



Governor Pete Ricketts

Growing Nebraska for the Next Generation

April 6, 2021

Ashley Olson, Executive Director
Willa Cather Foundation
413 North Webster
Red Cloud, NE 68970

Dear Ms. Olson:

We write to follow up on the recent briefings provided to the Governor's Office and state agencies, and to express opposition to the Willa Cather Foundation's plans to seek a National Heritage Area designation for portions of South Central and Southwestern Nebraska.

While we appreciate the important contributions of Willa Cather and her writings to that area and the State of Nebraska as a whole, this designation poses the risk of federal overreach in our communities. The designation of a National Heritage Area in our state requires federal approvals from the National Park Service and the U.S. Congress. Federal designations come with unquantifiable and unknowable risks for the future. Conditions and requirements for federal management can change at any time without vital input from the states, eroding state and local control of decision-making regarding our land and communities. A federal agency and new administration can unilaterally issue new regulations or orders governing areas with a federal designation.

Furthermore, a designation such as this would require a National Environment Policy Act (NEPA) plan. NEPA is one of the most significant bureaucratic barriers to infrastructure and other important projects in our country. Extending NEPA's reach in our state could hinder growth and development in the communities and surrounding areas.

It is also worth noting that over the past few months the State has been contacted by Nebraskans voicing their opposition to this designation. Those constituents feel as though our state can adequately promote our own regional tourism without any federal intervention, a sentiment that we share.

We appreciate the efforts of the Willa Cather Foundation to further Nebraska tourism and local development but strongly oppose this designation given the unintended consequences that are associated with it. We will continue to look for ways to promote Nebraska heritage and tourism while also keeping authority and control where it belongs – at the state and local level with Nebraskans.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Pete Ricketts in cursive.

Pete Ricketts, Governor
State of Nebraska

Handwritten signature of Anthony L. Goins in cursive.

Anthony Goins, Director
NE Dept. of Economic Development

Handwritten signature of Steve Wellman in cursive.

Steve Wellman, Director
NE Dept. of Agriculture

House Federal & State Affairs
February 14, 2024
Attachment 5C