

The Prairie Pulse



Brice Krohn

A Note From the President

Dear Friends,

I hope this letter finds everyone enjoying the holiday season and embracing friends, family, and the beautiful outdoors. First, I want to thank every one of you for your continued support through our annual appeal. The team and I continue to be humbled by your generosity and support for the Crane Trust's mission, including the staffing levels that you enable us to attain.

We were lucky enough to witness 46 Whooping Cranes utilizing our property this fall! This is the largest flock of Whooping Cranes ever documented on the Platte River. The unprecedented event was a thrilling sight to witness, virtually through our river camera and with my own eyes. I immediately thought of our supporters like you and our team, who consistently provide their time, talent, and treasures to protect this critical landscape for these endangered birds and all users of Nebraska's central Platte River valley. This amazing event truly highlights the value of our research and land management efforts, focusing on wet-meadow and riverine maintenance, restoration, and protection within our mission area. We have several peer-reviewed publications that provide further details on aspects of Whooping Cranes -- including flock size, foraging, and use of the Platte River -- located on our website. Please visit our [publication page](#) on the website and read further details about our work.

As 2021 comes to a close, we are very excited to open another chapter of the Crane Trust's legacy and are very happy to continue our mission into 2022! We plan to expand our "virtual" river camera opportunities to allow our Members to witness the March migration of the cranes during the entire month. We are also looking forward to running our March "in-person" crane viewing and lodging opportunities at full capacity, which we have not been able to provide for nearly two years. Our team is very excited to tell our stories and showcase the diversity of wildlife to our visitors -- including the story of our bison herd.

In this newsletter, you'll read about our successes in land management, habitat restoration, and volunteerism -- the work the Crane Trust team dedicates itself to all year.

I want to personally thank you again for your friendship and support of our mission. It is vital to our success.

Happy New Year!



2021 Land Management Highlights

By: Tim Smith, Director of Land Management

Even though 2021 came in with a bit of uncertainty, the Land Management team came through with a big year for habitat restoration and maintenance of our lowland tallgrass prairie ecosystem. To start, it was a big year for bison. We continue to produce at a high level with minimum interference in the husbandry process. This is a true indicator of a happy and healthy herd. We had 42 calves this year, and we will be selling 34 yearlings, 5 cows, and one 2-year-old breeding bull on the prairie legends sale to kick off the new year. This will keep our herd at our current carrying capacity for the bison range on the Crane Trust.

The Southside Vision continues to move forward with the completion of the Harrell Farms easement. This property extends the currently held easement on Backbar Farms east toward Highway 281. Along with the easement, the landowner plans to restore approximately 25 acres of wet meadow habitat that is currently being farmed over the next couple of years. This is another great showcase of how the Crane Trust is working together with our neighbors to achieve common goals of a working landscape that benefits both agricultural and conservation interests in the area.

Our partners: the Nebraska Army National Guard, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners Program, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Prairie Plains, Central Platte NRD, and many others were instrumental in assisting with management and restoration projects in 2021. With their help, we cleared or maintained 53 acres of trees and other woody species from the prairie landscape. This work opens up more foraging habitat for migratory birds, more nesting habitat for grassland nesting birds and removes edge habitat that many predators thrive in, and creates corridors for the expansion of species that need larger tracts of open grassland. We were able to clear 136 acres of vegetation from sandbars within the river channel for roosting habitat within the high banks of the river channel. This work created roosting habitat for 5 miles along the main channel of the river. We continue to work on the invasive purple loosestrife on Mormon Island through intensive grazing and shredding to protect the vegetative diversity on this site. Along with grazing, we shredded over 300 acres for the third consecutive year before purple loosestrife had a chance to seed out. This will take more time, but the results are starting to show from our persistent and continued management.

Our fire program continues to evolve, and we were able to burn approximately 300 acres this spring and assist others in the valley that are doing the same. After a dismal year of burning in 2020, this was a necessary action to keep on track with the amount of fire needed to maintain a prairie ecosystem in the years to come. Another feather in the cap for land management is prepping 39 acres of cropland to be reseeded to native grassland in the next year. Grasslands are being lost at an astonishing rate. The fact that we can go the other way with another 39 acres is a win for conservation and wildlife that depend on these grasslands to complete their lifecycles.

This year was busy but fulfilling, and I can't wait to get started in 2022.

