include permanent wetlands, as well as shallow, temporary wetlands occurring in cropland. Major prerequisites of suitable stopover locations appear to be resting areas with shallow water (standing or flowing) (i.e., less than 30 cm depth), wetlands no smaller than 0.04 hectares (0.099 acres) in size, good horizontal (at least 20 meters) and overhead visibility, proximity to feeding sites (Howe 1989), and reasonable isolation from human developments and/or disturbances (Armbruster 1990). Proximity to human developments and/or disturbances increases the needed distance of horizontal visibility; thus, their distance from these zones of influence (Armbruster 1990). Critical habitat for whooping cranes has been designated as a strip of river bottom south of I-80 with a north south width of three miles, extending from about Lexington to the Interstate 80 interchange for Shelton and Denman (see **Exhibit 3a**).

Northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*). Suitable habitat for the northern long-eared bat consists of trees 3 inches or greater diameter at breast height (USFWS 2014c), and other structures that provide protection, such as large culverts and buildings. Isolated trees of appropriate size are considered suitable habitat if they have exfoliating bark, crevices, cavities, or cracks, and are less than 1,000 feet from the next nearest suitable roost tree within a wooded area.

There have been documented occurrences associated with American elm (*Ulmus americana*), cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*), honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), various hickory species (*Carya* spp.), maples (*Acer* spp.), green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), hawthorn (*Crataegus* sp.), ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), and oak trees (*Quercus* spp.) (Cryan 1997, Foster and Kurta 1999, Schmidt 2003, Carter and Feldhamer 2005, Timpone et al. 2010). In general, the

overall habitat association for roosting and foraging is wooded riparian zones, but may include adjacent wetlands or nearby open environments (e.g., agricultural fields and pastures) (Schmidt 2003, USFWS 2014b).

Within Nebraska, the suspected range of northern long-eared bat includes 64 counties. The range generally follows areas with riparian deciduous forests, such as the Niobrara River in the north of the state, and the Missouri River and its tributaries in the east (USFWS 2014c). Counties that contain the Loup and Elkhorn River headwaters (i.e., riparian corridors) and southern counties bordering Kansas, except for Dundy and Hitchcock, are also thought to contain northern long-eared bat (USFWS 2014c). The Nature Serve website (2014) indicates the following counties as having records of northern long-eared bat presence: Brown, Cherry, Dakota, Dixon, Franklin, Holt, Jefferson, Pawnee, and Thurston (see **Exhibit 3b**).

Impacts of the Preferred Alternative.

Whitefront WMA Tract. The property transfer would have no impact to Threatened and Endangered species as there is no habitat or potential for habitat for these species on the 40 acres proposed for the property transfer.

Schultz Tract. The Preferred Alternative would enable future management actions to restore wetland hydrology and improve the overall functionality of wetlands within the Whitefront WMA, which could have moderate, long-term benefits for whooping cranes by increasing the acreage of the wetlands on the WMA. The Preferred Alternative would have no effect on the Northern long-eared bat due to the lack of habitat for the species. The NGPC determined that acquiring the 40 acres of the Schultz tract would have "no adverse effect" on state-listed endangered or threatened species and instead has the potential to benefit listed species. The NGPC has no objection to the proposal as currently planned (see **Exhibit 3c**).

Impacts of the No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative would have no effect on T&E species.

Mitigation. None required.

3.10 Raptors and Migratory Birds

The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA) (16 USC § 668-668d) and Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) (16 USC 703–712) ensure protection for many raptor and bird species. Any activity, intentional or unintentional, resulting in take of protected bird species, including eagles, is prohibited unless otherwise permitted by the Service (50 CFR Sec. 10.12 and 16 USC Sec. 668(a)). The MBTA has no provision for allowing take of migratory birds that may be unintentionally killed or injured by otherwise lawful activities. Take includes harm to the living bird (directly or indirectly), any part of the bird, its nests, or eggs.

Existing Conditions. Bald eagles use mature, forested riparian areas along large rivers and lakes throughout the state. It has been determined that there is no suitable habitat for bald eagles present on the WMA property because the area lacks mature, deciduous woodlands and has inadequate waterbodies. Golden eagles use prairie habitats in the western part of Nebraska; there is no suitable habitat for golden eagles in the project area. Other raptor species likely to occur within and near the project area include red-tailed hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*), American kestrels (*Falco sparverius*), Swainson's hawks (*Buteo swainsoni*), peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*), and several owl species, including short-eared owls (*Asio flammeus*). Raptor species likely use WMA site for roosting, nesting, feeding, and perching habitat. Many other species of migratory birds could use the wetland, grassland, and scattered trees within the Whitefront WMA.

