

Conflict on the Rural-Urban Fringe: How a Natural Resource Issue Can Divide and Unite a Community



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Where is Lincoln, Nebraska?



Photo source: http://travel.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-577790-map_of_nebraska-i

Lincoln, Nebraska

Demographics

- State Capital of Nebraska
- College Town: University of Nebraska-Lincoln
- 89.2% Caucasian; 3.1% African American; 3.1% Asian; 4.6% Other
- Median age: 31.3 years old
- Median household income: \$40,605

Lincoln Population Growth

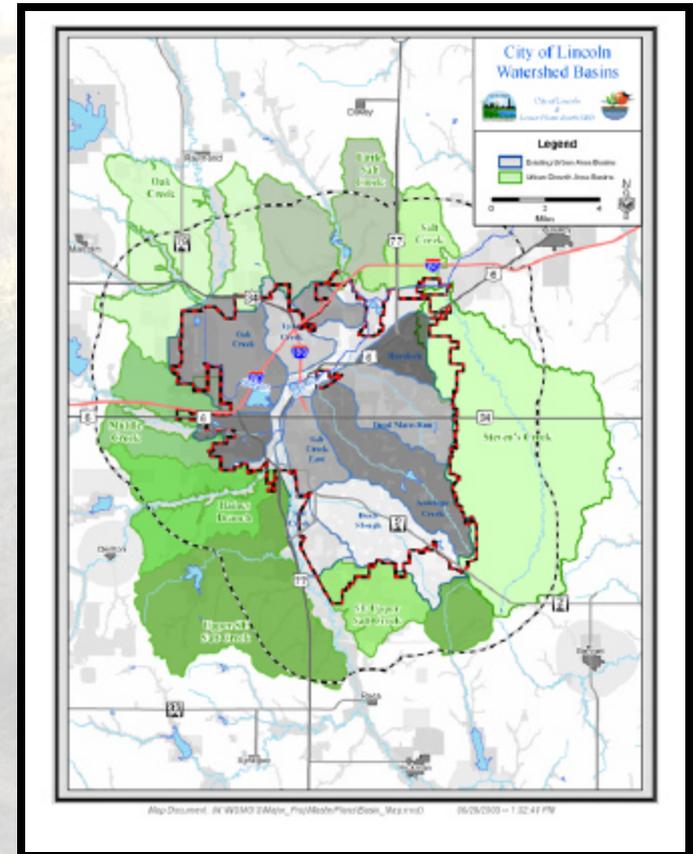
- Population (1990): 213,641
 - Urban: 192,558
 - Rural: 21,083
- Population (2000): 250,291
 - Urban: 226,582 (17.7% urban gain)
 - Rural: 23,709 (12.4% rural gain)



