



Fort Robinson Management Plan 2013-2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FORT ROBINSON STATE PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN TEAM

Mike Morava- Fort Robinson State Park Superintendent
Todd Nordeen-Wildlife District Manager
Al Hanson-Fisheries District Supervisor
Gerry Steinauer-Natural Heritage Specialist
Matt Steffl-Wildlife District Manager
Amanda Filipi-Parks Education Specialist/Superintendent
Shelly Steffl-Wildlife Biologist
Jeff Hoffman-Wildlife Assistant Division Administrator
Kirk Nelson-Parks Western Regional Manager
Trisha Schlake- GIS Applications Developer
Michelle Stryker- Outdoor Recreation Planner, Facilitator of Plan

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

Roger Kuhn-Parks Division Administrator
Clayton Stalling-Wildlife District Manager
Dave Tunink-Fisheries Assistant Division Administrator
Lindsay Rogers-Outdoor Education Specialist
Jeff Fields-Ponca State Park Superintendent
Greg Schenbeck- Fish and Wildlife Biologist II
Bill Vodehnal-Wildlife Program Manager
Joel Jorgenson-Nongame Bird Program Manager
Mike Fritz-Natural Heritage Specialist
Kristal Stoner-Wildlife Diversity Manager
Jim Swenson-Parks Eastern Regional Manager
Craig Wacker-Federal Aid Administrator
Jane Gustafson-Information & Education Assistant Division Administrator

ADMINISTRATION

Jim Douglas, Director
Tim McCoy, Deputy Director
Roger Kuhn, Parks Division Administrator
Scott Taylor, Wildlife Division Administrator
Don Gabelhouse, Fisheries Division Administrator
Angela Janda-Craig, Human Resources Division Administrator
Christy Rasmussen, Information and Education Division Administrator
Patrick Cole, Budget and Fiscal Division Administrator
Tony Knust, Information Technology Division Administrator

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INTRODUCTION

PARK OVERVIEW

Nebraska’s State Park System is composed of, 59 State Recreation Areas, 10 State Historical Parks, two State Recreational Trails and eight State Parks, of which Fort Robinson is the western most in location. The goal of Nebraska’s parklands program, according to the Focusing on the Future Strategic Plan of the agency is to provide the people of Nebraska and visitors, with a balanced and diversified state park system that complements other public and private recreational opportunities; that provides a high level of accessibility that is consistent with the preservation and stewardship of natural, cultural and recreational resources; and, that assures a satisfied, proud and appreciative constituency. Fort Robinson State Park is a wonderful example of a very diversified park setting.



Fort Robinson State Park (herein known as the Fort), at 22,604 acres in size, is one of the largest, most historic and popular State Parks in Nebraska. With hundreds of thousands of visitors per year, the Fort hosts a myriad of activities for all types of recreationalists. The first parcel for the Fort was acquired by the Nebraska Game, Forestation and Parks Commission, now known as the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) in 1955. The State Park was established in 1956 and much of the land was deeded over from the Federal Government in 1966. The James Arthur Ranch was purchased by NGPC in 1972, bringing the park to its current size.



The Fort is located in the shortgrass prairie ecoregion in the Pine Ridge Biologically Unique Landscape (Schneider et al 2011) in northwest Nebraska. This Biologically Unique Landscape is a rock escarpment that rises several hundred feet from the surrounding plains. The Fort includes rugged hills and bluffs, ponderosa pine forests and woodlands, riparian woodlands grasslands, and even croplands. Solider Creek and the White River flow through the park, merging in the park’s east end. The Fort is part of a large complex of conservation lands. The

U.S. Forest Service’s Soldier Creek Wilderness Area borders the park on the west. NGPC’s Petersen

Wildlife Management Area (WMA) borders the park on the southwest and Fort Robinson WMA borders the park on the north central side. This would make the Fort complex a total of 25,644 acres. See Figure #1 for a map of the Fort Robinson complex.

The Fort offers a multitude of activities and lodging choices. Fishing, hunting, historic interpretation, hiking, mountain biking, horseback trail rides, canoeing, picnicking, swimming and wildlife viewing are just a few of the activities to participate in when visiting the Fort. Lodging accommodations include primitive camping, modern camping pads (30 & 50 amperages, as well as full hookup pads), lodge rooms, cabins and adobes, which are historic quarters retrofitted with modern conveniences. Many of the historical buildings that were officer quarters, barracks and halls have been updated to suit guests for unique lodging experiences. The Fort is one of the premier places in Nebraska to have a family reunion due to the facilities and the variety and quality of activities for all ages.

HISTORY OF THE FORT

The Fort has had a long and fascinating history. It was initially established in 1874 as a post-Civil War Indian Agency post to protect the Red Cloud Indian Agency. The Fort survived the Indian Wars, and remained active throughout World War II and into the end of the 20th century. In 1919, the Quartermaster Remount Depot was established and was developed into the world's largest training, care, and breeding center for army horses and mules. From 1935 to 1939, the Fort was used by multiple U.S. Olympic Equestrian teams as their training facility; this took place until the beginning of World War



II. During World War II (1942-1946), the Fort was home to the War Dog Reception and Training Center, as well as a German prisoner-of-war camp (1943-1946). In 1948, the U.S. Army designated Fort Robinson as surplus property and turned it over to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). In 1949, the USDA reopened the Fort as a Beef Cattle Research Station; the

station remained open for 22 years and was closed in 1971. From 1954 through 1964, the USDA also used the facilities as a training center for the Soil Conservation Service-which is known today as the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The history of the Fort itself is a noteworthy attraction due to the numerous buildings, facilities, and land that are available for visitors to experience. Many of the buildings have been refurbished for guests to use for lodging, as well as for them a "snapshot in time" of

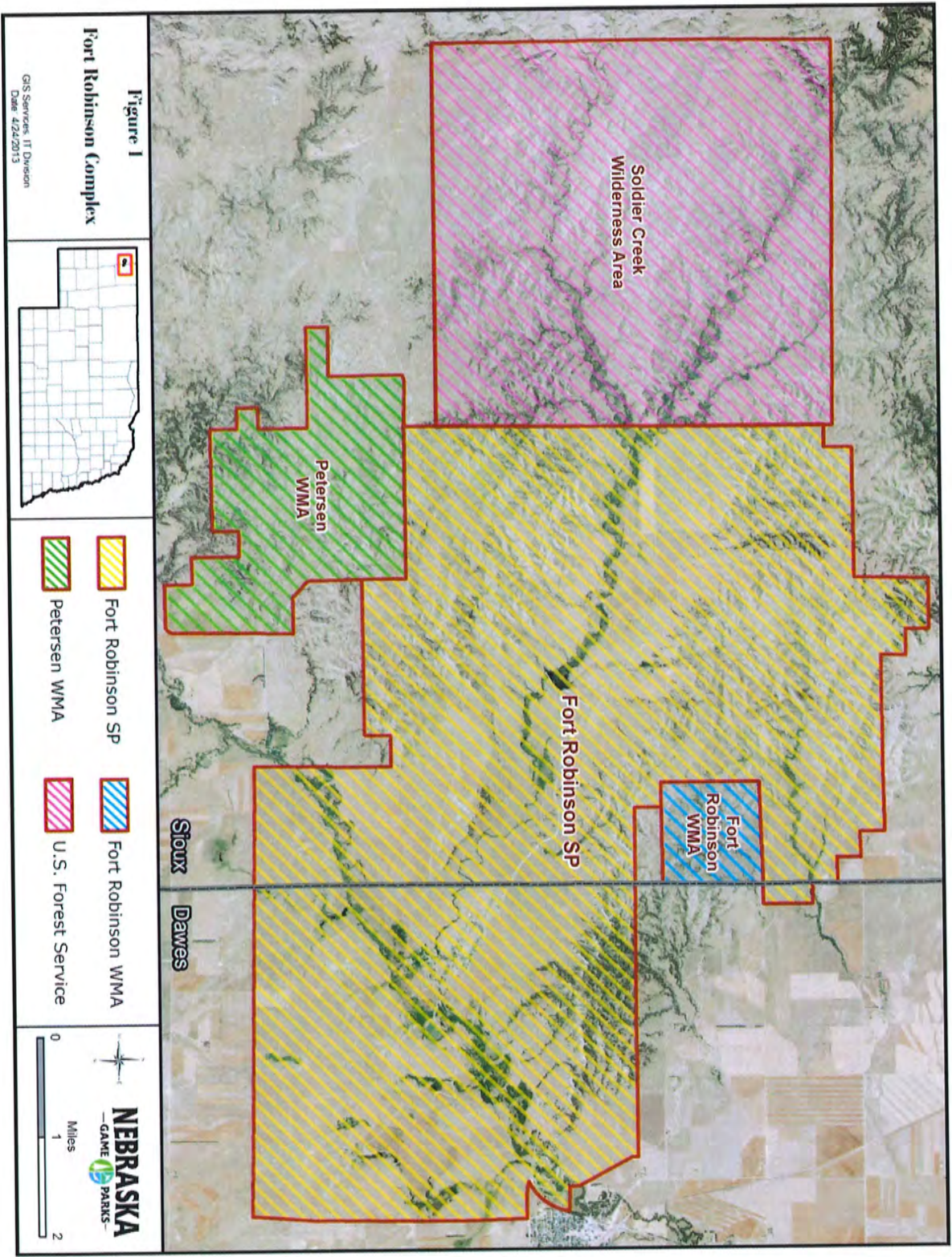
yesteryear. This park was established as a National Historic Site in 1960 and remains a jewel in Western History.

EXISTING PARTNERSHIPS

NGPC entered into partnerships with the Nebraska State Historical Society along with the University of Nebraska in 1974 to maintain and operate certain buildings on the property. The Nebraska State Historical Society manages, operates and maintains the Fort Robinson Museum, which was originally the 1905 post headquarters. The Society also maintains other buildings and historical markers which are further outlined in the Cultural Resources section of this plan. These partnerships are sustained through the work of the Park Superintendent, Lincoln Administration and staff and administration from the other agencies.

NGPC divisions have worked together over the years to manage the complexities of the Fort. The Fort is not only part of the bighorn sheep range; they have domestic herds of both bison and longhorn cattle that are managed for recreational viewing, consumption and livestock income. Along with these unique species, viewing opportunities are plentiful for various mammals, reptiles/amphibians, birds and several plant communities unique to western Nebraska. There are several streams, rivers and ponds in the park which provide various fishing opportunities for local residents and visitors. It takes a tremendous effort to ensure that the various habitats are sustained in a healthy balance to accommodate all the diverse interests of visitors.





PLANNING PROCESS/APPROACH

The planning process for a management plan was started in 2011 when the NGPC Board of Commissioners requested information on the livestock practices and the management of wildlife resources on the Fort. Once that information was presented in December 2011, it was determined because the Fort Complex affects every aspect of NGPC; it would be advantageous to put all current management practices and issues into a comprehensive Management Plan. NGPC's administration identified internal stakeholders from each division to play a role in the planning process and meetings began in October, 2012. The process, facilitated by the Parks Division's Outdoor Recreation Planner was truncated to meet the deadline of having a plan done in the spring of 2013.

The plan is an inventory of the existing amenities and resources at the Fort, with each large management component; livestock, wildlife, fisheries, cultural resources, interpretation and education, and recreation having a section included. Each of the sections outlines the inventory of resources and the existing management practices of the resources. The plan then moves forward with each section laying out the management issues that the resources have or could have in the future. Finally the sections summarize recommendations on how to address the issues identified. The conclusion of the plan prioritizes all of the recommendations and provides a timeline as to when the recommendations could be accomplished.

Each section author was required to have plan reviewers. These plan reviewers reviewed the plan on multiple occasions. The plan also went to the Division Administrators of Parks, Wildlife and Fisheries for review and then to the Deputy Director and Director for their review and comments. Many NGPC staff had the opportunity to comment on the plan to make it the comprehensive document that it is.

REGIONAL ANALYSIS

The Fort is located in the Pine Ridge Biologically Unique Landscape in western Nebraska. The Fort has 26 different neighbors, including private landowners, the City of Crawford, Chief Dull Knife College, US Forest Service, and Wildlife Management Areas owned by NGPC. The Fort is currently open all year, but the accommodations and restaurant are seasonal and open from April 1 to November 30. The Fort is open for a multitude of recreational activities including, hiking, biking, camping, picnicking, horse trail rides, fishing, kayaking, hunting and wildlife viewing. For more information on the activities offered at the Fort, see other sections of this plan. Figure 2 provides an overview of public lands available in the region. It shows the importance of the Fort within this region as well as the opportunity to promote many activities available in the region. A regional approach to promotion may be extremely important and advantageous to the Fort's Future. Being aware of and working with the other amenities will allow the Fort the ability to bring in additional visitors.

ACCESS TO FORT ROBINSON

The Fort is located off of U.S. Highway 20, which is part of the Bridges to Buttes Scenic Byway from Valentine to the Wyoming border. The Fort can also be accessed by traveling the Sandhills Journey Scenic Byway, which is State Highway 2. The closest regional airport is Rapid City Regional Airport in South Dakota, which is 125 miles away. The closest international airport is to the south in Denver, CO, which is 270 miles away.

VISITOR USE PATTERNS

The Fort is a popular family destination and is among the top 15 visited tourist destinations in the state. Visitation has been relatively stable within the last eleven years, estimated between 300,000 and 360,000 people visiting the park each year. See Table 1: Annual Visitation to Ft Robinson State Park, 2001-2012. The majority of visitors are overnight guests, coming with families and have been to the area before, according to past park user surveys and data gleaned from the staff at the park.



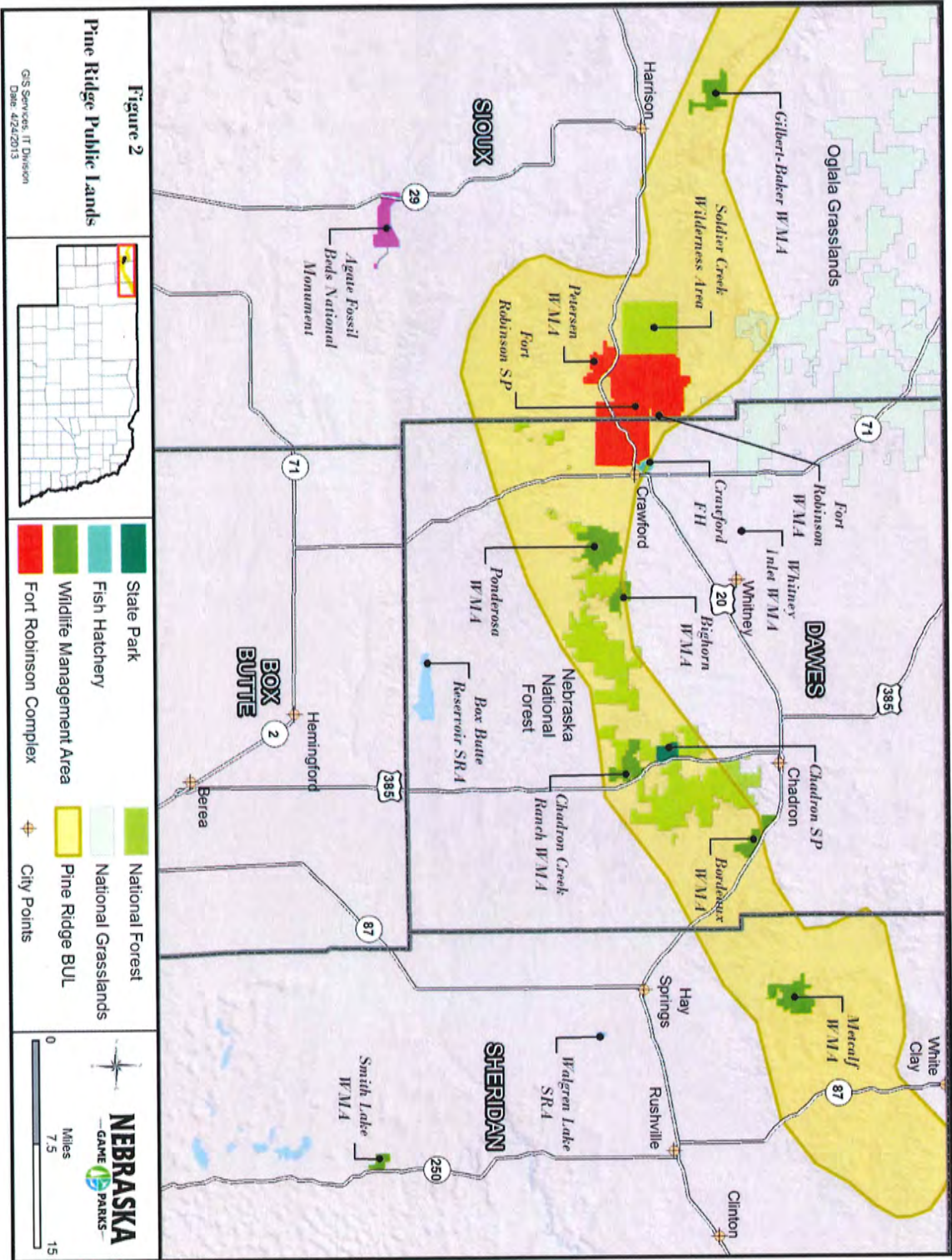
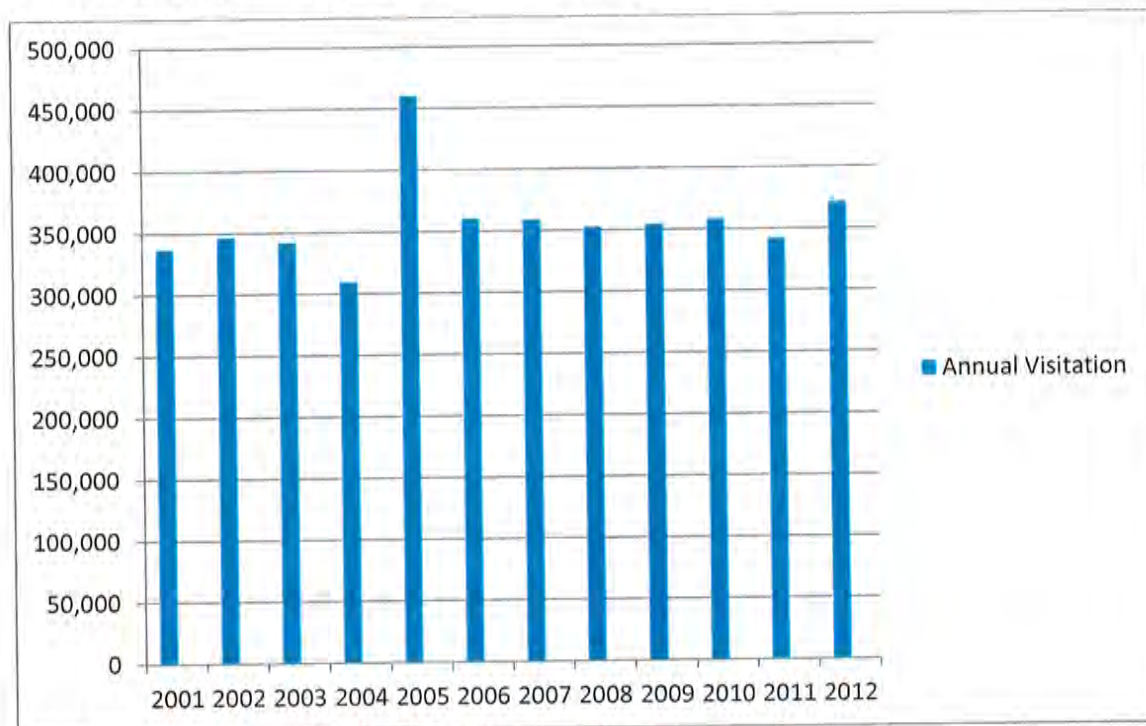


TABLE 1: ANNUAL VISITATION TO FT ROBINSON STATE PARK, 2001-2012



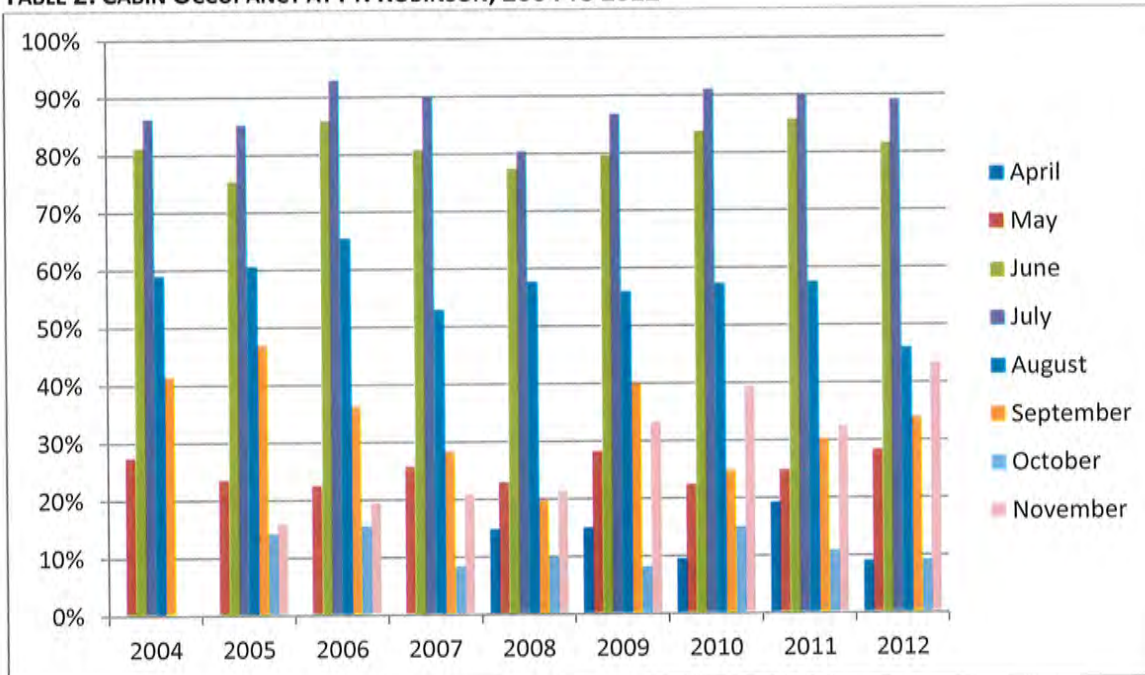
Source: Annual Visitation Reports, Parks Division, 2012

OVERNIGHT USE

There is a multitude of different lodging accommodations for visitors to choose from at the Fort. This includes modern campsites, primitive campsites, lodge rooms, cabins, adobes, officers’ quarters and the Comanche Hall. These accommodations sleep anywhere from two to 60. Tables 2 show the occupancy rate of cabins for the past nine years. Data is only available for that period as opposed to ten years due to the change in reservation systems. Table 3 shows the occupancy rate of lodge rooms for the past five years. Data was not kept on lodge occupancy prior to 2005. Primitive camping is harder to determine for occupancy because it is self-service and not all guests register when they stay so a table for primitive camping is not provided. Table 4 provides information on the modern camping occupancy rates. The tables below show that the Fort’s main season is approximately 100 days of the year, which is from Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day weekend.

Table 2 accounts for 35 different cabins that sleep six all the way up to 60. All of the cabins are historic in nature and have kitchen facilities along with sleeping accommodations. The majority of those using cabins are between the months of June through August. This correlates to the Fort being a very family oriented park and goes along with the school calendar.

