

# Gracie Creek Implementation Project

## Restoring Habitat for Priority Species

By Richard Edwards

*Funded by the Nebraska Environmental Trust for 3 years at \$90,000, \$60,000, \$60,000*

Northern grassland birds, a suite of birds that occur nowhere else in the world, has suffered precipitous declines; this project aims to restore and conserve bird habitat. The mostly untilled grassland region of Nebraska's Sand Hills harbors some of the most intact natural habitat, one of the last strongholds of the Greater Prairie Chickens and other grassland birds. Because these lands are largely privately-owned and managed for livestock production, conservation efforts must work in partnership with private ranchers while maintaining their economic viability.

Through this project, Sandhills ranchers on contiguous land in the Gracie Creek watershed and their partners are implementing beneficial management practices over three years to sustain and improve native habitats for the benefit of birds and other species that are priorities in the State of Nebraska. Specifically, the project is delivering conservation for Prairie Chickens and Sharp-Tailed Grouse by providing habitat for these and other species such as the Long-Billed Curlew and Lark



*Gracie Creek*

Bunting; in addition, it is promoting the viability of the federally endangered Blowout Penstemon.

The project initially concentrated on three ranches totaling 50,000 acres which together have been designated as an Audubon Important Bird Area; it will eventually engage the participation of other adjacent landowners, with the goal of including over 100,000 acres. This proposal builds on previous assessment and planning efforts funded in part by NABP (NETF) and complements funding for species habitat conservation from the NRCS CCPI program. The project implements actions identified through those planning efforts to improve ecological processes and conserve and protect native species and habitats in ways that directly engage landowners in management, are livestock-friendly, build local expertise, and provide education and outreach.