Photos by Kristen Corey

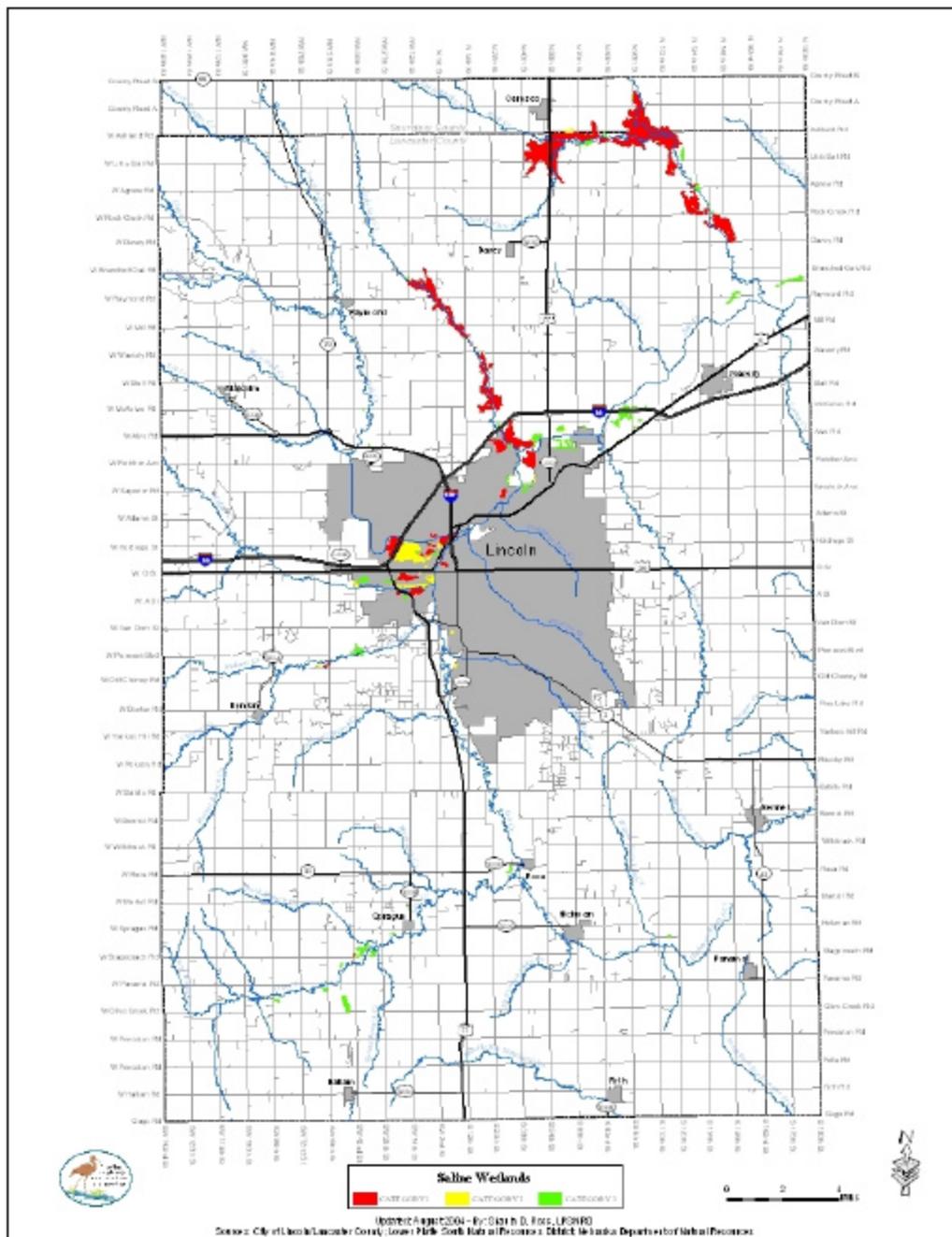
Little Salt Watershed

- Watershed for the moment is “protected” from development in city’s long-range plan
- Why is this particular watershed protected?



Why –

- Because of saline wetlands and other ecological factors
 - Most saline wetlands: directly N and NE of Lincoln
 - A few in the W part of the city

