

Nebraska State Parks Centennial Lesson Plan

Activity Title:

100 Years of a “Good” Thing: Chadron State Park History

Grade:

Lower Elementary

Upper Elementary

Method:

During this activity students will complete a personal timeline.

Materials:

100 Years of a "Good" Thing-CSP History Centennial timeline worksheet

Pencil/crayons

Optional (100 Years of a “Good” Thing- Powerpoint)

State Standards:

SS 2.3.2.b; SS 2.4.1.b; SS 3.4.3.a; SS 6.4.5.c

Objective:

Students will 1) discover the history of Chadron State Park, 2) complete a personal timeline using important dates in their history and Chadron State Parks history.

Background:

Come along as we explore the history of Nebraska’s oldest state park, Chadron State Park. We will discover the people, legislation and improvement projects that make the park what it is today.

James W. Good was born in Kentucky in March of 1861. He went to school in Kentucky and Illinois, where he attended Business College. Good moved to Nebraska in 1884.

He had been a farmer, merchant, rancher and real estate dealer before becoming a city councilman. In 1919, Good was elected to represent the twenty-eighth district (which was around Chadron) for the Nebraska State Senate.

In Senator Good’s district, there was a really scenic area located along Chadron Creek. He thought it would make a good state park, but he had to persuade 33 other Nebraska Senators to pass a bill, which would create Chadron State Park.

Senator Good worked with five senators from Omaha. The agreement was that the western senators would support a paved road in their area, if the Omaha senators would support the park bill. Both bills were passed and Chadron State Park became a reality in 1921.



A State Park Board was also created on March 18, 1921, to administer this area and “such other areas thereafter acquired” and the board was placed under the Department of Public Works (Laws of Nebraska, 1921).

Mr. Good was made the park superintendent with no pay.

He began working on the 640 acres of land immediately. Picnic benches were placed. Volunteers came to donate their time and effort toward this cause.

Teams of horses were used to clear the brush away from baseball diamonds. Horse-drawn scrapers were also used to dig a small swimming lake (now known as the lagoon).

The first road system in the park was designed by an unlikely engineer, cows. The crew followed cow paths around the hill curves and saved \$600 on the project.

The Chadron Chamber of Commerce and Chadron merchants cooperated to raise \$300 for the road construction. Farmers and community members from around Chadron volunteered labor to complete the road project.

Another park improvement project was the swimming lake. Over \$3,000 was raised in Chadron to build and construct the swimming lake.

Later business of Chadron and the surrounding towns donated money and materials for picnic tables in the park. The upkeep, painting and repair of the tables was taken care of by the volunteers each year.

The Civilian Conservation Corps, also called the CCC, had a camp in Chadron State Park in 1933. These camps were established across the nation and provided jobs and training to thousands of young men during the Great Depression. They were paid \$30 a month with \$22 to \$25 sent home to their families each month. The money provided relief for their families who were desperate for food and basic needs. The corps' workers at Chadron State Park removed dead and diseased trees, cleared picnic areas along Chadron Creek, cut lumber, built new cabins and a new picnic shelter and improved the water system. In 1934, Mr. A.E. Speer, from Falls City, NE, came to the park as superintendent. Unfortunately, Mr. Speer passed away two months later before he had a chance to start on general improvements at the park, Mrs. Speer became his successor and the third superintendent of the area. She was one of the first female park superintendents.

Under Mrs. Speer's management, the park operation began to prosper. In 1934, A Works Progress Administration (WPA) camp was set up at Chadron State Park. WPA employed both skilled and unskilled workers for a variety of public work projects. At Chadron State Park, these workers set to work improving the roads, parking areas, bridges, log picnic tables, natural stone fire pits, and the plantings adjacent to the swimming pool.

Chadron State Park improvement projects continued:

- 1948- a complete new water system was installed,
- 1949- a shop and additional roads,
- 1950- two modern cabins were constructed,
- 1951- an additional two modern cabins were added,

1953- six miles of underground secondary power lines were installed,
1954- five old cabins were rebuilt and modernized,
1956 through 1958 a new administration building was built, a utility and fire house were constructed, and the interior of the auditorium at the group camp was remodeled,
1959- 16 modern cabins were in use,
1964- work began on the multi-thousand dollar group complex,

Let's compare Chadron State Park in 1921 (the year it was founded) with the way the park looks today (in 2021). What changes do you notice?

Then (1921):

- 640 Acres
- Tree covered wilderness
- Chadron Creek

Now (2021):

- 974 acres
- Roads
- Pond
- 22 Cabins
- Group lodge
- Campground
- Swimming Pool
- 100 miles of trails
- Managed Pine Woodlands
- Chadron Creek

Over the past 100 years, there have been many changes made to Chadron State Park. One thing remains the same over all these years and that is the fun memories created at Nebraska's first state park. What changes will occur over the next 100 years?

Step-By-Step Instructions:

- 1) Students will learn about Nebraska's first state park, Chadron State Park. Students can either read or have the information read to them about this history
- 2) Students will think about their own history and think about important events in their life. This might be events like their birthday, birth of a sibling or other special events.
- 3) Students will pick their top four life events to complete the timeline. They can either draw or write the event in the box provided.
- 4) Have them think about (estimate or calculate using subtraction) how many years passed between 1921 and the start of their life events. What are some historic events that happened during that time? Research these events.
- 5) Have students present their timelines with the class and share the most exciting event they researched that happened between 1921 and now. (Examples may include things such as wars, the moon landing, computers being invented, other technological advancements (tv, internet, smart phones), Olympics and sporting events or milestones, intercontinental airplane flight, Civil Rights Movement, noteworthy music and entertainment events, political changes and more.)

Focus Questions:

How has life changed from the time the first Nebraska State Park was created until now?

What events in my life have been noteworthy in my development?