



## Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field



Photo: Jose Luis Duce

# Niobrara River Valley TRES

## Prescribed Fire Training Exchange March 14-29, 2015

**Fifty fire people**—firefighters and fire practitioners, college students and professors, and local farmers and ranchers—gathered at the Niobrara Valley Preserve in north-central Nebraska for two weeks of experiential learning opportunities. Over the course of the training exchange, they shared their knowledge—both formally, through presentations, and informally—and conducted a series of controlled burns on The Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Valley Preserve and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge.

**On the first day**, while high winds and low humidity led to Red Flag warnings, participants received really interesting introductions to grasslands ecosystems, the community of Valentine's Firewise program, the Fire Learning Network, fire-related smart-phone technology and the basics of black-lining, one of the most effective ways to create a safe control line in the local fuels.

**As the weather** became more conducive to burning, resources and equipment were ready to burn on day two. Incident Commander Chad Bladow led a team of six overhead plus two task forces (two modules of 10 people each, with some variations during the course of the incident). During 12 full operational periods, this solid team worked together to burn seven burn units (3,691 acres) in seven burn days. The burns met the expectations of preserve staff, who has planned and prepped these units in the months leading up to the TRES, facilitating the burning.

**Over the weekend**, volunteer firefighters from the Gering VFD took part in a special training embedded within the TRES. This two-day training, planned by Emily Hohman and delivered with assistance from Jeremy Bailey, Rodolfo Zúñiga and Steve Dyer, included both classroom and field segments on controlled burn firing operations, covering techniques, patterns, timing and safety.

## Participating Agencies & Organizations

Center for Natural Lands Management  
Colorado State University  
Department of Defense—Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Fish and Wildlife Program  
Doane College  
Gering Volunteer Fire Department  
Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks  
Los Angeles Fire Department  
National Park Service  
Nebraska Forest Service  
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission  
Northern Arizona University  
Northern Prairies Land Trust  
The Nature Conservancy  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
University of Idaho  
University of Missouri  
University of Nebraska at Lincoln  
USDA Forest Service  
Utah Department of Natural Resources  
Wildland Restoration International



In 2008 the Niobrara Valley hosted one of the first TRES, and this year's event brings the landscape's total to seven. Grasslands, bison, local fire capacity and university students have all reaped the benefits. *Photos: Jose Luis Duce*

“Downtime” during red flag weather and other times when burning wasn’t possible was packed with classroom sessions, unit scouting and preparation, and mop-up and patrol assignments. A positive, flexible, professional and always-fire-ready attitude by the Incident Management Team and participants prevailed throughout the entire TRES. As a result of this—and a good dose of hard work—participants left with many new and valuable skills and a well-justified sense of great accomplishment.



## NIOBRARA NUMBERS

**3,691** ACRES of burning on 7 units for 2 landowners

Participants in this TRES completed six burns at the Niobrara Valley Preserve (TNC) and one unit on the Ft. Niobrara NWR (US FWS).

**30** fire professionals worked on their **NWCG TASK BOOKS** and all participants received an Incident Personnel Performance Rating (ICS form 225)

**25** UNIVERSITY students and professors took part during their spring breaks  
For the fourth year in a row, students formed a large proportion of this training exchange, gaining valuable practical experience and connections, and bringing a fresh perspective to the work. This year six universities were represented in the crews.

geographically diverse with participants from **12** states



Photos: Jose Luis Duce

### Presentations by TRES Participants and Partners

- Annual Fire Management Numbers from The Nature Conservancy (Jeremy Bailey)
- Black-lining Operations (Wade Snyder)
- Fire Adapted Communities (Wendy Fulks)
- Firewise Program in Valentine Area (Jen Corman)
- Geographical Information Systems (T.C. Christensen)
- Mediterranean Ecosystems (José Luis Duce)
- My Phone is on Fire: Mobile Fire Applications (Sam Lindblom)
- National Wildlife Refuge System (Kathy McPeak)
- Prescribed Fire Management for Biodiversity in the Grasslands (Scott Moats)
- Six Minutes for Media (Chad Bladow)

For more information about this TRES, contact:

**Rich Walters**  
rwalters@tnc.org

For more information about TRES being offered elsewhere across the country, visit:

<http://nature.ly/trainingexchanges>

TRES are part of *Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together (PERFACT)*, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. For more information on PERFACT, contact Lynn Decker ldecker@tnc.org or (801) 320-0524.



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v. 14 Apr15/Jose Luis Duce