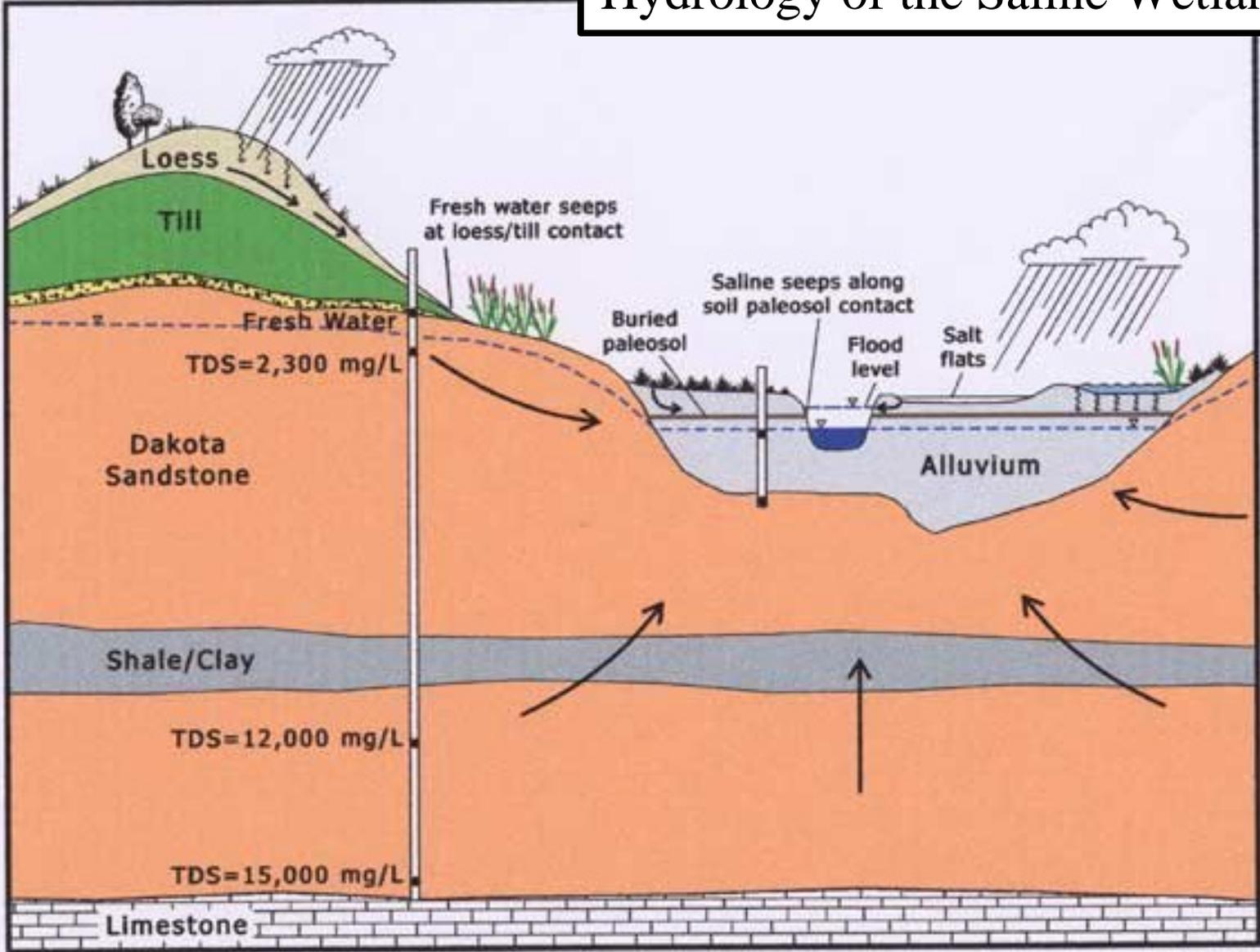


Map source: Tom Malmstrom, City of Lincoln/Saline Wetlands Conservation Partnership

Saline Wetlands in Nebraska?

- Source of salinity for these wetlands is not completely understood
- Popular hypothesis: caused by “groundwater inflow that passes through a rock formation containing salts deposited by an ancient sea that once covered Nebraska” (USDA 1996)
- Seepage of groundwater over thousands of years from deeply buried saline aquifers - caused the accumulation of salts in the floodplain soils, allowing the saline wetlands to form
 - Source:
<http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/parks/admin/wetlands/whatare.htm>

Hydrology of the Saline Wetlands



Not to scale

Photo source: <http://watercenter.unl.edu/archives/SecretsSaltyGW.asp>

Main Reason: Endangered Species

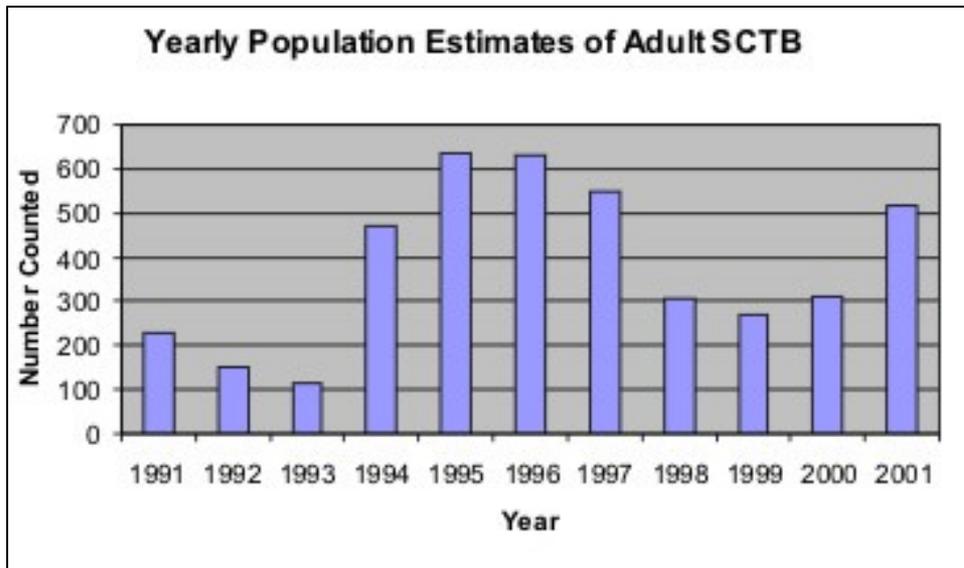
- Listed on the state endangered species list in 2002
- Federally listed: 2006
- Move by Game and Parks and other agencies in area to keep wetlands protected

