

# A Plan for Meeting the Shooting Range Needs of Nebraska

**NEBRASKA**  
- GAME  PARKS -

# **A Plan For Meeting The Shooting Range Needs of Nebraska**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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# A Plan For Meeting The Shooting Range Needs of Nebraska

## INTRODUCTION

Recruiting and retaining new hunters and shooting sports enthusiasts is critical to meeting the mission of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. In 2007, a Commission resolution further directed staff to take a more active role in hunter/angler recruitment, development and retention efforts. Shooting ranges are vital to this effort as they provide central locations for the recruitment and retention of new and participating hunters and shooting sports enthusiasts. They are hubs for creating social support necessary for continuation in these traditions. Shooting ranges serve communities by providing for family enjoyment and life skill development. They also are critical to the Hunter Education efforts by providing facilities where adults, families and youth can learn the safe and proper use of firearm and archery shooting and how fun these activities can be. Nebraska's hunting heritage runs deep; however, as the state becomes more urbanized, the future of hunting and shooting sports will depend

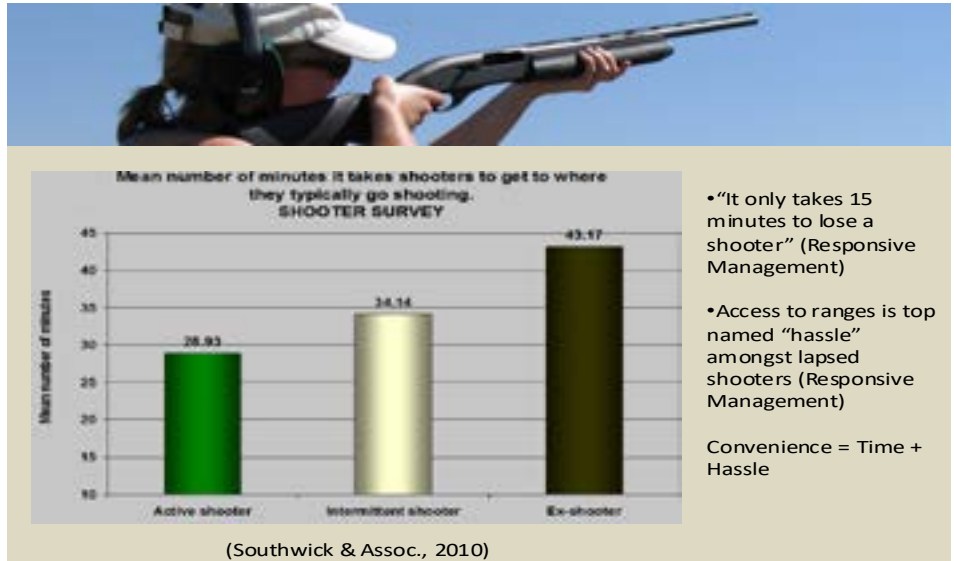


Figure 1

on the ability of our citizens to conveniently use shooting range facilities.

Our state parks serve several million visitors annually. These visitors rely on the park and nearby attractions for family entertainment. Hunting, fishing, shooting sports and related activities are a natural fit at many state park locations, providing visitors with activities that can open the door to a lifetime of outdoor enjoyment. The recent success of the Roger G. Sykes Outdoor Heritage Park at Platte River State Park, along with current developments at Ponca State Park and the City of Lincoln, suggest shooting facilities are well received by our public. The aim of these facilities has been to provide the newest participants with education

programming and quality venues for discovery and practice of these activities, as well as support for our existing educational programs where participants can return and continue to enjoy these sports.

Research suggests shooters are less willing to drive long distances to reach shooting venues. While many will drive 28 minutes to shoot, extending that drive time to 43 minutes results in lapsed shooters (Figure 1). We need to make shooting sports access convenient for the public, especially those who are not convinced they are ready to embrace these sports. The idea of community shooting facilities located near communities in city parks or other like venues will be important in developing new

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youth and families in the hunting and shootings sports just as community recreation centers support the many ball sports.

Annually, Nebraska deer hunters find it increasingly difficult to find access to safe facilities to simply sight in a rifle and practice for the upcoming season. While larger facilities can serve a

specific area, simple hunter sight-in ranges spread out across Nebraska are needed for our valuable customers. This plan suggests using permit purchase criteria to locate these facilities, which would consist of only a few benches, 100 yard distance to berm and safety features as needed. Wildlife management areas across Nebraska could host

these facilities and also solve the problem of indiscriminate target shooting common at these locations.