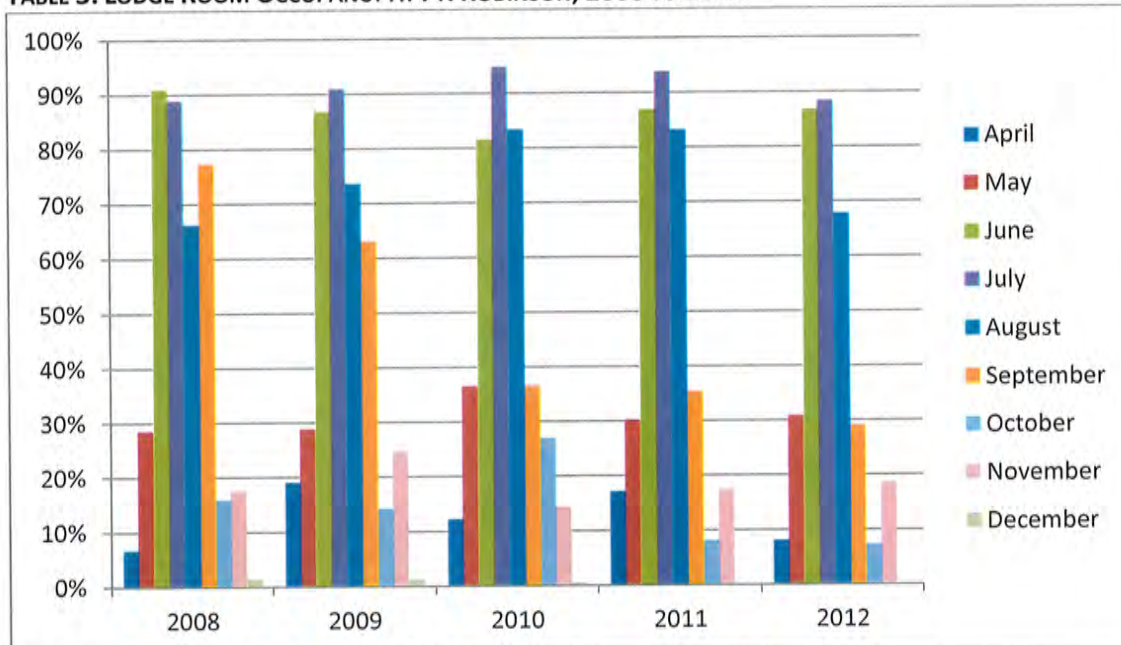
TABLE 2: CABIN OCCUPANCY AT FT. ROBINSON, 2004 TO 2012



Source: Annual Reports, Park Division 2004-2013

Table 3 shows the occupancy levels for the lodge rooms at the Fort. There are 22 lodge rooms that can be rented. Data is available starting in 2008 because this is when NGPC went to a new reservation system. Again, table 3 shows that the majority of users are from June through August. The bump of occupancy in November is due to hunters in the area.

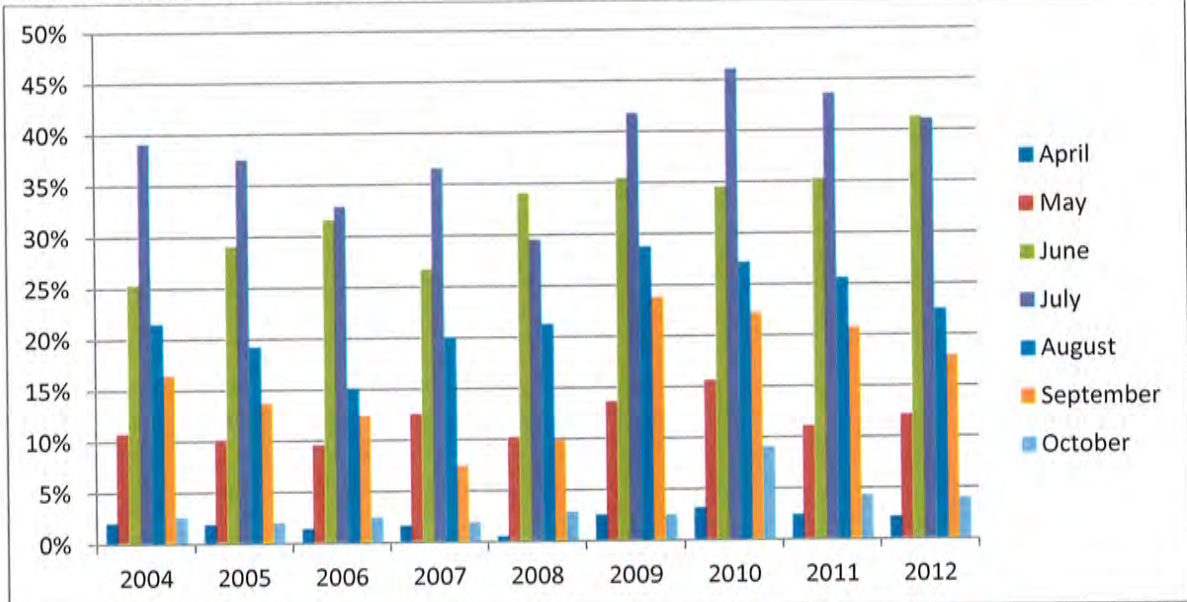
TABLE 3: LODGE ROOM OCCUPANCY AT FT. ROBINSON, 2008 TO 2012



Source: Reservation System, Parks Division, 2008-2012

Table 4 provides information on modern camping occupancy at the Fort. As stated above, it is difficult to determine how many of the primitive sites are used due to it being self-service. There are 100 camping sites that have electrical hook ups and 25 sites without electricity. The summer months are the most popular months with campers.

TABLE 4: CAMPING OCCUPANCY AT FT ROBINSON, 2004 TO 2012



Source: Reservation System and Camping Registrations, Park Division, 2004-2012

Visitation at the Fort has changed some due to the school system’s start date being mid-August. The Fort may need to look at expanding offerings to visitors that may not be on a family vacation. For example it may be advantageous to look at marketing to Baby Boomers in late August, early September due to their flexible schedules. They also have the discretionary income to spend and many have the interest in the history and geology of the area. Shoulder season marketing and promotion may benefit the Fort when there is still staff available to accommodate the visitation.

EXISTING RESOURCES WITHIN THE AREA

According to the Commission’s Focus on the Future Plan, Nebraskans have grown to appreciate their park system and visiting state parks has become a family tradition. This popularity with both residents and non-residents, alike, has been well documented by the Nebraska Commission of Tourism, with many of the state park recreation areas being included among the state’s most popular attractions. This popularity



makes our state park system the backbone of Nebraska's tourism industry. The Fort is strong support system to the local communities economically, by being a leading employer as well as providing economic support through visitors going to the communities for additional activities. The Nebraska Department of Economic Development has determined that each dollar spent by tourists in Nebraska is re-spent in the state to produce an additional \$1.70 in business and income, creating an overall economic impact of \$2.70, which totals over \$30 million annually in our state.

It is important to look at the population of the area within 60, 90 and 120 miles to determine the local draw that the Fort has. The local population that visits the Fort is minor compared to the visitors that travel a significant distance to stay at the Fort. See Figure #3 for the map of 60, 90 and 120 mile radius population around the Fort. The map shows that within 120 miles there are over 342,000 people in the area that could potentially spend time at the Fort. While there is a sparse population in the region, there is still some potential of capturing more local visitors to the Fort in the future. Specific marketing strategies will need to be created to meet this goal and will be discussed further on in this section.

According to a study done by the Nebraska Tourism Commission in 2009 (Dean Runyan Associates,



2009), visitors are willing to travel approximately 60 miles for a day trip from their lodging location. This plan will suggest possibilities for regional partnering as well as look to see if there is specific competition within the 60 mile area that could affect the Fort. There is an extensive amount of recreational resources available in a 120 mile radius of Fort Robinson. This captures several state parks in Wyoming and South Dakota's most popular destination point, the Black Hills, which includes Mt. Rushmore,

Crazy Horse Monument, Deadwood and Sturgis. While the recreational amenities of other states is important to be aware of, this plan focuses more on the resources in Nebraska that could be viewed as either complimentary to Ft. Robinson or as competition. Below is information on recreational amenities that are within a 60 mile radius of the Fort. It is important to determine if the Fort should look to do more regional partnering with other recreational amenities. While the Fort is the biggest recreational draw in the region, there are many amenities that could benefit from cross promotion as well as packaging for guests who stay at the Fort. Regional packaging could very well be the future of this area due to the population out-migration and the location of the area and should be seriously considered. See Figure #4 for map of recreational amenities within the 60 mile radius of the Fort.

According to the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP, Stryker, 2011), the western region has more recreational amenities than any other area in Nebraska. There are large federal properties dedicated to outdoor recreation that make up a tremendous amount of the

opportunities in the region. But the population is sparse, so recreational amenities must rely heavily on outside visitors. This region offers some of the most scenic vistas in the state, with cliff-like escarpments covered in ponderosa pine. There is a tremendous amount of recreation that is offered through private outfitters. Most of these outfitters offer some specific activities such as hunting, fishing, and horseback riding and many offer lodging opportunities. There are more private outfitters in this region compared to any other region in the state through research gleaned from the SCORP. This could be considered competition to the amenities offered at the Fort, but people come to the Fort for many reasons; not just for hunting, fishing and horseback riding. They come for an overall experience that the Fort can provide, all in one location. Below is a review of the other recreational amenities within the region.

State Parks, Recreation Areas and State Historical Parks

Chadron State Park is located on US Highway 385, just outside of Chadron. It has 973 acres and offers a swimming pool, horseback trail rides, tennis and sand volleyball courts, craft center, snack bar, souvenirs, paddle boats on a pond, fishing, hiking, evening programs, picnic tables, shelters (which can be reserved), water, dump station, showers and modern restrooms, along with modern cabins.

Lake Minatare is located 9 miles north of Minatare and has over 2,000 acres of water with facilities for boaters, campers, anglers and outdoor enthusiasts. There is one of the only lighthouses in Nebraska at this location. The area is open from January 16 to October 14 each year.



Box Butte State Recreation Area is located 9 ½ miles north of Hemingford and has a 1,600 reservoir on the Niobrara River. It offers camping and water-related recreation and is open year round.

Walgren State Recreation Area is located 5 miles southeast of Hay Springs and offers camping, fishing, hiking and picnic facilities. It is open year round and is 130 acres, 50 acres being water.

Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area is located 8 miles south of Gering and is 1,094 acres. It has a Nature Center that offers different naturalist programs. Hiking, backpacking, wildlife viewing and camping are allowed at this area that is open year round.

Wildlife Management Areas (WMA)

There are multiple Wildlife Management Areas available within 60 miles of the Fort. All of these areas offer various types of hunting opportunities along with wildlife viewing. Table 5 provides a listing of the areas and how many acres each of the WMAs has.

TABLE 5: WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS WITHIN 60 MILES OF FORT ROBINSON

<i>Name of WMA</i>	<i>County Located In</i>	<i>Size</i>
Fort Robinson	Sioux	640 acres
Petersen	Sioux	2,400 acres
Gilbert-Baker	Sioux	2,537 acres
Whitney Inlet	Dawes	8
Ponderosa	Dawes	3,979 acres
Bighorn	Dawes	1,230 acres
Chadron Creek Ranch	Dawes	2,449 acres
Bordeaux Creek	Dawes	1,915 acres
Metcalf	Sheridan	3,237 acres
Smith Lake	Sheridan	640 acres
Arnold Trupp	Morrill	155 acres
Nine Mile Creek	Scotts Bluff	180 acres
Kiowa	Scotts Bluff	505 acres
	Total Acres	19,875

Source: NGPC Land Atlas, 2013

National Forests and Grasslands

The Nebraska National Forest (Pine Ridge Ranger District) is located just south and west of Chadron. Hunting deer and turkey is allowed as well as hiking, biking and horseback riding. Trails are available for these activities. It is open year round and camping is available.



Toadstool Geologic Park

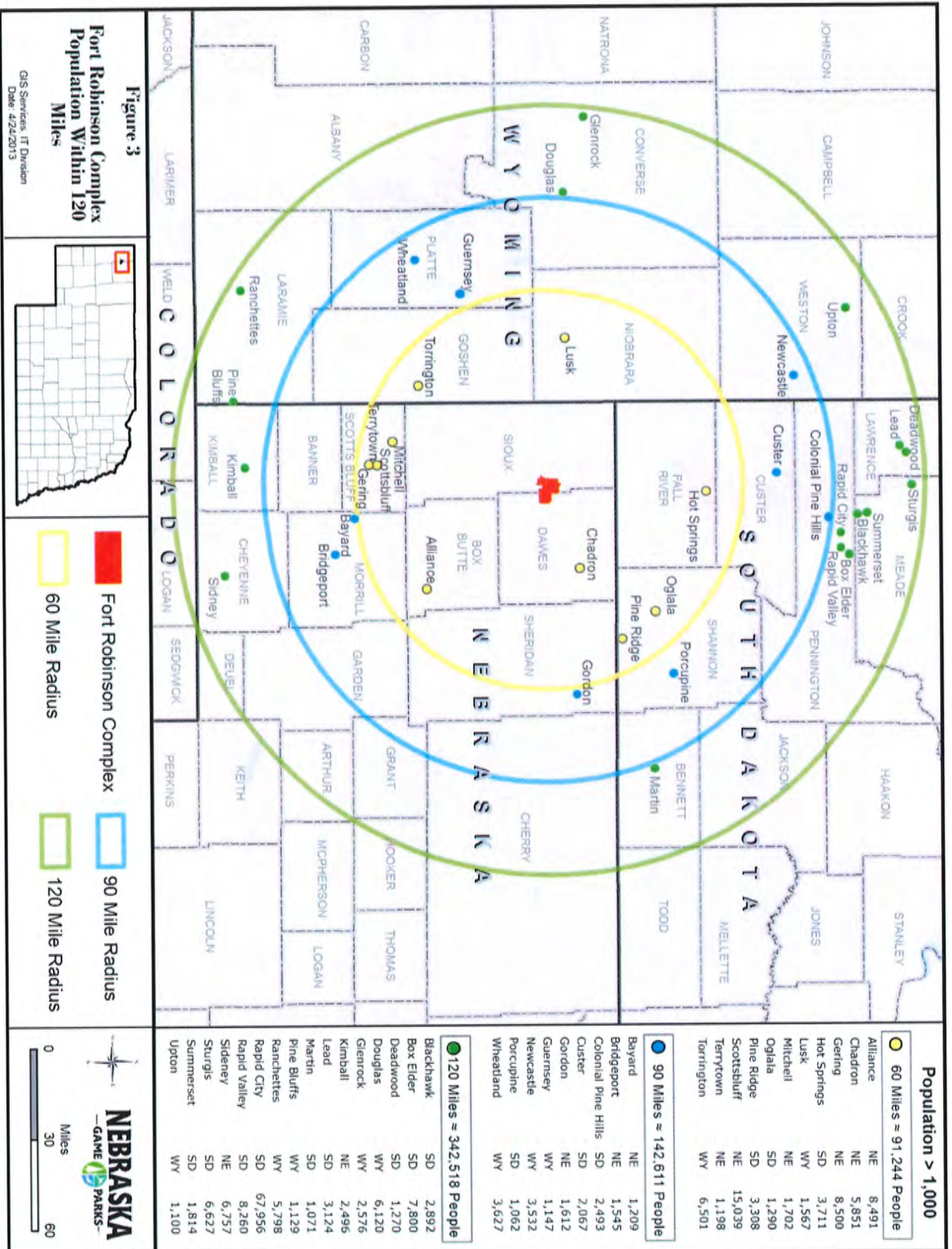
Toadstool Geologic Park is located four miles north of Crawford. It provides an opportunity to see the “moonscape” of the Badlands. It is open year round and offers picnicking and camping opportunities.

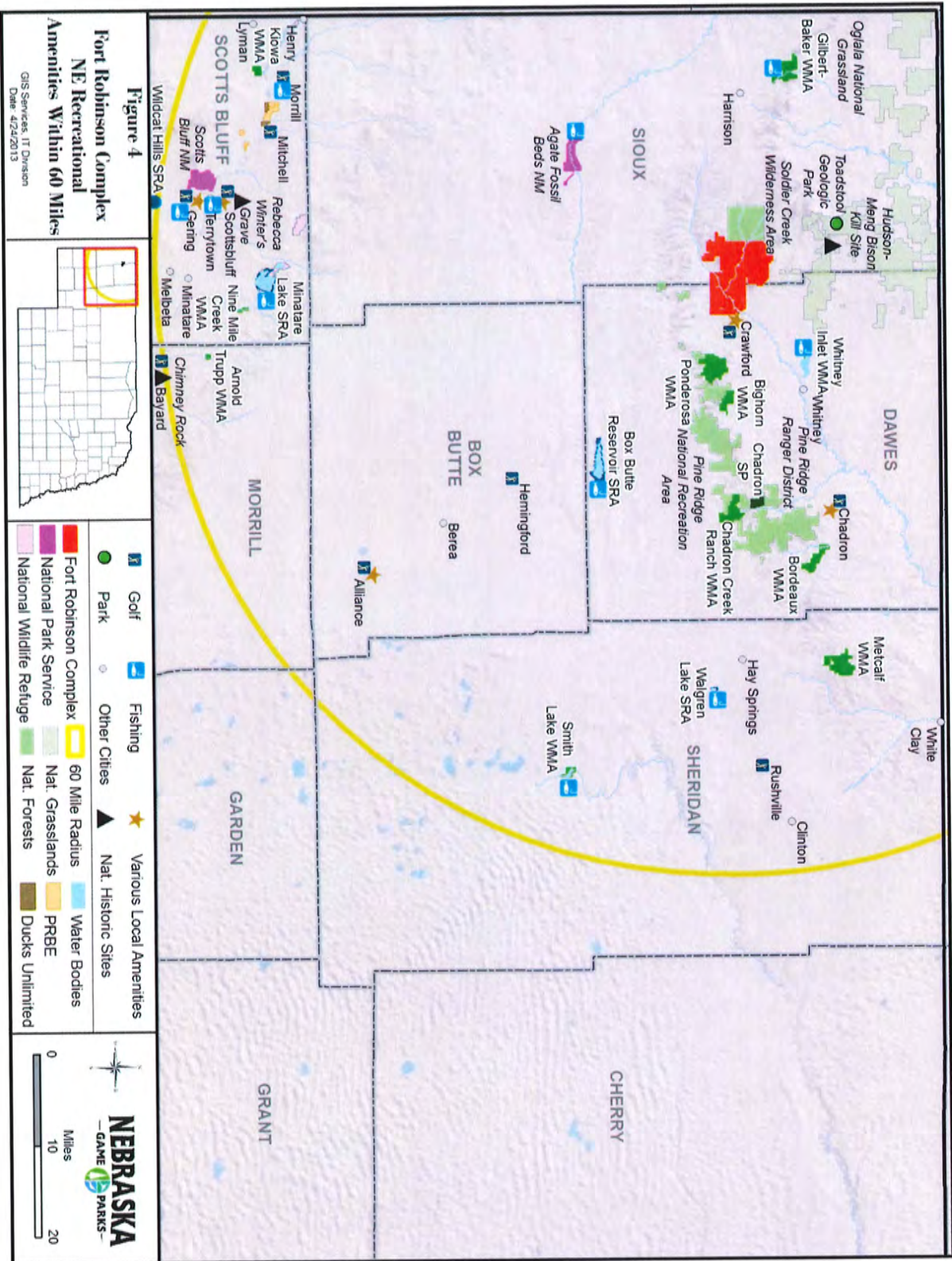
National Monuments

Scotts Bluff National Monument is located in Gering and is a landmark that was used by the American Indians, fur trappers and pioneers. The Oregon Trail is still visible in this location. A museum is on-site and is open year round.

Agate Fossil Beds National Monument

Agate Fossil Beds National Monument is a U.S. National Monument near Harrison, Nebraska. The main features of the Monument are a valley of the Niobrara River, and the fossils found on Carnegie Hill and University Hill. There is a museum and trails on-site and is open year round.





National Historic Sites

There are over 50 sites registered on the Nebraska National Register of Historic Sites located within the 60 mile radius of the Fort. There are rural and urban sites within this 60 miles and include archaeological sites, courthouses, historic buildings and districts, as well as Pony Express locations and significant log cabins. For a history enthusiast, putting together a package and map of these sites could be advantageous to the Fort to capture a niche market. Below are three examples of Historic Sites within the 60 mile radius of the Fort.

Chimney Rock National Historic Site and Visitors Center is located outside of Bayard and is the most recognized landmark along the Oregon Trail. An interpretive center is operated by the Nebraska State Historical Society and is open year round.

Rebecca Winters' Grave is located 1 ½ miles east of Scottsbluff who was one of the pioneers in the



Church of the Latter Day Saints that was traveling the Mormon Trail. She contracted cholera and died. An iron wagon tire marked her grave and was relocated by the Railroad in 1995 to ensure visitor safety to the area.

Hudson-Meng Bison Kill Site is located in rural Sioux County and is a the location where more than 600 bison were slaughtered and processed between 8000 and 7700 B.C.

National Recreation Areas

Pine Ridge National Recreation Area is located southwest of Chadron and is 6,600 acres of semi-primitive recreation. No motorized vehicles are permitted, but mountain bikes are. It is open year round and there is trail access and camping available.

Soldier Creek Wilderness Area is located eight miles west of Crawford and encompasses 7,794 acres. It offers 15 miles of trails for non-motorized uses, wildlife viewing, hunting opportunities and camping. It is open year round.

Local Recreational Areas

It is important to look at the local recreational facilities around the Fort to determine if there is overlap of services or if there are amenities that would complement the activities offered at the Fort. It is difficult to capture all the different amenities available because the research was done through simple Internet searches. In the future, it may be necessary to do more thorough research on this topic. There are several museums within the 60 mile radius for a person to visit. They are listed below in Table 6.

Looking at all of the museums that are available in the 60 mile radius, this could be an opportunity to create partnerships with the local areas and design a “museum tour” for visitors at the Fort.

TABLE 6: LOCAL MUSEUMS WITHIN A 60 MILE RADIUS OF FT. ROBINSON

<i>Name of Museum</i>	<i>Location</i>
Knight Museum & Sandhills Center	Alliance
Sallows Military Museum	Alliance
Museum of Fur Trade	Chadron
Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center	Chadron
Eleanor Barbour Cook Museum of Geology	Chadron
Crawford Historical Society & Museum	Crawford
Pioneer Museum	Hot Springs, SD
Wounded Knee The Museum	Hot Springs, SD
Mammoth Site	Hot Springs, SD
Rushmore Borglum Story	Keystone, SD
Homesteader Museum	Torrington, WY
Stagecoach Museum	Lusk, WY
Farm and Ranch Museum	Gering
North Platte Valley Museum	Gering
Riverside Discovery Center-Children’s Museum	Gering

Source: Internet Search, January 2013

Table 7 provides a brief listing of different local recreational areas that are within 60 miles of the Fort. This shows that there are many activities that are available to visitors at the Fort. Some of them are duplication of what already exists at the Fort and others are unique amenities that might be beneficial for the Fort to partner with to provide additional activities for guests to participate in.

TABLE 7: LOCAL RECREATIONAL AREAS WITHIN A 60 MILE RADIUS OF FT. ROBINSON

Name of Amenity	Location	Activities Available	Other pertinent info
Buffalo Creek Recreation Area	11 miles from Gering	Fishing, picnic area, wildlife viewing, trail	Open year round
Morrill Sandpits	3 miles south of Morrill	Fishing area	25 acres, no boating allowed
Segway West Tours	Scottsbluff	Segway rental	Tours of City
Robidoux Pass & Trading Post	South of Gering	Educational Tours	Reconstructed trading post
Terry's Lake	Near Terrytown	Fishing, picnic area	7 acres, open year round
Carhenge	Alliance	Roadside Attraction	Stonehenge replica made of cars
The Big Blue Bay Outdoor Pool	Alliance	Swimming pool	Includes water slides, open to public
Dobby's Frontier Town	Alliance	Historical Town	Open April through October
Chadron State College Planetarium	Chadron	Planetarium	Star viewing
Chadron Public Swimming Pool	Chadron	Swimming pool	Open to public
Belmont Tunnel	Crawford	Historic railroad tunnel	Longest railroad tunnel in area
Crawford Public Swimming Pool	Crawford	Swimming pool	Open to public
Bison Express Tours	Hot Springs, SD	Bus tours of Hot Springs attractions	Open to public
Black Hills Putt 4 Fun Mini-Golf	Hot Springs, SD	Mini golf	Open to public
Evans Plunge	Hot Springs, SD	Natural Springs, pools, waterslides	Open to public
Grandma's Farm & Zoo	Hot Springs, SD	Petting zoo, pony rides	Open to public
Wind Cave National Park	Hot Springs, SD	Wind cave tours	National Site-open to public
Angostura Recreation Area	Hot Springs, SD	Camping, swimming, fishing, boating, canoe/kayak	Open to public
Fort Laramie National Historic Site	Fort Laramie, WY	Bird watching, fishing, hiking, interpretation	National Site-open to public
Table Mountain Vineyards	Huntley, WY	Vineyard tours and wine tasting	Open to public
Highway 92 Raceway	Gering	Auto Racing	Open on Fridays
Five Rocks Amphitheater	Gering	Open Air Theater	Open to public
Historic Midwest Theater	Scottsbluff	Music, theater, art, film	Open to public
Theater West Productions	Scottsbluff	Theater	Open to public
West Nebraska Arts Center	Scottsbluff	Gallery & Theater	Open to public

Source: Internet Search, January 2013

A popular activity, such as golf, is another amenity that could be offered in a “package.” The Nebraska Tourism Commission strongly markets golf within the state, so there could be some opportunities to work with them and the local courses to set up a tour of golf for visitors of the Fort, which could potentially include discounts at these courses. See Table 8 for a listing of courses within 60 miles of the Fort.