Salt Creek Tiger Beetle



Photo source: www.entomology.unl.edu/lgh/sctb

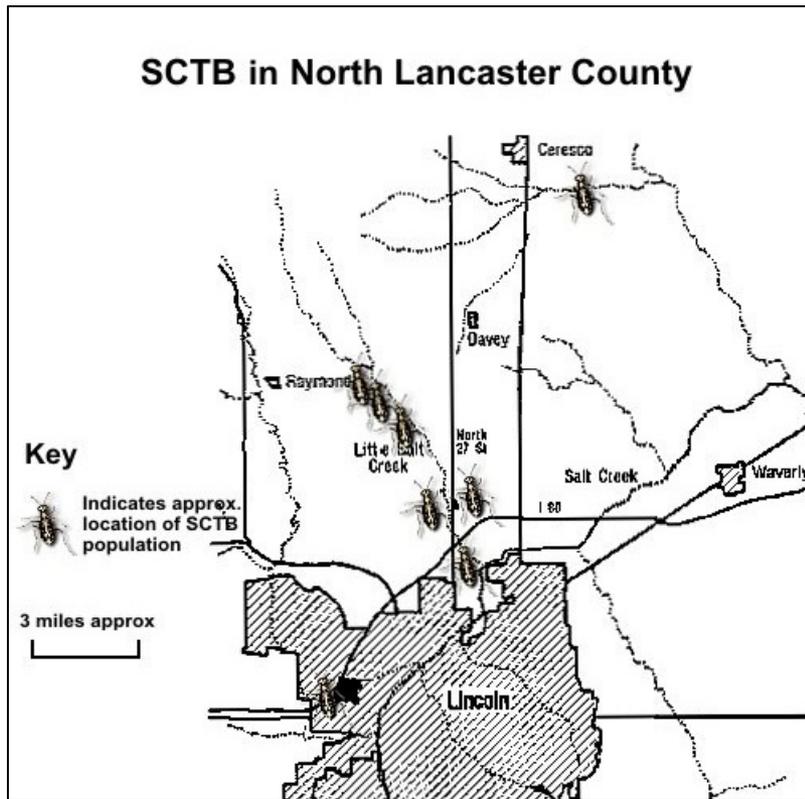
Salt Creek Tiger Beetle Population



•Table Source: <http://entomology.unl.edu/lgh/sctb/maps.htm>

- In 1991 – slightly above 200 total in area, decreased in following years
- Population increase from 1994 – 1997
- Roughly above 500 counted in 2001 (approx. number at present)