Impacts of the Preferred Alternative.

Whitefront WMA Tract. Transfer of the property could have a minor long-term effect on raptors and migratory birds if the property is used for cropland. Impacts would be negligible if the 40 acres of upland prairie habitats used for pasture or hayland.

Schultz Tract. The property transfer would have a moderate, long-term beneficial impact on raptors and other migratory birds by adding an estimated 12 acres of wetland habitat and 28 acres of upland prairie habitat available for living and breeding.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative would have no effect on raptors or migratory birds.

Mitigation. None required.

3.11 **Recreational Resources**

Existing Conditions. The NGPC Wildlife Division manages the Whitefront WMA for public hunting and fishing; however, all WMAs are open to the public for many other activities, including hiking, bird watching, nature study, and primitive camping.

Impacts of the Preferred Alternative.

Whitefront WMA Tract. Transfer of the property could have a minor long-term effect on hunting and trapping if the property is used for cropland. Impacts would be negligible if the 40 acres of upland prairie habitat is used for pasture or hayland.

Schultz Tract. Transfer of the property and restoration of the wetland would incur minor impacts to recreational resources. It is anticipated that the additional acres of wetland and open water created would increase the number of waterfowl available for hunting during the fall migration and attract more wildlife species for hunting and trapping.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative would have no effect on recreational resources.

Mitigation. None required.

3.12 **Archeological, Historical, and Cultural Resources**

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 USC § 470) and the Archeological Resources Protection Act (16 USC 470, et seq) require Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on cultural resources, including archaeological sites and historic properties eligible for the National Register of Historic Place.

Existing Conditions. A request was made to the Nebraska State Historical Preservation Office (NeSHPO) for a records review of historic and archeological resources within the project area. The NeSHPO indicated that there are no recorded historic resources or historic resource surveys for the area, and there is little potential for archaeological sites (see **Exhibit 4**).

Impacts of the Preferred Alternative. Based on correspondence from the NeSHPO Preservation Archeologist, the project area and the surrounding terrain are poorly suited to past settlement and have been heavily impacted by farming and other historic activity; therefore, an archaeological survey was not considered necessary. The NeSHPO also stated that a determination of *no historic properties affected* is appropriate for the property exchange.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative would have no effect on archeological, historical, and cultural resources.

Mitigation. If any historic artifacts or unanticipated cultural resources eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places are identified, they would be protected by covenants to the deed, which would be attached to the property in perpetuity. Consequently, any impacts to potentially occurring historic resources would be mitigated or avoided.

3.13 Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts are impacts on the environment that result from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions, regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions. The geographical area and temporal period of consideration for the cumulative impacts evaluation is the State of Nebraska, over the course of the last century and the foreseeable future.

Resources considered for cumulative impacts are (1) wetlands and (2) fish, wildlife, and aquatic species (including T&E species and raptors and migratory birds). No other resources were considered to be sensitive to the types of effects from the property transfer and proposed future wetland restoration.

Impacts of the Preferred Alternative on Wetlands. A synopsis from the Guide to Nebraska's Wetlands discusses the health and historical context of wetlands in Clay County. Nebraska contained an estimated 2,910,500 acres of wetlands in 1867, at the time of statehood, covering approximately 6 percent of the state (Dahl 1990). Wetlands have been converted to other uses (agriculture, transportation, and development) through filling, ditching, tiling, digging concentration pits, channelization, declining water tables, and indirectly by changes in the surrounding uplands that cause increased sedimentation or the diversion of surface runoff away from wetlands. The net result of all these activities statewide was a reduction in wetlands by an estimated 35 percent. The wetlands of Clay County are playa wetlands of the Rainwater Basin. Playa wetlands are wind-formed, nearly circular depressions located in semi-arid areas. They have a clay layer in the soil under the wetland that slows runoff water from seeping into the ground. The Rainwater Basin has 34,103 acres of wetlands remaining and these were given the highest ranking, a Priority 1, in the Nebraska Wetlands Priority Plan (Gersib 1991). The remaining wetland resources of the Rainwater Basin continue to face threats, mostly related to conversion to cropland. Rainwater Basin wetlands face the direct threat of elimination by drainage and or filling. The construction of concentration pits (also called dugouts or reuse pits) is common and threatens the function of wetlands by converting shallow productive water spread over a large area into a smaller, deep and less productive water pit. Water pollution, especially from sedimentation, can seriously reduce the functions of Rainwater Basin wetlands.