TABLE 8: GOLF COURSES WITHIN A 60 MILE RADIUS OF FT. ROBINSON

Name of Course	Location	Size of Course	Public or Private
Chimney Rock Golf Course	U.S. Hwy 26 outside of Bayard	18 holes	Public
Hemingford Golf Course	Hemingford	9 holes	Public
Legend Buttes Golf Course	Crawford	18 holes	Public
Monument Shadows Golf Course	Gering	18 holes	Public
Rolling Green Golf Course	Morrill	18 holes	Public
Ridgeview Country Club	Chadron	18 holes	Public
Riverview Country Club	Scottsbluff	Floating driving range, 18 holes	Public
Sand Ridge Golf Course	Rushville	18 holes	Public
Scenic Knolls Golf Course	Mitchell	18 holes	Public
Skyview Golf Course	Alliance	18 holes	Public
Southern Hills Golf Course	Hot Springs, SD	18 holes	Public
Torrington Municipal Golf Course	Torrington, WY	18 holes	Public
Cottonwood Country Club	Torrington, WY	18 holes	Public

Source: Internet Search, January 2013

Lodging/Camping

There are 15 different private places to stay, including Bed and Breakfasts, ranches and cabins in a 60 mile radius in Nebraska. These locations sleep anywhere from six to 16. Many of these facilities offer horse boarding facilities and wildlife viewing. There are many different private places to stay in the Hot Springs area of South Dakota. Most of these areas are Bed and Breakfasts; one is a spa, three are cabin rentals and there are two that cater to either those traveling with pets or that are bikers.

There are also 19 different outfitters within 60 miles of the Fort in Nebraska alone. They provide hunting experiences for deer, turkey and upland game birds, as well as fishing experiences. Most all of these facilities have on-site accommodations and many of them are working ranches. There is one ranch that offers trail rides and lodging as opposed to hunting experiences.

Besides private bed and breakfasts, ranches, cabins and private outfitters, there are other camping and lodging available in the region. There are five private RV camp areas available in Alliance, Bayard,

Gering, Oshkosh, and Sidney in Nebraska. In South Dakota, there are two private RV camp areas available in Hot Springs. There are also several hotel/motels that people could stay in communities such as Gering, Scottsbluff, Chadron, Alliance, Torrington, WY and Hot Springs, SD.

After researching the regional lodging, it is important to note that the Fort fills the important family reunion niche that no one else has the capacity to do. While there are many other lodging opportunities available to people, the Fort provides a tremendous amount of activities within the confines of their area, as well as a very unique lodging experience that a person cannot get anywhere else in this vicinity. It is important to market that aspect of the Fort to not only the visitors that come from a significant distance, but also to those locals looking for a “staycation” near home.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM REGIONAL ANALYSIS

Looking at the information above provides a regional picture of the area that the Fort is in. According to NGPC’s Focus on the Future plan, one of the goals of the State Parks section is to retain existing customers while increasing new users. An issue identified within that goal is that coordination with other divisions and outside partners isn’t adequate to maximize promotion of park areas and opportunities. The tactics outlined to relate to that issue can be incorporated into the recommendations below. Below is a list of recommendations from the research above.

1. Work with Nebraska Tourism Commission to market the Fort when marketing other amenities within the area.
2. Examine the feasibility of providing information to Visitors on “tour packages” of other resources around the Fort during their stays (i.e. historical tour, museum tour, golf tour).
3. Research visitors coming to the Fort to determine where to focus market strategies to increase visitation.
4. Develop additional interpretative materials of the activities that could enhance the visitors’ stay at the Park.
5. Assess the potential of enhancing existing markets and tailoring to new niche markets for the Fort (Equestrians, Baby Boomers, Western Culture, Hunters, Geology...etc.).
6. Enhance the Fort by working with other regional recreational amenities (US Forest Service areas, National Monuments, local amenities) to cross promote activities.
7. Create a marketing strategy to bring in more local population, within 120 miles of the Fort.

NATURAL RESOURCES

When planning for the future of the Fort, one of the first factors to inventory are the natural resources of the area. It is important to know the opportunities and limitations that the environment provides for the Fort. In future sections, the wildlife, fisheries, cultural, educational, livestock and recreational resources will be discussed. The following information gives a brief overview of the geology, climate and the species that inhabit the Fort.

GEOLOGY

The Fort lies in a valley of two major streams which are bordered by the Pine Ridge escarpment. The White River begins west of the park and runs in a southwest to northeast direction through the park. The Soldier Creek valley enters the park in its northwest corner and runs southeasterly until joining the White River valley in the parks center. These stream valleys are fairly wide with several level stream terraces (former floodplains) present. Along the parks southern boundary, several small streams, including Cherry and Bozle creeks, flow northward into the White River. These streams have cut shallow valleys into the gently rising plains located here. The Pine Ridge escarpment occupies large areas of the



northern and western portions of the park.

The Fort is within the Pine Ridge Biologically Unique Landscape (BUL). BULs were identified in the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project as priority landscapes that if properly managed will conserve the majority of the

state's biological diversity (Schneider et al 2011). BULs were selected based on the occurrences of at-risk species and intact natural communities. The Pine Ridge is a series of pine- and mixed grass-covered ridges and draws, bordered by prairie-covered plains and rolling hills. It enters Nebraska in northwestern Sioux County and runs southeasterly to southern Dawes County then bends northward exiting the state in northwestern Sheridan County (See Figure 2). The Ridge is actually a long set of bluffs and attached ridges that separate a lower landscape of scattered badlands of the White River strata from a higher landscape of local tablelands of the upper Airkaree and Ogallala sediments. The Pine Ridge includes many rock outcrops, bluffs and cliffs, some of the bluffs rising 4,200 feet in height.

Sediments of the Arikaree group, deposited during the late Oligocene and early Miocene, 28 to 19 million years ago, form the ridge. The ridge is composed mainly of light tan, fine-grained sandstones and siltstones, which are often interspersed with layers of large carbonate concretions. The homogenous character, abundant concretions, and a greater degree of cementation and sand make the sediments of the Pine Ridge more resistant to erosion than overlying and underlying sediments. Near the base of the Pine Ridge is the contact between the more impermeable, volcanic-rich Brule Formation of the White River group (40 to 80 percent volcanic ash) and the somewhat sandier sediments of the overlying Arikaree group (20 to 60 percent volcanic ash). This creates local, perched aquifers and spring with the Arikaree sediments.

CLIMATE

Located in the continental interior, western Nebraska has a classic continental climate; and due to the rain-shadow effect of the Rocky Mountains, the climate is characterized as semi-arid. Average annual precipitation for the Pine Ridge ranges from 16 to 18 inches. The average high temperature at Chadron, Nebraska located approximately 29 miles east of the park is 63° F, while the average low temperature is 32° F. The daily temperature for the Fort exceeds 100° F a few times a year. Minimum temperatures of 0° F and below occur 15 to 20 times per year. Winds in western Nebraska are prevailing from the southeast from May to September; the remainder of the year they blow from the northwest. The average wind velocity in the vicinity of the Fort is 10 miles per hour.



NATIVE PLANT COMMUNITIES

Native plant communities – prairies, woodlands and wetlands – are a key component of Nebraska’s biological diversity. They provide habitat for numerous species of fungi, plants and animals. A key feature of all nearly all conservation plans is the preservation and enhancement of native plant communities.

The Fort’s diverse topography creates conditions to support several plant communities. No detailed inventory of native plant communities, however, has ever been completed at the Fort and therefore, a complete list of plant communities present at the park is not available. However, some restricted surveys have been completed at the park. The following plant community types are known to occur within the park boundaries.

1. Cottonwood-Peachleaf Willow Riparian Woodland – This community has a canopy dominated by cottonwood and peachleaf willow with a subcanopy of box-elder and green ash. This community occurs in the floodplain of the White River.
2. Peachleaf Willow Woodland – The community has a canopy dominated by peachleaf willow with a subcanopy of diamond willow. This community occurs in the White River floodplain.
3. Green ash-Elm-Hackberry Canyon Bottom Woodland – The community has a canopy dominated by box-elder, hackberry, green ash, and American elm. It occurs on low slopes and in bottoms of ravines in narrow canyons.
4. Ponderosa Pine Forest – The community has a canopy dominated by a dense cover of ponderosa pine often below which is a subcanopy of green ash, box-elder, Rocky Mountain juniper, and American elm. Two shrub layers are usually present. The tall shrub layer is dominated by Saskatoon serviceberry and chokecherry. This community occurs on gentle to steep side slopes of canyons of the Pine Ridge escarpment, mostly on north and east-facing slopes. The 1989 wildfire greatly reduced the extent of this plant community within the park.
5. Dry-Mesic Ponderosa Pine Woodland – This community is dominated by a moderate to somewhat dense canopy of ponderosa pine with a very sparse to absent subcanopy and a tall shrub layer of Saskatoon serviceberry and chokecherry and a dense herbaceous layer. This community occurs on gentle to steep slopes on mostly north and east exposures. The 1989 wildfire greatly reduced the extent of this plant community within the park.
6. Dry Ponderosa Pine Open Woodland and Savanna – This community has an open canopy of ponderosa pine with Rocky Mountain juniper or eastern red cedar sometimes present, but never abundant. A shrub layer may be scattered to extensive, consisting of skunkbrush sumac, Arkansas rose, and wolfberry. The community occurs on gentle to steep slopes on south and west-facing slopes and upper north- and east-facing slopes of the Pine Ridge escarpment. The 1989 wildfire greatly reduced the extent of this plant community within the park.
7. Threadleaf Sedge Western Mixed-grass Prairie – This community is dominated by short and mid-height graminoids, primarily threadleaf sedge, blue grama and needle-and-thread. This community occurs on gentle to moderate slopes of various aspects.
8. Western Sand Prairie – This community is dominated by prairie sandreed and needle-and-thread. An underlayer of blue grama may be present. This community occurs on level to steep slopes of various aspects that are associated with and below sandstone outcrops and escarpments.
9. Western Sandstone Cliff – The vegetation of this community is often sparse. Plants occurring in this community are usually scattered perennial herbs that often do not flower. This community occurs on steeper (60% or greater) slopes of sandstone or siltstone escarpments.
10. Rock Outcrop – This community is sparsely to moderately vegetated by a mixture of short shrubs, mid and short grasses, and forbs. The most common shrub is skunkbrush sumac. This community occurs on nearly level to moderately steep (up to 40% grade) upper and middle slopes or irregularly eroded rocky escarpments or ravines, but may also be present on ridgecrests.

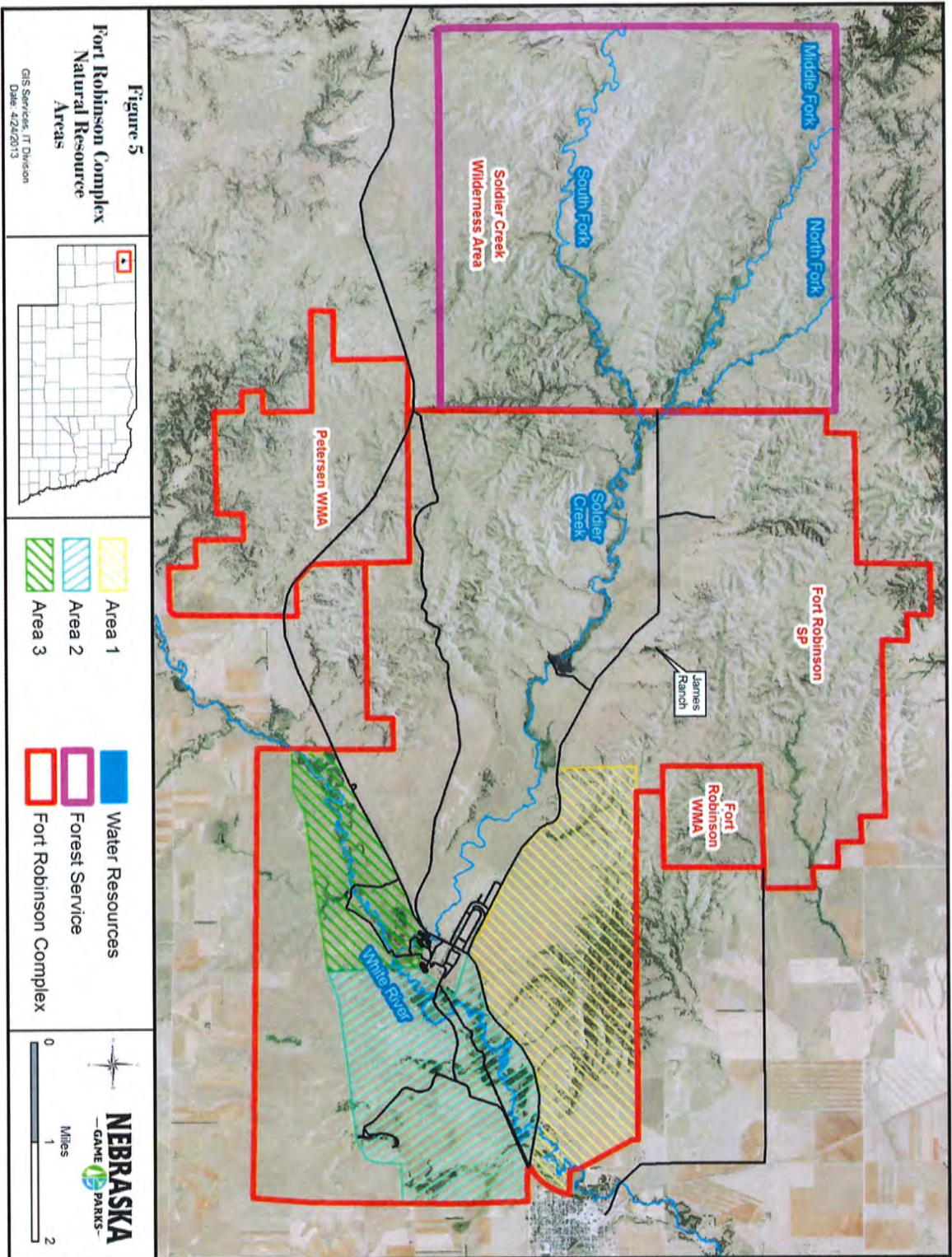
In September of 2003, the Nebraska Natural Heritage Program Staff conducted a 2-day inventory of the pastures on the Fort with the objective of identifying the overall ecological condition of the pastures and to determine the abundance of bighorn sheep forage within the Fort. The following are the general conclusions of the inventory regarding the ecological conditions of the pastures within the Fort:

1. Most pastures in the Fort are in good ecological condition. For the most part, the steeper, higher, rocky or gravelly hills are in the best condition and have the greatest forb diversity and abundance. This is due to the nature of the soils and because they receive low to moderate grazing pressure from domestic livestock.
2. A few areas of the Fort are in rather poor ecological condition due to past overgrazing and other factors. These are primarily the lower slopes and bottoms along the White River and Soldier Creek. Some of these sites are heavily infested with exotic cool-season grasses including downy brome (mostly *Bromus tectorum* and also some *B. japonicus*), smooth brome (*B. inermis*), crested wheatgrass (*Agropyron cristatum*), Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*) and reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*). The White River bottoms in Area 2 (See Figure 5) are highly degraded and infested with exotics. The Soldier Creek bottoms near the James Ranch are also degraded, as are the lower slopes in this area.

3. Grazing management of the Fort could be improved to benefit the quality of the grasslands, bighorn forage and overall biodiversity. Most important is improving



the grazing distribution. The lower slopes are receiving the heaviest grazing utilization, in areas being overgrazed. Whereas, many of the steeper and upper slopes are not getting grazed or only lightly grazed. Overgrazing of lower slopes can lead to increase in abundance of exotics, especially downy brome, and loss of native plant diversity and abundance. However, no grazing or only light grazing can lead to litter accumulation, exotic plant invasion, especially Kentucky bluegrass and smooth brome, and loss of native plant diversity and abundance.



Litter accumulation may also affect the palatability of bighorn sheep forage. Improvements in water distribution and fencing may be needed to better improve grazing distribution in the park.

4. Some highly disturbed areas, such as the exotic grass infested bottoms in Area 2, could be more heavily utilized for grazing without causing ecological damage to the plant community. For example, Area 2 could be targeted for spring grazing or as a pasture to place excess livestock when other pastures need rest.
5. Including fire into the management regime of the Fort would benefit the native grasslands and woodlands. Many of the high, steeper slopes of the Fort may be inaccessible to domestic livestock and bison. Without grazing, litter will accumulate in these areas leading to the stagnation of the native plant community, invasion of exotic cool-season grasses and degradation of bighorn sheep forage. Roads and rocky bluffs could be utilized as fire breaks. The grasslands in Area 1, between Hwy 20 and the Red Cloud Buttes, might be a good site for a demonstration burn.

PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES

The variety of native plant communities found within the Fort provide habitat for a wide diversity of wildlife and plant species. Although comprehensive surveys of the Fort's biodiversity have not been conducted, survey information from multiple sources provides some basic biological information for the region. For example, around the beginning of the 20th century expeditions by Lawrence Bruner, Merritt Cary, and Stephen Visher that explored the bird life of the Pine Ridge, including areas in and around the Fort. Richard Rosche accumulated numerous bird records from the area and published an annotated checklist in 1982 for the Pine Ridge which included 326 species (Rosche, R.R., 1982, *The Birds of Northwestern Nebraska and Southwestern South Dakota: an annotated checklist*). The Fort was included in the Nebraska Breeding Bird Atlas 1984-1989 with blocks located with the boundary of the Fort (Mollhoff 2001). These blocks were also included in the ongoing Nebraska Breeding Bird Atlas II. The Pine Ridge birds include grassland species as well as western and eastern woodland species. Several species of raptors, including the golden eagle, merlin, and prairie falcon nest on the bluffs and cliffs of the Pine Ridge escarpment within the park.

Although a detailed plant survey of the park has never been conducted, it is likely that a few hundred native plant species occur on the Fort, with the greatest diversity associated with dry rock outcrops, pine forests and woodlands, mixed-grass prairies and wetlands.

Table 9 provides a list of the at-risk plant and animal species at the Fort. The Nebraska Natural Legacy Project (Schneider, et.al, 2011) identified twelve Tier 1 at-risk species (species that are globally or nationally at-risk) that occur within the Pine Ridge Biological Unique Landscape that includes the Fort. Only three species from this list have been documented as occurring in the Fort since 1980, these are the swift fox, long-legged myotis and bighorn sheep. Several Legacy Project Tier 2 species (species that are at-risk within Nebraska but doing well in other parts of their range) have been documented at the Fort since 1980.

TABLE 9: AT-RISK PLANT AND ANIMAL SPECIES DOCUMENTED AT FORT ROBINSON STATE PARK SINCE 1980

Common Name	Scientific Name	State Rank*	Legacy Classification
Birds			
Barn owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	S3	Tier 2
Bell's Vireo	<i>Vireo belli</i>	S4	Tier 1
Black-billed Magpie	<i>Pica hudsonia</i>	S3	Tier 2
Black-n-white Warbler	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>	S3	Tier 2
Brewer's Blackbird	<i>Euphagus cyanocephalus</i>	S2	Tier 2
Cordilleran Flycatcher	<i>Empidonax occidentalis</i>	S1	Tier 2
Dark-eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>	S1	Tier 2
Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	S3	Tier 2
Lewis's Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes lewis</i>	S1	Tier 2
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	S1	Tier 2
Northern Saw-whet Owl	<i>Aegolius acadicus</i>	SNR	Tier 2
Pine Siskin	<i>Spinus pinus</i>	S3	Tier 2
Prairie Falcon	<i>Falco mexicanus</i>	S3	Tier 2
Pygmy Nuthatch	<i>Sitta pygmaea</i>	S3	Tier 2
Swainson's Hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>	S3	Tier 2
Townsend's Solitaire	<i>Myadestes townsendi</i>	S2	Tier 2
Violet-green Swallow	<i>Tachycineta thalassina</i>	S3	Tier 2
White-throated Swift	<i>Aeronautes saxatalis</i>	S3	Tier 2
Mammals			
Long-legged Myotis	<i>Myotis volans</i>	S1	Tier 2
Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep	<i>Ovis canadensis</i>	S2	Tier 1
Swift Fox	<i>Vulpes velox</i>	S2	Tier 1
Plants			
Antelope Bitterbrush	<i>Purshia tridentata</i>	SNR	Tier 2
Blue Larkspur	<i>Delphinium nuttallianum</i>	S1	Tier 2
Nodding Brome	<i>Bromus porteri</i>	S2	Tier 2
Tufted Fleabane	<i>Erigeron caespitosus</i>	S2	Tier 2
*S1 – critically imperiled in the state	*S2 – imperiled in the state	*S3 – Rare or local throughout its range in the state	SNR – State not ranked

Source: The Nebraska Natural Heritage Database

NATURAL LEGACY DEMONSTRATION SITE

The Nebraska Natural Legacy Project (NNLP) has selected the Fort as one of twenty Natural Legacy Demonstration Projects within the state. A multi-organizational team of conservationists choose the demonstration sites based on their ability or potential ability to demonstrate habitat management practices that focus on enhancing biodiversity. Demonstration sites needed to provide opportunity for the public and conservationists to view conservation projects occurring on the site, learn more about the sites unique qualities, the importance of at-risk species, and management practices that sustain biological diversity.

ISSUES AFFECTING BIODIVERSITY WITHIN THE PARK

The stressors affecting native species and plant communities listed in the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project for the Pine Ridge Biologically Unique Landscape are similar to those impacting the biological diversity of the Fort. These are as follows:

1. Specific livestock grazing and haying practices that may reduce native plant diversity and promote uniform habitat structure.
2. Invasive plant species, including cheatgrass, smooth brome, Kentucky bluegrass, reed canary grass, leafy spurge, Canada thistle, musk thistle, Russian olive and eastern red cedar (a native species, though invasive).
3. Lack of prescribed fire.
4. Increased density of ponderosa pine and to a lesser extent eastern red cedar due because of lack of fire.
5. Catastrophic wildfires resulting from increased tree density and an overabundance of ground litter (primarily pine needles).
6. Pine bark beetle infestations that threatens remaining pine stands.

CURRENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND POTENTIAL MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

The primary method of natural community management at the Fort Robinson is livestock (longhorn cattle, bison, and horses) grazing. Resource management at the park follows a multiple use approach balancing livestock production and viewing opportunities (bison and longhorns), wildlife viewing and hunting, historical interests and education. Although prescribed fire can be a primary tool to manage Nebraska's native prairies and woodlands, it is not presently utilized at the Fort. Other potential management tools for management of the park's native plant communities include selective herbicide application (presently used in the park to control noxious weeds) and mechanical or chemical thinning in pine woodlands and riparian woodlands to remove unwanted trees and shrubs.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Maintaining and enhancing native plants communities –prairies, woodlands, and wetlands – is key to managing and enhancing populations of most native plant and animal species. This approach to management of the Fort's biological diversity is highly recommended. In certain situations other specific management is required. For example, visitor access may need to be restricted from certain areas so raptor nests are not disturbed or certain pastures may not be grazed at specific times to prevent damage to certain rare plant species at critical times in their life cycle.

In 2011, the NGPC Wildlife Division completed management guidelines for native grassland, woodland, and wetland types on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). These documents provide a management philosophy, goals, and acceptable management strategies and methods for managing native plant communities on WMAs. It is recommended that management of native grasslands and woodlands on the Fort follow the approach provided in these documents. The general goal for each plant community type on a WMA is to improve its ecological grade one step (ecological grades range from A-D with A grade plant communities being the highest quality) through management over a given time period. The multiple use aspects of the park's management will need to be incorporated into this framework.

The Commission's Focus on the Future Plan contains several strategies that are fulfilled by the management recommendations given below, these include the following:

Biodiversity Chapter:

- Conducting systematic inventories to identify new populations of at-risk species and occurrences of natural communities.
- Provide long-term protection for natural communities and at-risk species populations on Commission lands.
- Increase management for biodiversity values on agency lands in concert with management of other values.
- Develop and utilize natural areas for education purposes and create programs that bring nature to the classroom.

Parks Chapter:

- Continue to work with the Natural Heritage Program to evaluate threatened and endangered species and unique habitats.

The following are general recommendations to improve the management of native plant and animal species, including at-risk species, and native plant communities on Fort Robinson State Park:

1. Conduct native plant community surveys within the park during the 2013 or 2014 field season. Surveys should document and map plant communities and determine their dominant species, ecological grade, and threats.
2. Conduct surveys to further identify plant and animals species, including at-risk species, found within the Fort. The surveys should determine at-risk species habitats, locations, threats, and management needs within the park and should be conducted during the 2013 or 2014 field seasons.
3. Conduct surveys for invasive plants within the Park. These should be conducted at the same time as the at-risk plant surveys mentioned above. Conduct annual monitoring of identified populations.
4. Develop management guidelines for at-risk animal and plant species and native plant communities at the park based on results of the surveys. The plan would include goals, strategies and monitoring to ensure that management methods are enhancing the park's biodiversity. Livestock grazing would likely be the primary tool available to use for management of native plant communities within the park, though other management tools such as prescribed fire also should be used.