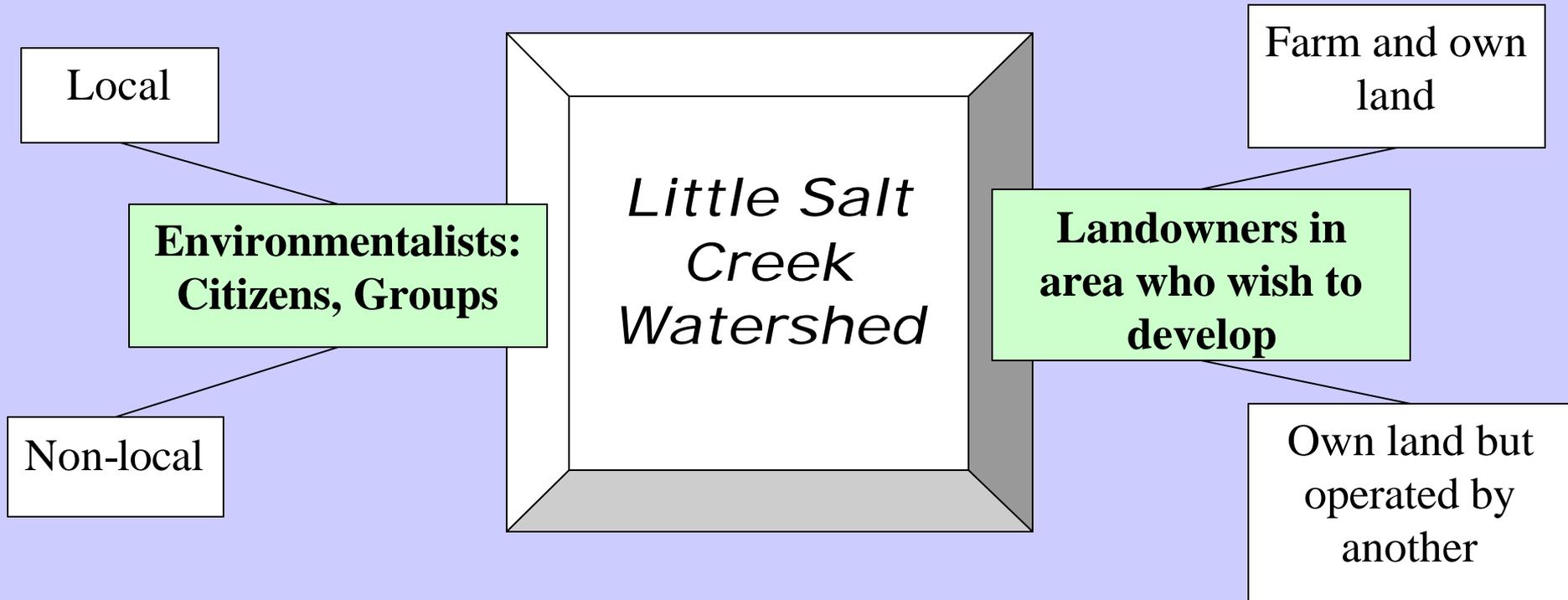
Where is the Salt Creek Tiger Beetle?



- Known to live in many of the wetlands within the Little Salt Creek watershed
- The beetles are so small, that they are hard to see with an untrained eye

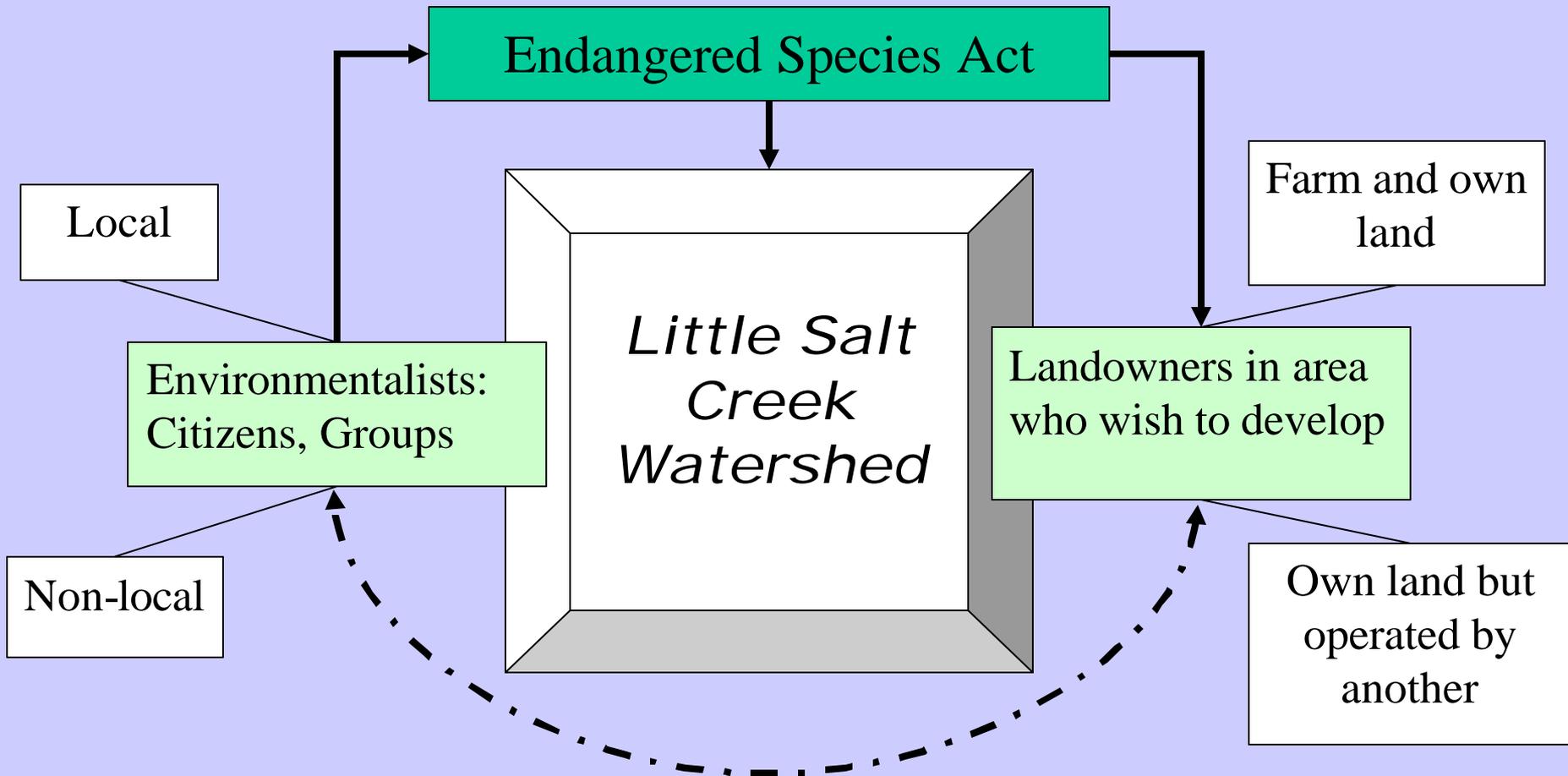
Map source: www.entomology.unl.edu/lgh/sctb/maps.htm

