

JUN
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JUL
2023

ADDRESSING EASTERN REDCEDAR IN THE SANDHILLS

TNC BURNING UPDATES

This summer has been blazing past, and it's hard to believe it's August already. The team has been busy with workshops, site visits and a summer prescribed burn at the Niobrara Valley Preserve. Most of the Sandhills have received an abundance of moisture this year and drought conditions from the past 2 years are improving. Several landowners have begun making plans for burning again in the coming year. There are several prescribed burns planned in the Sandhills this summer and fall.



THIS WORK IS POSSIBLE DUE TO THE SUPPORT OF THE FOLLOWING PARTNERS:



SUMMER PRESCRIBED BURN AT THE NIOBRARA VALLEY PRESERVE

On June 8th, staff from the Niobrara Valley Preserve and volunteers with the Niobrara Valley Prescribed Fire Association implemented a prescribed burn to control eastern redcedar trees and smooth brome. The burn was successful in areas where the burn unit had been rested for 2 years allowing thatch to build up and carry the fire. Despite calm winds and a lot of green grass, the fire spread across the entire area. Most of the cedar trees were less and 4 feet tall and the burn resulted in near 100% mortality. The fire burned slow and with low flames lengths for a very safe burn. The biggest challenges were the warm temperatures and thick smoke. We're looking forward to more opportunities to burn in the summer and have been preparing for a 400-acre summer burn south of Senecca near the Dismal River.



Summer burn at the Niobrara Valley Preserve.



TRAININGS/WORKSHOPS/EVENTS

June: Amanda was a Crew Boss at Youth Range Camp where she mentored a group of high school students for the week. Chad gave a presentation on prescribed burning one afternoon of the Camp. Chris Helzer hosted a Plant ID Workshop at the Niobrara Valley Preserve where 25 participants toured prescribed burn units from this past spring and previous years to compare production amount the different areas.

July: The Fire Team travelled to Barta Brothers Ranch for an Open House hosted by University of Nebraska - Lincoln and Nebraska -Extension. During the Open House 40 participants learned about the Collaborative Adaptive Management (CAM) Program focusing on grassland management in the Sandhills. The Fire Team assisted Barta Brothers Ranch with a prescribed burn this past May which was featured during the afternoon field tour. The site looks great and the preliminary research results show strong benefits for prescribed fire.

Chad presented on woodland prescribed burns at a Woodland Management Workshop hosted by Nebraska Game & Parks, USDA-NRCS and Nebraska Forest Service. The Workshop had 23 participants who learned about using fire scars in tree growth-rings to date historical fires across the Great Plains. One tree ring study from the University of Nebraska looked at trees from the Niobrara Valley Preserve and revealed a history of frequent fires.



Chad presenting at the Plant ID Day at the Niobrara Valley Preserve.



Barta Brothers Open House Tour.



Chad talking to Youth Range Camp with the Loess Canyons Burn Association.



Chad on a panel at the Barta Brothers Open House.

FIELD VISITS

The Fire Team visited with 5 landowners in June and July to look at prescribed fire projects. The Prescribed Fire Technicians have been assisting Shane Pettit with fire break preparations for an upcoming burn.

Amanda and Kevin met with Ashley Garrelts of the Sandhills Taskforce for two landowner field visits on July 27th. The first tour was at TK Rogers' ranch where a cut and stuff cedar removal project occurred this past June. The goal is to do a follow up burn in a few years to capture the regrowth of cedar trees. Later that day, the crew met at the Pokorny property north of Halsey. Paula and Brad Pokorny toured the pasture, showing the group some old homesteads and windbreaks that they'd like the prescribed burn to exclude. The pasture had a cedar removal project several years ago, so young cedars have emerged and dot the hillsides. They would like to burn this coming spring.



Ashley Garrelts with the Sandhills Taskforce talking with Brad and Paula Pokorny during their field visit.

FAREWELL TO ASHLEY

The Fire Team recently bid farewell to Ashley Oblander who has taken a new job with Pheasants Forever Quail Forever in Tekamah, Nebraska.

Ashley has been with the Fire Team since February 2021 and made great contributions to prescribed fire in the Sandhills. She's a dedicated leader and taskmaster who organized many fire trainings and workshops. Along with Joel and our partners, she lead the way to the formation of the Garfield Loup Wheeler Prescribed Burn Association. Her hard work ethic, impressive intuitiveness, and great communication skills made her a valuable asset when working with partners and landowners. We will miss seeing her on the fireline regularly, but want to wish her all the best in her new endeavors!



Chad and Ashley on a summer burn (above). Ashley leading a line on a prescribed burn (right).



SUMMER BY NUMBERS

BURNS
COMPLETED

1

LANDOWNER
VISITS

5

FIRE TRAINING/
WORKSHOPS

4

WORKSHOP
PARTICIPANTS

88

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Advanced Firefighter (S131) Training, Niobrara Valley Preserve, Sept. 12th & 13th
- Western Nebraska Engine Academy, hosted by Gering Fire Department, Sept. 16th & 17th.



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