5. Implement “management guidelines” within a multiple use framework. Modification of grazing practices at the park to enhance biodiversity will likely require investment in grazing infrastructure (primarily water development and possibly fencing).
6. Modification of grazing practices at the park to enhance biodiversity will likely require investment in grazing infrastructure (primarily water development and potentially fencing)
7. Develop and enhance nongame wildlife and native plant viewing and educational opportunities in the park.

LIVESTOCK RESOURCES

At the Fort, there is the unique opportunity to have livestock within the property. Management of Bison at the park has occurred since the early 1970s. The purebred herd of longhorn cattle arrived at the park in 2000. The livestock herds have been integrated into the everyday management of the Fort and provide great viewing opportunities for the visitors to the Fort. Not only do the livestock herds provide entertainment to the guests, but both bison and longhorn herds provide meat for the Fort's restaurant. Bison meat is also provided for cookouts and park restaurants throughout the park system.

EXISTING RESOURCES

Below is a brief history of the existing herds that are managed at the Fort. Please refer to Figure 6 for a layout of where these livestock are kept within the confines of the Fort.

Bison

Bison were first introduced at the Fort in the early 1970s. In 2001, the Fort had 200 head of breeding cows in three different pastures. The market for bison had been going up so in 1996, the herd was increased by 50. To accommodate this increase, additional fencing had to occur on approximately 700 acres north and east of the James Ranch. The 50 head of cows lived in this pasture until 2003. This increase resulted in this pasture becoming a no hunting area and basically off limits to all equestrians and hikers. In 2003, the old cows were sold off and the herd went back to pre-1996 numbers of approximately 150 head of breeding cows.



The bison are managed in two herds and are pastured on the south side of the Fort. The "east" pasture (1,788 acres) has about 75 cows and 8 bulls, while the "west" pasture (934 acres) has 55 cows and 6 bulls. In an average rainfall year, the east pasture can run 90 head of cows while the west pasture runs 60. This number of 150 breeding cows is ideal for several reasons: first, the pastures can handle the animals through average years easily; second, the public has no conflict with other uses on these areas; and third, the numbers are conducive to a genetically diverse herd. The buffalo in the west pasture are moved across the highway to old smiley (847 acres) for public viewing in early April. Thousands of visitors take the Smiley Canyon scenic drive to see the herd and every jeep tour that is taken on the Fort travels through this pasture.

There are several reasons why it is advantageous to have the bison on the property. They assist in meeting NGPC's mission by preserving a native animal that was at one time almost extinct. The bison provide excellent public viewing and educational opportunities. They also provide an excellent opportunity for the public to consume a healthy and native food source. Raising these bison

substantially reduces the costs at the restaurant. Bison also provide excellent range management opportunities at the park.

Longhorn

The longhorns were acquired in 2000 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Refuge at Valentine, Nebraska. The Game and Parks Board of Commissioners agreed to accept the herd from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The agreement includes three major stipulations that Game and Parks must adhere to: 1) to preserve the herd genetically, 2) to keep them registered with the TLBAA (Texas Longhorn Breeders Association of America), and 3) to provide public viewing opportunities. The Fort keeps the number of breeding cows at 125 for the herd.



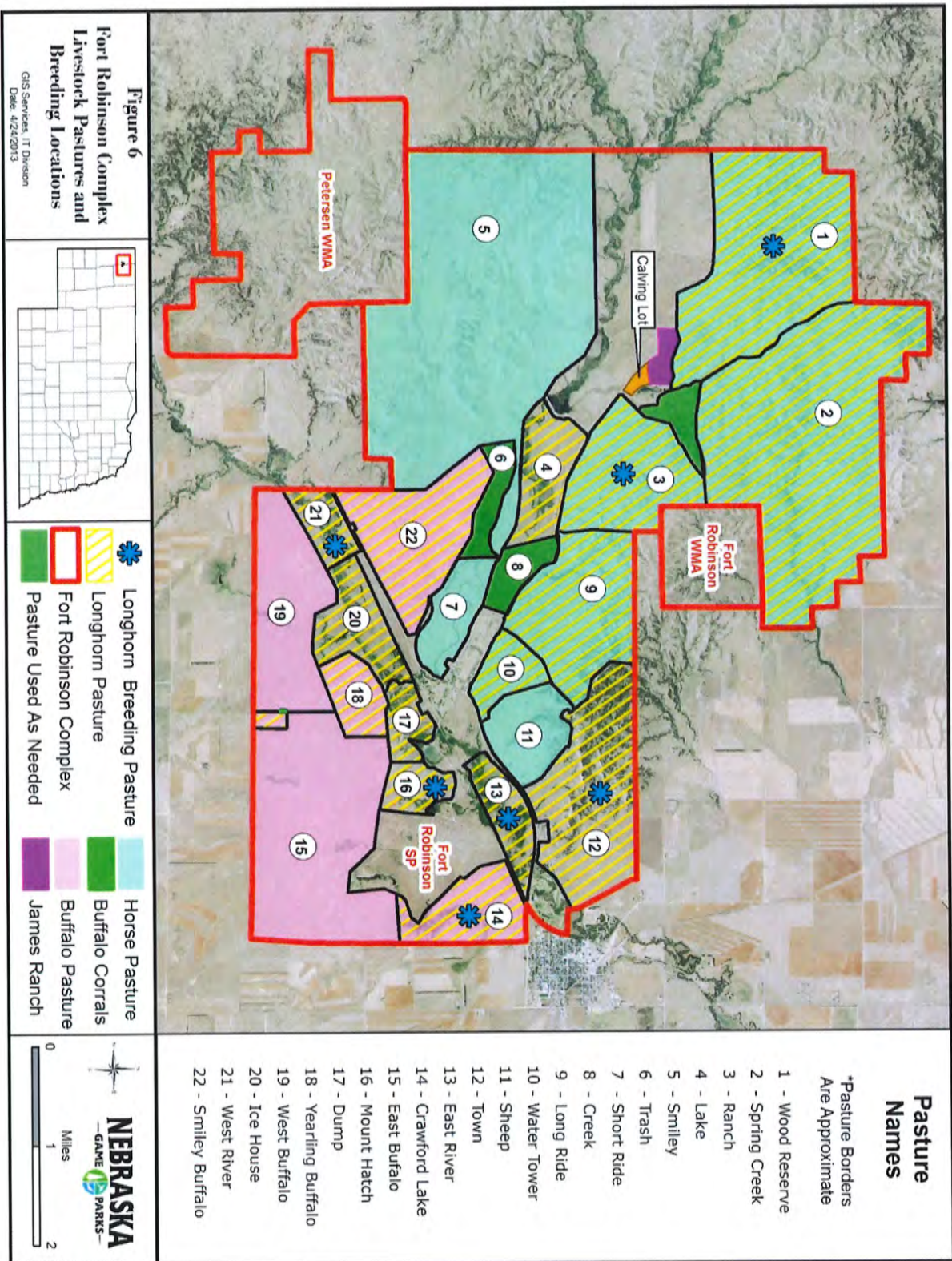
According to the past President of the Cattleman's Texas Longhorn Registry/Vice President of the Cattleman's Longhorn Conservancy (Debbie Davis), a herd of 125 animals is the minimal number to keep a genetically pure herd. She states that the herd is sufficient at this time. An Associate Professor at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, who is the Extension Beef Genetics Specialist, concurs with the management plan of having a herd of 125. Both individuals believe the current practice of selling off most of the annual crop of calves allows NGPC to prevent in-breeding problems by increasing the generational interval in the herd.

The Fort was required to add a large amount of interior fencing to accommodate the breeding herds, but no other major changes had to be made in operations to introduce the longhorns into the area. There are several reasons why it is valuable to have longhorns at the Fort. It allows for the preservation of true longhorn genetics which is becoming very scarce. It provides the public the ability to view and be educated on this species, as well as sample the meat at the restaurant. It allows the Fort to have some rangeland management opportunities it wouldn't if the longhorns were not on the property. The longhorns provide the public a view of how cattle are handled as well as ranching techniques that they may not see anywhere else. The longhorns add a tremendous value to the atmosphere of the Fort that coincides with the "old west" history of the area.

Horses

The horses play an extremely vital part of the activities at the Fort and their importance cannot be stressed enough when it comes to visitor satisfaction. There is tremendous equine history at the Fort that draws a large number of equine visitors to the park. The Fort has a horse herd that consist of trail ride horses, teams of mules and horses for the Stagecoach and hayrack activities, and a herd of mares. The trail ride herd consists of approximately 40 head of horses; 12 (Soldier Creek) short ride horses, 12 (Butte ride) long ride horses and 16 wrangler and replacement horses. These horses are also used for the Park's weekly rodeo. The park has four to five teams of two horses and/or mules to accommodate the horse drawn activities. The mares number from 18-20 and are kept for breeding. The mares and colts also provide an educational viewing opportunity for the public. The trail rides are the most popular activity that is offered at the Fort.





CURRENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Below is a brief synopsis of the existing management practices for each type of livestock.

Bison

The bison are rounded up in early November every year. The calves are weaned and any maintenance on the herd (ear tags, disease testing, etc.) is done at this time. Thirty head of bull calves are taken to the ranch corrals and fed all winter. These calves are then turned out on grass in April in a third smaller pasture north of the buffalo corrals (between the east and west pastures). These yearlings are then gathered in early November of the next year and taken to the ranch. They are put on feed in January and butchered that spring and summer as two year olds.

Approximately 15 head are butchered per year and are used at the restaurant. Another ten are butchered for the eastern parks. If there are any leftover, they are sold at the sale in the fall. Another ten heifer calves are turned back into the herd when they are two years of age. This number depends on how many, if any, old cows are sold and how close the herd is for the number of breeding cows that are needed. Replacement heifers from the east herd are put in the west herd and vice versa to keep the herds' inbreeding coefficient high enough to avoid problems. The rest of the calves weaned at roundup time are sold at auction in late November. The west herd is moved across the highway to the "viewing pasture" in early April to avoid moving the herd while they are calving. In mid-September, they are moved back south across the highway to their winter pasture.

As of 2011, the average costs per year for the buffalo herd is approximately \$33,500. This includes the man hours it takes to manage the herd, fencing, feed, veterinary bills and the windmills (for water source maintenance). The income received on the herd would include the sale of the bison at the auction and the sale of the meat at the restaurant. Since 2004, the sale of the bison, on average, has brought the Park \$52,750 each year. It is unknown at this time how much of the restaurant profit is from the sales of buffalo meat. It will be necessary to create an accounting system of this if it is important to determine the amount of buffalo sold annually and the profit made from those sales at the restaurant.

Longhorn

The longhorn cows start calving in late February and at this time they are taken to the James Ranch and put in a small 15 acre lot. They are fed ground hay every day until all calves are born and a few days old. The cows and calves are moved to an adjacent pasture after calving to wait for branding and sorting which occurs around the first of May. The calves are branded with a four digit number; the first number is the year they are born and the last three digits are their mother's identification (001-125). This creates a permanent herd identification number that is required on registrations. The State of Nebraska brand is also put on the animals.

The day after branding, the herd is separated into seven or eight smaller herds of 15-22 animals and are put in separate smaller pastures for breeding. This is done at this time to guarantee that the herds are out to pasture before the visitor season begins. Small herds are used to ensure which bull is breeding each cow. There are eight to 12 bulls kept at the Fort and one bull is put with each breeding herd. The bulls are sorted by mid-May and put with the cows. This ensures that calving will not begin until the end of February. The bulls are kept with the cows for 50 days to keep the calving period to 50 days.

By mid-July, the small herds are gathered and the bulls are taken out. Then the herds are combined and they are put in the pasture that is next to Crawford. This is done to keep this pasture grazed so there is not a high fire threat to the town. It also allows the American Paint Horse Association (APHA) trail ride participants to move the cows to a pasture known as spring creek in September. This pasture is on the northeast corner of the park and is 2,316 acres. The cows stay there until early November.

In November, the herd is gathered and taken to a pasture that is directly east of the arena. This is done to sort the cows that will be sold, wean the calves, and keep the herd close and out of the way for the upcoming rifle deer season. The herd is moved the day after rifle season ends to a pasture east of the fort buildings that is on the river.



The cows then are moved based on feed availability to pastures adjacent and west until it is time to move them to the ranch in mid-February for calving.

At sorting time in November, 24 heifer calves are kept to look at when they are yearlings, for replacements when they are two years old. Another 20 steer calves are used for roping cattle the following summer for the rodeo. These steers are then put on feed until the next January and butchered for the restaurant as two year olds. Approximately 15-18 steers are butchered each year. If there are steers left over, they are then sold at the sale. The Fort keeps between two and four bull calves for possible breeding if they look good as two year old bulls. All the other calves are sold, as well as any yearling heifers that did not make the final cut. Between ten and 15 older cows are culled every year and sold. This creates the number of replacement heifers that are kept to keep the herd at 125. Any older bulls that are no longer used are sold at this time as well. The bulls are kept in one of the buffalo pastures when they are not breeding to keep them away from the public due to their temperament.

The average cost per year, as of 2011, to maintain the herd is approximately \$30,800. This includes the man hours it takes for calving and caring for the herd, fencing, feed, veterinary bills, windmills and registrations. The income received on the herd would include the sale of the longhorns and the sale of the meat at the restaurant. Since 2003, the sale of the longhorns, on average, has brought the Park \$33,700 each year. It is unknown at this time how much of the restaurant profit is from the sales of longhorn meat. It will be necessary to create an accounting system of this if it is important to determine the amount of longhorn sold annually and the profit made from those sales at the restaurant.

Horses

The trail ride horses are switched out during the summer to keep them fresh and reliable. This is also the herd where new horses are added to be trained for the rides by the wranglers. Depending on the



horses, training can be relatively quick and at other times, the horses need a couple of years to get acclimated. The teams of horses and/or mules that accommodate the horse drawn activities (Stagecoach and hayrack rides) travel an extensive amount of miles, so they receive days off during the season to keep them fresh. Depending on injuries, temperament, age of existing horses and availability of horses, young teams are acquired and trained at every opportunity.

The herd of trail horses and teams (Stagecoach and hayrack ride horses) stay close to the barns during the season and are pasture in Smiley Canyon (3,700 acres) from early September through May. They are brought in to a pasture close to the fort again for rifle deer season, which is nine days long. Then the herd is moved back to other pastures. The herd of mares is kept specifically for breeding. The colts raised out of these mares are traded as two year olds for trail ride prospective horses. This keeps the costs down when acquiring new horses. These horses are kept in the "Spring Creek" pasture (2,316 acres) year round except for during rifle deer season and breeding season. They are brought back into the James Ranch during these times. The horse herds are supplemented with energy barrels during the winter and grain during the season. Table 10 provides the income and expenses of the horses at the Fort for the past five years.

The current number of 65 horses being maintained at the park is considered to be an appropriate sized herd for the different uses the horses, according to local horse experts. The large number of park activities at the Fort that use horses require an adequate number of trained animals to be on hand and readily available. Injuries and exhaustion are common among working animals which require substitutions and replacements be readily available. The current herd size also allows for the economical exchange of yearlings for the eventual replacement of older horses, thus maintaining a healthy herd of working animals. No reduction in the current herd size of 65 animals is recommended at this time by staff.

It should be noted that in the past, other parks within the system sent their horses to the park in the fall and picked them back up in the spring to be cared for. The practice of over wintering horses at the park besides the existing is no longer allowed which reduces the grazing pressure on the park's pastures.

TABLE 10: INCOME AND EXPENSES OF HORSES AND HORSE RELATED ACTIVITIES; 2008 TO 2012

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Income					
Trail Rides	\$51,123	\$66,181	\$70,341	\$67,355	\$62,021
Pony Rides	\$1,337	\$1,329	\$1,505	\$1,238	\$1,128
Bedding	\$1,100	\$828	\$752	\$0	\$0
Hayrack Ride	\$371	\$47	\$0	\$822	\$882
Stagecoach Ride	\$5,774	\$6,257	\$6,047	\$5,372	\$5,537
Stall Rental	\$28,270	\$36,872	\$53,638	\$36,652	\$36,242
Total Income	\$87,975	\$111,515	\$132,284	\$111,438	\$105,811
Expenses					
Perm Wages & OT/Comp	\$19,470	\$10,788	\$11,865	\$9,581	\$8,274
Temp Wages	\$42,526	\$51,163	\$42,309	\$47,535	\$43,951
Benefits	\$16,558	\$10,927	\$11,222	\$9,673	\$7,598
O&M	\$29,863	\$21,494	\$24,401	\$30,839	\$27,102
Total Costs	\$108,418	\$94,372	\$89,797	\$97,629	\$86,925
Profit/Loss	(\$20,443)	\$17,144	\$42,487	\$13,810	\$18,886

Source: Parks Division Income/Expense Statements, 2013

ISSUES DEALING WITH LIVESTOCK

The Fort manages the livestock with a long-term view of managing both livestock and grassland health, which becomes especially critical in drought years. Managing the livestock does not conflict with the operations of the park during the “tourist” season. In fact, having livestock allow the Fort to provide a robust experience for visitors; from viewing the animals out in pastures, to being entertained at the rodeo with the steers, to eating the livestock at the restaurant; these animals are a unique and integral part of the operation of the Fort.

The bison and longhorn herds have some of the same issues when dealing with the management of the breeds. The maintenance spent on fencing and corrals for the bison is challenging due to the upgraded facilities needed to handle what is basically a wild animal. Bison corrals are heavy duty and taller than cattle facilities. Catwalks are needed to “work the bison” through the facility. Fences are taller and more secure. All of this infrastructure is in place at the Fort, but needs more maintenance than regular livestock facilities. Grass availability during a drought can be an issue for feeding of the livestock. Because there are no fisheries within the Bison areas that they are located, there is no conflict of use for fisheries with park guests. The longhorns do not conflict with any of the fisheries as well. Bison pastures are in “No Hunting” areas but wildlife is not prevalent in these areas of the Fort.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS ISSUES

The current use of the pasture lands comprising the Fort complex is mostly to accommodate domestic livestock and, thus, these grasslands are managed for grazing animals. According to the Focus on the Future Plan, “Managers are expected to meet the needs and demands of increasing numbers of users, multiple use interests, and additional state and federal mandates, along with rising operation and

maintenance requirements.” The Fort Robinson Management Plan reflects these needs as well as the needs of the livestock and the park visitors. The following are recommendations regarding the livestock at the Fort:

1. Work with the Wildlife division to continue to manage the land with attentive grazing practices with the use of the livestock. Potential to rotate pastures should be reviewed when necessary.
2. Ensure that both the Longhorn and Bison herds are genetically pure and viable. New genetics have been added to both herds in the past. Be prepared to annually review the herd to determine when new genetics need to be introduced.
3. Maintain existing livestock infrastructure with seasonal maintenance, allowing flexibility to add new fences, corrals and water sources as needed. Livestock infrastructure is in excellent condition as of early 2013, but it is importance to maintain the infrastructure to adequately manage the livestock.
4. Maintain park’s hay lease program to ensure availability of feed for animals at little to no cost. Alfalfa fields in the hay lease program also provides food for other wildlife on the property and enhances hunting availability and access.
5. Continue to keep Bison numbers at 150 breeding cows. However, the flexibility to manage the herd at lower numbers if conditions (drought, market fluctuations) warrant should be a sound management practices for the future.
6. Continue to keep the Longhorn number at 125 breeding cows. However, the flexibility to manage the herd at lower numbers if conditions (drought, market fluctuations) warrant should be a sound management practices for the future.
7. Create a mechanism to determine the proceeds from the sale of longhorn and buffalo meat in the restaurant.
8. Explore the option of additional interpretation for the public viewing aspect of the livestock. Public viewing is important in the management of both the Longhorn and Bison herds and perhaps interpretation for visitors could be beneficial.
9. Provide an Annual Report regarding the livestock at the Fort to Commissioners. This report will include an overview of the horses, longhorns, and bison. It will provide information on income and expenses for each type of livestock, breeding success, grazing patterns, typical activities associated with each type of livestock, issues that affect the livestock and any recommended changes in management practices that should take place for any of the livestock.

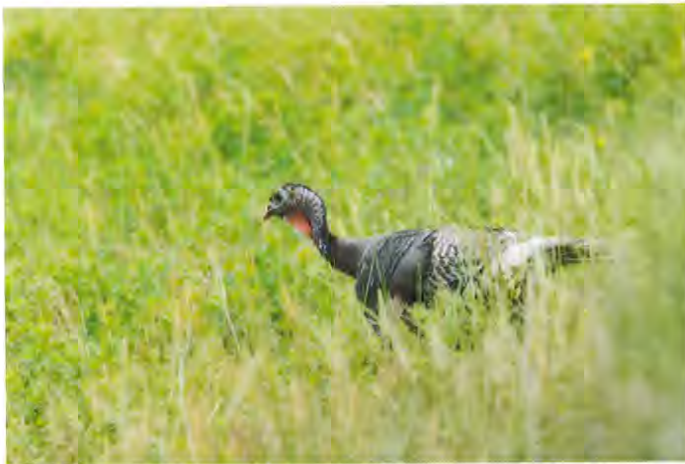
10. Develop a protocol to surplus and harvest older bison including bulls to present to the Commissioners.



WILDLIFE RESOURCES

EXISTING RESOURCES

The Fort and the surrounding area is home to numerous wildlife resources including big game such as elk, mule deer, whitetail deer, bighorn sheep, pronghorn and turkey. Sharptail grouse are the primary upland game species with pheasants inhabiting isolated areas. Migratory game species consist of Mourning dove, numerous duck species and occasional Canada geese. Mountain lion, several small game, furbearer (beaver, martens, mink, muskrats, raccoons, opossums, otters, bobcats, grey and red foxes, badgers, long-tailed weasels, Canada lynx and skunks) and non-game species inhabit this area as well.



Various habitat types exist throughout the Fort consistent with that of short and mixed grass prairie, Pine Ridge woodlands, deciduous woodlands, rock escarpments, rolling hills & valleys, and rivers & streams. The NNLP also identifies At-Risk species within the Pine Ridge BUL that may be found on the Fort; see the Natural Resources section for the at-risk species.

CURRENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Resources within the Fort have to balance multiple uses. Livestock grazing and viewing; wildlife viewing and hunting; historical interests, camping, trail use, and education encompass the major uses on the landscape. Over the past several years Wildlife and Parks staff have met frequently to discuss management considerations involving compatible use projects within the Fort's goals and objectives. Wildlife related projects have included bighorn sheep captures and research; installation of wildlife friendly fences; set special big game management restrictions and re-establishment of an annual forage plot.

Hunting is allowed throughout most of the Fort except in the closed area of the bison pasture and around any existing buildings. All huntable species can be pursued following standard hunting seasons and regulations unless otherwise specified. The Fort, Soldier Creek Wilderness Area, Petersen WMA and Fort Robinson WMA are currently under an antlerless mule deer harvest restriction. Special management restrictions also exist on pronghorn within



the Fort. Special regulation also applies during the November firearm deer season which divides the Fort into hunting units with hunter numbers restricted in three of those units as shown on Figure 7. A lottery drawing occurs each morning assigning hunters to those specific units. Bighorn sheep permit holders currently receive guide service and a free, four day/night stay at the Fort.

Wildlife viewing opportunities are of high interest in this region. Wildlife Watching is a considerable draw for individuals to the Fort. Since the Fort is a pine-dominated escarpment with the Great Plain's grassland, the Pine Ridge supports many rare species at the edge of their range. There are opportunities to see many iconic western species such as bighorn sheep, bison and Golden Eagles that are not offered in other areas in Nebraska. The Fort is listed on the Nebraska Birding Trails Website as a destination for many elusive woodpecker species. Birders come to the Pine Ridge area to see its characteristic western species such as the Common Poorwill, Lewis's Woodpecker, Pinyon Jay, Mountain Bluebird, Red Crossbills and Western Tanager. The relatively intact landscape provides habitat to many avian species such that this regions boasts nearly 130 bird species that breed in Sioux County. At the Fort, the established hiking trails take birders through multiple habitat including towering buttes which lend themselves to viewing many species such as nesting Prairie Falcons and Merlins. The White River and Soldier Creek which pass through the park are lined with deciduous woodlands which attract songbirds. Other opportunities exist through guided jeep and horseback rides; self-guided hikes and horseback rides; and self-guided tours along Smiley Canyon, Soldier Creek roads, and other area points of interest. See the Recreational Amenities and Education and Interpretation sections for more information.

Bighorn sheep have been an important component of the Fort since their reintroduction in 1981, after nearly a 100 year absence. Bighorn sheep are vulnerable to many diseases and stressors and therefore are considered an At-Risk species in Nebraska, according to the NNLP. Over the past 32 years several bighorn sheep capture and research projects have occurred in an effort to better understand this sensitive species. Viewing and



photographing bighorn sheep remains a favorite past time for many at the Fort. Recreational hunting has also allowed 17 hunters to pursue this highly sought species with 100% success on those permits.