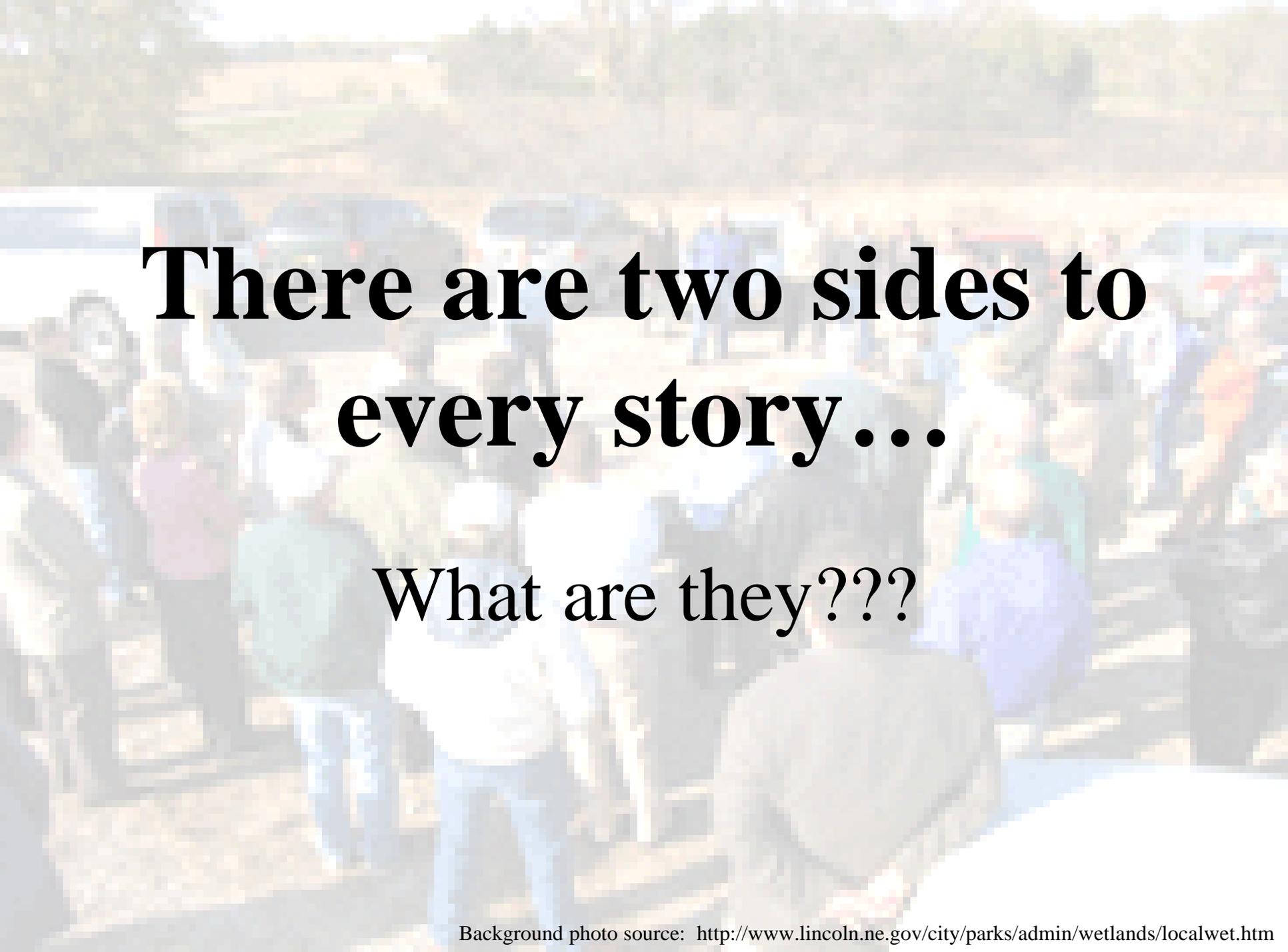
Conflict Situation Surrounding the Saline Wetlands



