

2011 Public Access Atlas

For Hunting and Fishing in Nebraska



This Atlas valid through August 2012

The Open Fields and Waters Program is a joint project of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and Pheasants Forever.

Funding support provided by:



Learn more at OutdoorNebraska.org

NEBRASKA'S PUBLIC ACCESS PROGRAMS FOR HUNTING AND FISHING

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (Game and Parks) has joined Pheasants Forever (PF), Quail Forever, Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration, National Wild Turkey Federation, the Nebraska Environmental Trust, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, hunters, anglers, landowners, private organizations and government agencies on programs to address wildlife habitat and hunting, fishing and trapping access throughout the state. This "Public Access Atlas" identifies and consolidates these access resources for the benefit of our hunters, trappers and anglers.

Open Fields and Waters Program (includes former Conservation Reserve Program-Management Access Program sites)

Public access programs for hunting and fishing on private lands are extremely important to Nebraska due to its very limited amount of publicly owned land. The Game and Parks and PF work closely with hundreds of private landowners who voluntarily participate in private land access programs within the state.

Previously, there were three public access programs available to private land owners with eligible lands: the Conservation Reserve Program - Management Access Program (CRP-MAP); Open Fields and Waters (OFW); and the Tall Wheat Stubble Management program.

CRP-MAP and OFW were recently restructured into a new OFW program. The OFW program was created as a component of Game and Parks' "Recruitment, Development and Retention Plan," which seeks to increase the participation of hunters and anglers in Nebraska.

This program provides financial incentives for allowing public access and the opportunity for private landowners to work with Game and Parks biologists to improve wildlife habitat. These programs have opened more than 232,000 acres of private land to hunting and fishing and more than 35 miles of river to the public in Nebraska.

- Payments for OFW contracts range from \$0.50 to \$15 per acre, depending upon habitat type.
- Landowners willing to complete management activities that restore plant diversity and increase wildlife habitat values on their CRP lands, receive a higher access payment rate. These activities must adhere to CRP management standards.
- Habitat improvement incentives and the highest CRP access payment rates reward landowners that retain volunteer, broad-leaved plants. This includes exclusion of mowing or spraying except for spot-treatment of noxious weeds.

Guidelines for hunting and trapping sites:

- Sites must include quality woodland, grassland (i.e. CRP), or wetland hunting habitats, which provide big game, upland game, and waterfowl hunting opportunity.
- Payment rates for hunting access on high quality woodlands and wetlands range from \$6-\$15 per acre, depending on the proximity to Nebraska's population centers and if access is provided during the November firearm deer season.
- Lower per acre payment rates (\$1.50 to \$3 per acre) are provided for other types of grasslands and woodlands, with rates dependent on the location and quality.
- Many sites include cropland areas that are accessible to hunters. Be sure to stay within individual site boundaries.

Guidelines for fishing sites:

- Access is provided to streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes.
- Areas enrolled for fishing access must have an established sportfish population.
- The lake/pond fishing rate is \$250 for the first surface acre and \$40/acre for each additional acre (with general requirement of at least one surface acre for enrollment).
- For cold-water streams and rivers with trout fishing opportunities, the rate is \$750 per mile if both sides are enrolled and \$375 per mile for only one side.
- The rate for warm-water streams and rivers (typical river fish species) is \$500 per mile if both sides are enrolled and \$250 per mile for one side.

WILD Nebraska

WILD Nebraska is offered through Game and Parks, participating Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) and other partners across the state to improve wildlife habitat. Some project areas provide access to small tracts of habitat open to hunting, fishing, trapping, and hiking by foot traffic only. Information pertaining to public-access tracts may be obtained from Game and Parks district offices or area NRD offices.

The tracts:

- Open to public-access will have signs indicating their availability for public use, including tracts enrolled in the Conservation Corners Program in the Tri-Basin NRD.
- Are funded from the sale of habitat stamps, local NRD tax levies and often, the Nebraska Environmental Trust.
- Are improved for wildlife habitat by the Game and Parks, participating NRDs, and other partners. Landowners who allow public access are provided additional payments.

Focus on Pheasants

Focus on Pheasants is a grassland habitat initiative that

creates public and private land “Focus Areas” for targeted habitat restoration. The goal is to demonstrate the value of diversified grasslands to support pheasant populations throughout the year. Management techniques include setting back succession through combinations of periodic disking, herbicide use, prescribed burning, and interseeding of alfalfa, clover and wildflowers, along with other habitat improvements. Landowners receive incentives for enrollment in the program.

