



Niobrara Valley Prescribed Fire Association

Project Description Encroachment of eastern red cedar into prairies and woodlands in the Niobrara Valley is a growing problem for ranchers and other land managers. Cedar chokes out grass for grazing and browse for wildlife. Nearly every ranch in the area struggles to stay ahead of the problem. Mechanical tree removal is expensive, and there are not enough contractors and equipment in the region to make a dent in it. Prescribed fire can keep cedar in check cheaply and effectively. The three main barriers to landowners wanting to implement prescribed fire on their land are lack of: 1) training 2) equipment and 3) labor. Several Niobrara Valley landowners took it upon themselves to organize a local prescribed fire association to address these barriers. They worked with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to obtain two mobile fire cache units, each with enough tools and equipment for a 10-person crew. They wrote a successful Nebraska Environmental Trust Grant for funding to conduct training for their members. They created an excellent website (www.nvpfa.org) to provide prescribed fire information and to help members organize into neighborhood burn crews to help each other with the staffing needed to conduct safe burns. They have conducted training burns for members and organized post-burn tours for the public to spread the word and increase membership. They are pursuing 501(c) 3 status.

Outcomes NVPFA members have treated over 2,000 acres of cedar-infested land in the Niobrara Valley, benefiting both wildlife and livestock capacities. Increasing the productivity of pastures produces a positive financial benefit to a ranching operation. Neighbors working together help improve local communication and encourage good stewardship, as other neighbors see what is happening and seek to join. Burning instead of mechanical treatment saves thousands of dollars on every project. The mobile fire caches represent a \$20,000 investment in the community. The training and workshops offered by NVPFA increase community knowledge of prescribed burning and good land stewardship.



Partners

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, North Central Nebraska RC&D Council, the Northern Prairies Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, the Niobrara Council, and the National Park Service. Assistance provided by USDA, NRCS, Nebraska Game and Parks and Nebraska Forest Service employees. Additional funding support received from the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

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