Simmel (1955) - suggests that conflict is not always divisive - can be functional; Conflict creates unity among groups around united for a common cause

Enter the Federal Government...





**There are two sides to
every story...**

What are they???

The Story of the Environmentalist

- Saline wetlands have a purpose
 - Historically important – salt mining
 - Hydrology important to city and surrounding ecosystem
 - Flood Management
 - With the urban population encroaching on wetland habitat, we need to protect this land
 - Development around I-80 booming
 - Quote: “What is a big threat to the saline wetlands is that Lincoln is growing towards Omaha and Omaha is growing towards Lincoln, and that’s going to come pretty much right through wetland country” (Nature Conservancy)

The Story of the Landowner

- This is our land (private property rights)
- What is going on?
 - Many landowners feel that much of this legislation is happening without their knowledge – do not have control over what happens to their own land
- Why are there no watershed groups in the area?
 - Many interested in water quality, hunting, etc., but more interested in farming elsewhere/paying for retirement

The Story of the Landowner – Retirement Funds

- We want our retirement!
 - Quote: “[My land] is just family land but I don’t have an attachment to it. But if I have 500 acres here, at the rate that this stuff is accruing in value, I can turn around and sell it, go get farm ground in another county and have the farming operation that I want” (Farmer)
 - Quote: “Most farmers, if they’re honest, will tell you they view their land as a retirement program, that the only reason they’ve stayed with it is because as soon as they saw that 27th Street overpass that went in, they saw it as an opportunity to finally turn around marginally productive (from their standpoint) soils and land” (The Nature Conservancy)

Who holds power here?

- Federal involvement (Endangered Species Act) has angered many landowners & some agency members
 - Increases landowner animosity toward agency folks
 - Land values up in the air
 - Waiting for “critical habitat” to be designated (approx. date: June 2007)
- Saline Wetlands Conservation Partnership (SWCP) - partnership created in 2003
 - **Purpose:** Implement a Conservation Plan for the Eastern Nebraska Saline Wetlands
 - **Partners:** (Funded through the Nebraska Environmental Trust) City of Lincoln, Lancaster County, Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, the Nature Conservancy, and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.
 - Source: <http://www.lincoln.ne.gov/city/parks/admin/wetlands/partners.htm>

