



Prescribed Fire Training Exchange Notes from the Field

Niobrara, Nebraska

March, 2011

Spring break for the 13 students who came to the Niobrara to burn was filled with hard work. Besides the homework and reading assignments, University of Idaho students served in firefighter and firing boss positions during a series of prescribed burns. Two contract firefighters from Spain and one from California were also participants in this training exchange, and the Hiawatha National Forest and Iowa Department of Natural Resources provided crews and equipment.

All of the participants received tremendous experience, burning every day. A core of leaders had been mobilized days before the event began, working several days to prepare units and burn plans and familiarize themselves with the equipment. Thus everything was in place, so on the first day that the taskforce was fully staffed, the team conducted a 3,000-acre burn.



Top: Firefighters from the Hiawatha National Forest (Michigan), Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service's Niobrara National Scenic River staff review maps and ignition patterns during a controlled burn on the Conservancy's Niobrara Valley Preserve

Bottom: Dr. Penelope Morgan of the University of Idaho's College of Natural Resources, discusses the fire ecology of the site with participants who traveled to the exchange from Spain as the crew waited for the snow to melt so the burn could be conducted



I had no idea that it was going to affect me to the degree that it has. From a training standpoint, I couldn't have asked for more. To have the opportunity to learn from all of you, who come from different backgrounds and experiences, was priceless. Sometimes in this field, we get blinders on and think that the only way to operate is the way that you've always been doing it. My eyes have been opened to the fact that there is more than one way to skin a cat. It was so valuable to get to practice and observe techniques that I've only read about. There's a much bigger world out there than what I've been in, and I am inspired to experience it!

—training exchange participant

Spring 2011 Training Exchange by Agency & Role

		The Nature Conservancy	USDA Forest Service	US Fish and Wildlife Service	National Park Service	Bureau of Indian Affairs	Bureau of Land Management	State/Local Government	Military	Other Non-Profit	Private	University	International
Trainee totals:		29	4	1	2		1	2			4	13	2
Position	SIRB-FIRB/ENGB	5	1	1							1		2
	FFT1	17	1					1			2	13	
	FEMO	3	1		2								
	RXB2 / RXB3	4	1				1	1			1		
	cadre		3	1				3			1		

... Lots of small and modest sized cedars were killed and some larger cedars as well. The burned units will be beautiful later this spring, and ideal for providing some tours for folks in the area who are not familiar with the benefits of prescribed burning, and likely hesitant to venture into this management practice on their own lands. The potential education and demonstration values are tremendous ...

—landowner



Left: Much of the land along the Niobrara River has high conservation and recreation value—the National Park Service manages the area as a National Scenic River, and The Nature Conservancy and National Audubon Society have preserves in the area. As is the case across much of the Great Plains, the prairie along the river is being encroached upon by red cedar.

Right: In addition to meeting the training needs of participants, the exchange successfully treated over 6,200 acres on Audubon and Conservancy preserves to reduce encroachment by red cedar. Having the large crews on site allows for these large, and sometimes complex, burns to be safely completed—a project that is often beyond the capacity of local resources. Photos: TNC / Kyle Lapham

Training exchanges are supported by Promoting Ecosystem Resiliency through Collaboration: Landscapes, Learning and Restoration, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more information about the exchanges, contact Jeremy Bailey at jeremy_bailey@tnc.org or (801) 599-1394.



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