Finally, a tremendous amount of wealth exists within the many rod and gun clubs across Nebraska that serve our veteran hunters and shooters. These facilities survive on very limited funds and often lack the monetary influx to provide for normal maintenance or to address safety issues or plan for expansion. In 2004, the Commission started the Shooting Range Grant Assistance Program, which was a competitive grants program for non-profit gun clubs using federal grants. The program provided for several hundred thousand dollars worth of shooting range upgrades, expansion and development that had tremendous benefits to Nebraska, including access and safety. Such a program is needed still today to help these valued partners continue to offer safe quality shooting facilities for our shooting public.



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## APPROACH

### Goal

Create new and support existing lifelong hunters and shooting sports enthusiasts through development of shooting sports facilities that meet the diverse needs of Nebraska.

### Objectives

The need for outdoor skills and shooting sports access is statewide.

1. Increase availability of outdoor skills and shooting sports education access in at least four locations that have concentrated visitation rates or near large population centers for the given area, such as state parks and recreation areas, in Nebraska by 2017
2. Develop outdoor skills and shooting sports education access in at least one location within a large community in Nebraska by 2015
3. Enhance hunter sight-in access and reduce indiscriminate shooting

on wildlife management areas, state recreational areas and other available locations where more than 2,500 big game hunters live within a 50-square-mile area

4. Provide support to Nebraska nonprofit gun clubs to help with expansion, access and safety enhancements annually

In 2001, a shooting range survey conducted by the Commission showed a shortage of safe and accessible shooting facilities across the state of Nebraska. Ranges that provide

facilities for high power rifle were especially lacking. In late 2011-2012, a similar survey was conducted with the help of the Nebraska Firearms Owners Association to indicate where current known ranges are located. Each facility was contacted to learn additional information resulting in a more current database to help guide needs for Nebraska. Although the maps in Appendix A show various shooting facilities across Nebraska, very few offer open public access where a shooter can use the range throughout the week without being a member. Even fewer provide



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the educational programming Nebraska needs to recruit new hunters and shooting sports enthusiasts. The role of most club style shooting ranges is to help retain shooters once they have been recruited.

## **Current Shooting Range Facilities of Nebraska** (See Appendix A)

The recent shooting range survey helped us better understand what facilities exist in Nebraska along with the types of shooting opportunities they provide. The limited survey responses returned show an interesting trend. Although several private ranges exist in Nebraska, few offer any extensive educational recruitment programs targeting various user groups such as youth or women. Many are private club style facilities which are not easily accessible to the average hunter/shooter. Facilities known at this time are found in the Appendix section. These include:

## **Known Rifle Ranges in Nebraska**

### **Appendix A1**

*Map of rifle ranges in Nebraska separated by those that are private and those that allow some form of public walk-in access*

## **Known Shotgun Ranges in Nebraska**

### **Appendix A2**

*Map of shotgun ranges (trap, skeet, sporting clays) in Nebraska separated by those that are private and those that allow some form of public walk-in access*

## **Known Archery Ranges in Nebraska**

### **Appendix A3**

*Map of archery ranges in Nebraska separated by those that are private and those that allow some form of public walk-in access*

In November 2011, Commission staff was selected to serve on a shooting range planning team. The Planning Team began researching needs for shooting ranges across Nebraska and developed four major needs for introductory shooting sports in Nebraska. These include:

1. Family friendly facilities oriented for basic shooting sports education located in areas with high public visitation such as state parks
2. Family friendly education and public use facilities, embedded within communities, following the model of the many recreation centers found in cities across Nebraska
3. Simple hunter sight-in ranges located across Nebraska that allow hunters a safe and effective place to sight in a deer rifle
4. Monetary support for Nebraska nonprofit rod and gun clubs for enhancement of facilities and development of new club style facilities



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Critical to selecting appropriate locations for these efforts, the Committee developed specific sighting criteria for each of the objectives. These criteria use a tiered system to filter potential locations beginning with regions and ending with a specific location on the map. The criteria was developed

using technical information from the National Shooting Sports Foundation and the National Rifle Association's Range Source Book. Members of the Shooting Range Planning Team began visiting potential range locations in late 2011.