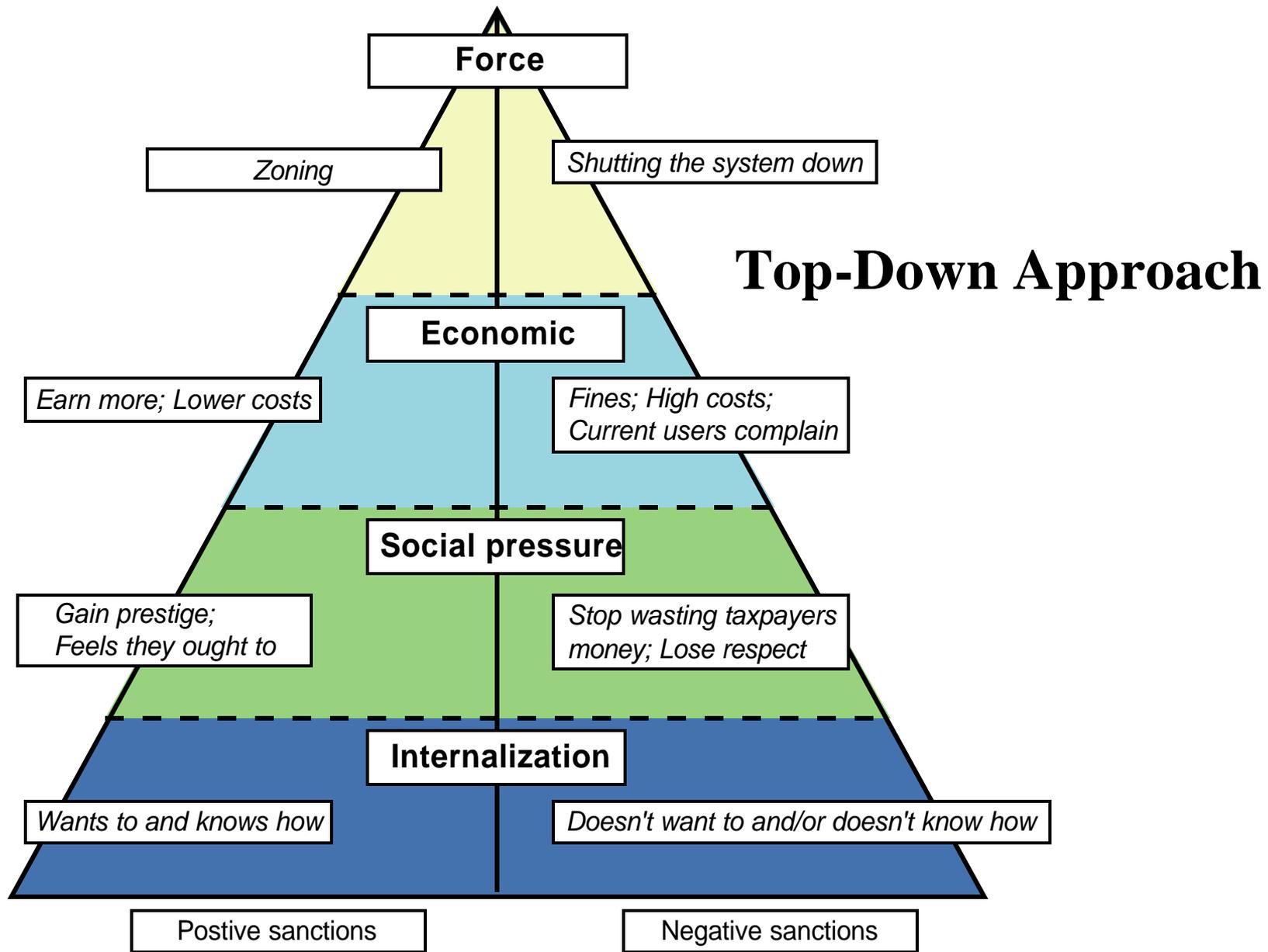


Figure 1. Flora's model of social control applied to agroecosystem manager

Is this an effective way to go about protection of the local water resources?

- Effective – arguably, yes
- Inclusive of local citizens – not really
 - No local watershed group exists
 - Actions were taken to include landowners initially by the SWCP - this fell through; no consistent attendance at meetings
 - Many of the landowners in the area just want to sell land for a “fair” price

How could both sides win?

- For those trying to preserve these lands - pay landowners more or exactly what developers are willing to pay
 - Simmel (1955) suggests that one way to resolve conflict is to compromise
 - “Fight can be avoided by offering the owner of the desired object another object from one’s possession” (Simmel, 1955)
- Keep the public updated on what is going on - continue to have local meetings

The Biggest Factor Leading to Conflict

Fear of the unknown!!!

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