The Open Fields and Waters Program

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Rainwater Basin Joint Venture Seminar
Grand Island, NE
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Agenda

• Introduction
  – What is the Open Fields and Waters (OFW) Program?
  – Importance of OFW
• Current Status of OFW
• Rainwater Basin Region
• Questions
What is Open Fields and Waters?

- **Open Fields and Waters (OFW)** is a voluntary program that offers financial incentives to landowners willing to allow public walk-in access for hunting, trapping, and/or fishing.
- Began in 2009
- **Goal:**
  - To increase public access opportunities on private lands.
Open Fields and Waters (OFW)
More Places to Hunt and Fish
Some Specifics
Landowner Benefits

• Annual, per acre payments – Rate depends on location, type/quality of habitat, option
• Technical/financial assistance for habitat work
• Other enrollment options available – 1-5 yr. contracts, pro-rated withdrawal at any time
• WALK-IN only; no vehicles except on specified trails
• Boundary signs posted by NGPC and properties displayed in Public Access Atlas
• Properties patrolled regularly by NGPC conservation officers
• Protection from liability through the Nebraska Recreation Liability Act (Nebraska Statutes 37-729 to 37-736), which states that landowners or tenants do not assume responsibility or incur liability for injury to any persons who enter land opened to public hunting and fishing under agreement with the state.

For more information, visit https://nebraskalegislature.gov/laws/laws.php.
How to Enroll

1. Contact your nearest NGPC office any time of the year.

2. Your property will be evaluated in the spring and approved tracts are contracted by June 1st.

3. Once your contract is approved, NGPC staff will post OFW boundary signs around your property.

4. Your annual payment will be issued in spring (March/April) following closure of the primary hunting seasons.
Open Fields and Waters (OFW)
More Places to Hunt and Fish

Permitted All Species & Seasons By Walking Only

Do not hunt, trap or fish beyond field boundary

This site has been enrolled to provide hunting, trapping and/or fishing opportunities with your Habitat Stamp funds. Federal Aid to Fish and Wildlife Restoration and Environmental Trust funds also may have been used.

Respect the landowner and the land!
Importance of OFW

• Nebraska’s Public Lands
  – Lack of public land in Nebraska

• Nebraska’s Hunting Legacy
  – The contribution of OFW to the future of hunting in Nebraska
Nebraska’s Public Lands

PUBLIC ACCESS ATLAS
FOR WALK-IN HUNTING, TRAPPING, AND FISHING IN NEBRASKA

~65,000 copies
OutdoorNebraska.org/PublicAccessAtlas

The Open Fields and Waters Program is a joint project of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and valued partners. This atlas is valid through July 2019.

Funding support provided by:

Learn more at OutdoorNebraska.org
Nebraska’s Public Lands

- **Federal Lands**
- **State Lands**
- **Conservation Partner Lands**

>700,000 ac

49,506,368 ac
Nebraska’s Public Lands

Dawes Co.

>97%
Nebraska’s Public Lands

- Federal Lands
- State Lands
- Conservation Partner Lands

- Open Fields and Waters
  +317K acres

≤1,000,000 acres
Publicly Accessible Lands
Nebraska’s Hunting Legacy

Our Connection with the Land
Nebraska’s Hunting Legacy

Hunter Success Survey
NGPC, 2017-2018

• 3 out of 5 upland hunters utilize public lands

• 25% of total permit sales – Non-Residents

• Availability of public land one of the most important factors influencing non-resident hunters choice to hunt upland and small game, and waterfowl in Nebraska
Nebraska’s Hunting Legacy

R3 Goals

Recruitment

Retention

Reactivation
Current Status of OFW
2018-19 Open Fields and Waters Program
Statewide Enrollments

- 317,558 Total Acres
- +36% Since 2016
- 316,952 Land Acres
- 605 Water Acres
- 42 Stream Miles
- 43 Ponds and Lakes
- 735 Landowners
2018-19 Open Fields and Waters Program
Statewide Enrollments by Habitat Type

Grassland Habitat

- Grassland: 74%
- Cropland: 11%
- Woodland: 6%
- Tall Stubble and Cover Crop: 9%
- Wetland: 0.3%
- Pond/Lake: 0.2%
# 2018-19 Open Fields and Waters Program

## Enrollments by Priority Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority Area</th>
<th>Acres Enrolled 2018-2019</th>
<th>% Change 2017 to 2018</th>
<th>% Change 2016 to 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Platte POA</td>
<td>445.7</td>
<td>-49%</td>
<td>-49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast POA</td>
<td>3,428.2</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central POA</td>
<td>3,635.0</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Panhandle POA</td>
<td>13,197.3</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northeast POA</td>
<td>14,581.7</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>South-Central FOP</td>
<td>20,536.1</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>36%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern Panhandle POA</td>
<td>25,516.9</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>166%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southwest FOP</td>
<td>107,605.4</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>112%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POA/FOP Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>188,946.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>43%</strong></td>
<td><strong>83%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2018-19 Open Fields and Waters Program
Enrollments Within Berggren Plan Priority Areas

Since 2016...

✓ Increased public access opportunities in 7 of 8 priority areas

✓ Added >85,000 acres to OFW Program within the priority areas (+83%)

Total Acres Enrolled
2016-17: 103,380.6 ac
2017-18: 132,111.2 ac
2018-19: 188,946.2 ac

Added >18,000 acres of CRP (+36%)

Added >13,000 acres of Tall Stubble (+89%)
Rainwater Basin Region
Hunter Use

UNL Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit
Hunter Survey Project Focal Regions

N. Panhandle
S. Panhandle
Southwest
Platte River
Rainwater Basin
Southeast
Harlan
Hunter Use

Target Species by Region (From Interview Data)

*SOURCE: Messinger, L.N. & Fontaine, J.J., unpublished data*
Residency of Hunters in the Rainwater Basins

*Source: Messinger, L.N. & Fontaine, J.J., unpublished data*
• 42,485 acres of publicly accessible lands and waters

• ~1% of total basin surface area
Farm Bill Update

• Voluntary Public Access-Habitat Incentives Program (VPA-HIP)

• Reauthorizes VPA-HIP for $50 million, an increase of $10 million

• $3 million dollars would be targeted at gaining public access on Wetland Reserve Easements
“I would’ve hung it up a long time ago if it weren’t for CRP and state walk-in programs.”

- 73-yr old hunter from Missouri
Questions?