Current management involves active monitoring of this species along with planning efforts to improve population levels. Adjacent to the Fort, a conservation easement was implemented on the Chief Dull Knife property to help protect bighorn sheep from disease as well as protect agriculture uses and wildlife habitat.

In recent years, with the help of the National Forest Service and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the NGPC has been able to replace 1.35 miles of boundary fence with a more wildlife friendly fence. This fence still allows for livestock grazing on both sides but also allows better movement of wildlife across the area.

In 2011, a five acre wildlife forage plot was reestablished near the north end of the Fort. This plot was fenced to exclude livestock. This plot, along with others on adjacent wildlife management areas, was established to provide additional forage during the more critical fall and winter months. It also serves to attract wildlife to public lands and away from neighboring depredation issues on private lands.

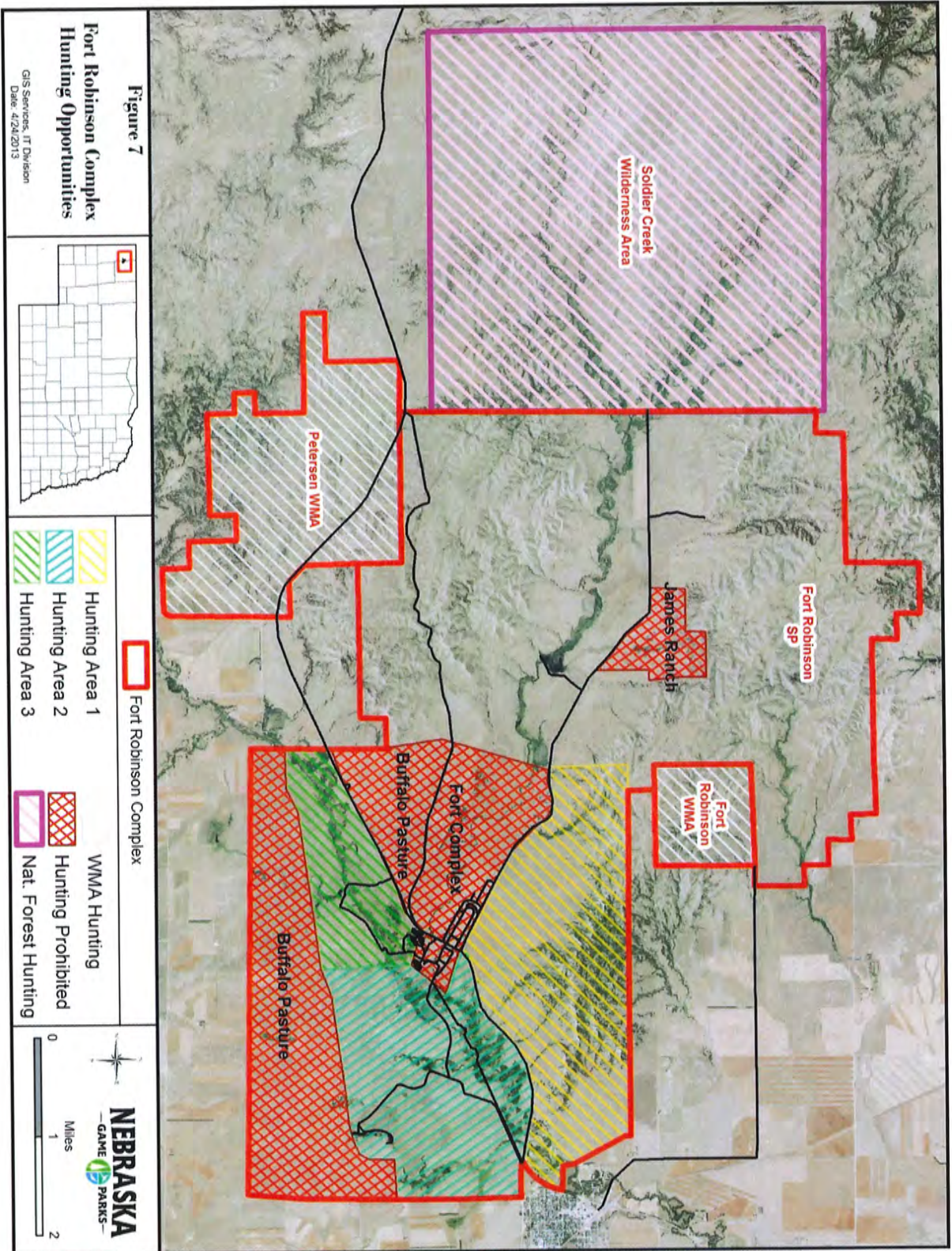
Past weather related events such as wildfire have changed and may continue to change the landscape within the Fort. These successional setbacks or changes in the landscape can be beneficial to some species and detrimental to others but are ultimately a part of natural cycles in the environment. 2012 forced numerous hardships upon livestock, wildlife and the landscape in the region, yet the Fort was able to meet the multiple use demands by making management adjustments as conditions warranted.

ISSUES DEALING WITH THE RESOURCE

The greatest issue may be climatic change resulting in extended drought and wildfires. Extreme weather conditions will add a great deal of stress potentially resulting in conflict with some of the multiple uses at the Fort such as livestock grazing, wildlife needs and the various public use interests. The challenge will be balancing those uses within the recommendations outlined in this plan.



Specific species issues include declining population levels of bighorn sheep. Overcoming *Pasteurella pneumonia* epidemics is the most complicated issue throughout the western United States. This disease can cause all age class die-offs and long lasting lamb recruitment problems for many years after an outbreak. Since 2005, the Fort herd has suffered two die-offs with poor lamb recruitment associated with that, resulting in immediate and gradual population declines.



Mule deer populations have declined to a lesser degree but are cause for concern. Multiple factors may be involved with these declines but specific reasons remain unknown.

The pronghorn population within the Fort is small but appears stable. Even though no harvest of pronghorns within the Fort is allowed, population levels fluctuate little. The eastern portion of the Fort is the most conducive part of the park for pronghorn habitat.

After the 1989 fire, elk had been observed less on Fort Robinson, primarily due to significant loss of tree cover. However, in the past 5 years elk have returned more frequently in the fall inhabiting unburned timber areas and agriculture fields along Soldier Creek. With this increased movement of elk in the fall, hunting opportunities have increased as well.

The same 1989 fire decimated much of the Fort Robinson landscape which was conducive to wild turkey habitat. However, in the past 10 years, wild turkeys have adapted to the changed environment and have increased in numbers at Fort Robinson and throughout the Pine Ridge. Wild turkeys continue to inhabit unburned areas and riparian drainages within the Fort complex.

Sharptail grouse and Ringneck pheasants are the primary upland game species found at Fort Robinson. The Fort is really not conducive to pheasant management but is more suited for Sharptail grouse. Grouse have not been a target management species in the past.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WILDLIFE RESOURCES

According to the NGPC's Focus on the Future plan, the goal of Nebraska's state parks is to provide the people of Nebraska with a balanced and diversified state park system that complements other public and private recreational opportunities; that provides a high level of accessibility that is consistent with the preservation and stewardship of natural, cultural and recreational resources; and, that assures a satisfied, proud and appreciative constituency. Most recommendations in this section will be a continuation of practices already implemented. Others have and will be discussed for future implementation.

1. Meet with Park Superintendent annually to discuss wildlife issues. Identify threats to species and potential management needs.
2. Continue to monitor the bighorn sheep population, overall health and evaluate bighorn sheep research. Consider additional bighorn sheep related research, captures, augmentations, and mineral supplements to increase populations and improve overall health. Utilize new technology and research where feasible to address disease and health issues.
3. Develop additional wildlife water sources (i.e. guzzlers) in critical habitat areas or areas of need. Depending on the location this type of water development may require a fence to exclude livestock. Other developments



may include wells or windmills to benefit both livestock and wildlife.

4. Install wildlife friendly fence in wildlife travel corridors and areas consistent with the Fort's other multiple uses and with adjacent landowners.
5. Evaluate livestock grazing strategies and vegetative standards that positively impact deer, elk, bighorn sheep, sharptail grouse, as well as other wildlife species that are consistent with multiple uses of the park. Identify grazing systems that would benefit different wildlife species and yet continue to meet the needs of the livestock herds on the Fort. Form a committee of Parks and Wildlife staff to visit the area periodically and evaluate range conditions and grazing systems.
6. Develop and enhance all wildlife and mega-fauna viewing opportunities in the park through means of brochures, kiosks, trails, guide sign...etc. Provide self-guided tour maps for watchable wildlife. Identify likely sites to observe wildlife and record this information on maps or brochures. Identify times and dates when certain species of wildlife will more likely be observed. (See Interpretation/Education Section for additional details).
7. Manage elk herds by maintaining existing agriculture fields along Soldier Creek Road and establish additional wildlife forage plots in the Spring Creek area where feasible and where consistent with the Fort's other multiple uses. Plots would consist of alfalfa or other clover/legume mixes. These plots would be fenced to exclude livestock. Evaluate timber resources to determine if timber stand improvement practices are needed to manage timber and increase browse plants for elk grazing.
8. Where feasible, evaluate the Fort's big game hunt regulations in relation to hunt regulations on wildlife management areas in the encompassing Pine Ridge deer unit (i.e. antlerless mule deer restriction). Determine if hunt rules could be modified to promote trophy hunting scenarios.
9. Consider conservation easements and other program implementation on adjacent private lands that can positively impact bighorn sheep and other wildlife in and around the Fort complex.
10. Develop a mule deer harvest strategy plan on the Fort and surrounding public lands to promote quality mule deer hunting. Objectives of the plan will be to monitor mule deer populations and implement strategies to increase populations and provide quality hunting and recreational experiences. Conduct a multi-year mule deer aerial survey on the Fort and on the public and private land surrounding the Fort with the following objectives: 1) determine a base-line mule deer population; 2) determine trends in mule deer populations; 3) determine if the mule deer antlerless restriction positively impacting the population; 4) determine if there is a need for further research. Develop strategies and regulations to support quality mule deer buck hunting through limited quota permits. Consider decreasing the number of deer hunters allowed in the park during deer seasons to reduce buck harvest. Consider a prohibition on mule deer buck

harvest, yet allowing the harvest of whitetail deer. Recommendations from the plan will be brought to the Commissioners for approval.

11. Continue to monitor and maintain a small pronghorn herd. Conduct annual surveys and implement strategies to maintain a viable viewing population. Evaluate vegetation conditions to determine if management practices are needed to improve pronghorn forage resources, such as spraying of invasive plant species, grazing or haying.



FISHING RESOURCES

A broad array of fish species is available for the angler on the Fort. Fishing is an amenity that can be very popular with guests and local residents. It is important to inventory what currently exists and what may need to occur to provide additional access and fishing opportunities at the Fort. The following is a listing of the available resources and a brief description of species will be included in current management practices listed below.



EXISTING RESOURCES

There are several streams, reservoirs and small impoundments at the Fort that provide opportunities for anglers. See Figure 8 for a map of the water bodies at the Fort. Table 11 provides a listing of these areas.

TABLE 11: WATER BODIES AT FORT ROBINSON COMPLEX

<i>Name of Water Body</i>	<i>Type of Water Body</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Additional Information</i>
Soldier Creek & its branches (north, South and middle on USFS property)	Cold Water Stream and Springs	8.7 miles middle branch 7 miles south branch for a total of 15.7 miles	South and Upper Middle Branch on USFS accessed only through the Fort
White River	Cold Water Stream and Springs	13 miles	
Spring Creek	Cold Water Stream and Springs	N/A	
Carter P. Johnson	Reservoir or small impoundment	17 acres	
Grabel Ponds 1-4	Reservoir or small impoundment	6 acres	
Ice-House Ponds (upper and lower)	Reservoir or small impoundment	5 acres	
Wood Reserve Ponds 1-4	Reservoir or small impoundment	2 acres	Located on USFS lands accessed through the Fort
Cherry Creek Dam	Reservoir or small impoundment	2 acres	
Cherry Creek Diversion	Reservoir or small impoundment	0.25 acres	
Crazy Horse Dam	Reservoir or small impoundment	5 acres	
Lake Crawford	Reservoir or small impoundment	Dry	

Source: Fisheries Division, January 2013

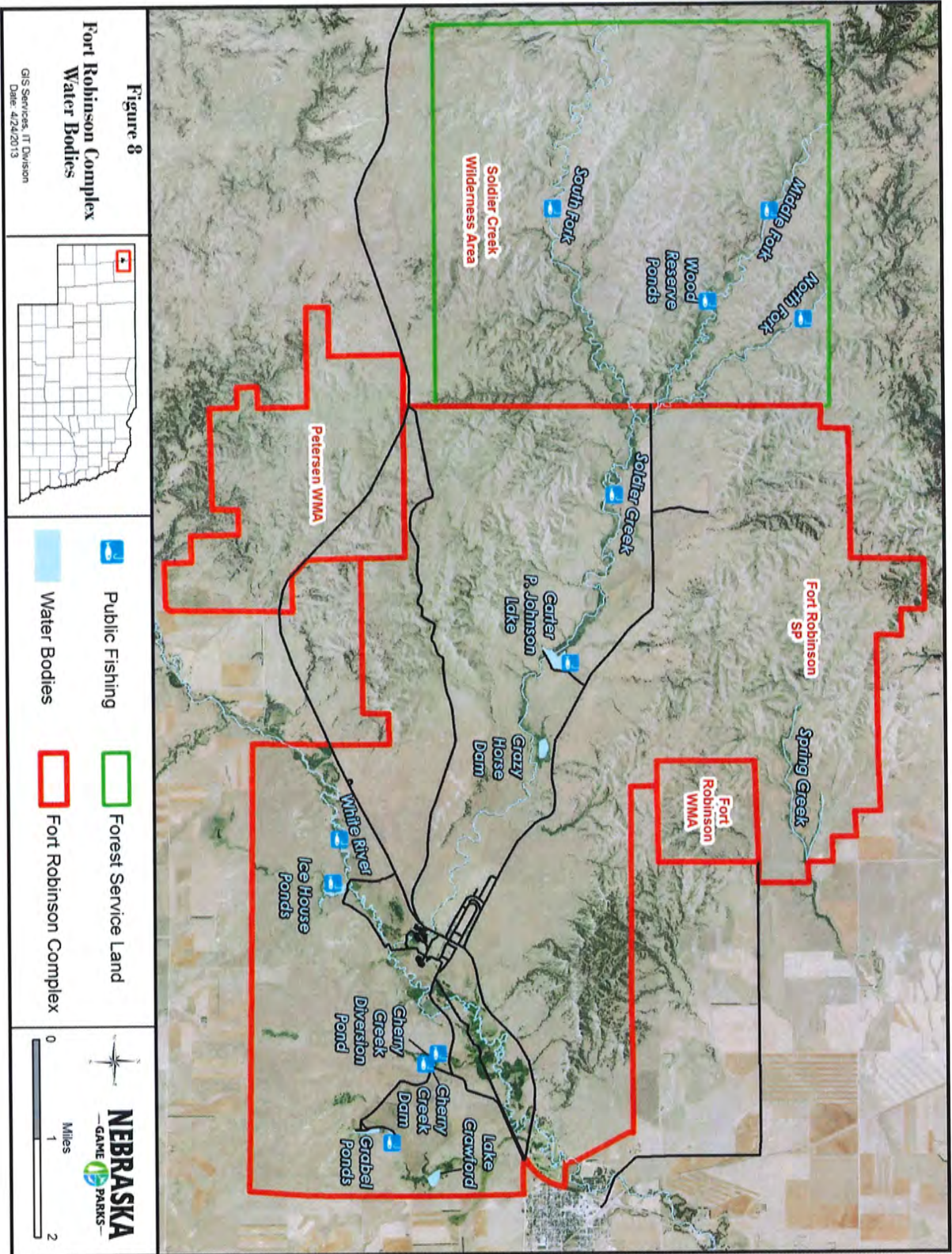
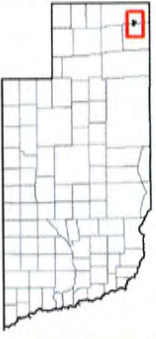


Figure 8
Fort Robinson Complex
Water Bodies

GIS Services, IT Division
 Date: 4/24/2013



CURRENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Carter P. Johnson and Grabel Ponds 1-3 are managed for a high harvest fishery with catchable rainbow trout stocked the months of April, May and October. These dates were selected for stocking as surface water temperatures can become higher than acceptable in the mid and later summer months to safely stock trout at these times. The October stocking offers an ice fishing opportunity and some trout carry over to the next year attaining some additional growth. In total 7,500 catchable rainbow trout are stocked annually in Carter P. Johnson and 7,200 in the Grabel Ponds. Access is very good to these areas via improved roads and one handicap accessible pier is available at Carter P. Johnson and two small dock type piers at Grabel Ponds #1 and #2. An angler access project has been proposed to remove cattails from Grabel Ponds #1 and 2 which will improve fishing access.

Grabel Pond #4 is last on the chain of the four ponds. Limited water flows reach #4 and it maintains a warm-water fishery for largemouth bass, bluegill and channel catfish. It is subject to low levels during drought years.

Carter P. Johnson is our largest reservoir on the Fort at 17 acres and provides a unique dual purpose as



it has an excellent largemouth bass and catfish fishery in addition to the trout fishery. It is stocked annually with 500 channel catfish to maintain that portion of the fishery. Black crappie, bluegill and rockbass are also present and provide prey for the largemouth bass and also are an addition for the recreational angler. There is an accessible fishing pier available.

The Ice-House Ponds provide a warm-water fishery for largemouth bass, bluegill and channel catfish in the lower pond. Catfish are stocked every other year in the lower Ice-House Pond. Access is provided by a parking lot and an arched foot bridge over the White River. This also provides stream access for fishing of the western portions of the White River.

Wood Reserve Ponds 1-4 are the old Crawford hatchery rearing ponds. A flood in May of 1991 damaged all these ponds along with Lake Carter P. Johnson. Large amounts of sediment and debris was washed into these water bodies which required the mechanical removal to restore the ponds. Currently the Wood Reserve Ponds are managed for a quality trout fishery. Access is by walk-in only and stocking rates are reduced to enhance growth as fish carry over from one year to the next. Annual stockings of 400 to 500 rainbow trout into the four ponds have accomplished our management goal. In 2012 brook trout were available from our hatcheries for a one time stocking with the goal to provide an additional trout species for anglers. Cutthroat trout are being requested for future stockings starting in 2013. If cutthroats are successful and available through our hatchery system they could be used for future stockings. These ponds provide a quality experience for the angler willing to hike a mile to catch and release and or harvest an occasional quality trout.

Cherry Creek Dam and diversion currently have a limited largemouth bass bluegill fishery due to some

past dam leakage creating some limited habitat due to water level fluctuations. An aquatic habitat improvement project has been proposed to repair the Cherry Creek Dam. The project proposal is in and a design and bidding process is in the near future plans, hopefully by 2015 or 2016. Future management for Cherry Creek dam will be for largemouth bass, bluegill, black crappie and channel catfish. If the Cherry Creek diversion is deepened by sediment removal, it could maintain a cold-water fishery for trout.

Soldier Creek is a self-sustaining fishery for brown trout and to some extent brook trout in the upper



reaches of the south branch and middle branches. Tiger trout have been documented twice during our surveys in the middle branch. This is a hybrid of the brown and brook trout. Limited stocking of the stream occurs in these areas; however brook trout were introduced and on occasion could be stocked again in these waters. A negative impact in the south branch is the heavy cattle use in the summer. This is totally on USFS land and is noted here as it does impact brook trout habitat. NGPC's area is in good condition at this time.

White River is stocked with brown trout when available to our hatchery system. Fishing is limited on the developed park area due to summer water temperatures and tubing activities. The current hatchery production schedule will provide brown trout for stocking on an every other year basis. Some cutthroats were stocked in 2012 as they were available and documented to have survived prior to the 1991 flood. Additional stocking and management activities have increased due to additional miles of river open to the public via the Open Fields and Waters Program.

Crazy Horse Dam currently is silted in and provides no fishery. A flood occurred in 1991 that deposited tons of silt in Carter P. Johnson. Subsequently Carter P. Johnson was drained to reclaim some of the lake and as Crazy Horse is directly below Carter P. Johnson a large amount of sediment collected in Crazy Horse.

Spring Creek is a consistent water flow but insufficient to support a stream fishery.

Lake Crawford is dry as the development of the Grabel Ponds has utilized all the spring flow. The lake retains limited water from runoff in above average moisture years thus currently has no potential to be developed to support a fishery.

ISSUES DEALING WITH THE RESOURCE

Water availability is always an issue in Nebraska especially in the western portion. Over consumption by domestic and agricultural sources can result in lower levels in ponds and reduced flows in the rivers and streams which would result in higher summer temperatures which can result in the loss of the trout fisheries. Livestock grazing on stream corridors can have negative impacts on stream habitat. Over

grazing on the streams should not be allowed. It would be preferred that cattle have alternative watering sources.

Tubing on that section of the White River located in the park could cause erosion problems especially if this activity increases. The improvement of in-stream structure could improve available habitat that increases the carrying capacity in these streams. On the ponds, shoreline access can be a problem with the encroachment of cattails along the shoreline which will require scheduled removal. These ponds are small thus sediment input and loss of depth will be an issue as these ponds age thus effort needs to be taken to reduce sediment inflow. The deepening of these ponds will be required in the future.

Lack of fishing equipment, tackle and bait available on Fort Robinson limits the potential of park visitors of actually fishing on the area. In addition to that, there are no designated fish cleaning areas on the park, which could potentially affect participation levels. At this time Park's Division is developing a pamphlet that will display the fishing opportunity to park visitors. This will be very useful. Another thing to consider would be to put together a Mobile Application for the fishing opportunities in the Fort proper as well as nearby opportunities.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT

The Focus on the Future plan has several sections on the water bodies that Fisheries manages. The recommendations below fall into line with the Strategic Plan by assessing and evaluating the water bodies as well as marketing the fishery opportunities at the Fort. There are several recommendations for the fisheries development at the Fort. Below is a brief synopsis of those actions that should be considered in the future.

1. Look to develop an additional cold-water fishery with the excavating of sediment in the spring area of the Cherry Creek Diversion. It would support trout and is close to the Cherry Creek Pond for foot access. It currently is fenced out and if cleaned out a provision could be built to supply water for the current livestock use. The current aquatic rehabilitation project includes the diversion as it will improve the water flow to the main Cherry Creek pond.
2. The stream fishery is a park and walk access. It is recommended to keep three access points for stream fishermen. Field trails provide some access at this time. Any future closures could limit stream access and should be discussed before any changes are made. Some improvement for angler access can be investigated to coordinate areas with grazing, farming...etc. In stream structures could be installed to increase carrying capacity of the streams and increase angler success.
3. Produce a pullout that promotes the Fort as a fishing state park. This could be printed with color photos, maps and brief description of the fishing



resources available. This pamphlet could be available at the park office. Consider also the opportunity of a Mobile Application to market the fishing resources available.

4. Examine constructing a small dam on Spring Creek and an annual trout stocking program to provide a quality fishery for those inclined to utilize a walk-in fishery or possibly a unique brook trout fishery. A two fish bag limit could be imposed to help regulate harvest and enhance carryover and consequently the growth and quality of the trout fishery.
5. Explore the potential to dewater at Crazy Horse Dam and determine the feasibility of major sediment removal project. This could create an additional warm-water fishery within the fort boundaries.
6. Assess current stocking rates used on the Fort's resources and make adjustments to best fit future fishing needs as use increases and or in some cases decrease. Fish surveys are conducted on a rotating basis and changes to existing fisheries are monitored and recommendations will be changed to accommodate an optimum sustained yield for most of the water resources. Current plans are to evaluate current and future stockings of cutthroat, rainbow and brook trouts on the area.
7. Included in this plan are the Wood Reserve ponds and the three stream branches. They are on United States Forest Service (USFS) property however, all access is through the Fort and any future changes by the USFS could have some impact to our access and availability of these fisheries that are made available through the Fort Robinson. The agreement with the USFS for access to the Wood Reserve ponds will be continued.
8. Riparian grazing by livestock should be closely monitored as the stream banks are very fragile. Grazing is necessary for the operation of the state park and when needed horse grazing is more desirable than other livestock. Work with the USFS to have them provide alternative water sources for cattle grazing on the south branch.
9. Provide a fishing tackle loaner program, including bait to allow park visitors to capitalize on the parks fishing opportunities.
10. Provide staff led fishing programs to provide angler experiences for visitors (i.e. rod and reel fishing at Carter P. Lake, Fly Fishing in streams).