The wetland at the west side of Whitefront WMA is a playa wetland that had been converted to cropland and restored to a wetland in 2003 with sediment and tree removal. Future plans for the 40 acres to be acquired include restoration of the playa wetland at the east side of the WMA. Restoration activities will include removing a dike that holds back water; removing sediment that has accumulated, and filling the concentration pit that currently serves as a wetland drain. These measures are designed to reconnect the adjoining ends of playa, restore the hydrology, and allow the playa to be managed as one feature. As a result, the Preferred Alternative would have moderate, long-term beneficial cumulative impacts to playa wetlands of the Rainwater Basin.

Impacts of the Preferred Alternative on Fish, Wildlife, and Aquatic Species (including T&E Species and Raptors and Migratory Birds). A synopsis from the Guide to Nebraska's Wetlands discusses the importance of wetlands to fish, wildlife, and aquatic species. Wetlands produce more plant and animal life per acre than cropland, prairies, or forests (NGPC 2005). Nebraska wetlands provide migration, breeding, nesting, and feeding habitat for many fish species, 13 amphibians, 18 reptiles, 176 birds, and 29 mammals. The Rainwater Basin wetlands are most noted for their importance to waterfowl, especially during spring migration (Gersib et al. 1992, Gersib et al. 1989(a), USFWS and Canadian Wildlife Service 1986). They host 7 to 14 million spring-migrating ducks and geese annually. Over 257 species of birds have been recorded in the Rainwater Basin and 131 species may breed there (Mollhoff 2001). The whooping crane (endangered) and bald eagle use the Clay County Rainwater Basin wetlands.

The Preferred Alternative would have moderate, long-term, beneficial cumulative impacts to fish, wildlife, and aquatic species (including T&E and raptors and migratory birds) through restoration of an estimated 12 acres of playa wetland and associated open water. Habitat managed for fish and aquatic species will increase within the WMA, as will habitat for wildlife and bird species. The endangered whooping crane may benefit by the development of a larger wetland in a location with little human disturbance.

Impacts of the No Action Alternative on Wetlands, Fish, Wildlife and Aquatic Species. The No Action Alternative would have no cumulative effect on wetlands, fish, wildlife, and aquatic species.

Mitigation. None required.

4.0 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Prior to a decision on whether to prepare an EIS or FONSI, the Service would place the DEA on their website and provide a 30-day comment period for public and resource agency input.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Summary of Impacts. NGPC has prepared this DEA with active input by the Service to evaluate the potential impacts of trading 40 acres of the Whitefront WMA for the 40-acre Schultz tract located adjacent to the WMA. The DEA has been prepared in accordance with NEPA and the CEO's Regulations (40 CFR 1500–1508). The DEA evaluated environmental and socioeconomic resources of relevance to the proposed property transfer. **Table 2** summarizes the findings of the evaluation. Of the 12 resources (including cumulative impacts), all were found to have long-term beneficial impacts, or no effect.

Recommendation for Finding of No Significant Impact. This DEA indicates that the Preferred Alternative would have no significant impact on the human or natural environment; therefore, a FONSI is recommended for the proposed property transfer of 40 acres from the Whitefront WMA for the adjacent 40-acre Schultz tract, and the future wetland restoration that it will facilitate.

Table 2: Summary of Environmental Impacts by Alternative

Environmental Resource	Preferred Alternative	No Action Alternative
Topography and Hydrology	Beneficial, Moderate, Long-Term	No Effect
Geological Resources	No Effect	No Effect
Prime Farmland	Beneficial, Minor, Long-Term	No Effect
Landscape	Beneficial, Moderate, Long-Term	No Effect
Vegetation	Beneficial, Minor, Long-Term (net)	No Effect
Wetlands and Waters	Beneficial, Minor, Long-Term	Adverse, Minor, Long-Term
Fish, Wildlife, and Other Aquatic Species	Beneficial, Moderate, Long-Term	No Effect
Threatened and Endangered Species	Beneficial, Moderate, Long-Term	No Effect
Raptors and Migratory Birds	Beneficial, Moderate, Long-Term	No Effect
Recreational Resources	Beneficial, Minor, Long-Term	No Effect
Archeological, Historical, and Cultural Resources	No Historic Properties Affected	No Effect
Cumulative Impacts	Beneficial, Moderate, Long-Term	No Effect

