

In the future, fuels treatment programs may spread to other areas of the state to address growing concerns about hazardous coniferous forest fuel loads. The first step toward this expansion is completing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).

A CWPP is a plan for how a community will address and reduce its wildland fire risk. This plan can be completed with help from NFS. Once the plan is in place, these locales become eligible to apply for fuels treatment grants—again with assistance from NFS.



If the grant application is approved, landowners can begin working with NFS foresters and local contractors to implement fuels treatment projects and receive cost-share assistance for their approved and completed fuels treatment projects.

Other fuels treatment opportunities exist for Nebraska landowners whose land is adjacent to National Forest land. Contact your nearest NFS forester for details about this program.

TO LEARN MORE

For more information about forest fuels treatment and cost-share assistance provided by the Nebraska Forest Service, contact your local NFS district office:

Bassett

Sandy Benson
(402) 684-2290
sbenson4@unl.edu

Chadron

Doak Nickerson
(308) 432-3255
hnickerson1@unl.edu

Fred McCartney
(308) 432-8159
fmccartney@unl.edu

Ord

Rich Woollen
(308) 728-3221
rwoollen1@unl.edu



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THE GROWING RISK

Centuries ago wildfires burned across the landscape. These fires were frequent enough that they reduced forest fuel loads by burning grass and other debris that accumulated on the forest floor and keeping brush and tree seedlings in check. Because they remained mostly surface fires and didn't spread into the forest canopy, these fires helped rejuvenate and regenerate young trees and shrubs and were less destructive than those seen in Nebraska during the last few years.

However, with today's growing and dispersing population, wildfires cannot be allowed to burn as they once did. More people are moving into rural, often forested areas, meaning that homes and other structures are vulnerable when catastrophic wildland fires occur.

We are also seeing warmer summers and shorter winters. Several years of below-average precipitation have left our forests and grasslands dangerously dry. Fire seasons are starting sooner and lasting longer.

All the while, our forests continue to grow. As they do, pine needles, pine cones and branches accumulate on the forest floor. Brush and small-diameter trees growing in the forest understory near larger overstory trees are known as "ladder fuels" because they serve as a pathway for ground fires to become highly destructive crown fires.

When fires reach the forest canopy, they behave erratically and can quickly spread and change direction. Because of their erratic behavior, crown fires are also harder to suppress, making firefighters' jobs more difficult and more dangerous.

As the crowns of trees are consumed by fire, there is a tremendous release of energy. This heat energy creates powerful columns of rising air capable of carrying firebrands, such as burning pine cones or small branches. These firebrands cause spot fires in front of the advancing fire and rain down on structures in the fire's path, putting property—and lives—at risk.



In overstocked forests, fires can quickly spread from the ground into the forest canopy. These highly destructive crown fires spread rapidly and are difficult—and dangerous—to suppress.

WHAT CAN HOMEOWNERS DO?

Forest landowners can take steps to reduce forest fuel loads on their land, thus creating an environment less prone to crown fires and rapid fire spread.

Fuels treatment projects are conducted within overgrown forestland to remove ladder fuels and create space between the crowns of overstory trees. During fuels treatment projects, timber is removed either



To decrease forest fuel loads, timber is removed either by hand or mechanically (above). Leftover debris, also called slash, is either scattered to decompose; piled for controlled burning or wildlife habitat; or chipped for use in woody energy systems. Chadron State College currently uses 9,000 tons of wood chips each year to heat and cool more than 1 million square feet of building space.

mechanically or by hand. Leftover debris, also called slash, is typically scattered and left to decompose or piled for controlled burning or wildlife habitat. In some cases, the slash is chipped and used as fuel by institutions with wood energy systems, such as Chadron State College.

The benefits of fuels treatment projects reach far beyond decreasing the risk of catastrophic wildland fire. Fuels treatment projects also:

- improve the overall health and sustainability of forests;
- preserve water quality;
- enhance wildlife habitat;
- create wood products; and
- strengthen local economies.

COST-SHARE ASSISTANCE FROM NFS

The Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) has several types of cost-share assistance available to eligible landowners.

Using state and federal funds, NFS is able to provide eligible forest landowners up to 75 percent cost-share assistance for fuels treatment projects on their forest land. These programs are currently open to forest landowners in the Pine Ridge and Niobrara Valley areas.