Small Grain Stubble Management and Access Pilot Program

Within the Southwest Focus on Pheasants Focus Area, you may arrive at Open Fields and Waters sites and find out that they are milo or wheat stubble. Within this area, which includes portions of western Red Willow County, southern Hayes County and much of Hitchcock County, Game and Parks and Partners are offering incentives to landowners to leave taller wheat and milo stubble and also to leave that stubble in place through April 1st of next year. Some of the landowners were willing to allow public access on these sites, so they have been enrolled through this pilot program.

This type of access could potentially be expanded to other areas of the state if it is found to provide quality hunting opportunities, if you hunt one of these stubble fields, let us know how it went by calling T. J. Walker at the North Platte office at 308-535-8025.

GUIDELINES FOR WALK-IN ACCESS TRACTS

1. Act responsibly in the field.

- Inappropriate behavior may cause landowners to drop out of the program.
- Obey posted signs and Nebraska hunting, trapping and fishing regulations.
- Respect the rights of landowners.
- Treat the land as if it were your own.
- Do not leave trash on an area and pick up any trash left by others.
- If fish and game are cleaned on site, please pack out the remains.
- Do not open gates and avoid stretching fences when entering tracts.

2. Do not walk, hunt, fish, or trap on adjacent property or cross fences or roads unless a signed access route is provided.

- Hunting with a rifle is prohibited within 200 yards of any inhabited dwelling or livestock feedlot and hunting with all other equipment or trapping is prohibited within 100 yards. Trapping also is prohibited within 200 yards of any livestock crossing (road or bridge).

- The exception to this law is if permission to hunt or trap has been granted by the owner or tenant. The Atlas and on-site signage will help define areas with prohibited access.

3. Open Fields and Waters tracts are for walk-in hunting, trapping, and/or fishing only.

- Target shooting, camping, horseback riding, professional dog training, and other unauthorized activities are prohibited.
- Tracts are open for specific uses (i.e. Fishing Only), so be sure you are in compliance with the allowed use. Tracts are generally open year-round during legal hunting, trapping, and fishing seasons. Exceptions include closure during the November firearm deer season (no public access during that time), Spring Turkey only sites, Ice-Fishing only sites, etc.
- Regulations on OFW tracts are the same as those on Wildlife Management Areas. Check the current Nebraska Guide to Hunting and Public Lands for details.
- Ponds and lakes are managed under statewide fishing regulations that include:
 - A 21-inch minimum length limit (one-fish daily limit) on black bass (largemouth, smallmouth, spotted bass).
 - A 15-fish daily bag limit on panfish (bluegill, green sunfish, orangespotted sunfish, pumpkinseed, redear sunfish, all sunfish hybrids, rock bass, yellow perch, white crappie, black crappie).
 - A five-fish daily bag limit on channel catfish.

4. Driving vehicles of any kind on enrolled public access tracts is prohibited.

- Habitat destruction, erosion, fire, and landowner withdrawal from the program all may be consequences of driving on these tracts.
- Park in designated parking areas or along roads and be careful to avoid creating safety hazards for other vehicles.
- Do not drive on private field roads and lanes unless signs allow.

5. Temporary blinds and tree-stands and portable watercraft are allowed unless otherwise posted. Trailer-launched boats are prohibited on enrolled sites unless posted signs allow it.

6. Every effort is made to ensure quality habitat.

- If habitat quality becomes inadvertently degraded after enrollment, the landowner is held harmless in his agreement.
- If landowner actions result in significant habitat degradation, payment will be adjusted or withheld. For example, the USDA can authorize landowners with CRP to harvest forage from enrolled lands through emergency haying and grazing and managed haying and grazing provisions. When landowners enrolled in OFW with CRP lands use these provisions, the areas still will appear in the atlas and be posted open to hunting. However, Game and Parks' staff inspect these areas and adjust contract payments for acres that no longer provide acceptable wildlife cover.

