

WTOO-175

82-4919

1. NAME: Chalk Cliffs and Republican River— Natural feature.
2. LOCATION: One mile south of the corporate limits of Red Cloud, on either side of the county road, running about one-half mile west of U.S. Highway 281.
4. OWNER/ADDRESS: James K. Kidd estate  
c/o Linda Jane Williams  
1246 O. Mines Road, Livermore, CA 94550

Webster County Commissioners  
Webster County Courthouse, Red Cloud, NE 68970

7. DESCRIPTION: The "chalk cliffs" are exposed bluffs along the south edge of the Republican river just south of Red Cloud. The cliffs (photo #12) are a naturally occurring geologic feature, exposed by the action of the Republican River and considered a landmark in the community. The cliffs, specifically referred to in Cather's writing, occur only within the area defined by the boundaries of this site.

The Republican River, the portion of which was selected immediately adjacent to the cliffs, is an unspoiled section of river ecology (photo #13). This section was selected because of its unspoiled character, its accessibility and its relationship to the cliffs which are included in a tour of "Catherland".

8. SIGNIFICANCE: The river occurs frequently in Cather's writings. The Republican River is the river of Cather's O Pioneers, My Ántonia, One of Ours, A Lost Lady and Lucy Gayheart. It is also the river of many of her short stories including "The Enchanted Bluff."

". . . .The river was brown and sluggish, like any other of the half-dozen streams that water the Nebraska corn lands. One shore was an irregular line of bald clay bluffs where a few scrub-oaks with thick trunks and flat, twisted tops threw light shadows on the long grass. The western shore was low and level, with corn fields that stretched to the sky-line, and all along the water's edge were little sandy coves and beaches where slim cottonwoods and willow saplings flickered.

"The turbulence of the river in springtime discouraged milling, and, beyond keeping the old red bridge in repair, the busy farmers did not concern themselves with the stream; so the Sandtown boys were left in undisputed possession. In the autumn we hunted quail through the miles of stubble and fodder land along the flat shore, and, after the winter skating season was over and the ice had gone out, the spring freshets and flooded bottoms gave us our great excitement of the year. The channel was never the same for two successive seasons. Every spring the swollen stream undermined a bluff to the east, or bit out a few acres of corn field to the west and whirled the soil away to deposit it in spumy mud banks somewhere else. When the water fell low in midsummer, new sand-bars were thus exposed to dry and whiten in the August sun. Sometimes these were banked so firmly that the fury of the next freshet failed to unseat them; the little willow seedlings emerged triumphantly from the yellow froth, broke into spring leaf, shot up into summer growth, and with their mesh of roots bound together the moist sand beneath them against the batterings of another April. Here and there a cottonwood soon glittered among them, quivering in the low current of air that, even on breathless days when the dust hung like smoke above the wagon road, trembled along the face of the water." ("The Enchanted Bluff" - Five Stories, Pg. 3-4.)

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The chalk cliffs, a highly visible manifestation of a local geological condition (see WT00-176) are a local landmark which was also noted in Cather's writings.

". . . .Our own house looked down over the town, and from our upstairs windows we could see the winding line of the river bluffs, two miles south of us." (My Ántonia, pg. 145)

". . . 'Ha,' he murmured under his breath, 'there's the white chalk cliff where the Indians used to run the buffalo over Bison Leap--we kids called it--the remote sea wall of the boy world. I'm getting home sure enough'. ("The Treasure of Far Island" Collected Short Fiction, 1892-1912, pg. 266).

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA:

Acreage: 50 acres (approx.)

UTM CoordinateS: A 14/E540420/N4434745  
                  B 14/E540930/N4434740  
                  C 14/E540930/N4434340  
                  D 14/E540420/N4434335

Verbal Boundary Description: This property is located in the SE¼, Section 11, T1N, R11W beginning at point 630 meters west of a center line of Highway 281, and 410 meters north of the south section line, then heading east for 510 meters, turning south 405 meters then returning west for 510 meters again heading north for 410 meters to point of origin. 52 acres.

WTOO-176

82003207

1. NAME: Willa Cather Memorial Prairie--Natural feature
2. LOCATION: 5 miles south of Red Cloud, west of U.S. Highway 281 including all of Section 35 west of the highway.

4. OWNER/ADDRESS: The Nature Conservancy  
                  Rex Boner  
                  328 East Hennepin Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55414

cc: Hal Nagel, Depart of Biology  
          Kearney State College, Kearney, Nebraska 68847

7. DESCRIPTION: The Cather Prairie is a large tract of unbroken prairie nearly 600 acres in area. Dr. Harold Nagel, Professor of Biology at Kearney State College has kindly provided the following description of the Cather Prairie from a soon to be published manuscript.

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