## **Objective #1**

*Increase availability of outdoor skills and shooting sports education access in at least four locations that have concentrated visitation rates or near large population centers for the given area, such as state parks and recreation areas, in Nebraska by 2017*

## **Strategy #1**

Develop two additional Outdoor Heritage Parks in areas of high visitation (State Park or Recreation Areas) or next to larger cities in Nebraska by 2015 and begin planning/development for additional facilities in FY 2015-2017.

## ***Outdoor Heritage Parks***

The outdoor heritage park, such as the recently developed facility at Platte River State Park was designed for outdoor education offerings inviting to novice participants. They are facilities that engage youth, families and adults and allow



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them to experience, enjoy and discover various outdoor skills. They are designed to be located in areas where we already have a large number of people visiting such as a state or city park or near a large population of possible customers. They support a wide range of outdoor skill based activities such as rifle, shotgun, muzzleloader and archery shooting, camping, fishing, kayaking and hiking activities and other educational programs. They are not necessarily high volume shooting ranges that appeal to veteran shooters but provide a comfortable and inviting atmosphere for novice participants. With some planning, future Heritage Parks could offer opportunities for all levels of participants.

Heritage Parks are designed differently than standard shooting ranges because they are to meet the needs of new and potential hunters and shooters. Such design features may include:

## **Small bore rifle range with targets at 25 and 50 meters**

- Target sets for paper as well as fun interactive targets such as metal spinners, plates, etc.
- Can be used as a handgun range for general public if designed properly

- Can be part of a larger 100-yard rifle range

## **Target archery range with targets from 5-60 yards**

- Targets include paper, 3-D animal and fun interactive targets
- Could include field range for novice shooters and hunters

## **Indoor air gun range with adjustable targets from 0-10 meters**

- Includes fun interactive targets such as plastic or metal spinners, animal targets, etc.



- Could also incorporate indoor archery range

## **Trap range**

- Includes standard trap field and 5-stand sporting clays to help develop new shooters with fun challenging opportunities
- Depending on location, additional fields could be added

## **Other outdoor skills educational opportunities**

- Fishing ponds with shorelines developed for easy access
- Ponds for kayaking and canoeing to support Boating Education efforts
- Family camping areas for additional Family Camp programs and camping education
- Areas for hiking, GPS programs and space for youth and families to discover the outdoors



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## Current Prioritized Heritage Park Locations

### See Appendix B

The Shooting Range Planning Team reviewed many locations for potential Heritage Parks. For the 2013-2015 and 2015-2017 biennium budgets, four locations have been selected from this list, see charts below.

Other potential Heritage Park locations reviewed by the Planning Team include:

- Lake Wanahoo, Wahoo
- Indian Cave State Park, Shubert
- Chadron State Park, Chadron
- Lake Maloney State Recreation Area, North Platte
- Fort Kearny Shooting Sports Club, Kearney
- Fort Kearny State Historical Park, Kearney
- Centennial City Park, North Platte

## Objective #2

*Develop outdoor skills and shooting sports education access in at least one location within a large community in Nebraska by 2015*

## Strategy #2

Develop the Lincoln Shooting Park and Education Center in Boosalis Park in Lincoln.

## Community Shooting Park

Community recreation centers have a long track record of providing quality recreation and education opportunities for metro residents. They are located "next door," easily accessible, allow youth and families to engage in programs and activities with little planning and are a strategic base for delivering education programs. Youth and families have many

competing options for their free time. Many of the ball sports have found success through development of youth at early ages using such recreation centers. In most cities or towns across Nebraska, there is no opportunity for a youth or family to learn about hunting or the shooting sports outside of a few scheduled events. If outdoor sports such as hunting and shooting sports are to compete with so many other activities, efforts are needed to make accessing such facilities easier and the opportunities to learn about hunting and shooting more plentiful. In many towns, kids can ride their bikes to a community recreation center and participate in many sports with like-minded youth. We need to provide similar

FY 2013-2015			
Area	Location	Cost	Year
Wildcat Hills SRA	Scottsbluff	\$559,744	2013-2014
Two Rivers SRA	Waterloo	\$898,914	2014-2015

FY 2015-2017			
Area	Location	Cost	Year
Fort Kearny SRA	Kearney	\$700,000	2015-2016
Buffalo Bill Ranch SRA	North Platte	\$600,000	2016-2017



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opportunities for the hunting and shooting sports to ensure future support of and participation in these activities.

