



# Crane Trust History & Mission



## Fast Facts

**Established:** 1978

**Website:** [CraneTrust.org](http://CraneTrust.org)

**Crane Trust Headquarters:**  
6611 W Whooping Crane Drive  
Wood River, NE 68883  
308.384.4633

**Crane Trust Nature & Visitor  
Center:**  
9325 South Alda Road  
Wood River, NE 68883  
308.382.1820

**Mission:** Protect and maintain critical habitat for whooping cranes, sandhill cranes and other migratory birds along the Big Bend Region of the Platte River Valley through sound science, habitat management, community outreach and education.



Photo by Rick Rasmussen / platteriverphotography.com

## An Extraordinary Legacy Born of Conflict and Cooperation

The Crane Trust was established in 1978 as part of a court-approved settlement over the construction of Grayrocks Dam on a tributary of the Platte River, more than 400 miles upriver in Wyoming. The settlement itself reflects the very nature and strength of the organization — and stands today as a testament to the good that can come when differing interests come together to find a lasting solution to complex and interlocking issues.

The driving interests couldn't have been more powerful and far-reaching for the region: power generation, water for irrigation, recreation, municipalities and industry, and conservation of critical habitat for the endangered whooping crane, other migratory birds and wildlife that depend on the Platte River for their survival.

## Power, Water and Conservation Interests Come Together



The state of Nebraska and the National Wildlife Federation objected to the Grayrocks Dam out of concern for its impact on irrigation and wildlife downstream in Nebraska. In the end, the three parties came together. The requirements of the Endangered Species Act were satisfied; a manifest for developing surface water in the region was created; the Crane Trust was founded; and the Missouri Basin Power Project was able to complete construction of its Grayrocks Dam.

As part of the three-party settlement, the Crane Trust was founded and funded by a payment from the Missouri Basin Power Project. Income from the endowment was used to finance land acquisition and conservation easements in the Big Bend region of the Platte River. Income from the endowment was also used, and continues to be used today, to establish programs of scientific study, and habitat management and restoration. It is also used to support collaboration with other conservation groups and research institutions.



The Crane Trust is administered by three trustees consistent with its mission. In both the letter and spirit of the settlement, one trustee is appointed by each of the respective parties

## Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center is Gateway for the Community



In January 2012, the Crane Trust acquired the assets of the Nebraska Nature & Visitor Center immediately to its north. As part of the Crane Trust, the new Nature and Visitor Center serves as an important gateway for community outreach and education — and for building greater awareness, understanding and support for the Crane Trust and its mission.

# The Crane Trust Works to Fulfill its Mission in the Following Ways:

**1. Leading Science & Research:** The Crane Trust scientifically monitors and evaluates the ecological community along the Big Bend region of the Platte River. The Trust employs a team of scientists and supports visiting researchers. Trust staff works in partnership with other agencies and organizations to conduct research that advances knowledge about how cranes and other migratory birds use the Platte River and adjacent habitats.

For example, the Crane Trust has established over 55 sites where surveys are conducted to monitor both resident and migratory birds, and small mammals (such as rodents and shrews). At these same sites we also monitor vegetation to more fully describe the habitat. This information allows the Trust to compare each individual site before and after prescribed burns, to compare bison and cattle grazing, and detect changes over decades. With these new insights, Trust staff can recommend management plans across the Plains region, and to benefit our threatened or endangered species such as the piping plover, least tern, northern long-eared bat, and whooping crane.



The Crane Trust endeavors to connect people with nature through year round programs that promote understanding of science and nature—and an appreciation for the Crane Trust mission. Photo by J. Wiese.

### 3. Advancing Outreach & Education:

The Crane Trust serves as a resource center for the public, other conservation groups, and academia. The Trust is host to scientists and students eager to study cranes, migratory birds, wetlands, native prairie, and progressive land management practices. These researchers are providing important information to help conserve habitat for cranes and other migratory birds.



Special events and workshops at the Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center provide a vital platform to inform the public and build support for conservation. Photo by B. Mellema.

**2. Managing Critical Habitat:** The Crane Trust purchases, restores, and manages habitat for cranes and other migratory birds. The Trust currently protects and maintains approximately 10,000 acres of land along the central Platte River, either through direct ownership or through conservation easements. These lands represent a diversity of habitats including: prairie grasslands, wet meadows, and riparian woodlands.

In managing its lands, the Crane Trust strives to recreate the natural influences that have shaped these habitats for millennia including: wildfires, bison grazing, and river dynamics. To this end, the Trust manages grasslands with prescribed burning, and bison and cattle grazing. In 2015 the Trust acquired a rare herd of genetically-pure bison; these animals will once again be part of the habitat management and scientific research at the Trust.

Fires and grazing are conducted in a rotational regime to allow certain areas to rest, thus creating a mosaic of habitats in different states. To mimic the physical actions of high river flows, the Trust mechanically clears vegetation from riverine islands and banks to create vital roosting and nesting habitats. In addition, the Trust also restores prairie habitats and manages invasive vegetation to promote plant diversity on its properties.

*“In the end, we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught.”* – Baba Dioum, African Conservationist

Through its Nature & Visitor Center, the Crane Trust annually welcomes upwards of 45,000 tourists, students, and outdoor enthusiasts of all ages. Many enroll in education programs developed by the Trust and are offered at the Center and in elementary and high school classrooms throughout the community. Very often, this provides the visitor or student’s first opportunity to experience and develop an appreciation for this extraordinary ecosystem in central Nebraska — and the native birds and wildlife that depend on it to thrive.

Importantly, the Crane Trust relies heavily on the generous support of the local community and individuals, government agencies, foundations and private industry to continue ongoing operations, community outreach, and education.