



By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

On July 1, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) will formally hand over the Champion Mill State Historic Park to Chase County. An informal ceremony will be held at 10 a.m. at the Mill in Champion to mark the transfer of ownership.

Kirk Nelson, West Regional Manager of the Parks Division for NGPC, said that since the Nebraska Legislature approved the change in ownership in January, "It's basically a formality, but we might as well have a small ceremony, exchange keys and talk about the partnership."

The park's maintenance is still a partnership, Nelson noted, as LB 16 specifies that the title to the park will be owned by Chase County unless the property is not operated "as a public park and recreation area, or if a financial need arises pertaining to the park that is detrimental to the county."

At that point, NGPC would take back the title to the property.

Nelson said, "We want Chase County to succeed, and the Mill to prosper and be preserved."

He said the ceremony "gives us a chance to thank Chase County and to talk about the future of parks."

Nelson noted that in the last five years the Champion park is the eighth to be given up by NGPC.

"The Game and Parks is struggling," he said, adding that in the past NGPC received 70 percent of its budget from the Legislature and 30 percent from park permits.

Now, Nelson said, NGPC receives 70 percent of its budget from permits and 30 percent from taxes.

"We haven't been able to maintain (Champion) as we had in the past," Nelson stated, "and a lot of our parks are in the same shape."

Before NGPC turned ownership of Champion Mill State Historical Park to the county, NGPC put a new roof on the Mill, painted, renovated the lake and the spillway.

Commissioner Don Weiss, Jr. said in February that the county will have to hire someone to take care of the lawn and open the doors of the Mill to the public on weekends.

He said he hopes donations will aid in the operation of the area, although \$10,000 had been put in this year's budget for expenses.

The ceremony is scheduled for July 1 as that's the first day of the fiscal year for Chase County.

The public is urged to attend the ceremony. County commissioners, State Sen. Mark Christensen and NGPC personnel will be on hand. Refreshments will be served.