

Comments accepted on plan that protects wildlife

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The draft North Central Nebraska Community Wildfire Protection Plan for the counties of Boyd, Brown, Cherry, Holt, Keya Paha, and Rock is ready for public review.

Public meetings are scheduled during the first week of December to answer questions and accept comments.

The plan updates the 2009 protection plan adopted in Brown, Cherry, Keya Paha, and Rock counties to improve collaboration and communication among the various agencies and organizations who manage fire in the central Niobrara River valley, and to effectively manage wildfire and hazardous fuels.

The Central Niobrara Watershed Fire Advisory Council recommended expanding the plan boundary to coincide with the Region 24 Emergency Management Area that includes Boyd, Brown, Cherry, Keya Paha and Rock counties.

Holt County, which has its own emergency management area, opted to be included in this effort. The amended plan updates outdated information in the original plan, and adds information about the Firewise Communities program that is currently being implemented in the area.

Having a protection plan in place allows the Nebraska Forest Service to apply for funds to cost-share forest fuels reduction treatments in at-risk areas within the plan boundaries.

This boundary adjustment may also provide increased opportunities for counties, municipalities, and rural fire districts to seek grant funding for activities related to fire protection.

Meetings are scheduled as follows:

Monday, Dec. 1, 3 p.m., O'Neill, Holt County Courthouse, Supervisors' meeting room.

Tuesday, Dec. 2, 4 p.m., Butte, Lower Niobrara NRD meeting room.

Wednesday, Dec. 3, 4 p.m., Bassett, RC&D meeting room.

Thursday, Dec. 4, 4 p.m., Valentine, Cherry County Courthouse, Commissioners' meeting room.

Comments will be accepted at the meetings, or they may be sent by mail to the Nebraska Forest Service, Box 130, Bassett, NE 68714 or emailed to sbenso4@unl.edu.