

# Endangered Species Act 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Success Stories Blowout Penstemon



The blowout penstemon (*Penstemon haydenii*) is the only federally endangered plant species in Nebraska and is the rarest endemic plant in the Great Plains. It was thought to be extinct until it was rediscovered in 1968, and then it was listed as endangered in 1987.

The Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands have environmental conditions suitable for blowout penstemon at the Bessey Ranger District, which is located in the Nebraska Sandhills. In 1992, the Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands and its partners started the long process of restoring populations. Today, thanks to these efforts, there are seven known populations on the District that total about 20,000 individuals.

The blowout penstemon is in danger because its habitat is shrinking. This is caused by reducing fire and ongoing efforts to improve grazing practices, resulting in healing the blowouts.

Research, plant propagation, and monitoring continue so that we can better understand the ecology of the blowout penstemon, expand its population, and protect its habitat. Partners in this effort have included the University of Nebraska and the ARS National Center for Genetic Resources.



Figure 2. Endangered blowout penstemons growing in a Sandhills blowout

The Bessey Nursery has become a major contributor to the recovery efforts. The Nursery has been propagating the penstemon from seeds. These seedlings have been transplanted to appropriate Forest Service habitat. Under agreements with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, seedlings have also been transplanted into several of Nebraska's federal wildlife refuges. In addition, the Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands is part of the blowout penstemon national recovery plan revision team.

Another partnership developed in 2012, implemented an interpretive panel and garden constructed at the Bessey Ranger District office to inform visitors about this beautiful, endangered plant and our efforts to sustain it. Partners in this effort included the American Penstemon Society and the Bessey Nursery.



Figure 1. Blowout penstemon interpretive panel at the Bessey Ranger District



**Nebraska National Forests  
and Grasslands**  
125 N. Main St.  
Chadron, NE 69337