

Saving the Platte River for Wildlife and People

The Platte River Basin attracts hunters and anglers from all over the world. They fish in the gold-medal trout streams high in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado and Wyoming, and in the river and reservoirs downstream. They hunt mule and whitetail deer, elk and pronghorn. Waterfowl hunters know that the Platte and nearby wetlands are great places to hunt in the fall, and a critical migratory stopover in the spring that helps keep duck and geese numbers strong.

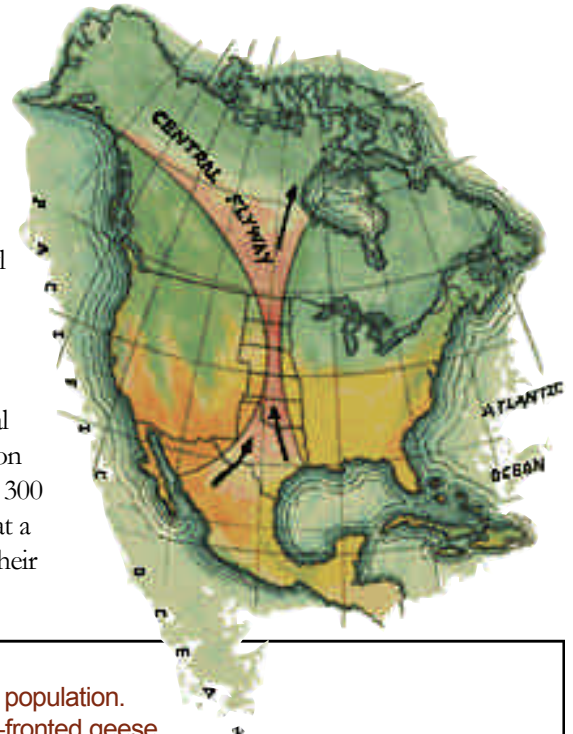
Hunting & Fishing Along the Platte

North America's Waterfowl Hotel

The prairie potholes in Minnesota, Iowa, the Dakota's and Canada are rightly known as "North America's duck factory," the nesting grounds for much of North America's waterfowl population.

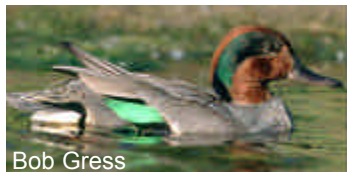
The central Platte and nearby Rainwater Basin wetlands are increasingly being recognized as America's "waterfowl hotel," a critical stopover point for ducks and geese heading to and from nesting grounds in the north.

Each spring, the central Platte and nearby wetlands and wet meadows provide ideal habitat for the massive annual migration of birds through the Central Flyway. Ten million ducks and geese, a half-million sandhill cranes, and some 300 species of birds use the area. They stay, often for weeks at a time, resting and feeding, building strength to complete their journey.



Platte visitors include:

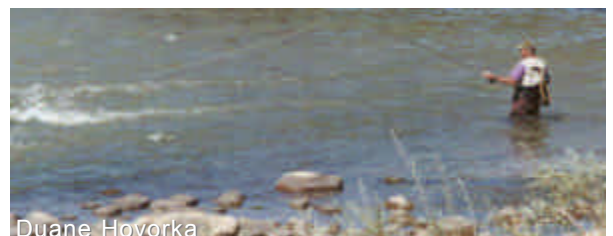
- 30 percent of North America's northern pintail duck population.
- 90 percent of the mid-continent population of white-fronted geese.
- 90 percent of the world's sandhill crane population.
- 50 percent of the mid-continent population of mallard ducks.
- Two million snow geese, half of the mid-continent population.
- Canada geese, common mergansers, gadwall, American wigeon, northern shoveler, blue-winged teal, common golden-eyes and **green-winged teal (left)** all use the Platte and Rainwater Basin.



Ice Cold Mountain Streams

High in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado and Wyoming are the headwaters of the South Platte and North Platte Rivers. Here, national forests and Rocky Mountain National Park protect gold medal trout streams, and provide habitat for elk, deer, beaver, bighorn sheep and other high-country wildlife. Anglers come from all over the world to fish for cutthroat, brook, brown and rainbow trout in these rivers and their tributaries.

The "Miracle Mile" on the North Platte southwest of Casper, and the "Dream Mile" on the South Platte southwest of Denver, boast some of the best fishing on the planet. Fifteen major reservoirs throughout the Platte Basin provide fishing for lake trout, walleye, smallmouth and largemouth bass, catfish, northern pike, perch and others. The rivers and reservoirs also provide camping, boating and recreation for millions of visitors every year.



Ribbon of Life Across the Great Plains



In the arid parts of Colorado, Wyoming and western Nebraska, the Platte River is an oasis of water for wildlife through the long, hot summers. Pronghorn, **mule deer (left)**, elk, and jackrabbits are scattered across the shortgrass prairie, along with remnant populations of prairie dogs, burrowing owl and mountain plovers.

Change in the Basin

In the early 1800s, hunters and trappers nearly wiped out the massive populations of bison, deer, elk, beaver and otter from the Platte Valley. Today, thanks to modern wildlife management, populations of deer, elk, waterfowl and most other huntable species continue to rebound.



Platte River Whooping Crane Maintenance Trust

A wide, healthy Platte, **above**, was regularly cleaned of vegetation by sediment flows. **Right**, stretches of the river have narrowed and become overgrown with vegetation.



Platte River Whooping Crane Maintenance Trust

The Platte River's flow continues to decline, the victim of growing demand for water for cities, farms and industry. River flows in the Central Platte have been cut by more than half, and 90 percent of the wetlands in the Central Platte and Rainwater Basin have been drained or destroyed. Wildlife has suffered.

Rare Species Along the Platte

The Platte River supports a host of rare and endangered species. Four federally protected species are the subject of the Platte River Cooperative Agreement, a joint effort by Colorado, Nebraska, Wyoming, and the Department of Interior to help these rare species recover.

Interior least terns and piping plovers nest along the Platte's sandbars. The pallid sturgeon uses the river near Plattsmouth, where the Platte empties into the Missouri River.



The **whooping crane (right)**, North America's largest bird and one of its rarest, migrates through the central Platte on its way from wintering grounds along the Texas Gulf Coast to nesting grounds in Canada.

Fish and Wildlife for the Future

Under the Platte River Cooperative Agreement, state and federal officials, water users, and conservation groups are developing a basin-wide management plan that would protect 10,000 acres of habitat in the central Platte, provide water to maintain critical river flows, and ensure that future water development does not harm those flows.

A strong species recovery plan could also benefit other fish and wildlife in the basin. The protected areas of the central Platte would be good habitat for migrating ducks, geese and cranes. Efforts to protect river flows from further depletion would benefit fish and wildlife throughout the Basin.

What You Can Do

For more information on the Platte River, and ways you can help protect Platte River wildlife, visit the National Wildlife Federation's web site, www.nwf.org/platte.

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