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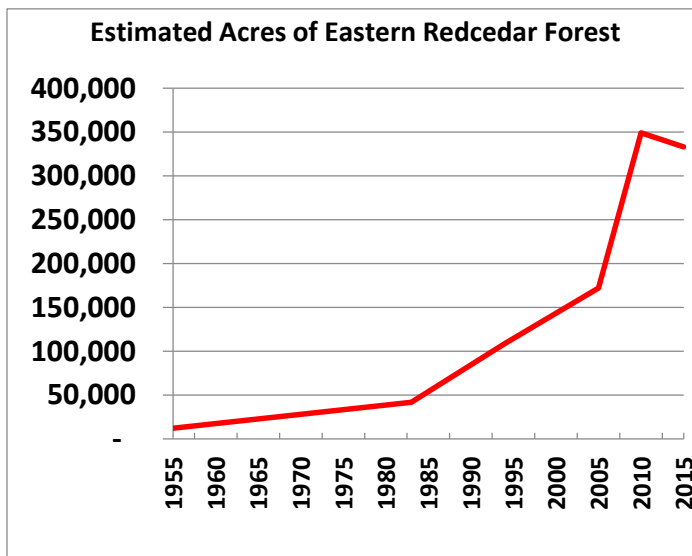
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****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

Report Shows Decline of Eastern Redcedar Forest

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(LINCOLN, Neb.) – A newly released report by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) says that management through tree cutting and prescribed burning has slowed the expansion of eastern redcedar (ERC) forests in Nebraska. The report, which analyzes data from forest plot samples collected from 2010-2015, shows a 30,000-acre net loss of redcedar forest area since 2013. Signs that removals outpaced expansion are significant given that ERC was rapidly spreading as recently as 2010.



“The net loss clearly demonstrates the potential that management of ERC can have on the health and vitality of Nebraska’s grasslands and forests,” said Nebraska State Forester, Scott Josiah.

Eastern redcedar is a valuable native tree, but because of its aggressive tendency to colonize new areas, it’s also considered a major threat to the health of the state’s natural resources by Nebraska’s Conservation Roundtable. When left unchecked its rapid spread increases wildfire risks, reduces forage and available grazing land, and damages critical habitat for birds, small mammals and pollinators. However, the USDA inventory indicates that through targeted management a reduction in the spread of redcedar forest is achievable.

“The good news is that management had a measureable impact,” said Josiah. “The flipside is there are still an estimated 275 million seedlings under existing forests and millions more on grasslands that don’t show up in the survey.”

If conditions are favorable for redcedar growth and management efforts remain limited, Josiah adds a population explosion in central and eastern Nebraska’s forests and grasslands could happen in the near future. Dr. Craig Allen—leader of the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit—says those removals would be costly. Mechanical treatments range anywhere from \$120 to \$1,000 an acre, and prescribed burning remains an underutilized option.

“Complex terrain, lack of training opportunities for landowners, negative perceptions of prescribed fire and laws that restrict the number of potential safe burning days limit implementation of fire.”

Efforts to devise alternatives that would drive the reduction of redcedar populations prompted the Nebraska Forest Service to conduct feasibility studies to assess new market opportunities including: woody biomass energy, biochar, compost-and-mixing with coal in power plants, and work with the state’s forest products industry to increase traditional markets for redcedar material including fence posts and lumber.

“There simply aren’t enough cost-share funds available to reverse this problem over the long term”, said Adam Smith, who focuses on forest products utilization for the Nebraska Forest Service. “Redcedar utilization and market development, combined with management, are the most sustainable ways of exploiting this new resource while decreasing its spread in Nebraska.”

Currently, there are nearly 350,000 acres of redcedar growing in the state. Because of the high value of the wood produced, redcedar is emerging as an important and valuable renewable resource that can support jobs in rural areas.

“To make this happen, we need to build public-private partnerships that exploit this new resource, and tap into existing and emerging markets that drive ERC removal from locations where it is not wanted,” said Josiah.

(The USDA’s Forests of Nebraska, 2015 provides an overview of forest resources in Nebraska based on inventories conducted by the U.S. Forest Service, Forest Inventory and Analysis program of the Northern Research Station.)

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