6.0 EA PREPARATION

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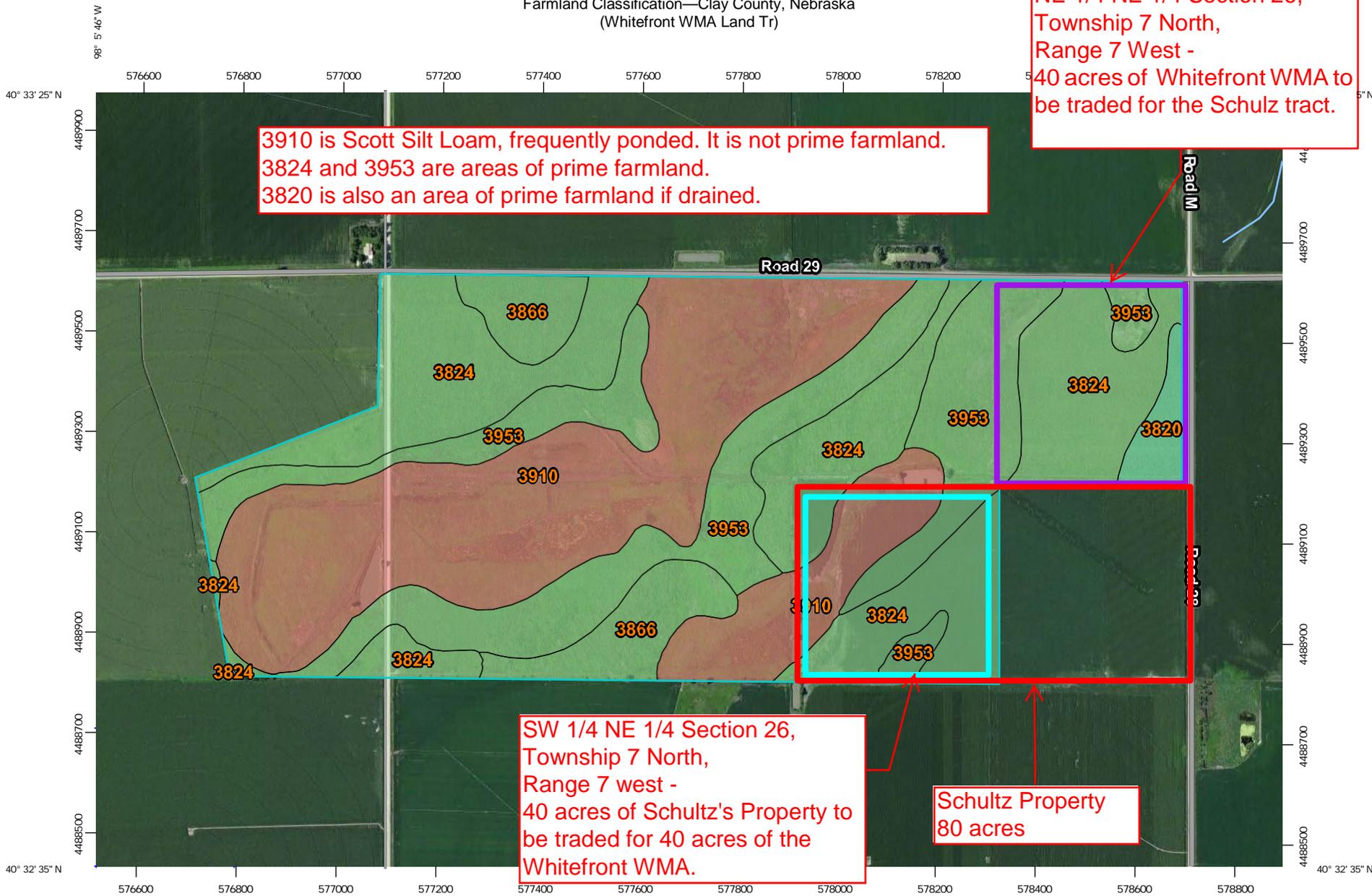
8.0 EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1	Prime Farmland Soil Map
Exhibit 2	Wetland Concurrence Memo
Exhibit 3a	Whooping Crane Migration Use and USFWS-designated Critical Habitat
Exhibit 3b	Estimated Current Range of Northern Long-eared Bat
Exhibit 3c	NGPC Concurrence
Exhibit 4	Archeological, Historical, and Cultural Concurrence Memo

Farmland Classification—Clay County, Nebraska
(Whitefront WMA Land Tr)

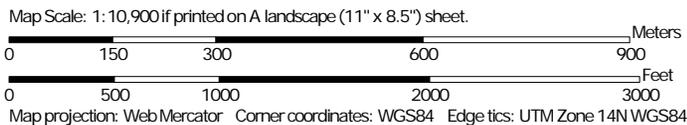
NE 1/4 NE 1/4 Section 26,
Township 7 North,
Range 7 West -
40 acres of Whitefront WMA to
be traded for the Schulz tract.

3910 is Scott Silt Loam, frequently ponded. It is not prime farmland.
3824 and 3953 are areas of prime farmland.
3820 is also an area of prime farmland if drained.



