

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

The transfer of ownership of Champion Mill State Historical Park (SHP) and State Recreation Area (SRA) from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) to Chase County will take place in a ceremony at the mill July 1.

In a “short and sweet” ceremony at 10 a.m., according to County Clerk Debbie Clark, speakers will include State Sen. Mark Christensen of Imperial; Kirk Nelson, West Regional Manager of the NGPC Parks Division, and a Chase County Commissioner, to be determined.

Champion Mill SHP and SRA, located adjacent to the town of Champion, comprise approximately 11 acres, most of which is the lake created by the damming of the Frenchman River at the mill.

The mill was built in the late 1800s. Local contractors George and Henry Spady were hired in 1915 to add on to the mill.

NGPC purchased the property in 1969, operating the area as a historical park and public recreation facility. The mill was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988.

Following a severe flood and hailstorm in June 2007, part of the dam gates were damaged and the lake was emptied.

NGPC refurbished the dam, raceways and shoreline and the mill was repainted and reroofed this past year.

Roger Kuhn, Parks Administrator for NGPC, said, “In essence, Chase County will receive a newly renovated park for it to manage for public use. The Commission wishes to express sincere thanks to all the citizens of Champion and Chase County who have assisted with the operation and maintenance of the mill during difficult budget times.”

He continued, “We know the dedicated folks of Champion and Chase County will continue to protect and enhance this valuable national resource.”

NGPC is transferring ownership of the property to Chase County in an effort to pare its budget.

The area is the eighth such property given up by NGPC in the last five years, Nelson said.

“We haven’t been able to maintain the park (Champion) as in the past. A lot of our parks are in the same shape,” he said.

If at any time Champion Mill and Lake become an economic burden to Chase County, or if the county ceases to operate the property as a public park and recreation area, NGPC will step back in as owner, as required in LB 16, passed by the Nebraska Legislature this past February.