Now, the Lincoln Community Shooting Park and Education Center is under development. In 2011, a Master Plan for this facility was completed highlighting the possibilities of this location. Having received preliminary confirmation of a \$611,000 grant agreement from the Easton Foundation, staff are working with the City of Lincoln Parks and Recreation

Department to finalize plans for offering a Community Shooting Park in Lincoln that would complement a newly developed outdoor archery range and a local trap and skeet facility. Future locations of particular interest include Chalco Hills Recreation Area in Omaha (**See Map Appendix C**).

Community Shooting Parks are designed to appeal to new shooters as well as provide year-round opportunities for advanced shooters as they develop their skills. Such design features may include:

## Target archery ranges

- Target butts from 10-90 meters to support all phases of archery development

## Outdoor field archery ranges

- At least one 14-station field range for hunter, animal and 3-D rounds

## Youth target and 3-D ranges

- Target butts from 5-20 yards
- Youth 3-D range with six targets from 5-20 yards

## Indoor shooting ranges for year round education programming and shooting recreation

- Firearms range from 5-50 yards
- Air gun range for youth and league shooters to 10 meters
- Archery range to 25 meters
- Able to support conservation organization banquets, meetings, etc.

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FY 2013-2015			
Area	Location	Cost	Year
Boosalis City Park	Lincoln	\$1,000,000	2012-2013
Boosalis City Park	Lincoln	\$1,000,000*	2013-2014

\* Cost offset by \$611,000 Easton Foundation Grant.

- Classrooms for Hunter/Boater Education and shooting sports development
- Restrooms
- Vending/kitchen areas

## Current Prioritized Community Shooting Park (See Appendix C)

### Objective #3

*Enhance hunter sight-in access and reduce indiscriminate shooting on wildlife management areas in locations where more than 2,500 big game hunters live within a 50-square-mile area*

### Strategy #1

Develop at least eight simple hunter sight-in ranges in locations nearest big game permit buyers by 2017.

### Hunter Sight-in Range

Through several shooting range surveys, it is understood that Nebraska lacks quality and safe facilities for our growing big game hunting constituent base to sight in a rifle or handgun. Although target shooting has been allowed on many wildlife management areas throughout

Nebraska, each year more are closed to target shooting due to indiscriminate shooting and associated problems. Very few locations offer any infrastructure needed to sight in a deer rifle. We need to provide simple, inexpensive options for our hunters to safely sight in a rifle and practice shooting. These locations should be spread throughout Nebraska. This Plan suggests building such facilities on wildlife management areas, state recreation areas or other public areas where at least 2,500 big game permit



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purchasers reside within a 50 square-mile area (**See Map Appendix D**).

Hunter sight-in ranges are designed to appeal to hunters and people who already consider themselves shooters. Such facilities can be much more primitive, inexpensively providing the basics needed for safe and accessible target shooting and rifle sight-in. These features include:

- Two shooting benches constructed of metal on a concrete pad
- Bullet containment berm structures, 20 feet high, located at 25 and 100 yards from the shooting benches
- Side berms, at least 10 feet high outlining the sides of the range
- Target holders directly in front of the backstop
- Parking area
- Necessary safety features

A current partner in this effort, the Nebraska Firearm Owners Association, is supportive of this concept and willing to mobilize their membership to assist staff with



operations and maintenance. The Planning Team used site visits, location criteria and input from field staff to locate several areas statewide that could support a Hunter Sight-in Range. Four were prioritized for the 2013-2015 biennium. See chart below.

Other areas that were reviewed and offer feasibility for a potential Hunter Sight-in Range include:

1. Cornhusker WMA
2. Buffalo Bill Ranch SRA
3. Chadron State Park
4. Omadi WMA
5. Ponderosa WMA
6. Valentine Fish Hatchery
7. Borman Bridge WMA
8. Wanamaker WMA
9. Leonard Koziol WMA
10. Narrows WMA
11. Bruning Dam

FY 2013-2015			
Area	Location	Cost	Year
Wood Duck WMA	Norfolk	\$25,000	2013
Osage WMA	Tecumseh	\$25,000	2013
Twin Oaks WMA	Tecumseh	\$25,000	2014
Bassway Strip WMA	Kearney	\$25,000	2015

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## Objective #4

*Provide monetary support to Nebraska nonprofit gun clubs to help expansion, access and safety enhancements annually*

## Strategy #1

Re-establish the Shooting Range Grant Assistance Program to provide at least \$60,000 annually to nonprofit club style ranges that supports development, expansion, access and safety projects that will serve many Nebraska hunters and shooting sports enthusiasts.