SW 1/4 NE 1/4 Section 26,
Township 7 North,
Range 7 west -
40 acres of Schultz's Property to
be traded for 40 acres of the
Whitefront WMA.

Schulz Property
80 acres



Farmland Classification—Clay County, Nebraska
(Whitefront WMA Land Tr)

MAP LEGEND

Area of Interest (AOI)

 Area of Interest (AOI)

Soils

Soil Rating Polygons

-  Not prime farmland
-  All areas are prime farmland
-  Prime farmland if drained
-  Prime farmland if protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season
-  Prime farmland if irrigated
-  Prime farmland if drained and either protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season
-  Prime farmland if irrigated and drained
-  Prime farmland if irrigated and either protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season

-  Prime farmland if subsoiled, completely removing the root inhibiting soil layer
-  Prime farmland if irrigated and the product of I (soil erodibility) x C (climate factor) does not exceed 60
-  Prime farmland if irrigated and reclaimed of excess salts and sodium
-  Farmland of statewide importance
-  Farmland of local importance
-  Farmland of unique importance
-  Not rated or not available

Soil Rating Lines

-  Not prime farmland
-  All areas are prime farmland
-  Prime farmland if drained

-  Prime farmland if protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season
-  Prime farmland if irrigated
-  Prime farmland if drained and either protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season
-  Prime farmland if irrigated and drained
-  Prime farmland if irrigated and either protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season
-  Prime farmland if subsoiled, completely removing the root inhibiting soil layer
-  Prime farmland if irrigated and the product of I (soil erodibility) x C (climate factor) does not exceed 60

-  Prime farmland if irrigated and reclaimed of excess salts and sodium
-  Farmland of statewide importance
-  Farmland of local importance
-  Farmland of unique importance
-  Not rated or not available

Soil Rating Points

-  Not prime farmland
-  All areas are prime farmland
-  Prime farmland if drained
-  Prime farmland if protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season
-  Prime farmland if irrigated
-  Prime farmland if drained and either protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season

-  Prime farmland if irrigated and drained
-  Prime farmland if irrigated and either protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season
-  Prime farmland if subsoiled, completely removing the root inhibiting soil layer
-  Prime farmland if irrigated and the product of I (soil erodibility) x C (climate factor) does not exceed 60
-  Prime farmland if irrigated and reclaimed of excess salts and sodium
-  Farmland of statewide importance
-  Farmland of local importance
-  Farmland of unique importance
-  Not rated or not available

Water Features

MAP INFORMATION

 Streams and Canals

Transportation

 Rails

 Interstate Highways

 US Routes

 Major Roads

 Local Roads

Background

 Aerial Photography

The soil surveys that comprise your AOI were mapped at 1:20,000.

Warning: Soil Map may not be valid at this scale.

Enlargement of maps beyond the scale of mapping can cause misunderstanding of the detail of mapping and accuracy of soil line placement. The maps do not show the small areas of contrasting soils that could have been shown at a more detailed scale.

Please rely on the bar scale on each map sheet for map measurements.

Source of Map: Natural Resources Conservation Service
Web Soil Survey URL: <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>
Coordinate System: Web Mercator (EPSG:3857)

Maps from the Web Soil Survey are based on the Web Mercator projection, which preserves direction and shape but distorts distance and area. A projection that preserves area, such as the Albers equal-area conic projection, should be used if more accurate calculations of distance or area are required.

This product is generated from the USDA-NRCS certified data as of the version date(s) listed below.

Soil Survey Area: Clay County, Nebraska
Survey Area Data: Version 16, Sep 25, 2014

Soil map units are labeled (as space allows) for map scales 1:50,000 or larger.

Date(s) aerial images were photographed: Aug 1, 2011—Sep 22, 2011

The orthophoto or other base map on which the soil lines were compiled and digitized probably differs from the background imagery displayed on these maps. As a result, some minor shifting of map unit boundaries may be evident.

Farmland Classification

Farmland Classification— Summary by Map Unit — Clay County, Nebraska (NE035)				
Map unit symbol	Map unit name	Rating	Acres in AOI	Percent of AOI
3820	Butler silt loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes	Prime farmland if drained	5.2	1.6%
3824	Crete silt loam, 0 to 1 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland	98.3	30.3%
3866	Hastings silt loam, 1 to 3 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland	21.1	6.5%
3910	Scott silt loam, frequently ponded	Not prime farmland	119.0	36.7%
3953	Fillmore silt loam, drained, 0 to 1 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland	80.8	24.9%
Totals for Area of Interest			324.5	100.0%

Description

Farmland classification identifies map units as prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, farmland of local importance, or unique farmland. It identifies the location and extent of the soils that are best suited to food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. NRCS policy and procedures on prime and unique farmlands are published in the "Federal Register," Vol. 43, No. 21, January 31, 1978.

