

# Alternate Niche Statement for the Nebraska National Forest and Associated Units

(Buffalo Gap, Fort Pierre, and Oglala National Grasslands, Nebraska and Samuel R. McKelvie National Forests)

The Nebraska National Forest and Associated Units (NNF) is intermingled with private land (the majority) and state-managed lands. The private lands exhibit typical rural housing and agricultural developments associated with farming and ranching. State lands consist of minimally developed Wildlife Management Areas and highly developed State Parks. The NNF land developments include hundreds of miles of livestock-related fences and hundreds of stock water facilities.

The vast majority of Americans who visit the NNF do so in a recreation context. Developments to serve their purposes include a few widely dispersed campgrounds, picnic areas, and trailheads located mostly in Nebraska. NNF recreation facilities that are outside the norm of minimally developed sites are: (1) Bessey Recreation Complex (near Halsey, NE); (2) Hudson-Meng Bison Kill Site (northwest of Crawford, NE); and (3) the National Grasslands Visitor Center (in Wall, SD).

The NNF offers a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities that are suited for, and may require, large relatively undeveloped areas. The NNF makes up just seven-tenths of one percent of Nebraska's land area and is viewed by many as having outdoor recreation value far beyond its comparative size. Of the NNF's slightly more than one million acres, only 352,000 acres are located in Nebraska--along with the majority of developed recreation facilities. Most facilities are in the forested parts of the NNF.

Visitors are drawn to the NNF because of the relatively large public land base that offers unusual opportunities for wildlife-related and nature-based outdoor recreation that are rare in Nebraska and South Dakota. Significant reasons for the attraction are the lack of crowded facilities, appropriate facilities to encourage and support visitation, and minimal restrictions on access and activities.

While recognizing that the NNF cannot be everything to everyone, hiking, family and backcountry camping, horseback riding, hunting, on- or off-road driving, and many other outdoor recreation activities are supported by adequate access and appropriately placed and maintained facilities to provide a quality recreation experience that meets or exceeds visitor expectations.

The NNF and its outdoor recreation program and facilities are recognized as important partners with rural communities as well as regional and state entities that are marketing outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities as parts of their overall rural economic development strategies.