

Grant aids Prescribed Burn Task Force efforts

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The Prescribed Burn Task Force, initiated by the Central Platte Natural Resources District, will receive \$20,900 from the Nebraska Environmental Trust to continue educating landowners on the management benefits that prescribed fire can have on grasslands.

Funding for the project was announced by the Trust Board earlier this month. This is the third and final year of award with funding totaling \$14,970,328. The project is one of the 88 projects receiving grant awards from the Nebraska Environmental Trust this year.

NRD officials said prescribed fire is an effective, economical tool to use in the management of grasslands by restoring native prairie and grassland bird habitat.

In 1996, interest in prescribed fire among land users was increasing. The need for safe uses of fire as a management tool became evident. Out of that need, a group of volunteer firemen, federal and state agency personnel and private organizations partnered together to form the Prescribed Burn Task Force (PBTF), the first of its kind in Nebraska.

The PBTF encompasses four counties in south central Nebraska: Buffalo, Custer, Dawson and Lincoln. In 11 years the PBTF has successfully taught 1,255 people at its spring burn schools and completed demonstration burns on 28,780 acres.

The PBTF tool caches that were purchased with previous grants and donations have helped immensely, but there are not enough tool caches to meet the needs. Interest has increased so much that more tool caches are needed for use by the four counties' producers and those land owners in nearby counties.

With the grant, the PBTF hopes to continue quality schools and the purchasing of five additional tool caches.

The fact that PBTF's influence and success has gone from four counties to 34 Nebraska counties and nine in Iowa and South Dakota speaks for the cooperation between public and

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private entities.

The partnership has grown over the years but the focus of the group remains the same: to facilitate cooperation among landowners/land managers to enhance grassland resources through education, demonstration and application of prescribed burning and related management techniques.

The health and productivity of Nebraska's rangelands, the largest land use in the state, is jeopardized by encroaching Eastern Red Cedar trees.