Rating Options

Aggregation Method: No Aggregation Necessary

Tie-break Rule: Lower



Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

2200 N. 33rd St. • P.O. Box 30370 • Lincoln, NE 68503-0370 • Phone: 402-471-0641 • Fax: 402-471-5528

February 4, 2015

Carey Grell
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
2200 N. 33rd St.
Lincoln, NE 68509

Re: Whitefront Wildlife Management Area Land Trade, Clay County, Nebraska

Dear Ms. Grell:

Please make reference to your email dated January 14, 2015. This letter is in response to your request for a review of this project's potential impacts to endangered and threatened species in Clay County, Nebraska. As we understand it, the project involves trading 40 acres of land within Whitefront Wildlife Management Area (WMA) for 40 acres of land adjacent to Whitefront WMA. We have completed our review of the proposed project under Neb. Rev. Stat. § 37-807 (3) of the Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act and we offer the following comments.

The land being traded is within the range of the state and federally listed endangered whooping crane (*Grus americana*). The land trade will enable future management actions to restore wetland hydrology and improve the overall functionality of wetlands within Whitefront WMA, which could benefit whooping cranes. Future development projects on this site will be submitted for further review during their planning phase to ensure there will not be adverse impacts on listed species.

Therefore, we have determined acquiring this land will have "no adverse effect" on state-listed endangered or threatened species, and instead has potential to benefit listed species. We made this determination based on a review of the material you sent, aerial photographs, topographic maps, and our Nebraska Natural Heritage Database. Based on the submitted information, we have no objection to the proposal as currently planned. If the proposed project is changed or new information regarding endangered or threatened species becomes available, then this determination is no longer valid and further consultation will be necessary.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact me at (402) 471-5438 or michelle.koch@nebraska.gov.

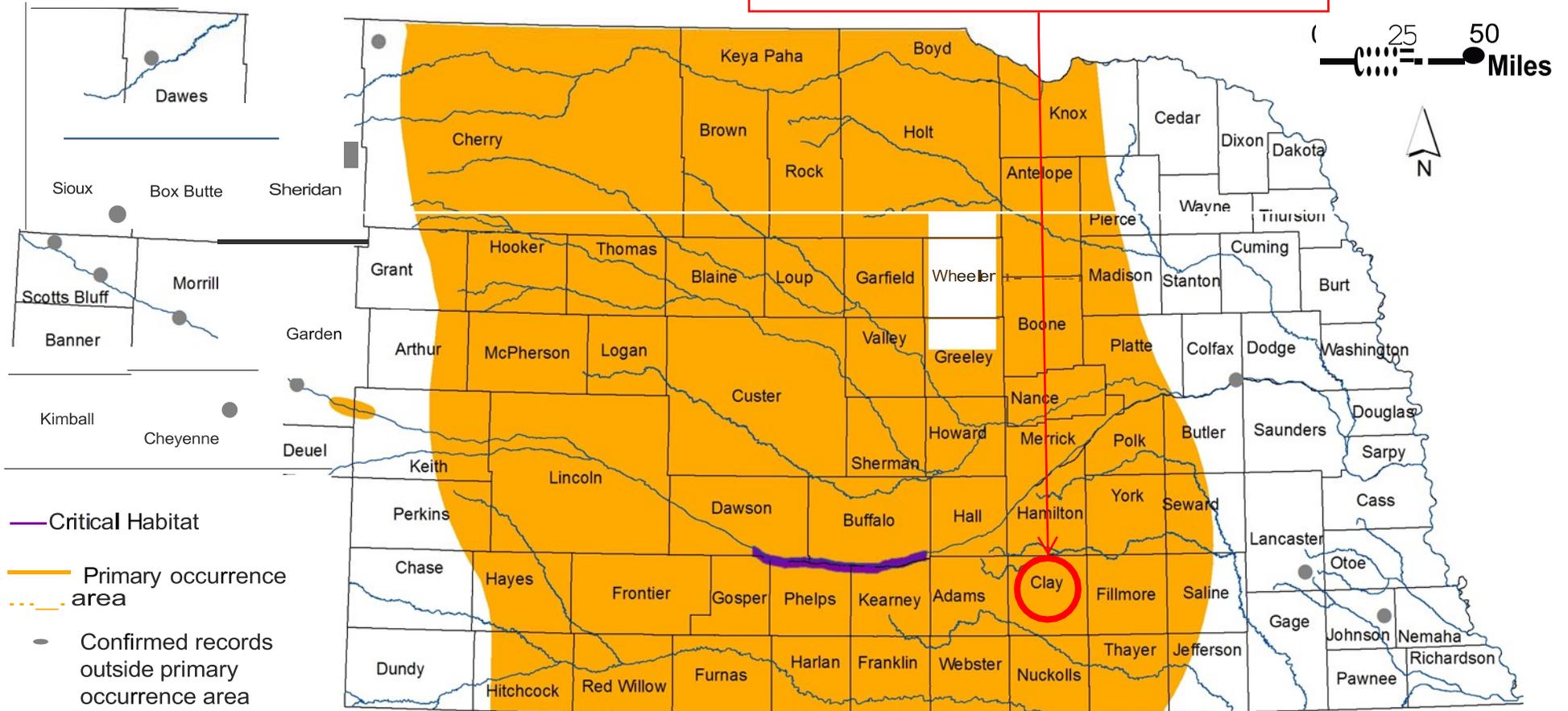
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michelle R Koch".