For summaries of Nebraska's hunting, trapping and fishing regulations, read current issues of the following:

Nebraska Guide to Hunting and Public Lands
Nebraska Big Game Guide
Nebraska Waterfowl Guide
Nebraska Fishing Guide

Access Program Contacts

To enroll in an access program, contact the nearest Game and Parks regional office:

Northwest – Alliance – Matt Steffl 308-763-2940

Shelley Stoley 308-432-6190

Northeast – Norfolk – Clayton Stalling

Scott Wessel 402-370-3374

Southwest – North Platte – T.J. Walker

Justin Haahr 308-535-8025

Southeast – Lincoln – Scott Luedtke 402-471-5597

Michelle Fuhrer-Hurt 402-228-0269

TRAVEL ON U.S. FOREST SERVICE LAND

The U.S. Forest Service restricts all motorized travel on the Nebraska National Forest and Grasslands to designated roads or trails. Routes are designated “open” or “closed” for motorized travel. Cross-country or off-road uses of motorized vehicles are prohibited, unless routes or areas are designated open. Motor vehicle use for big game retrieval and dispersed camping is allowed within 300 feet of most roads and trails that are designated open. Areas in Nebraska include Bessey Ranger District near Halsey, McKelvie National Forest near Valentine, Pine Ridge Ranger District near Chadron, and Oglala National Grasslands near Crawford.

Refer to the Motor Vehicle Use Maps issued by the U.S. Forest Service. They may be obtained at all Forest Service District offices, by request at U.S. Forest Service, 125 N. Main St, Chadron, NE 69337, 308-432-0300 or by visiting www.fs.fed.us/r2/nebraska.

US Army Corps of Engineers Lands

The US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) owns and manages multiple-purpose properties in Nebraska that provide public recreation opportunities. These properties have area-specific regulations for public use related to hunting, fishing, trapping and other activities. Information on Missouri River USACE lands can be found using the Missouri River Recovery Program link at OutdoorNebraska.org. Go to “Hunting” and then “Where to hunt” to find this link.

Natural Resources District Lands

The 23 Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) in Nebraska own and manage multiple-purpose properties in Nebraska that provide public recreation opportunities. These properties have area-specific regulations for public use related to hunting, fishing, trapping and other activities. Information on NRD lands can be found by contacting individual NRDs or within the yearly Game and Parks “Hunt Guide.” Area regulations are typically posted on site too.

Conservation Partner Lands

Conservation Partners including Ducks Unlimited and Platte River Basin Environments have acquired or control specific, high conservation value properties. These partners value and support public recreation and have allowed inclusion of specific properties in this Public Access Atlas.

These properties have area-specific regulations for public use related to hunting, fishing, trapping and other activities. Information on these lands can be found by viewing the Ducks Unlimited, Nebraska: “Managed Properties” and Platte River Basin Environments: “Wildlife Habitat lands” websites, respectively.

Thank You

Thank you to Rainwater Basin Joint Venture, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Forest Service, Ducks Unlimited, Platte River Basin Environments, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Natural Resource Districts for contributing to this atlas.

Disclosure statement: Under federal and/or state law, discrimination is prohibited on the basis of race, color, religion, age, gender, marital status, national origin, disability or political affiliation. If you think you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility or want more information, contact the Affirmative Action Officer, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Lincoln, NE 402-471-0641 or the Equal Opportunity Commission, Lincoln, NE, 402-471-2024 (TTY/TTD 402-471-4693).

RECREATION LIABILITY ACT

Questions about potential liability for injury sometimes have made landowners apprehensive about allowing hunters, anglers and others to use their property. Knowledge of Nebraska's long-standing Recreation Liability Act should relieve some of those anxieties and encourage landowners to allow recreational use of their land.

Statutes 37-729 through 37-736 of the Nebraska Game Laws states that unless users are charged for access to the property, landowners are not responsible for making sure the premises are in safe condition for recreational use.

The acts specify:

- A landowner who gives permission to use property for recreation is not extending any assurance that the property is safe, and no liability for injury or property damage can be sought from the landowner.
- Payment to landowners from a government body, such as the arrangement that occurs through Open Fields and Waters, has been treated the same as if no payment were made.
- If dangerous conditions are known to exist on the land, landowners are obligated to guard or warn users.
- Recreational users of private lands are responsible for their own actions unless they pay the landowner for such use.

REGULATIONS AND STATUTES

Sportsmen are responsible for knowing the regulations and statutes (state laws) before hunting, trapping, or fishing in Nebraska. Failure to do so is not an excuse. This publication is only a guide to those regulations and statutes.

To read them, visit:

Regulations:

outdoornebraska.ne.gov/admin/regulations/regulations.asp

Statutes:

law.justia.com/nebraska/codes/s37index/s37index.html

*A small number of enrolled tracts are not included in this publication because of printing dates or other circumstances. These tracts will still be posted with signs identifying that "Walk-In" access is allowed and any limitations.

The online Public Access Atlas will be updated as new tracts are enrolled, and PDF and KMZ (Google Earth) downloads of individual sites are available at outdoornebraska.ne.gov/hunting/programs/crp/atlas.asp.

SIGNS TO BE FOUND ON ENROLLED LANDS

