



## Conservation Easements

Under certain circumstances, a conservation easement may be an effective tool in helping the Sandhills Task Force reach its goal—*“to enhance the sandhill wetland-grassland ecosystem in a way that sustains profitable private ranching, wildlife and vegetative diversity, and associated water supplies.”*

Acquiring conservation easements is not a prominent activity or purpose of the Sandhills Task Force. Its use will be limited and in accordance with the guidelines established below. The guidelines are not absolutes, but reflect the principles under which this organization operates.

Conservation easements will focus on keeping areas from land use changes which significantly affect open space, private ranching, and wildlife at a local landscape level. Priority areas would include prominent lakes and streams; areas containing high densities of wetlands or wet meadows; and small parcels which encourage subdivision, but are large enough to support a small ranch.

### Easement Acquisition Guidelines

- Easements will be voluntary. **No easements will be taken or accepted from an unwilling seller.**
- Easements will reflect the wishes of the landowner and immediate family. Those which appear to place family members at odds will be avoided.
- Easements will not be taken when associated with circumventing legal and political matters.
- Easements will reflect the goal and management strategy of the Sandhills Task Force. That is, easements will protect the natural resources of the Sandhills in a manner that is compatible with ranching and rural communities. They would include: grassland (open space), wetland, and riparian areas.
- An easement maintenance fund will be established for easements and is expected to be approximately 10 percent of easement value.
- An easement documentation report will be done on each easement.
- No farming or cultivation, unless existing.
- No replacement of native grassland and wetland plants.
- Grazing or haying allowed. Some easements may be restrictive on amount, intensity, or time of grazing or haying.
- Existing conditions, including ranch buildings, road, and trails are allowed to remain. Additional new home sites would be decided on a case by case basis.
- Access to property will be controlled by landowner.
- No drainage or lowering of existing or natural water-holding capacity of wetlands. Partially drained wetlands may be allowed to remain partially drained. E.g. A ditch through a wet meadow may lower the water level enough to allow haying of a portion. That ditch would be allowed to remain. No additional ditching or improvement would be allowed.
- No artificial filling of wetlands.
- No straightening, narrowing, widening, or deepening of stream or ditch channel.
- No impoundments will be constructed, unless it is for the protection (i.e. erosion control) of the stream and riparian habitat.