

# Creating a Waterfowl Haven on Nebraska's Platte River



Least Terns



Piping Plover

Each year thousands of migratory birds, such as the least tern, piping plover and whooping crane, stop in Nebraska to rest and feed during their fall and spring migrations. To help these endangered and threatened waterfowl species, agencies such as the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District are working to restore native habitats in areas long used by waterfowl during migration.

By removing invasive vegetation, clearing trees, and opening waterways, the district is creating a desirable habitat for waterfowl along Nebraska's Platte River.

## Challenge:

As part of its license with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the district needed to restore and maintain two different kinds of habitats for waterfowl species: 1) sand bar and gravel bar areas preferred by small migratory shore birds and 2) wide-open areas of shallow water preferred by whooping cranes.

The challenge is to keep vegetation short and prevent the spread of invasive species like saltcedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*) and phragmites (*Phragmites australis*). These invasive plants can quickly form monocultures that displace native vegetation along lakes and waterways, change stream flow and ultimately affect native birds and animals.



A view of the wetland before restoration.



Herbicides helped open waterways on the river.

## Solution:

In autumn 2004, the district aerially sprayed herbicides on 80 acres of saltcedar and phragmites in the main Platte River channel, which helped open the waterways. The Central District relies on helicopters to make aerial herbicide applications to control phragmites, since it is often in hard-to-reach areas.

For saltcedar, the district uses a variety of application methods from aerial to backpack sprayers or all-terrain vehicles equipped with sprayers. The district applies herbicide treatments in the fall, and lets the vegetation lay dormant for the next two growing seasons. In the third growing season, dead vegetation is removed through mowing, burning or grazing.

Though the district has taken care of the initial infestation, it knows that re-infestations will come from weed populations upstream, and it plans to conduct long-term monitoring, early detection and rapid response to control invasive plants in the area.

## Result:

During the past three years, the Central District has nearly eradicated saltcedar. However, the district expects it will take several more years of restoration work to re-establish native grasses.

The Central District has met most of the requirements of its FERC license and is currently in maintenance mode. From open grasslands to wooded forest areas, the district's invasive weed control efforts are enhancing habitat for target species such as the least tern, piping plover and whooping crane.



### Learn More:

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