CULTURAL RESOURCES

The history of Fort is a colorful one. From its beginnings, the Fort has served as protection for the local



Indian Agency, to the years as a Quartermaster Remount facility, WWII K-9 training facility and German POW encampment, and USDA Beef Cattle Research facility. Now, the Fort provides visitors a unique chance to look into this mixed past. From the natural history of the Trailside Museum to the artifacts and buildings of the Fort

itself, there is a vast array of opportunities available for visitors to experience and enjoy.

EXISTING RESOURCES

There are three entities that are vested in the Fort. Beginning in the 1950's, these three separate entities- NGPC, Nebraska State Historical Society (NSHS) and University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) acquired lands/buildings from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). UNL now operates their Trailside Museum of Natural History in the building that once was the Fort's Army Theater. The NSHS acquired both land and structures from the USDA. Over the years, they have maintained existing buildings and re-constructed several structures that had been destroyed (see Table 12). There are also State Historical markers on several sites throughout the Fort to mark items such as the Red Cloud Indian Agency, Fort Robinson cemetery, German POW camp, and the K-9 training facility. The remaining structures, facilities and lands were acquired by the NGPC. Those buildings/structures owned by the NGPC are used in a variety of ways including lodging facilities for park guests, staff housing, the still running Post Playhouse, housing livestock, and educational purposes.

TABLE 12: BUILDINGS LOCATED AT FORT ROBINSON THAT ARE OWNED BY THE NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NAME OF BUILDING	DATE CONSTRUCTED
1905 Post Headquarters (NSHS Museum)	1905
Adobe Officer's Quarters	1887
Granary	1895; Annex 1941
Wheelwright Shop	1900
Harness Repair Shop (former Blacksmith Shop)	1904 (began use as a harness shop in 1943)
Blacksmith Shop	1906
Quartermaster Shop	1906; addition 1930
Veterinarian Hospital	1909; Annex 1941
Historic Garages	1936
Post Guardhouse	Reconstructed 1967
Post Adjutant's Office	Reconstructed 1969
Barracks-Site of Cheyenne Outbreak	Reconstructed 2003

CURRENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Currently, the staff at the Fort is charged with the protection of 46 structures that are listed on the National Historic Register. The Fort's staff is responsible for upkeep of all of the buildings, lands and structures on the

historic grounds and the James Ranch acquisition, management of all lands for livestock and wildlife, and various educational and outdoor experiences. NGPC has a standing agreement with the NSHS that states that while the Historical Society is responsible for upkeep of their



structures, electricity and other amenities necessary for their upkeep, Fort staff has responsibility for the groundskeeping on lands owned by the NSHS.

Under federal and state statutes, NGPC is responsible for the upkeep of all historical buildings. The exteriors of these structures must be maintained in their historic state. Work to modify the interior of buildings can take place, but nothing must change the exterior look of the buildings. Any restoration efforts to bring back buildings that have been destroyed must also result in a building that is, on the

exterior, identical to the original building. An example of this type of renovation would be the Buffalo Soldiers barracks. Funding for the upkeep of these buildings comes from several sources, including the annual Park budget and Title 309 funds.

As with all other Parks, cultural resource reviews must take place prior to certain activities taking place on the Fort. This is especially pertinent, since the potential to unearth artifacts is high throughout the property. In the event that this type of work needs to take place, Fort staff work closely with the NSHS archaeologist based in the Trailside Museum of Natural History to ensure no artifacts are affected by their work.

ISSUES DEALING WITH THE CULTURAL RESOURCES

Maintenance and upkeep are the primary issues when dealing with the historic buildings at the Fort. These issues range from general upkeep, which includes project such as painting, to major maintenance, such as roof replacement. When dealing with external maintenance and upkeep of the structures, Fort staff must be cognizant of and continue to work within the guidelines laid out for sites listed on the National Historical Register to ensure they retain their historic appearance. Although park staff does prioritize project work on an annual basis for both historic and other structures on the Fort grounds, flexibility needs to be maintained within the list to account for unforeseeable changes.

Another challenge that occurs when dealing with the cultural resources is the level of funding for interpretation and education of the resources. More information can be found in the Interpretation and Education section regarding this issue, as well as recommendations for this issue.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS NEEDS

According to the Focus on the Future Plan, one of the major goals of State Historical Parks, which the Fort can be considered in part due to all of the cultural resources available is to operate the park in a manner that is consistent with the mission of the Commission. Maintaining the historical buildings is of the utmost importance to interpret, preserve and protect the resources which provides an enriching experience; a goal outlined in the Focus on the Future plan. The following recommendations provide steps to ensure that the Fort is following the goals outlined in NGPC's Strategic Plan.

1. Continue the upkeep of the buildings, both internal and external, so they may continue to function as a national attraction. Establish annual lists based on need with the understanding that allowances must be made for any unexpected additions.
2. Examine the potential of long-term funding sources for the continued investment of the cultural resources at the Fort. This type of funding will complement existing funds allocated to the park through their annual budget as well as Title 309 funds. These funds may also become critical to the Fort if monies like those available through Title 309 are no longer accessible.
3. Interaction between all those invested in Fort Robinson is vital for the future of the park. From the cultural history and natural history perspectives, the NSHS and UNL are invaluable partners who each have their own special niche within the Fort and complement the goals for the experience of visitors to the Fort. Their continued work and any recommendations for NGPC held property, as well as their own, are critical to manage the Fort as a historical landmark. Interactions with the NSHS and UNL are and have been open lines of communication; any

issues/situations that come up and need to be addressed are done on a case-by-case basis. These types of open and ongoing communications should continue.

4. Continue to work with partners to find funding sources to provide proper care of any artifacts that are unearthed on the property, as well as housing and display structures if needed. Working with partners to promote the educational aspects associated with the Fort, Natural History and State Historical Society museums is an important task that should continue to take place.
5. Work with the Nebraska Tourism Commission to assess the value of creating and implementing a marketing a campaign aimed at cultural/history travelers and develop a marketing strategy and plan if research indicates audience is a large enough/profitable enough to be worthwhile.

INTERPRETIVE / EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

According to the Focus on the Future Strategic Plan, the state parks will continue to explore and implement educational and recreational opportunities that offer high potential for the development of new constituents and park users. Non-consumptive park activities like Watchable Wildlife that complement budget driven operational changes such as the creation of natural areas, hold high promise for the future. The Fort is well suited for this type of future development.

The objective of interpretation and education in state parks is to enrich the lives of visitors, provide new opportunities to learn and enhance their park stay. Through interpretation and education, NGPC has the opportunity to promote stewardship, provide awareness,



understanding and appreciation of the environment, as well as, educate people on a wide range of outdoor recreation opportunities. By providing education and interpretation, the Fort has the opportunity to provide a better park experience and a greater likelihood of repeat visits.

Electronic overstimulation, demanding work schedules and more scheduled activities, leave less time for free time and recreation in nature. Recent studies have shown children and younger adults spend up to 50 hours a week in front of electronic media, leaving little time for free play or fun in the outdoors. This sedentary routine promotes unhealthy lifestyles which lead to an increase of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Additionally, this electronic-driven life style leads to a disconnect from nature and the outdoors. This leads to a deepening lack of appreciation of nature, natural resources and the environment.

The Fort provides visitors with several recreational opportunities that can contribute to better physical and mental health. The Fort also offers areas for solitude, relaxation, family time and gateway to a wide diversity of outdoor experiences. These outdoor experiences will foster family connection, develop a greater appreciation and knowledge of nature, provide opportunities to learn outdoor skills and build lifelong state park visitors.

Existing events and programming within the Agency's Recruitment Development and Retention Actions Plans and Focus on the Future are long-term investments towards the future of outdoor recreation. Educational programs provide visitors with a facilitated experience that will enrich visitor's lives and will

allow for the creation of environmentally literate citizens. Furthermore, educational programming at state parks will lead to citizens taking positive actions to conserving our natural resources. Implementing educational and recreational opportunities at state parks will offer high potential for the development of new park users.

Although both education and interpretation have similar goals, slight differences in presentation techniques allow for a two pronged approach for educating park visitors and school students about the Fort. **For this plan, “Interpretation” will refer to non-formal educational programs provided to general park visitors; “Education” will refer to providing educational opportunities for area schools in the form of field trips.**

INTERPRETATION

Interpretation based programs are aimed at optimizing the enjoyment of the park and increasing visitor’s knowledge of the cultural and natural history of the area all while protecting its scenic, natural and historical resources.

The average American spends less than 5% of their life in school. Ninety-five percent of their life is spent *outside* the formal classroom. It should come as no surprise that most Americans are acquiring most of their knowledge outside of structured classroom settings. This presents NGPC with an opportunity to direct Nebraskan’s knowledge and understanding of natural resource & environmental topics.

REVIEW OF EXISTING INTERPRETIVE RESOURCES

Naturalist Programs

Interpretive Naturalist programs provide park visitors with programs in natural history, geography, weather, communities in nature, local food chains, animal camouflage, interpretive talks, guided walks and night skies, just to name a few. Naturalist programs can be the most effective means of interpretation because of personal contact, opportunities for two-way communication and the opportunity for hands-on experiential learning. Visual, tactual, auditory and olfactory simulation are effective means of instilling long term memory. Currently, naturalist programs occur several Saturdays a month with a wide range of program topics. Naturalist Programs are offered at multiple times throughout the day in an effort to reach all audiences. In 2012, seven naturalist programs were conducted over three Saturdays (one in June and two in July).



Nature Center

The Fort’s Nature Center is an important interpretive facility for explaining the natural processes happening in the park. Currently, the unstaffed Nature Center is open from 10am-5pm (the operating hours of the Activity Center/Sutler’s Store, the building where it is

located). The center's current displays focus on several area ecosystems including Pine Ridge, prairies and watersheds of the area. Displays include animal mounts and fixed specimens. It also offers a revolving wildflower display, which is updated weekly with new wildflowers in bloom. Although the nature center is small, it does a good job of informing the visitors about area wildflowers, local ecosystems and native wildlife.

Trails

The Fort has outstanding hiking trails that traverse all the major landscape forms in the park. The Fort's trails are multi use, for hikers, backpackers, mountain bikers and horseback riders. These trails are an amazing, yet untapped, resource for interpretation at the Park. The trails are not heavily interpreted; their purpose being more for enjoyment of the hike rather than learning. By placing more interpretive signage along trails, visitors would be allowed to walk the trails at their own pace, while still learning about the natural and cultural history of the area. Providing more interpretive trail signage would be an inexpensive, low-staff way of providing interpretive education at the Fort.



Brochures

Brochures, pamphlets and handouts are an effective way to disseminate information to visitors and can increase visitor's knowledge about both the natural history of the area and offerings of the park. Current brochures/handouts consist of an overall brochure of the park with maps of the trails and buildings, along with a historic timeline of the park. More brochure and handout would allow for more, low-staff interpretation at the Fort. Additionally, brochures and handouts can be sent by mail before a trip, carried throughout the park, and taken home afterwards as souvenirs of the park experience. Another way to look at getting information out besides brochures is to look at creating Mobile Applications. The Fort is the perfect place, due to its size, to experience a Mobile Application that takes a visitor on a tour of the area.

Jeep Rides & Trail Rides

Two popular programs offered at the Fort include Jeep and Trail rides for park visitors. The Jeep Ride is an outstanding attraction and offers visitors scenic views, wildlife watching possibilities and the potential for interpretive talks along the route. Horse trail rides are also very popular, especially with children, who seem drawn to anything dealing with horses. These two programs are more for scenic and aesthetic appreciation, but could offer the possibility for an interpretive message.



Historical Horse Drawn Tours

The Fort offers two different types of Historical Horse Drawn Tours. The first tour is presented with the Nebraska State Historical Society and is a lengthy tour around the park. This tour is taken with a member of the Historical Society, who talks about the historical importance of the various buildings on the route. This tour is targeted at those interested in the history of the park and its historical importance. The second tour is shorter in length and while it still focuses on history, does not go into as much depth. During this tour, a Fort employee leads visitors around the park, highlighting the main historic buildings or events. This tour is targeted mainly towards family groups or large groups who wish to tour the park together.

Nebraska State Historical Society

Nebraska State Historical Society maintains several sites and structures located in Fort Robinson, including the Fort Robinson Museum. Visitors can visit over a dozen historical structures and sites including blacksmith shop, veterinary hospital, officer's quarters and old post cemetery, just to name a few. The 1905 post headquarters building houses the Fort Robinson Museum, which is packed full of historic photos, historical army uniforms and Native American artifacts.

Trailside Museum



The Trailside Museum, administered by University of Nebraska State Museum, is an important part of the interpretation experience available to Fort Robinson visitors. Individual exhibits are unique and representative of one of the most famous fossil areas in the world. The Museum exhibits focus on the interpretation of the geologic history and physiography of the hills and valleys

immediately surrounding the Fort. While some of the displays may appear outdated, it does provide important paleontological and geographical background to the area.

ISSUES DEALING WITH INTERPRETATION

Although the Fort staff has developed numerous interpretive opportunities for visitors, more can be done to develop the ecotourism possibilities at the Fort. Three main issues have been identified.

1. *Lack of Dedicated Staff*

Although Naturalist Programs are well-received by the public, their availability is somewhat sporadic due to lack of qualified, dedicated educational staff. Currently, education staff is responsible for leading programs at numerous other parks throughout western Nebraska; the Fort has no dedicated educator. Due to the lack of educational staff, interpretive programs are not provided at a regularly scheduled times such as every Saturday at 10am, or Tuesdays at 2pm during the summer months.

Tasking existing staff with interpretive programming, in addition to normal daily maintenance and operational routines compromises the potential and at times quality of programming. That staff is focused on customer service and facility maintenance necessary to fulfill guest expectations, which is a full time commitment. It is not optimal to expect non-educational staff at the Fort to lead interpretive programs.

2. *Lack of supplies and materials to develop and lead interpretive programs*

Developing quality interpretive programs should be a priority. However, to properly provide interpretive programs, materials and supplies are needed. A dedicated set of mammal pelts & skulls, field guides on a wide variety of topics, insect nets & collection jars, owl pellets & dissection kits, replica tracks & scat – just to name a few – are some of the resources needed to provide quality, hands-on interpretive programming.

3. *Lack of Funding*

The major issue with interpretive programs at the Fort is lack of funding – for both staff and resources. With increased funding specifically for education, most issues could be solved.

SPECIFIC INTERPRETATION ISSUES

Nature Center

The fact that the Fort has a dedicated area for a nature center is outstanding. The potential of this resource is tremendous for the visitors at the Fort. The current displays at the Nature Center at the Fort are informative, but do not incorporate multiple learning styles and perhaps are not as relevant to younger audiences. Currently, the Center lacks hands-on, experiential learning for younger Park visitors, who learn best through doing or discovering.

At this time, this Center is open seasonally, which is logical when looking at the peak visitation numbers. The nature center, however, is not climate controlled. This presents problems for both visitors seeking a cool place in the summer and the ability to have certain displays requiring stable temperatures.

Additionally, there is no staff on hand to interact with visitors to the Center; the Nature Center is self-guided for Park visitors. Unfortunately, many visitors are not confident in exploring a nature center on their own. Although current staff does a great job of updating the wildflower display, without a dedicated staff, most of the Nature Center displays can be considered static.

Trails

As stated before, the Fort's trail system is a huge asset. However, there is a lack of signage to guide visitors to the trail system and this is acknowledged by the management at the Park. By properly signing the trails visitors would be more confident to start out on a trail hike.



Additionally, a short, self-guided interpretive walk stationed close to the Fort Complex would offer park visitors easy access to this trail. Visitors with young children could learn about the area without traveling too far from the Fort Complex. At times, if the naturalist had time, guided walks could also be scheduled.

The current trail map (located on the Fort's brochure), offers little information for users. Trail length and difficulty level are not currently available on the maps. Once the trail signage is in place and incorporated into the map, the information available to park visitors will greatly increase and park visitors will feel more at ease with the massive trail system that exists at the Fort.

Brochures

Fort Robinson currently has several brochures, but they are outdated. The Fort park staff lacks the time and training to develop new brochures. Additionally, funds would need to be made available to print new brochures. Mobile Applications may also be necessary to meet the needs of those with smart phones and devices.

Jeep Rides & Trail Rides

Both the Jeep & Horse Trail Rides are hugely popular with visitors and the main goal of these activities is entertainment of the guests. These offerings present a great opportunity to provide interpretive information to visitors. There is potential to examine if it is feasible to either modify the existing activities to include interpretation or to create an additional tour that provides an interpretive service for those park guests that are interested. This would require additional staffing, which falls under the recommendations below.

Horse Drawn Tours

Current staff does a wonderful job with the existing program. These tours are well done and popular with visitors. These tours focus on building and major events that happened in or around the Fort. Adding more interpretation to these tours may be difficult for several reasons. As with the Jeep and Trail

Rides, time is limited on the Horse Drawn Tours. And, because of the historical nature of the Fort and the fact that some sensitive topics may be presented, staff may be apprehensive to add more interpretation to the Tours. More interpretation on the interactions between Native Americans and historical Fort military personnel may make both current Fort staff and visitors uncomfortable.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS ISSUES

The possibilities for increased interpretive services at the Fort are unlimited. The site offers a fantastic opportunity for both natural and cultural history interpretation. It is important to note that any new or additional interpretation opportunities must not fall on current staff to implement.

1. Hire an Interpretation/Education Specialist.
By hiring one qualified, full-time staff person, both educational (discussed below) and interpretive programing could be expanded dramatically. This position would be responsible for:
 - Developing new interpretive, public programs year-round, but especially in the summer and fall months (recommendation #3).
 - Working with others to create a Comprehensive Education/Interpretation Plan for the Fort (recommendation #2).
 - Update and expand the Nature Center on a regular basis (recommendation #4).
 - Update brochures and other educational handouts (recommendations #5 & 6).
 - Help to include more interpretation on Jeep & Trail Rides and Historical Horse Drawn Rides (recommendation #7).
 - Develop interpretative signage for trails (recommendations # 8 & 9).
 - Coordinate programs with Nebraska State Historical Society and Trailside Museum.
 - Interact with visitors.
 - Offer educator workshops.
 - Develop new and expanded field trip options.
 - Examine funding sources and work with other staff to secure grant funding.

2. Assess creating multiple Naturalist programs that are designed for both children and adults separately, in addition to those for family groups. Night or evening programs should be included in the assessment, as most of the current recreation attractions do not operate at night. Due to the remoteness of the location, there could be a strong niche to include night time activities for guests



and have great success. Naturalist programs during both daytime and nighttime hours would give visitors a wider choice of recreational activities.

3. Evaluate the need for a comprehensive education plan specific to the Fort, utilizing goals set forth by several NGPC documents; including Focus of the Future Plan and the Recruitment, Development and Retention Plan.
4. Update the current Nature Center to incorporate different learning styles, include more hands-on activities, and create a comfortable place for exploring.
5. Create a Fort Trail Brochure and Trail Mobile Application, complete with degree of difficulty, length and trail protocol reminders.
6. Explore internal and external resources available to obtain additional materials for interpretive programming.
7. Create a series of small brochures to take advantage of the many interesting natural history in the park and outdoor recreational opportunities and/or series of Mobile Applications. Recommended topics could include:
 - Birds of the Fort (with birding checklist, photos of unique birds)
 - Fort Robinson: Fishing at the Park (with list of fishing opportunities, fish species, etc...)
 - Watchable Wildlife (places to see animals like Big Horn Sheep, Bison, etc.)
 - Plants of the Pine Ridge (a guide to wildflower & plants in the park)
8. Assess the need to increase interpretive message on the Jeep rides, Trail rides, and Horse Drawn Tours, on a case by case situation. If a jeep driver, wrangler, or tour guide feels comfortable in their position and would like to add additional interpretive information, a script with route highlights or interpretive techniques could be made available.
9. Complete a small interpretive loop trail that starts around the Fort Complex.
10. Increase interpretative signage on existing trails.
11. Evaluate the possibility of creating an in-service training for current and seasonal staff. This once-a-year training will help increase visitors enjoyment as all staff will be able to better answer questions and incorporate information into their everyday jobs. Items that could be included in training:
 - a. A comprehensive explanation of existing interpretive offerings at the park,
 - b. The Historical Society programs,
 - c. Concessions, visitor's services, facilities,
 - d. Educational programs and educational supplies available for checkout at the Fort.

EDUCATION

Environmental education, at its truest, is hands-on and engaging for participants. It is not simply a lecture. Quality environmental education asks participants to become active in their learning. In the non-formal arena – such as state parks – environmental education has endless opportunities. According to the 2003 Nebraska Conservation & Environment Literacy & Awareness Survey, 82% of Nebraska respondents believe government agencies should support environmental education. Additionally, 98% of Nebraskan respondents believe environmental education should be taught in schools. This presents an amazing opportunity for NGPC to meet both wishes of our constituents. In this plan, “Education” will refer to field trip offerings to area classrooms and schools.

REVIEW OF EXISTING EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

The Fort currently offers some school field trip opportunities on a limited basis. The Fort does not have a large population base in the vicinity for school field trips, but they are offered in the springtime prior to school being released for the summer. During these programs, students take part in three sessions; one at the Trailside Museum, another at the Historical Society and the third at the park. The session at the Fort consists of a hayrack ride around the park. Although it is a fun opportunity for students, the hayrack ride offers minimal educational instruction.

ISSUES DEALING WITH EDUCATION

Many of the same issues with interpretation also exist with educational programming. Issues that have been identified for the education are identified below.

1. *Lack of dedicated staff*

Although the staff at the Fort is extremely knowledgeable in the local natural and cultural history, they are not trained in curriculum development of educational programming. Furthermore, staff does not have adequate time to facilitate programs. The staff lack both experience in leading quality educational programs (field trips) and time to facilitate programs. To ensure the programs are taught with the most integrity and well received by the local schools, staff tasked with these programs would need a working knowledge of teaching tactics use to engage students and have a grasp on the Fort’s vast history and the ecological, geological and paleontological offerings of the area.

Staff would also need a working knowledge of state educational standards to ensure they are meeting these standards during the field trip. Because all teachers must meet numerous, specific standards throughout their school year for multiple subjects (math, science, language arts, social studies), it is critical that field trip and educational programs at state parks are aligned with these standards. Many schools will not attend field trips if they do not meet standards.

Also, many potential field trips would occur during the month of May. At this time, current staff are preparing for the busy summer ahead, which limits their availability to teach or help with these programs.

2. *Lack of supplies and materials to develop and lead educational programs*

Limited materials and supplies also make it difficult to connect students with many topics. Learning aids, tactile objects, art supplies and biological artifacts (animal skins, skulls, wings, etc...) would greatly assist in teaching historical events or environmental processes.

3. *Lack of Funding*

Limited funding for both supplies/materials and staff make implementing education programs exceedingly difficult. State Park budgets are stretched thin, limiting funds for creating new or updating existing programs and hiring knowledgeable personnel.

4. *Lack of field trip amenities*

Due to seasonal site availability and inclement weather, there is a lack of field trip amenities. Many of the historical buildings are closed for viewing in the fall and reopen in the early summer. This would limit school field trips' ability to view historical buildings and limit the ability to conduct cultural and historical education.

Additionally, for a field trip to be conducted in an organized and appropriate manner, an indoor space is often needed for a part of the formal instruction before taking students outside. This indoor space would also be very useful in case of rain or snow the day of the event/field trip. Additionally, these indoor spaces provide the critical issue of restrooms. Currently, there may be indoor space available if the building is not checked out by other visitors.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS ISSUES

Expanding Education programs would help create environmentally literate students and adults that make informed choices about the environment, both regionally and global. Education and field trip offerings are also a way to increase park usage and expose more people to the Fort. By bringing more students into the park, it is likely they will come back with their family.

The following recommendations would help to expand education and field trips offerings at the Fort:

1. Hire an Interpretation/Education Specialist.
By hiring one qualified, full-time staff person, both educational and interpretive (discussed above) programing could be expanded dramatically. This position would be responsible for:
 - Developing new interpretive, public programs year-round, but especially in the summer and fall months.
 - Working with others to create a Comprehensive Education/Interpretation Plan for Fort Robinson State Park.
 - Update and expand the Nature Center on a regular basis.
 - Update brochures and other educational handouts.
 - Help to assess the possibility for more interpretation on Jeep & Trail Rides and Historical Horse Drawn Rides or create and conduct a new interpretation tour.
 - Develop interpretative signage for trails.

- Coordinate programs with Nebraska State Historical Society and Trailside Museum (recommendation #3).
- Interact with visitors.
- Offer educator workshops (recommendation #4).
- Develop new and expanded field trip options (recommendation #2).
- Examine funding sources and work with other staff to secure grant funding.
- Solicit for and coordinate volunteer participation and Master Naturalist programming.

Hiring a dedicated educator, with a degree or significant experience in education is vital to the success of both education/field trip offerings and expanding interpretive programming.

Although volunteers can help do some education and interpretation programming, a full-time education staff would ensure high-quality education was being developed and implemented in a timely manner.

