



By Carolyn Lee
The Imperial Republican

It was a beautiful Monday morning and the crowd of about 35 people enjoyed the sunshine as ownership of Champion Mill State Historical Park and State Recreation Area transferred from the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission (NGPC) to Chase County.

During a ceremony at the Mill, Kirk Nelson of NGPC's Parks Division said NGPC is in "a state of flux. We're looking for outside funding sources."

That's why this is the eighth transfer of ownership of a NGPC site to another government entity. The Chase County Commissioners agreed to take ownership of the area. If it doesn't remain a public park, or if the financial load becomes too heavy, NGPC will step back in.

Of the ceremony, Nelson said, "This is a commemoration of our partnership. We wouldn't be anywhere without you."

State Sen. Mark Christensen of Imperial, who introduced the legislative bill that transferred ownership, said he "commended Chase County and the community of Champion that's taken this project on. Champion locals always kept it up. That's a sign of what the community believes in. I hope you won't stop here."

Christensen suggested that features such as a bike trail would add to the attraction.



"If you want this place to see more visitorship you have to do more things," he added.

Mark Spurgin of Paxton, a NGPC commissioner, said he loves history. He said historical parks, such as Champion "are difficult because people don't come back to visit. I commend the community to take this on because it takes a community to make something viable."

Chase County Commissioner Chuck Vette of Wauneta said, "If I could pick one place to put something it would be Champion because the people are well rooted" and they're the ones to get things done.

Nelson said, "We have to think of how to get people's interest in historical parks. We have to get young people out of doors. It's a good thing for them."

The commissioners have appointed a board to oversee the care of the mill and park. The board includes Charlie Beard, Burton Beard, Commissioner Don Weiss Jr., Dennis Spady and Don Welch.

Bill and Kristi Eskew will be the caretakers for the first year.