Michelle R. Koch
Environmental Analyst Supervisor
Planning and Programming Division

Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*): Migration Use Area and USFWS-designated Critical Habitat

Location of Whitefront Wildlife Management Area



The primary occurrence area is a modification of the area identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as encompassing 95% of documented Whooping Crane migratory stopovers between 1975 and 2007. The modification consisted of incorporating additional locations known to have repeated use. Data source: USFWS. State-specific Nebraska flyway for Whooping Crane. Vector digital data Unpublished shapefile received October 27, 2008 from USFWS, Region 6, Grand Island, NE.

Critical Habitat areas are considered essential for the conservation of a listed species. Data source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 2. 2003. Whooping Crane critical habitat. Vector digital data. Downloaded October 29, 2008 from <http://crithab.fws.gov>.

Confirmed records are current through Fall 2010 (Source: USFWS, Region 6).

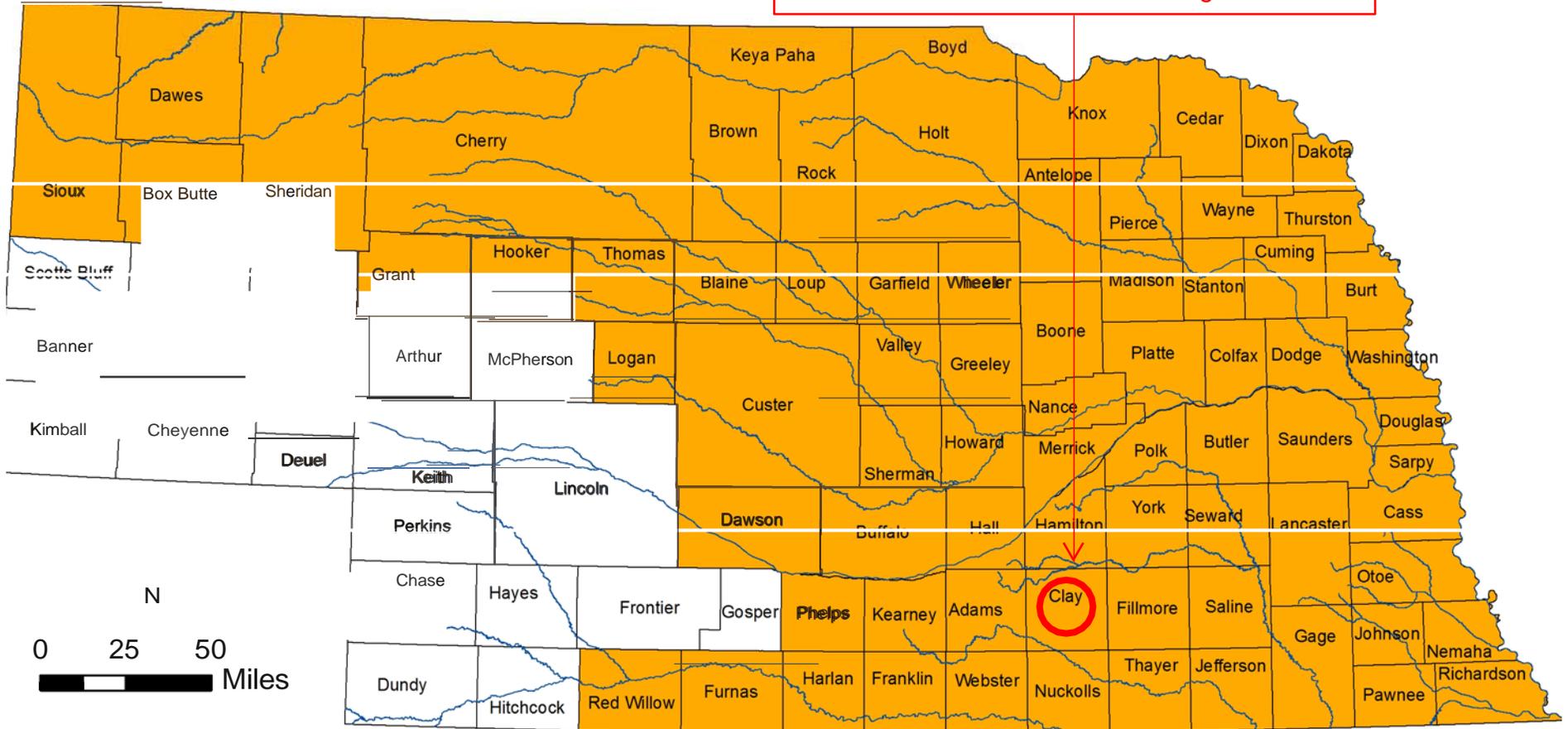
Map produced by the Nebraska Natural Heritage Program, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, July 6, 2011.

