

Scenic beauty unveiled Saturday

By RICK MYERS
Staff Reporter

For several years area outdoor enthusiasts have taken advantage of several thousand acres of available land ranging from the familiar Buffalo Creek southwest of Mebeta to the Kiowa Wetlands Area south of Morrill, but now the playing field has expanded.

As of yesterday four new areas have been open to the public adding about 13,000 acres to the mix which now amounts to about 20,000 total acres or 31 square miles of land available for hunting, fishing, hiking, biking, bird watching or photography.

Now the Carter Canyon Ranch, Montz Point Wildlife Management Area, Diamond Bit and Spotted Tail areas are open.

As a result the other favorite areas like Bead Mountain, Wildcat Hill Nature Center, The Nature Conservancy/Murphy Ranch, Cedar Canyon, Scotts Bluff National Monument, Mitchell Valley, and Horse Creek now have neighbors.

At Saturday's public event at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center, representatives of Platte River Basin Environments Inc. and their conservation partners met with the public to showcase the Wildlands that have been developed over the past two decades.

Volunteers and wildlife professionals work to expand public lands while enhancing the many plant and animal communities that are found in the biologically unique region.

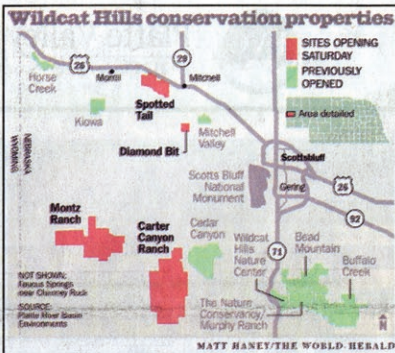
Ecologist Pat Reece said The Nature Conservancy has recognized the Wildcat Hills as "biologically unique," which gives a special international designation to the area.

As part of the Wildcat Hills Wildlands Initiative has resulted in conservation planning efforts to identify the most strategic tracts of land that would be effective in conserving the unique ecosystem.

Reece said the previous landowners of the area had a tremendous love of the land and were great stewards.

"These hills are truly awesome," said Reece.

For persons using the new or any of the areas wildlife partners ask that signs be strictly obeyed. As a variety of hunting seasons begin users are also cautioned to be aware of hunting seasons, regulations, parking areas, boundaries and restrictions.



TOP: Bead Mountain south of Gering is a relatively new acquisition and is one of the more scenic areas.

ABOVE LEFT: A map of the new areas open was available to the public at Saturday's event.

ABOVE: Hod Kosman, left, and Pat Reece of Platte River Basin Environments Inc. talk about the opening of new tracts of land.

LEFT: Erika Dittmar of the Rocky Mountain Bighorn Observatory uses binoculars to view bighorn sheep on the Montz Point Wildlife Management Area south of Stegall.

BELOW: Bighorn sheep hang out on cliffs in the Cedar Canyon Wildlife Area southwest of Gering.

Photos by Rick Myers