2. Develop new education and field trip offerings.

Historical, paleontological, ecological and natural history based field trips to area schools are recommended. Taking youth to parks, nature centers and other outdoor settings provides an important contribution to the learning process. Schools that attend field trips at the park could combine their visits with the Trailside Museum or Historical Society, capitalizing on multiple experiences during one field trip. These field trips offered would reach several state and national standards including Nebraska history, science, social studies and language arts



3. Collaborate with existing partners (NSHS & UNL) and schools.

By collaborating with existing partners, field trip opportunities would become more appealing to area schools. Additionally, more interaction and communication with area schools would likely increase the use of the park for field trips.

4. Provide educator workshops for area teachers. Possible workshops include: Project WILD, Growing Up WILD, Flying WILD, History of the Fort, Pine Ridge Ecosystems.

It should be noted, finding qualified education staff could be difficult if the position were to be only part-time or seasonal with the limited applicant pool in the area. It is recommended that the position be full-time to encourage high-quality staff from all areas to apply for the position.

The Environmental Education and Interpretive programs proposed in this plan would allow for vastly expanded recreation opportunities for the Fort visitors. This will lead to increased visitation, increased length of stay, increased visitor satisfaction and an increased appreciation for Nebraska's environment and heritage.

RECREATIONAL AMENITIES

The Fort's 22,000 acres of beautiful Pine Ridge scenery, fascinating old west history, exceptional lodging opportunities and recreational amenities offer something for everybody. It is considered one of the top 10 Great Plains ecotourism sites, according to a survey recently completed by The Center for Great Plains Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The Park has been touted in USA Today as one of the "10 great places to gather family for a reunion in America." The Omaha World Herald has recognized the Fort in the Travel Section as "A great place to gather." This park is the largest tourist draw in western Nebraska and it has much to offer any vacationer. A person can swim, fish, kayak, hunt, hike, bike, ride horses, re-live the old west and experience a rodeo all in one place. The possibilities are endless at this park and a person could stay busy for days at the area. See Figure 9 for a map of the Fort and its recreational amenities. Below is a brief overview of the amenities offered at the Fort.



EXISTING FACILITIES/AMENITIES

The Fort has eight full time staff working at the park and there are approximately 115 temporary employees that work during the peak season, which is from Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day weekend. The population basis around the Fort is quite small, so the labor pool is limited. This staff is charged with a multitude of responsibilities, which includes the management of all the amenities outlined below.

The Fort has been, for many years upgrading the infrastructure of the area and at this point in time, it is in good condition. The water and sewer systems have been replaced throughout the park. This includes new lagoons and water storage tanks. The wells have new pumps and pump drives. Most of the buildings have updated wiring and fixtures. The campgrounds have updated electrical capability along with a new campground that has water, sewer, and electricity at each pad. The asphalt throughout the park is new including all the campground pads. New roofs on old buildings have been addressed along with many siding, painting, and concrete projects. Interior bathroom and kitchen upgrades have been implemented and are continuing. Barn renovations are almost complete for the equestrian park visitors, to go along with a new equestrian campground. There are hundreds of smaller maintenance details that are being taken care of at any time. When the peak season ends, the full time staff takes on many renovation and maintenance projects to keep the Fort running in good condition.

Lodging

Lodging and modern camping are available from April 1 to November 30.

Primitive camping is allowed year-round. There are 100 camping pads with electrical hook ups and 25 primitive, non-pad sites without electricity. There is room for additional primitive sites as needed for campers.

There are 22 lodge rooms that are housed in the 1909 Enlisted Men's Barracks, or better known as the Fort Robinson Inn and Lodge. The lodge rooms sleep up to three. There are also

35 different types of cabins available for visitors. All of these cabins are unique lodging experiences since they are historical buildings retrofitted to fit the needs of guests for overnight use. There are the cabins and Adobes that sleep six to 12. The Brick Officers' Quarters sleep 14 to 20 people; and the Comanche Hall sleeps up to 60. All of these cabins have kitchen facilities for visitor use. Many of the accommodations have been designed with the family reunion or group setting in mind. A large portion of guests at the Fort are those that are there for a family reunion.



At this time the overnight accommodations are from the time period of 1874 to 1909. Currently there is another overnight facility that is in design. It will be the 1891 Officers Quarters that will sleep up to 40 and will be the only group facility that has the modern convenience of air conditioning. In all, the Fort can accommodate hundreds of guests at any given time, which includes the camping opportunities.

Below is a breakdown of the income and expense there is with lodging at the Fort. Table 13 shows that



in the past five years the profit of lodging has grown exponentially. It should be noted that this could change with the addition of the new 1891 Officers Quarters that are slated to be complete by July 2014.

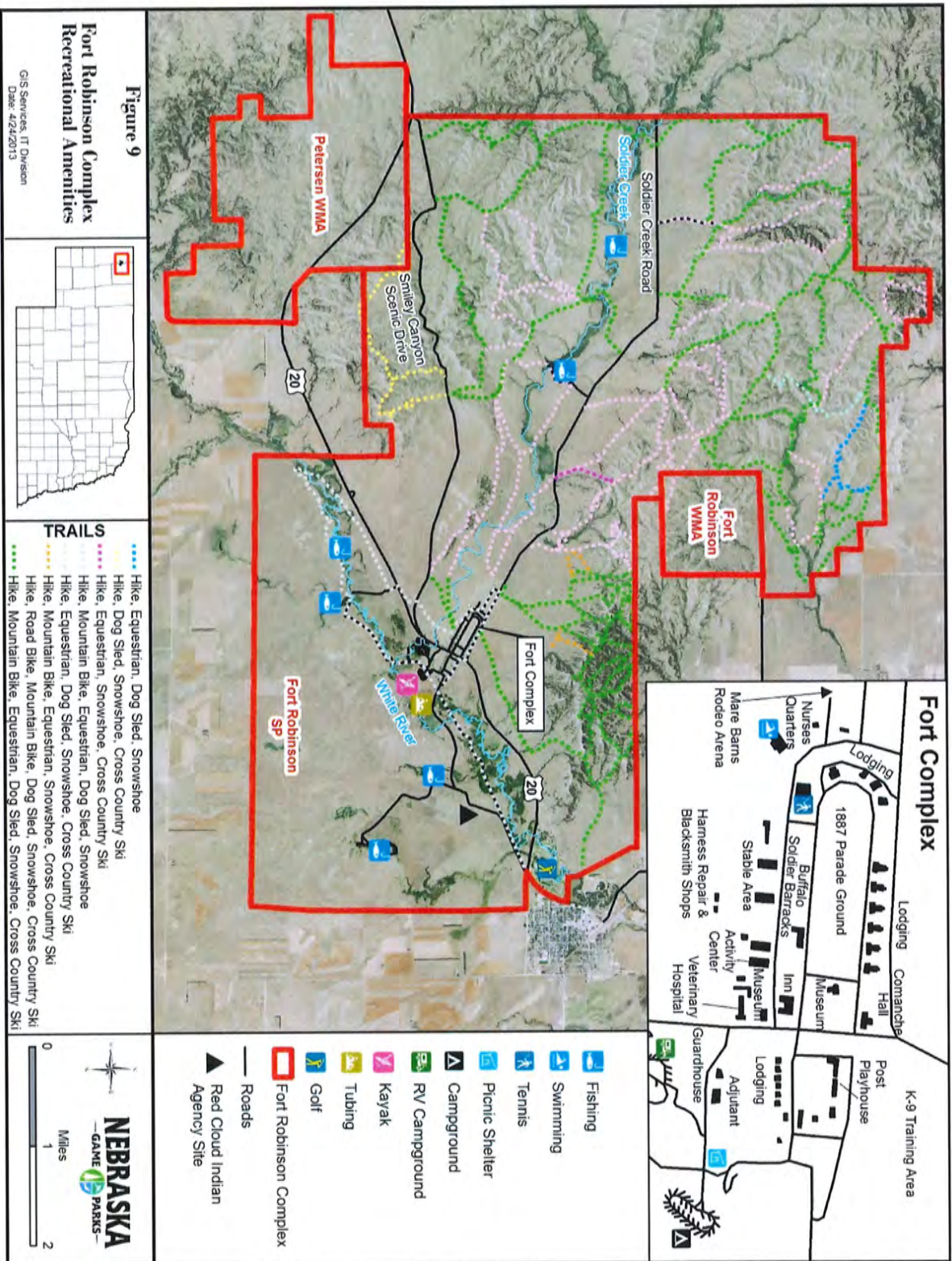


TABLE 13: INCOME AND EXPENSES FOR LODGING; 2008 TO 2012

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Income					
Advance Deposits	\$0	\$2,290	\$1,241	\$1,051	\$2,325
Cabins	\$462,375	\$509,321	\$541,238	\$553,631	\$553,257
Cots	\$1,200	\$1,312	\$1,168	\$1,470	\$1,059
Lodge Rooms	\$118,847	\$133,258	\$137,881	\$117,429	\$141,116
Reservation Fee	\$23,505	\$26,347	\$30,403	\$27,972	\$26,653
Dish/Linen Rental	\$248	\$364	\$0	\$0	\$0
Camping	\$74,348	\$105,433	\$115,952	\$113,170	\$107,476
Laundry Machines	\$0	\$454	\$345	\$355	\$550
Shower Building	\$762	\$256	\$822	\$765	\$692
Total Income	\$681,285	\$779,035	\$829,050	\$815,843	\$833,128
Expenses					
Permanent Wages	\$47,849	\$81,904	\$78,930	\$79,862	\$76,020
Temporary Wages	\$157,167	\$155,160	\$162,513	\$159,699	\$149,057
Benefits	\$44,068	\$64,257	\$68,923	\$67,212	\$48,768
O&M	\$188,461	\$205,384	\$154,656	\$172,299	\$153,676
Total Expenses	\$437,545	\$506,705	\$465,022	\$479,072	\$427,521
Profit/Loss	\$243,740	\$272,330	\$364,028	\$336,771	\$405,607

Source: Parks Division Income/Expense Statements, 2013

Group and Meeting Facilities

The Fort is an excellent place to have a conference or group meeting. There are four different group meeting facilities; Dodd Hall, Buffalo Soldier Barracks, Buffalo Barrack squad room and the Mare Barn Annex. Dodd Hall and the Buffalo Soldier Barracks can seat up to 200 people. The Mare Barn Annex and Buffalo Barrack Squad Room seats up to 120 people. These facilities have wireless internet except in the Mare Barn Annex and the Restaurant is capable of catering any event at these facilities. These facilities are used for meetings, reunions, catering large meals, and parties (graduation, wedding, anniversary...etc.).

Table 14 shows the income of the group meeting facilities and picnic shelter at the Fort. It appears that meeting room income has increased each year but the picnic shelter rental has decreased. This should be looked at in the future to determine if this shelter should be continued to be available for rental or just general use of park visitors. It should be noted that there are no expenses associated with Table 13. The staff time to deal with the meeting rooms was combined into the expenses in Table 12, so additional data mining would need to occur to determine the time staff spends dealing with the meeting room functions at the Fort.

TABLE 14: INCOME OF GROUP MEETING FACILITIES & PICNIC SHELTER; 2008 TO 2012

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Meeting Rooms	\$6,626	\$5,957	\$7,320	\$7,105	\$8,479
Picnic Shelter	\$490	\$300	\$450	\$0	\$150
Total Income	\$7,116	\$6,257	\$7,770	\$7,105	\$8,629

Source: Parks Division Income/Expense Statements, 2013

Food Service

The Fort offers a Restaurant, which also does catering and is available to do Cook Outs for group functions at the Fort. It is staffed with approximately 20 people and is able to accommodate cooking for hundreds in a day. The restaurant has fed up to 1,000 people in a day including cookouts and catering.

Restaurant

The Fort Robinson Inn Restaurant can seat up to 80 and is open from 6:30 am to 9:00 pm in the peak season. Food prices are very reasonable, varying from \$4.25 to \$20.50 for a meal. There are 10 servers and 10 other staff to run the restaurant. The kitchen has recently been renovated to update appliances and infrastructure

Catering

The Fort's Restaurant provides catering services for the park. Catering can be by plate or buffet style. On average, the Fort serves 9,016 meals through catering in a year. The kitchen staff prepares the meals and it is often served in one of the meeting rooms or taken to the rental unit that ordered the food.

Cook Outs

Guests at the Fort can also attend Cook Outs that are provided by staff at the park. These include Buffalo stew cook outs, available on Sundays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and; Steak cook outs on Monday, Thursdays and Saturdays; and breakfast cook outs on Thursday, Friday, Sunday and Mondays. The evening cook outs are offered from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm and the breakfast cook outs are offered from 8:00 to 10:00 am. On average, the Fort serves 1,982 meals



through the stew cookout; 605 through the steak cook out; and 1,010 through the breakfast cook out. Guests are able to buy tickets to these cook outs at the information booth, which is open from 7:30am to 7:00 pm every day. Up to 120 are taken for the stew cookout that is held at a site close to the Red Cloud Indian Agency Site. Up to 50 people are taken to the steak and breakfast cook outs to a site below the buttes north of the park buildings (see Figure 9 for location). People are taken to these sites on the tour train or hayracks pulled by jeeps.

Sutler's Store

The Sutler's Store is located in the Activity Center and provides snacks for the hungry visitor. It is open from 10 am to 8 pm daily during peak season. Hot dogs, ice cream, candy and ice are the main items sold at the Sutler's Store. It is a place that people can quickly get something to eat or drink and provides an alternate to the almost always busy restaurant.

Table 15 provides a picture of the income and expenses of food service at the Fort from 2008 to 2011. It is interesting to review the data because a portion of the years, the food service made a profit and other years it did not. These numbers should be reviewed on an annual basis to determine how things are operating and if anything could be improved upon in the future.

TABLE 15: INCOME AND EXPENSES FOR FOOD SERVICE; 2008 TO 2011

	2008	2009	2010	2011
<i>Income</i>				
Restaurant, Catering & Cookouts	\$271,352	\$312,917	\$366,194	\$356,532
Marina Food, Sutler Store	\$26,008	\$29,117	\$29,642	\$29,103
Gift Certificates, Pop Machines	\$808	\$217	\$0	\$0
<i>Total Food Income</i>	\$298,169	\$342,251	\$395,835	\$385,635
<i>Expense</i>				
Permanent Wages	\$6,307	\$16,148	\$14,244	\$13,870
Temporary Wages	\$116,669	\$141,098	\$139,912	\$137,118
Benefits	\$14,032	\$19,320	\$17,489	\$16,975
O&M	\$168,470	\$185,063	\$181,927	\$193,711
<i>Total Expenses</i>	\$305,477	\$361,629	\$353,572	\$361,674
<i>Profit/Loss</i>	(\$7,309)	(\$19,378)	\$42,263	\$23,961

Source: Parks Division Income/Expense Statements, 2013

Trails

There are 130 miles of hiking, biking and riding trails throughout the park. These trails range from easy to difficult and provide panoramic views of the buttes. The trails provide opportunities to view the wildlife along with some spectacular scenery. These trails are used primarily by horseback riders and hikers, but mountain bikes are available to rent at the park to enjoy the trail system as well.

Swimming

There is an indoor pool that has an outdoor wading pool and sun deck attached. The pools capacity is 200 swimmers and there are always two lifeguards on duty. The pool is an excellent place for visitors to get out of the heat and is very popular during the peak season. Hours of the pool are 5 pm to 8:30 pm daily. The pool serves hundreds of people per year. Table 16 shows the income and expenses of the pool for the past five years. The pool operates at a loss, which is relatively normal when it comes to pool management.

TABLE 16: INCOME AND EXPENSE FOR POOL; 2008 TO 2012

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Income	\$16,265	\$19,548	\$23,531	\$22,665	\$24,862
Expenses					
Permanent Wages	\$1,203	\$2,461	\$4,212	\$1,514	\$1,069
Temporary Wages	\$18,495	\$19,908	\$19,402	\$18,629	\$18,561
Benefits	\$2,093	\$2,802	\$3,816	\$2,332	\$1,792
O&M	\$8,273	\$21,016	\$16,966	\$19,502	\$19,548
Total Expenses	\$30,063	\$46,187	\$44,395	\$41,978	\$40,969
Profit/Loss	(\$13,799)	(\$26,639)	(\$20,864)	(\$19,313)	(\$16,107)

Source: Parks Division Income/Expense Statements, 2013

Fishing

There are fishing opportunities for visitors at the park at many of the ponds and along Soldier Creek. Visitors can catch trout, catfish, bass, bluegill crappie and rock bass. Fishing equipment is available at the information booth for visitors to use. See the Fisheries Section of this plan for additional information.

Equestrian Services



Horseback riding is an extremely popular activity at the Fort. There are horse trail rides available using the park's horses and there is also open horseback riding for those that bring horses to the park. Visitors can camp near their horses while boarding them for a small fee at the barns available. See Livestock Section for breakdown of income and expenses of equestrian services.

Hay Rack Rides

Hayrack Rides consist of a general historic tour through the park that last approximately 55 minute.

Watchable Wildlife

The Fort has some great wildlife viewing opportunities, which include jeep rides. These include traveling the Smiley Canyon Scenic Drive, the Soldier Creek Road and Grabel Pond Road. There are interpretive signs at a pullout on Smiley Canyon that focus on the tree replanting efforts of Boy Scouts. This pullout also provides a scenic view of the area. Interpretive signs are located at the



Mexican Canyon pullout on Soldier Creek Road focusing on the Bighorn sheep. Antelope, deer, turkeys, Bighorn sheep, Longhorns, Bison, and many bird and small game species can be seen from these roads. Jeep rides are available on the hour for up to twelve people from 9 to 11:00 am and 1 to 7:00 pm. They take a loop to the top of the Cheyenne buttes, travelling through the summer bison pasture. They stop at a point on top to take in the view of the surrounding area. There are numerous places for wildlife viewing during the jeep ride.

Rodeo

Every Thursday evening during the peak season from 8:00 to 9:00, the staff at the park put on a rodeo. It is a free event that entertains the visitors. It includes roping longhorn cattle, wrangler games, and sometimes a bareback or saddle bronc rider. The kids' favorite includes the hide ride, which is a steer hide ride pulled behind a horse.

Theater



Another amenity that is offered at the Fort is the Post Playhouse Theater. This professional theater provides entertainment from June to August. Shows are nightly at 8:00 pm except on Mondays. The theater brings in talent from across the country. The focus of the theater is family entertainment, featuring mostly musicals. The theater is very popular with guests at the park as well as for folks in the region for some night time entertainment.

Historic Interpretation

The park offers a Historic Buildings tour in conjunction with NSHS on Tuesdays and



and Fridays. This tour is with an interpreter from NSHS that provides the history of the Fort along with access to several Historical Society managed buildings that are just as they were in the Army days. The Trailside Museum of Natural History is staffed by the University of Nebraska and is open from May to October. There are limited hours in the early spring and fall but during the peak season, it is open from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm. The Nebraska State Historical Society also manages the Post Headquarters turned into a Historical Museum for visitors to tour. The museum is open to visitors during peak season from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, except on Sundays (9:00 opening). See more information in the Cultural Resources and Interpretation sections of the plan.

Tennis Courts

The Fort offers tennis courts for anyone interested. There are two courts on the site of the Post Hospital (see Figure 9 for location) and they are sporadically used. In the future, the Fort should look at repurposing the courts and developing some other type of recreational amenity to take its place.

Picnicking

There is one picnic shelter near the campground that is conducive for picnicking for park guests. A guest may rent out the shelter for their family reunion or group gatherings. Additional picnic shelters could potentially be a good investment at the Fort for guest use.



Kayaking and Tubing

Kayak and Tube rentals are offered by an outfitter at the park for guests to kayak or tube down a section of the White River that has been groomed for this use. This is a popular activity for the whole family. The river is not very wide or deep but a large number of guests like this activity on especially hot days.

Activity Center

The Activity Center houses a crafts center, bicycle rentals and old-time photo booth for visitors to enjoy. Ceramic painting is the most popular activity with the kids. It is open from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm daily during the peak season.

Legend Buttes Golf Course

There is a golf course adjacent to the Fort. It is a 18 hole course, operated by the City of Crawford. It is a nice course beneath Lovers Leap and Saddle Rock Buttes.

Gift Shop

The gift shop specializes in shirts, sweatshirts, mugs and hats with the Fort Robinson name on them. It is a goal of the Fort to have many Nebraska made products available to their guests. The Fort works with Grow Nebraska to buy products for the shop. The hours of the gift shop are the same as the office hours. Many of the visitors want to take home a piece of the Fort with them.

Table 17 provides the income and expenses of all the different amenities that are available to the Fort besides lodging, swimming and food service. It should be noted that there are some amenities that are quite profitable and others that are not. This table should be used as a bench mark of the popularity of the activities as well as where there is potential to re-vamp or change existing pursuits offered at the Fort. For example, looking at the income from resale gift items, perhaps it is time to look at the inventory available and change some of what is offered. More analysis would need to be done to determine if anything should change before doing away with any activity. This table also shows an interesting mixture of profit and loss during given years. Additional study would need to take place to determine the causes of the profit or loss.

TABLE 17: INCOME AND EXPENSES OF OTHER VISITOR SERVICES; 2008 TO 2012

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Income					
ATM	\$389	\$371	\$413	\$395	\$376
Bike Concession	\$2,325	\$2,956	\$5,294	\$2,629	\$2,762
Buffalo, Longhorn, Burrow Sales	\$74,573	\$49,207	\$158,675	\$96,091	\$91,469
Concessions	\$100	\$430	\$806	\$1,738	\$827
Copy/Fax	\$111	\$83	\$93	\$108	\$70
Crafts	\$11,896	\$13,348	\$11,891	\$10,045	\$12,162
Grill/table rentals	\$56	\$206	\$627	\$392	\$237
Historical Tour	\$869	\$2,102	\$1,365	\$2,043	\$1,100
Jeep	\$26,414	\$32,003	\$33,185	\$33,064	\$31,337
Kayak Concessions	\$7,375	\$7,600	\$5,463	\$7,450	\$8,073
Misc	\$4,220	\$4,597	\$5,994	(\$18,918)	(\$1,101)
Resale-gift items	\$80,386	\$91,774	\$82,630	\$62,183	\$64,555
Resale-Wood inc.	\$0	\$1,042	\$1,770	\$1,518	\$1,092
Tour Train	\$7,474	\$12,563	\$11,982	\$10,725	\$8,370
Tube Concession	\$9,060	\$12,400	\$10,720	\$9,630	\$5,084
Van Tour	\$0	\$0	\$11	\$0	\$0
Total Visitor Service Income	\$225,248	\$230,682	\$330,918	\$219,092	\$134,943
Expense					
Permanent Wages	\$4,349	\$21,755	\$20,443	\$16,749	\$16,892
Temporary Wages	\$48,864	\$54,588	\$51,536	\$45,584	\$39,575
Benefits	\$6,707	\$17,936	\$19,039	\$14,478	\$10,688
O&M	\$106,509	\$151,614	\$130,342	\$98,943	\$93,443
Total Costs	\$166,429	\$245,893	\$221,360	\$175,755	\$160,597
Profit/Loss	\$58,819	(\$15,211)	\$109,558	\$43,338	(\$25,654)

Source: Parks Division Income/Expense Statements, 2013

It should be noted that the above table does not provide income and expenses for the Fort during the off season when no activities are available. Given the Fort's location, climate and seasonal use pattern, it is difficult for the Fort to generate revenue year round, though operation and maintenance costs do continue year round. On average, from 2009 to 2011, the Fort spent \$303,426 more than revenue generated.

Another important item to mention is the special events that occur at the Fort in any given year. These events bring in thousands of people for different activities at different times of the year. These events assist in bringing in additional people to the Fort and exposing visitors to the activities available at the Fort. Special events are important to any Park's calendar to encourage visitation in any given month. There is the potential to work with the other State Historical Parks and examine what events they hold that are successful and could potentially work at the Fort (i.e. candlelight tour of the buildings). There are annual events that occur during each year and those are listed below in Table 18.

TABLE 18: ANNUAL EVENTS AT FORT ROBINSON

Month	Event
April	Boy Scout Tree Plan
April	Wildfire Academy and School
April	NSHS History Conference
May	Memorial Day weekend-Season Begins
June	Higher Ground
June	Intertribal Gathering
June	4-H Horse Camp
June	Crazy Horse Riders
July	4 th of July Celebration
July	Art Show
July	Ride the Ridge
August	Cowboy Mounted Shooters Competition
September	American Paint Horse Association
September	Pine Ridge Riders
September	Voecks, Meade Ride
October	Dog Field Trials
December	Christmas Dinner

Source: Ft. Robinson State Park, Park Superintendent, March 2013

CURRENT MANAGEMENT OF AMENITIES

As stated above, there is a staff of eight full time employees and approximately 115 seasonal employees that operate and maintain the amenities. There is a staff of 21 to do the housekeeping of the cabins and lodge rooms, which includes cleaning of facilities and laundry services. The single most challenging area of management of the Fort is making sure all the lodging facilities are clean for the guests in the summer season. There is a staff of nine that runs the activity center (six staff) and information booth (three staff). The information booth staff sells activity tickets, park permits, distributes information and answers all of the visitors' questions that they have.