- Safety baffling projects
- New range development
- Range lighting projects
- Trap and rifle range expansion
- Hunter Education programs
- Shooting sports development and the Scholastic Trap Program

Using carefully developed shooting range criteria, a committee of Commission and non-Commission stakeholders would award grant requests based on need and funding availability. The program was paused in 2009 to allow the Commission to use the program's federal funding base on current shooting range projects.

Area	Location	Cost	Year
Competitive Grant	Nebraska Club Ranges	\$60,000	Annually

## Shooting Range Grant Program

Started in 2004, the Nebraska Shooting Range Grant Program provided several hundred thousand dollars through a competitive grants process for partnering nonprofit gun clubs across the State. The program was greatly appreciated by our hunting and shooting public and helped with many solid programs, including:



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## SHOOTING RANGE BUDGETING

Budgets have been developed for the next biennium to accommodate the following:

Year 2012-2013				
Capital Const.	Cost	Operational	Cost	Total
Lincoln Shooting Park and Education Center	\$1,000,000			\$1,000,000

Year 2013-2014				
Capital Const.	Cost	Operational	Cost	Total
Lincoln Shooting Park and Education Center	\$600,000	Lincoln Shooting Park and Education Center	\$303,601	\$903,601
Wildcat Hills Heritage Park	\$599,744	Wildcat Hills Heritage Park		\$599,744
Wood Duck WMA and Osage WMA Rifle Ranges	\$50,000			\$50,000

Year 2014-2015				
Capital Const.	Cost	Operational	Cost	Total
		Lincoln Shooting Park and Education Center	\$221,451	\$221,451
Two Rivers Heritage Park	\$898,913	Wildcat Hills Heritage Park	\$288,443	\$1,187,356
Twin Oaks WMA and Bassway Strip WMA Rifle Ranges	\$50,000	Wood Duck WMA and Osage WMA Rifle Ranges	\$15,000	\$65,000



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<b>Year 2015-2016</b>				
<b>Capital Const.</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Operational</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Total</b>
		Lincoln Shooting Park and Education Center	\$221,451	\$221,451
Fort Kearny SRA Heritage Park	\$700,000	Wildcat Hills Heritage Park Two Rivers Heritage Park	\$190,993 \$288,443	\$1,179,436
Chadron State Park and Valentine Hatchery Rifle Ranges	\$50,000	Wood Duck WMA, Osage WMA, Bassway Strip WMA and Twin Oaks WMA Rifle Ranges	\$30,000	\$80,000

<b>Year 2016-2017</b>				
<b>Capital Const.</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Operational</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Total</b>
		Lincoln Shooting Park and Education Center	\$221,451	\$221,451
Buffalo Bill Ranch Heritage Park	\$600,000	Wildcat Hills Heritage Park Two Rivers Heritage Park Fort Kearny SRA Heritage Park	\$190,993 \$190,993 \$288,443	\$1,270,429
Chadron State Park and Valentine Hatchery Rifle Ranges	\$50,000	Wood Duck WMA, Osage WMA, Bassway Strip WMA, Twin Oaks WMA, Valentine Hatchery and Chadron State Park Rifle Ranges	\$60,000	\$110,000
Wanamaker WMA and Koziol WMA Rifle Ranges	\$50,000			\$50,000



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## OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

During the extensive planning phase, the Shooting Range Committee noted several other opportunities that would enhance shooting access in Nebraska. These include:

1. Contracting with existing gun clubs for enhanced public access
2. Hire education staff to work with existing shooting facilities to enhance public access and education programming
3. Heartland Shooting Range, Grand Island
4. Purchase existing ranges and operate for education programming and public access
5. Fort Kearny Shooting Sports Club
6. Other existing opportunities as they develop
7. Each state park should have at least one shooting venue available to the public prioritized by visitation.
8. Indian Cave State Park would benefit from an archery range and small-bore range.
9. Chadron State Park would benefit from a rifle range.
10. Buffalo Bill Ranch SRA would be an ideal location to focus on cowboy-action shooting.
11. Eastern Nebraska needs a large trap and skeet shooting complex to support the growing youth trap leagues and shooting programs.
12. Archery ranges should be found within 30 miles of most communities in Nebraska.