NEBRASKA
— GAME PARKS —



Estimated Current Range of Northern Long-eared Bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*)

Location of Whitefront Wildlife Management Area



NEBRASKA
-GAME PARKS-



Nebraska Natural Heritage Program,
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
June 2015



Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

2200 N. 33rd St. • P.O. Box 30370 • Lincoln, NE 68503-0370 • Phone: 402-471-0641 • Fax: 402-471-5528

February 4, 2015

Carey Grell
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
2200 N. 33rd St.
Lincoln, NE 68509

Re: Whitefront Wildlife Management Area Land Trade, Clay County, Nebraska

Dear Ms. Grell:

Please make reference to your email dated January 14, 2015. This letter is in response to your request for a review of this project's potential impacts to endangered and threatened species in Clay County, Nebraska. As we understand it, the project involves trading 40 acres of land within Whitefront Wildlife Management Area (WMA) for 40 acres of land adjacent to Whitefront WMA. We have completed our review of the proposed project under Neb. Rev. Stat. § 37-807 (3) of the Nongame and Endangered Species Conservation Act and we offer the following comments.

The land being traded is within the range of the state and federally listed endangered whooping crane (*Grus americana*). The land trade will enable future management actions to restore wetland hydrology and improve the overall functionality of wetlands within Whitefront WMA, which could benefit whooping cranes. Future development projects on this site will be submitted for further review during their planning phase to ensure there will not be adverse impacts on listed species.

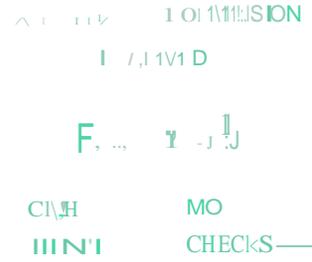
Therefore, we have determined acquiring this land will have "no adverse effect" on state-listed endangered or threatened species, and instead has potential to benefit listed species. We made this determination based on a review of the material you sent, aerial photographs, topographic maps, and our Nebraska Natural Heritage Database. Based on the submitted information, we have no objection to the proposal as currently planned. If the proposed project is changed or new information regarding endangered or threatened species becomes available, then this determination is no longer valid and further consultation will be necessary.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact me at (402) 471-5438 or michelle.koch@nebraska.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michelle R Koch".

Michelle R. Koch
Environmental Analyst Supervisor
Planning and Programming Division



29 January 2015

Carey Grell
Environmental Analyst
Planning & Programming Division
Nebraska Game and Parks
2200 N 33rd St. PO Box 30370
Lincoln, NE 68503-3070

RE: HP# 1501-081-01; -40 acre property exchange, Whitefront Wildlife Management Area, Clay County

Dear Mr. Grell:

Thank you for submitting the information and maps regarding the above referenced proposed property exchange for SHPO review and comment according to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 as amended, and implementing regulations at 36 CFR Part 800.

A review of our records indicates little potential for archaeological sites in close proximity to the 40 acres proposed for exchange. This specific area and the surrounding terrain is poorly suited to past settlement and has been heavily impacted by farming and other historic activity, therefore an archaeological survey is not considered necessary. We believe that a determination of *no historic properties affected* is appropriate for the property exchange.

Please be advised that this opinion does not necessarily reflect that of any Native American Tribes that might have an interest in the area, nor does it pertain to Traditional Cultural Properties, if they exist in the area.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call this office at 402-471-2609.

Sincerely,

Phil R. [redacted]
Preservation Archaeologist

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