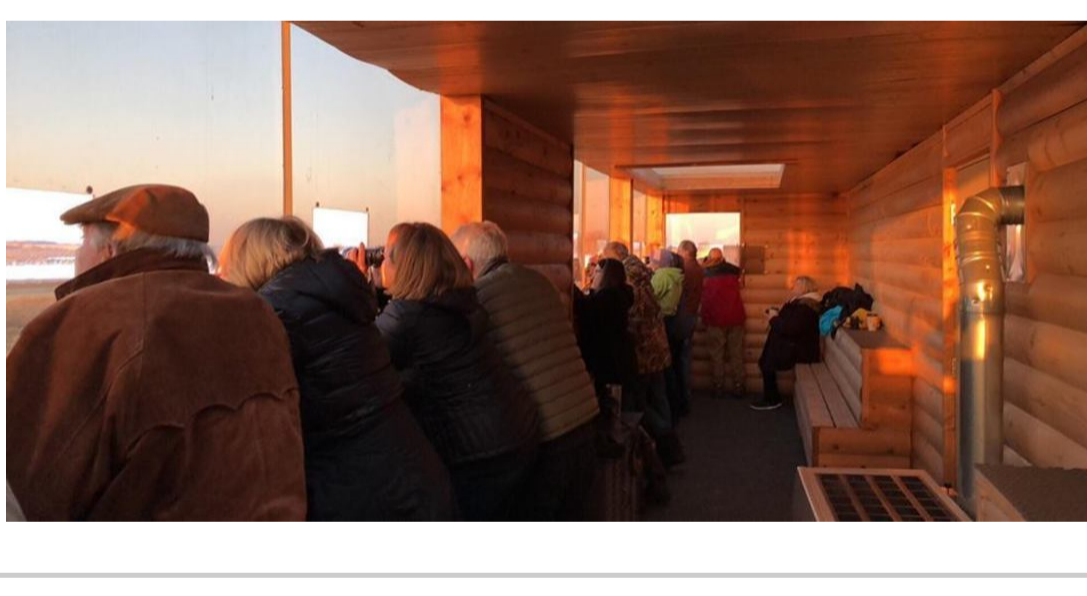


How can I see the cranes this year?

Crane season is nearly upon us, and many of you may be wondering "How can I see the Sandhill Crane migration this year?". The Crane Trust has you covered with several options for prime crane viewing opportunities:

- **Group Viewing Blind Tours:** A trained guide will accompany you to one of our viewing blinds on banks of the Platte River. Blind tours are offered early in the morning while the cranes are still roosting on the river, and in the evening when the birds are returning to the river to roost for the night. Tour booking is currently open for members and opens January 4th for non-members. Click [HERE](#) for more information.
 - **Cost:** \$40 per person (plus tax and booking fee)
 - **Duration:** 2.5 hours
 - **Minimum age:** 12 years
- **Footbridge Tours:** A guide will accompany you to a footbridge overlooking the Platte River. You will enjoy a 360 degree, open-air view of the cranes traveling to the river to roost for the night. These tours take place in the evening only March 12-27 only. Booking opens January 4th. Click [HERE](#) for more information.
 - **Cost:** \$15 per person (plus tax)
 - **Duration:** 2 hours
 - **Minimum age:** 12 years
- **VIP Crane Viewing Experience:** Take your crane viewing experience to the next level with this crane viewing tour. Enjoy a one-night stay on one of our cozy 4-room cottages. Each room contains its own private bath. This tour includes all food, beverages, and two crane viewing opportunities in one of our heated VIP blinds on the river. The availability of these tours is extremely limited. If you are interested in booking a VIP tour, please email reservations@cranetrust.org.
 - **Cost:** \$600 (includes one room, max of 2 guests)
 - **Duration:** 2 days, 1 night
 - **Minimum age:** 18 years
- **Virtual Crane Viewing Tours:** Enjoy the Sandhill Crane migration from the comfort of your home! All Crane Trust members are eligible for unlimited Virtual Crane Viewing Tours. These tours are run using a high-resolution pan/tilt/zoom camera with a spectacular view of the Platte River. Trained guides will provide audio commentary to accompany the breathtaking views. To learn more about our Virtual Crane Viewing Tours, click [HERE](#).
 - **Cost:** Included with a \$75 membership
 - **Duration:** 2 hours each
 - **Minimum age:** Suitable for all ages!

If you aren't interested in a tour but still want to see the cranes, we encourage you to stop at our Nature and Visitor Center. Our staff and volunteers can provide you with a map and directions to the best and safest places to see cranes.



Thank you to our volunteers!

The generous support of our volunteers throughout the year helps us tremendously and we appreciate all of the time and dedication they give to the Crane Trust. We could not achieve everything we do without them!

Are you interested in volunteering at the Crane Trust? Click [HERE](#) to learn more about volunteer opportunities and to sign up.



Our Featured Artists

Our Hornady Art Gallery showcases beautiful work by regional artists and photographers with Nebraska ties and subject materials. These artworks and photographers have truly captured Nebraska and the cranes in their work and we appreciate their efforts in supporting the Crane Trust and our mission. To learn more about the artists and see their work, click [HERE](#).



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