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## NEXT STEPS

### *Outdoor Heritage Parks*

- Define footprint for Wildcat Hills and Two Rivers facilities
- Define needs of next two locations
- Refine existing construction plans
- Begin construction
- Develop education programming for new facilities

### *Community Shooting Parks*

- Now that contracts are completed and grants are committed for the Lincoln Education Center, hire consultant for final design and construction plans
- Begin construction in late 2012
- Finish construction in mid to late 2013
- Develop Education programming for new Education Center

### *Hunter Sight-in Ranges*

- Finalize design for sight-in ranges
- Begin site prep
- Construction

### *Shooting Range Grant Program*

- Determine year to reestablish grants program



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## APPENDIX



**A1 - Known Rifle Ranges in Nebraska**

**A2 - Known Shotgun Ranges in Nebraska**



**A3 - Known Archery Ranges in Nebraska**

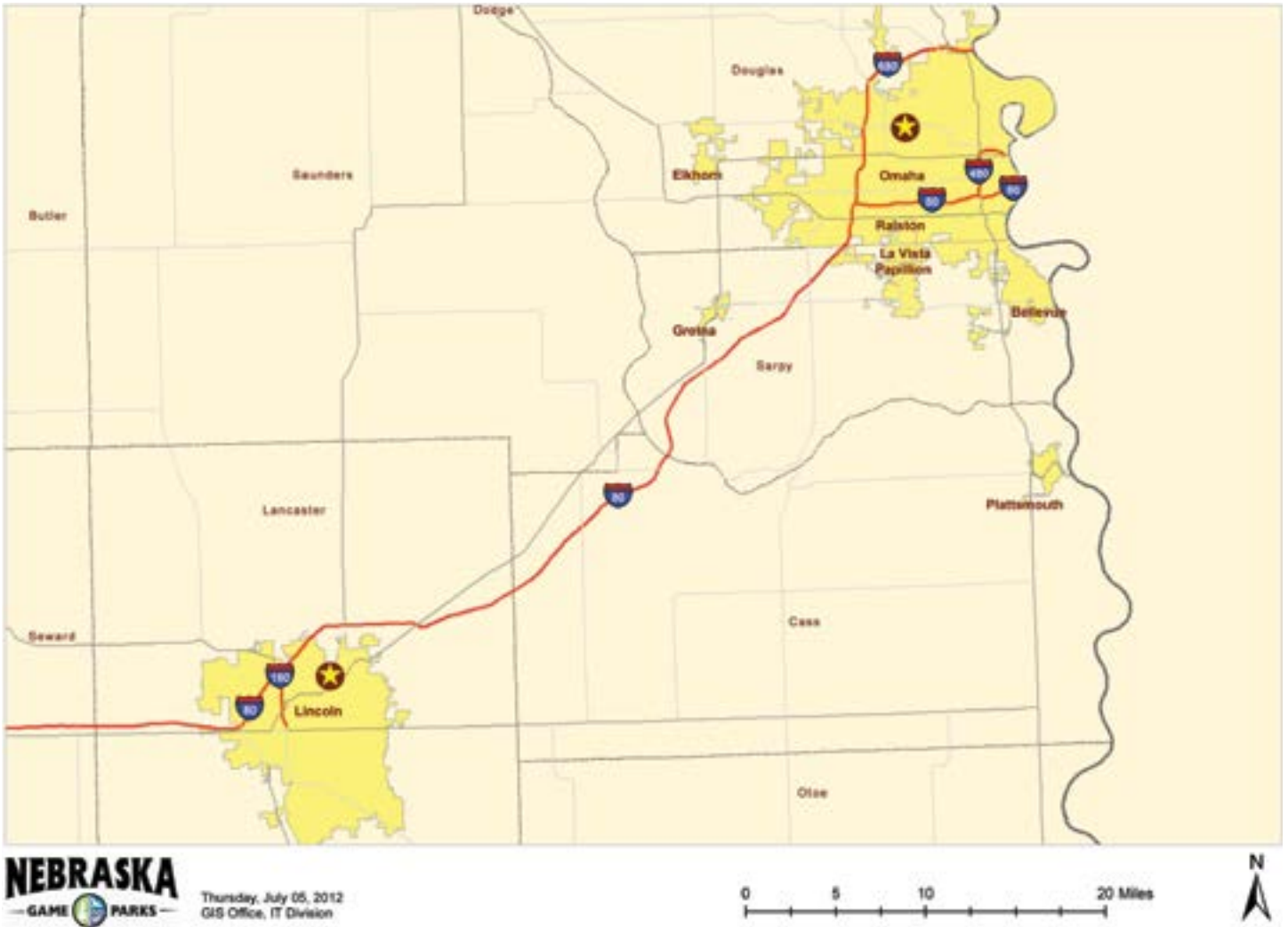
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## B - Prioritized Locations for Outdoor Heritage Parks



