

Niobrara Valley Preserve Prescribed Fire Training Exchange

Johnstown, Nebraska
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The Niobrara Valley Preserve Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (TREX), hosted by the Fire Learning Network and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in Nebraska, welcomed 35 fire practitioners with a wide range of qualifications, backgrounds, knowledge and skills. Using the Incident Command System structure, the objective of this TREX was the implementation of prescribed burning on this TNC preserve, to preserve grasslands ecosystems while providing good training opportunities.

Weather Summary

Weather conditions in Nebraska vary a great deal. In the spring, temperatures can range from the low 20s to high 80s in a short period of time. Shifting winds and high gusts are also characteristic of this area of the Great Plains. Besides these conditions, during this TREX, relative humidity was in the 20-30% much of the time, so we were under red-flag conditions most of the days. Safe burn windows were scarce, with only April 17 being a 'go' day.

Training Opportunities

Every day started with a briefing where the Incident Action Plan was updated and explained, and weather conditions, objectives, structure, and communication and safety plans were shared.

April 10: The first operational period started with an individual introductions from everybody, followed by some team-building and readiness activities with PPE, tools and equipment.

During the first two days there were also several drills and operational training opportunities. These covered engine and UTV familiarization, fire-shelter deployment, radio communication, wet-line and black-line operations—everything necessary to be ready when a burn window opened.

April 12: In the morning the Nebraska Forest Service requested our support on a wildfire burning in Chery County, the McCann Canyon Fire, which had been spreading for two days. The whole TREX contingent reported to the scene to be part of operations, and the wildfire that was controlled that evening, after burning more than 4,000 acres.

April 13: We conducted an after action review (AAR) of our work on the wildfire, which gave us the opportunity to reflect on and



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learn about safety, strategies and timing. This was followed by scouting and preparation of future units.

April 17: On our first non-red-flag day, and under good weather conditions, we implemented our first burn. Divided into two divisions, we accomplished 581 acres of good fire, and everybody had the chance to be part of firing or control teams. It was a great training opportunity for everyone and allowed us to implement everything we had learned in class or in drills. The following day the whole team had the chance to observe fire effects, patrol and mop up the unit, and hold an AAR.

April 19: We visited the Nebraska National Forest, with the objective of evaluating the effects of a high intensity wildfire they had months before, as well as discussing land management strategies and wildland urban-agricultural interface analysis.

And onward: The following days we continued with more individual and agency presentations that gave us the opportunity to learn more about each other's institutions and personal experiences, including some international programs and initiatives, challenges and opportunities.

Some Final Thoughts

- Previous training (IS-100, IS-700, S-130, L-180 and S-190) and the arduous pack test are super important for attending these events, as is some knowledge on integrated fire management concepts.
- The language barriers among Portuguese, Spanish and English language participants that could have interfered in communication processes were solved through good attitude, meetings, briefings, and time given for some translations.
- We think we are just in the initial learning curve of our prescribed fire implementation and fire effects careers, so we need more training opportunities. Definitely, we are ready for more!
- We want to thank the Niobrara Valley Preserve and its entire staff, The Nature Conservancy, Fire Learning Network, Watershed Research and Training Center and the TREX Coaches Network people for this incredible opportunity, and mostly, and most important, everybody with whom we had the chance to learn and share these incredible days—GRACIAS!!!!

For more about Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges, visit:
<http://nature.ly/trainingexchanges>

For more about the Niobrara Valley Preserve TREX:
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Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges are part of the *Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together* (PERFACT) cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more about PERFACT, contact Marek Smith at marek_smith@tnc.org.

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