The Fort utilizes the Campground Host program where volunteers help by caring for the campgrounds. These hosts assist by stocking and cleaning restrooms, answering guest questions and other tasks assigned by the permanent staff. There are approximately eight host couples per year during the peak season at the Fort.

The food service staff consists of 20 seasonal employees and supervision is provided by the Park Superintendent III. The Park Superintendent is also tasked with many other duties. It requires a tremendous amount of work from all staff to meet the needs of the visitors during the peak season. The restaurant is run in two shifts per day. Each shift needs three to four servers, one cook, one cook's helper, one dishwasher and one to two catering people.

Other staff includes the twelve wranglers to deal with the trail rides, pony rides, rodeo, Stagecoach and Horse-drawn tours. Trail rides and associated activities are a huge responsibility. The care and management of horses and mules, tack, barns, corrals, manure, along with trying to make sure the

public stays safe on an inherently dangerous activity takes a tremendous staff to deal with these very popular activities.

During the off season, the eight full time employees work on renovating, upgrading and maintaining all the amenities of the park. This is when bigger projects, such as re-roofing, working on window replacement, electrical work and interior renovations are worked on to prepare for the next season of guests. Not only does the staff maintain the facilities on the ground, they also manage the livestock. In the off season for park visitors, the staff is also focused on the livestock for breeding, branding, calving...etc.

The Fort starts hiring temporaries in March to get the park lodging operational by April 1. There are many things to get ready by Memorial Day weekend as well, such as painting and cleaning up leaves. There are also groups, such as the Annual Boy Scout Tree Plant, the Bi-Annual History Conference, fire school, and school field trips that occur in the spring. Temporaries are kept into the fall to continue the large amount of maintenance work that occurs at the Fort. Trimming trees, fencing, and roofing are all examples of such work.

The magnitude of the operations of the Fort can be staggering. It is difficult to outline the entire existing management of all of the amenities due to the sheer volume of activities offered. Contracts for concessionaires are needed along with ordering of supplies for livestock, lodging facilities, food for the restaurant, stock for the gift shop, supplies for the craft center, and bulk supplies for the other activities offered (such as chemicals for pool, trash bags, cleaners...etc.) require a large portion of the permanent staff's time of the Fort. Maintaining the landscaping, the buildings, the activities and the visitors is a balancing act which requires a well-organized staff to orchestrate.

ISSUES DEALING WITH RECREATIONAL AMENITIES

When there is a park operation this large, there are always issues to deal with when it comes to staffing, maintaining and operating the Park. While many of the issues are relatively routine and can be dealt with in regular operation, there are some items that should be discussed in more depth within this plan.

Staffing is the number one constraint in everything that is done at the Fort. Of those that apply for work at the Fort, 99% of them are hired and that still isn't enough staff to operate the area. Looking at Tables 12-16, there are decreases in wages in the expense sections. This is not because staff is being paid less; it is because the hiring pool is shrinking due to the population around the Fort. The demographics of the area show that there is a decrease of population, with many migrating into the urban centers of the state. This makes it extremely difficult to fully staff the Fort to the desired level to ensure that all parts of the operation are working seamlessly.

Maintenance of historic buildings is a challenging task to undertake. All of the buildings on the Fort are at least 100 years old. Since the Fort is on the National Register of Historic Sites, close work with NSHS is necessary anytime work on any exterior of the buildings to guarantee that the integrity of the building is not compromised. Besides looking at the historical importance of each building, it is also taxing to deal with the aging infrastructure of the old buildings. There are always issues that come up that have to be dealt with to ensure the buildings are in good working order and many times, it requires more funding

than a modern building would require with the same problem (i.e. electrical work, plumbing). The concrete and fixtures of the buildings are old and are methodically being replaced when funding is available. The wood porches on most of the buildings need attention and the walls are all made of plaster which takes time and money to replace. It is challenging to make sure that exterior of each building is maintained for its historical significance along with meeting the accessibility needs of our visitors.

Deferred maintenance is another management issue that should not be forgotten. The Fort staff did a quick inventory of their needs for the next five years, and over \$1.3 million in needs were identified. At the time of this plan, the Parks, Engineering and Operation and Construction Divisions are working together to do a full assessment of the State Park System. The staff at the Fort, more than likely, only touched upon the deferred maintenance list and more will be added once the full assessment is complete. That list of maintenance items should be adopted into this document for the future. Another item in question is if the Fort will need to meet the new ADA mandates that were recently updated by the U.S. Department of Justice. At this time, a request is into the Nebraska State Historical Society to determine what, if any, of the amenities must meet the mandates due to the fact that these are historical structures. Many times historical structures are exempt from accessibility mandates.

Alcohol consumption is allowed on the Fort's property; however it is not served at the restaurant. Currently this does not appear to be an issue as there are very few, if any, complaints regarding no alcohol in the restaurant. However, serving alcohol with the food service may need some exploring and there could be challenges to overcome. One of the first issues to deal with would be to obtain a liquor license from the Liquor Commission. NGPC has the authority to obtain a liquor license contingent upon approval from the Liquor Commission. NGPC should consider if it is more advantageous to contract this element out as opposed to holding the liquor license ourselves. Contracting alcohol sales would have to go through a formal Request for Proposals through the Nebraska Department of Administrative Services, so it will take several months. If NGPC took on the responsibility of obtaining the liquor license, paperwork along with public hearings will need to take place when filing for the license, which will take time. Since this is a seasonal restaurant, perhaps it would be in NGPC's best interest to control the sales of alcohol, but other issues, outlined below need to be considered.

Redesigning a part of the restaurant to incorporate a bar and an area to stock the liquor could be problematic and costly. If NGPC obtains the liquor license, staffing could be a problem due to the age servers must be to distribute alcohol. At this time, many of the staff that works in the restaurant are not of age to serve alcohol. Training will be required for bartenders and staff to ensure that liquor laws are adhered to.

In the past, citizens of Crawford have been asked if allowing alcohol at the restaurant would be an issue to them. They have said that it could be a problem since many of the Fort's guests go to Crawford for limited reasons; one being able to go to a restaurant that serves alcohol. A community partnership with Crawford is very important to the livelihood of the Fort and vice versa. The Fort serving alcohol could affect the type of partnership that Crawford has with the park.

Another issue to look at is privatizing the restaurant. Looking at the income and expenses, most years the food service makes a profit or nearly breaks even. The food service from 2008 to 2011 operated approximately \$40,000 in the black. Because the Fort's visitation is limited to approximately 100 calendar days and it is in a remote location with limited population, it may be somewhat difficult to find a business interested in running the restaurant. In 2010, NGPC put out a Request for Proposals for privatizing Fort Robinson State Park's food service, which included the desire that alcohol be served and provided at the restaurant and catered events. No proposals were submitted which leads one to conclude that the interest was not there from the private sector.

Food service at the Fort is multifaceted, not only would the private concessionaire be responsible for the restaurant, they would also be responsible for the different cook outs and the catering functions that take place at this time. There are some challenges regarding privatizing food service that should be considered. There could be the indirect negative impact on the Fort as a whole as the food service is an integral component of the entire park experience at the Fort. A poor food service operator could mean less lodging and meeting room rentals, less events and reunion and a decrease in park permit sales. Furthermore, the credibility of the Fort's reputation could be impacted by a poor food service concessionaire. Further streamlining of expenses may defer need to privatize as well as price increases.

The extensive trail system is in need a uniform trail marking structure for visitors that is easy to understand and meets the management needs of staff. Because there are numerous trails, different lengths, different difficulty levels and accessibility issues with each trail, it is important to look at finding a trail marking system that provides the visitors a way to easily identify where they are and which trails they would like to use. This also would assist in safety of the visitors in case something occurred in a remote area and emergency transport needed to occur. A uniform system will also assist management in maintenance issues of the trails.

There are other amenities at the Fort that may not be used as much as they were in the past. It is important to continue to keep amenities up to date, while meeting the needs of the guests. One example of this could be the tennis court that is rarely used. Perhaps it is time to look to repurpose it into something that works more with today's trends. Potentially adding some different activities that require little financial support and little man power to maintain them could be considered when developing the park in the future. However, it must be noted that the historical flavor of the area does not need to be marred by adding a lot of modern activities that do not flow well with the existing character of the Fort.

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECREATIONAL AMENITIES

1. Assess the staffing needs and what is being done for advertisement to determine if there is missing segments (such as Chadron State College) that are not being marketed to.
 - a. Look to determine if the pay scale at the Fort is in line with other businesses and farming operations in the area.
 - b. Consider free or reduced lodging costs for park workers (bunkhouse) to attract employees.

2. Continue to address regular and deferred maintenance needs on an annual basis for all buildings at the Fort.
3. Create a Work group to look into the issues with the Fort's Food Service. Items that the work group would need to explore include:
 - a. Examine what, if anything could be streamlined in current operations of the food service.
 - b. Review and evaluate current pricing structure of the food services available.
 - c. Look at the feasibility of privatizing the restaurant.
4. Develop a recommendation for Commissioners regarding the possible sale of beer and wine by the glass in the restaurant.
5. Create a Trail Master Plan that will create a more user friendly trail system, including a marking system that incorporates length, difficulty, accessibility and other information that will assist visitors when using the trails.
6. Develop additional marketing strategies and information to use for different segments of the population. Identify the best areas to market the Fort and come up with innovative ways to promote the area.
7. Identify those amenities at the Fort that are not as well used and determine if they should be replaced or if they need to be re-worked to meet the needs of the guests at the Fort. An activity that could be explored is the potential for a shooting range.
8. Examine the feasibility of lengthening the tourist season.
9. Continue to develop new recreation facilities that contribute to the positive experience of park visitors when feasible.
10. Evaluate expanding annual and special events at the Fort to encourage additional visitation.

CONCLUSION

Fort Robinson is one of the most unique state parks in the Nebraska State Park System. Currently the park serves as a historical facility open to the public to enjoy in a day use fashion or on a longer stay basis, overnight lodging accommodations for visitors, food service and numerous structured family activities, along with being one of the largest seasonal employers in the region. The Wild West ambience of the park is incredible and contributes to the attractiveness and popularity of the Fort.

Recently the infrastructure of the park, its sewer and water system and many of the building exteriors, have received substantial renovation. The Fort is in the best shape of its life, except of course, when it was new. Yet the yearly operation and maintenance costs exceed the annual income produced during the main operating season from Memorial to Labor Day. In addition, without continued maintenance and upkeep of the historical structures, the Fort will rapidly deteriorate. It remains to be seen if future developments, to include modern lodging facilities, will allow the park to generate increased income and potentially break even or become a revenue producer above annual operation and maintenance expenses.

This Management Plan meets one objective in the Focus on the Future plan, which is to “ensure the long term stewardship of resources within state parks by updating operational plans and procedures to include recreation and resource based best management practices.” Every effort has been made in the development of this Plan to include a broad representation of Commission personnel with various areas of expertise as contributing authors and reviewers. This plan reflects Goal #1 in the State Parks section of the Focus on the Future plan, which is “to position state parks for a cross-divisional, cooperative approach to recreation and resource management.”

The future of the Fort is very bright. The diversity of activities and facilities at the park almost guarantee its current and future position as one of the major tourist attractions in the state. Wise management decisions and a continued capital investment commitment will make the park a success and insure its future for years to come.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PLAN

There are numerous recommendations and each section of the plan presents courses of actions to be accomplished in the next ten years. However, it should be noted that a planning document can and should change when warranted. Opportunities may come along that are not outlined in the plan, but should not be dismissed because they are not in the plan. A Management Plan is only as good as the ability to be flexible in meeting the circumstances of the now, yet be prepared to meet the challenges of the future.

At this time, there are some conflicting management recommendations outlined within the plan. This will take coordination of the divisions to determine what the best course of action should be for the multiple uses of the Fort. Each section of the plan prioritized the recommendations made and assigned a timeline for completion. As stated above, there can and will be times that some of these

recommendations may not be met in the timeframe outlined or will not be met because other circumstances that occur. Below are the recommendations of the plan that are divided into the timeline of the next ten years. There is also a section that is categorized as continual, which means these are recommendations that need to occur recurrently for the best operation of the Fort, so there is no set timeline for these actions.

One Year Completion

- Work with Nebraska Tourism Commission to market the Fort when marketing other amenities within the area. (Regional Section)
- Examine the feasibility of providing information to visitors on “tour packages” of other resources around the Fort during their stays. (Regional Section)
- Research visitors coming to the Fort to determine where to focus market strategies to increase visitation. (Regional Section)
- Conduct native plant community surveys within the park during the 2013 or 2014 field season. Surveys should document and map plant communities and determine their dominant species, ecological grade, and threats. (Natural Resources Section)
- Conduct surveys for invasive plants within the Park. Conduct annual monitoring of identified populations. (Natural Resources Section)
- Conduct surveys to further identify plant and animals species, including at-risk species, found within the park. (Natural Resources Section)
- Create a mechanism to determine the proceeds from the sale of longhorn and buffalo meat in the food services offered at the Fort. (Livestock)
- Develop a protocol to surplus and harvest older bison including bulls to present to the Commissioners. (Livestock Section)
- Evaluate livestock grazing strategies and vegetative standards that positively impact deer, elk, bighorn sheep, sharptail grouse, as well as other wildlife species that are consistent with multiple uses of the park. Identify grazing systems that would benefit different wildlife species and yet continue to meet the needs of the livestock herds at the park. (Wildlife Section)
- Develop additional wildlife water sources (i.e. guzzlers) in critical habitat areas or areas of need. Depending on the location this type of water development may require a fence to exclude livestock. Other developments may include wells or windmills to benefit both livestock and wildlife. (**Annually** for the next 10 years Wildlife Section)
- Manage elk herds by maintaining existing agriculture fields along Soldier Creek road and establish additional wildlife forage plots where feasible and where consistent with the Fort’s multiple uses. (**Annually** Wildlife Section)
- Produce a pullout that promotes Fort Robinson as a fishing state park. This could be printed with color photos, maps and brief description of the fishing resources available. This pamphlet could be available at the park office. (Fisheries Section)
- Assess current stocking rates used on the Fort Robinson resources and make adjustments to best fit future fishing needs as use increases and or in some cases decrease. Fish surveys are conducted on a rotating basis and changes to existing fisheries are monitored and

recommendations will be changed to accommodate an optimum sustained yield for most of the water resources. (**Annually** Fisheries Section)

- Riparian grazing by livestock should be closely monitored as the stream banks are very fragile. Grazing is necessary for the operation of the state park and when needed horse grazing is more desirable than other livestock. Work with the USFS to have them provide alternative water sources for cattle grazing on the South Branch. (Fisheries Section)
- Provide a fishing tackle loaner program, including bait to allow park visitors to capitalize on the parks fishing opportunities. (Fisheries Section)
- Hire an Interpretation/Education Staff Specialist. (Interpretation Section)
- Assess creating multiple Naturalist programs that are designed for both children and adults separately, in addition to those for family groups. Night or evening programs should be included in the assessment, as most of the current recreation attractions do not operate at night. Due to the remoteness of the location, there could be a strong niche to include night time activities for guests and have great success. Naturalist programs during both daytime and nighttime hours would give visitors a wider choice of recreational activities. (Interpretation Section)
- Develop additional marketing strategies and information to use for different segments of the population. Identify the best areas to market the Fort and come up with innovative ways to promote the area. (Recreation Section)
- Develop a recommendation for Commissioners regarding the possible sale of beer and wine by the glass in the restaurant. (Recreation Section)

Two to Three Year Completion

- Develop additional interpretive materials of the activities that could enhance the visitors' stay at the park. (Regional Section)
- Assess the potential of enhancing existing markets and tailoring to new niche markets for the Fort (Equestrians, Baby Boomers, Western Culture, Hunters, Geology...etc.). (Regional Section)
- Develop management guidelines for at-risk animal and plant species and native plant communities at the park based on the results of the surveys. (Natural Resources Section)
- Explore the option of additional interpretation for the public viewing aspect of the livestock. (Livestock Section)
- Develop and enhance all wildlife and mega-fauna viewing opportunities in the park through means of brochures, kiosks, trails, guide signs...etc. Provide self-guided tour maps for watchable wildlife. Identify likely sites to observe wildlife and record this information on maps or brochures. Identify times and dates when certain species of wildlife will more likely to be observed. (Wildlife Section)
- Where feasible, evaluate the Fort's big game hunt rules in relation to hunt regulations on wildlife management areas in the encompassing Pine Ridge deer unit (i.e. antlerless mule deer restriction). Determine if hunt rules could be modified to promote trophy hunting scenarios. (Wildlife Section)

- Develop a mule deer harvest strategy plan on the Fort and surrounding public lands to promote quality mule deer hunting. (Wildlife Section)
- Look to develop an additional cold-water fishery when the spring area of the Cherry Creek Diversion is cleaned out. It would support trout and is close to the Cherry Creek Pond for foot access. It currently is fenced out and if cleaned out a provision could be built to supply water for the current livestock use. The current aquatic rehab project includes the diversion as it will improve the water flow to the main Cherry Creek pond. (Fisheries Section)
- The stream fishery is a park and walk access. It is recommended to keep three access points for stream fishermen. Field trails provide some access at this time. Any future closures could limit stream access and should be discussed before any changes are made. Some improvement for angler access can be investigated to coordinate areas with grazing, farming...etc. In stream structures could be installed to increase carrying capacity of the streams and increase angler success. (Fisheries Section)
- Provide staff led fishing programs to provide angler experiences for visitors. (Fisheries Section)
- Evaluate the need for a comprehensive education plan specific to the Fort, utilizing goals set forth by several NGPC documents; including Focus of the Future Plan and the Recruitment, Development and Retention Plan. (Interpretation Section)
- Update the current Nature Center to incorporate different learning styles, include more hands-on activities, and create a comfortable place for exploring. (Interpretation Section)
- Explore internal and external resources available to obtain additional materials for interpretive programming. (Interpretation Section)
- Create a Fort Trail Brochure, complete with degree of difficulty, length and trail protocol reminders. (Interpretation Section)
- Create a series of small brochures to take advantage of the many interesting natural history in the park and outdoor recreational opportunities. (Interpretation Section)
- Assess the need to increase interpretive message on the Jeep rides, Trail rides, and Horse Drawn Tours, on a case by case situation. (Interpretation Section)
- Complete a small interpretive loop trail that starts around the Fort Complex. (Interpretation Section)
- Evaluate the possibility of creating an in-service training for current and seasonal staff. This once-a-year training will help increase visitors enjoyment as all staff will be able to better answer questions and incorporate information into their everyday jobs. (Interpretation Section)
- Develop new education and field trip offerings. (Education Section)
- Assess the staffing needs and what is being done for advertisement to determine if there is missing segments (such as Chadron State College) that are not being marketed to. (Recreation Section)
- Create a Work group to look into the issues with the Fort's Food Service. (Recreation Section)
- Create a Trail Master Plan that will create a more user friendly trail system, including a marking system that incorporates length, difficulty, accessibility and other information that will assist visitors when using the trails. (Recreation Section)

- Identify those amenities at the Fort that are not as well used and determine if they should be replaced or if they need to be re-worked to meet the needs of the guests at the Fort. (Recreation Section)
- Examine the feasibility of lengthening the tourist season. (Recreation Section)
- Evaluate expanding annual and special events at the Fort to encourage additional visitation. (Recreation Section)

Four to Five Year Completion

- Create a marketing strategy to bring in more local population, within 120 miles of the Fort. (Regional Section)
- Implement the management system within a multiple use framework. Modification of grazing practices at the park to enhance biodiversity will likely require investment in grazing infrastructure. (Natural Resources Section)
- Develop and enhance watchable wildlife and native plant viewing and educational opportunities in the park. (Natural Resources Section)
- Examine constructing a small dam on Spring Creek and an annual trout stocking program to provide a quality fishery for those inclined to utilize a walk-in fishery. A two fish bag limit could be imposed to help regulate harvest and enhance carryover and consequently the growth and quality of the trout fishery. (Fisheries Section)
- Work with Nebraska Tourism Commission to assess the value of creating and implementing a marketing a campaign aimed at cultural/history travelers and develop a marketing strategy and plan if research indicates audience is large enough/profitable enough to be worthwhile. (Cultural Resources Section)
- Increase interpretative signage on existing trails. (Interpretation Section)

Six to Ten Year Completion

- Explore the potential to dewater at Crazy Horse Dam and determine the feasibility of major sediment removal project. This could create an additional warm-water fishery within the fort boundaries. (Fisheries Section)
- Examine constructing a small dam on Spring Creek and an annual trout stocking program to provide a quality fishery for those inclined to utilize a walk-in fishery or possibly a unique brook trout fishery. (Fisheries Section)

Continual

- Enhance the Fort by working with other regional recreational amenities to cross promote activities. (Regional Section)
- Work with the wildlife division to continue to manage the land with attentive grazing practices with the use of the livestock. (Livestock Section)
- Ensure that both the Longhorn and Bison herds are genetically pure and viable. (Livestock Section)

- Maintain existing livestock infrastructure with seasonal maintenance, allowing flexibility to add new fences, corrals and water sources as needed. (Livestock Section)
- Maintain park's hay lease program to ensure availability of feed for animals at little to no cost. (Livestock Section)
- Continue to keep bison numbers at 150 breeding cows. (Livestock Section)
- Continue to keep the longhorn number at 125 breeding cows. (Livestock Section)
- Produce Annual Report on Livestock. (Livestock Section)
- Meet with Park Superintendent annually to discuss wildlife issues. Identify threats to species and potential management needs. (Wildlife Section)
- Continue to monitor the bighorn sheep population, overall health and evaluate bighorn sheep research. Consider additional bighorn sheep related research, captures, augmentations, and mineral supplements to increase populations and improve overall health. Utilize new technology and research where feasible to address disease and health issues. (Wildlife Section)
- Install wildlife friendly fence in wildlife travel corridors and areas consistent with the other Fort's multiple uses and with adjacent landowners. (Wildlife Section)
- Consider conservation easements and other program implementation on adjacent private lands that can positively impact bighorn sheep and other wildlife in and around the Fort complex. (Continual-dependent upon available funding & support Wildlife Section)
- Continue to monitor and maintain a small pronghorn herd. Conduct annual surveys and implement strategies to maintain a viable viewing population. Evaluate vegetation conditions to determine if management practices are needed to improve pronghorn forage resources, such as spraying of invasive plant species, grazing or haying. (Wildlife Section)
- Included in this plan are the Wood Reserve ponds and the three stream branches. They are on United States Forest Service property however, all access is through Fort Robinson and any future changes by the USFS could have some impact to our access and availability of these fisheries that are made available through Fort Robinson State Park. We will continue our agreement with the USFS for access to the Wood Reserve ponds. (Fisheries Section)
- Continue the upkeep of the buildings, both internal and external, so they may continue to function as a national attraction. Establish annual lists based on need with the understanding that allowances must be made for any unexpected additions. (Cultural Resources Section)
- Examine the potential of long-term funding sources for the continued investment of the cultural resources at the Fort. This type of funding will complement existing funds allocated to the park through their annual budget as well as Title 309 funds. These funds may also become critical to the Fort if monies like those available through Title 309 are no longer accessible. (Cultural Resources Section)
- Interaction between all those invested in Fort Robinson is vital for the future of the park. From the cultural history and natural history perspectives, the NSHS and UNL are invaluable partners who each have their own special niche within the Fort and complement the goals for the experience of visitors to the Fort. Their continued work and any recommendations for NGPC held property, as well as their own, are critical in our ability to manage the Fort as a historical landmark. Interactions with the NSHS and UNL are and have been open lines of communication;

any issues/situations that come up and need to be addressed are done on a case-by-case basis. These types of open and ongoing communications should continue. (Cultural Resources Section)

- Continue to work with partners to find funding sources to provide proper care of any artifacts that are unearthed on the property, as well as housing and display structures if needed. Also work with partners to promote the educational aspects associated with the Fort, Natural History and State Historical Society museums. (Cultural Resources Section)
- Explore internal and external resources available to obtain additional materials for interpretive programming. (Interpretation Section)
- Collaborate with existing partners (NSHS & UNL) and schools. (Education Section)
- Provide educator workshops for area teachers. Possible workshops include: Project WILD, Growing Up WILD, Flying WILD, History of the Fort, Pine Ridge Ecosystems. (Education Section)
- Continue to address regular and deferred maintenance needs on an annual basis for all buildings at the Fort. (Recreation Section)
- Continue to develop new recreation facilities that contribute to the positive experience of park visitors when feasible. (Recreation Section)

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