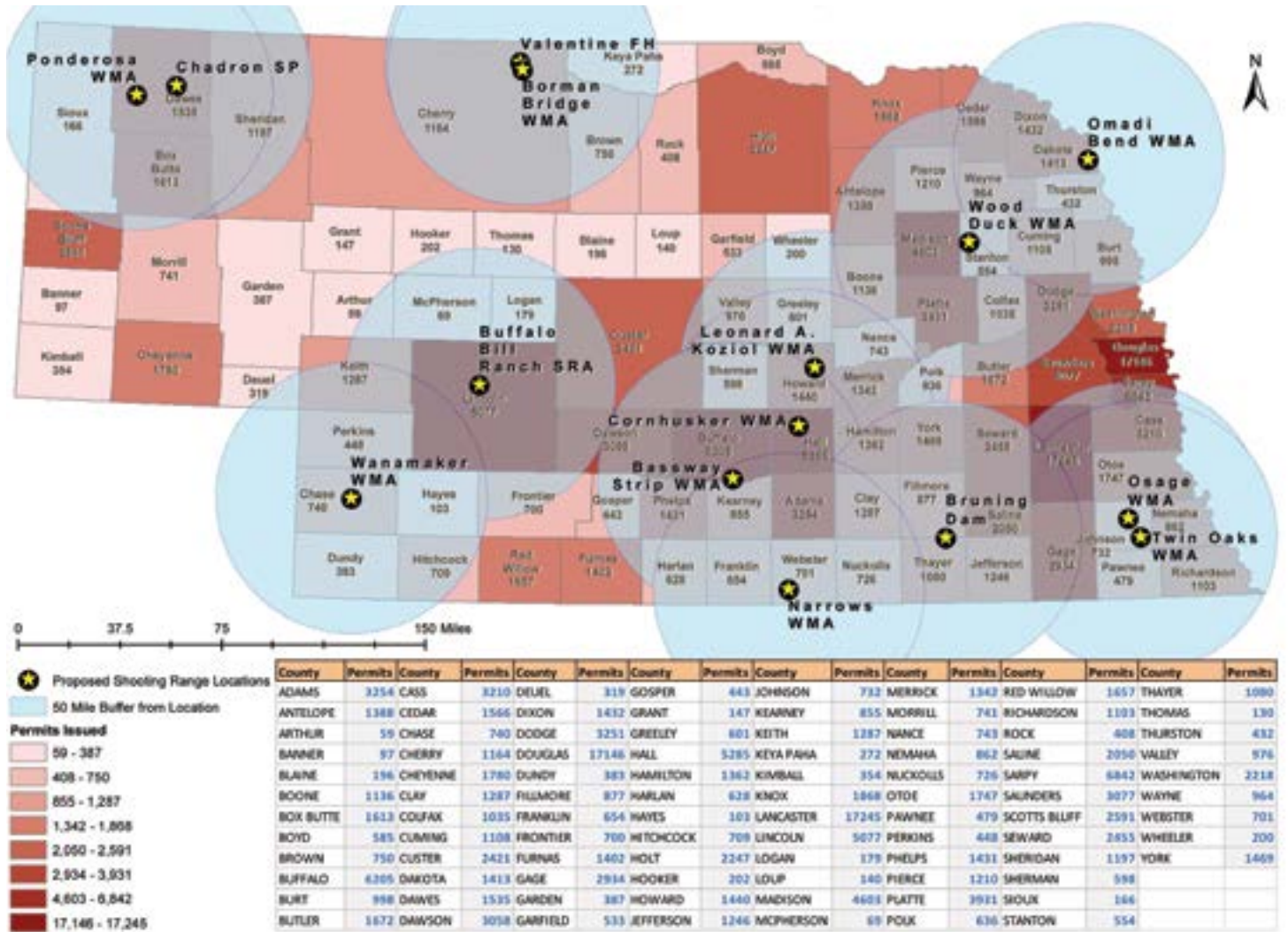
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## C - Community Shooting Park Locations of Interest



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## D - Proposed Rifle Sight-In Ranges in Relation to Big Game Permit Buyers by Region



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