

THE RURAL FIREFIGHTER

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Nebraska Forest Service

www.nfs.unl.edu

Nebraska Experiences Record-Breaking Wildland Fire Season

Never before has so much of Nebraska been scorched in a single year.

Large fires alone accounted for almost 400,000 acres. Final reports show that over 1,500 fires burned more than half a million acres (see page 2 for more information). Lightning sparked the largest and most destructive fires, however equipment use and debris burning also accounted for a significant number of acres burned.

The season started early with lightning in the Harrison Fire District. Before being brought under control, the Cottonwood Fire burned more than 4,000 acres, impacting many of the same landowners who faced wildfire just six years ago. NFS supported this incident by sending Nebraska Engine 841, staffed by nationally certified NFS firefighters, and a 5,000-gallon water tender to the area for several days. At virtually the same time, a fire near Potter, also believed to have been caused by lightning, blackened 3,000 acres.

As drought strengthened in July, lightning-caused fires increased, eventually consuming almost 85,000 acres across counties including Logan, Banner, Thomas, Brown, Keya Paha and Dawes. The scenic Niobrara River Valley was the hardest hit. The Region 24

Complex—the Fairfield Creek, Wentworth and Hall fires—burned more than 75,000 acres and destroyed 31 structures, including homes. It damaged thousands of acres of rangeland and resulted in a dramatic change for cattle ranchers that could send ripples through the area for years. NFS again sent Nebraska Engine 841 to assist along with a GIS Specialist and firefighting foam. Fire Shop staff also responded to repair apparatus on loan through NFS fire equipment programs.



The Wentworth Fire, part of the Region 24 Complex, pushing hard to the north on the day it started.

Conditions worsened as August arrived. Late summer fire danger is typically elevated in western Nebraska, but conditions in 2012 set the stage for catastrophic wildfires. Incidents in Dawes, Sheridan and Keith counties burned almost 200,000 acres. The combined impact of the two fires within the Region 23 Complex—the West Ash and Douthit Fires—make it one of the largest Nebraska incidents on record. Rocky Mountain Team C Incident Commander Joe Lowe reported early that “...lack of available resources have been a challenge, contributing to large fire growth.” Strategically placed fuels reduction projects spared Chadron State Park, a popular destination in the Pine Ridge, from significant

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“Record Breaking” continued from pg 1

damage.

Just when fire season seemed to be winding down, a warm, windy October resulted in another 78,000 acres burned, including almost 60,000 acres in a single 36-hour period. A 2,500-acre fire burning almost exclusively in corn stubble near Sutton damaged two homes, three machine sheds and a barn. Also lost were about 30 antique tractors, one valued at almost \$100,000, and approximately 350-400 center pivot tires.

It's a natural tendency, as the cold and shortened days of winter take hold, for many to forget the danger and lasting impact of wildfire. NFS is already concerned about what successive fire seasons may bring. Short-term forecasts predict continued dry weather this winter into spring. For the long term, fire history indicates that since 1964, large fire seasons are not only happening more often, the amount of acres burned is steadily increasing. It's becoming clear that the fires of today are not what they used to be. The growing acknowledgment of a new “normal” in wildland fire makes it imperative that Nebraska adapt to the growing complexity of fire management.

Much has been done to help firefighters and communities prepare for wildfire, but much remains, such as:

- Expansion of Firewise®, wildfire safety and fuels reduction programs to reduce risk to homeowners and rural landowners.

- Continue to improve the preparedness of Nebraska resources to ensure that well-trained, well-equipped firefighters are available to respond.

- Improve the ability to provide rapid, aggressive and efficient initial attack and coordinated extended attack. Firefighters were stretched too thin in 2012.

2012 Fire Season Statistics

Here are a few of the fires from the 2012 Nebraska fire season.

Name/Location	County	Month	Acres
Cottonwood	Sioux	June	4,500
Potter	Cheyenne	June	3,000
Logan County	Logan	July	5,100
Camp 5	Thomas	July	1,043
Fairfield Creek	Brown, Keya Paha	July	66,745
Wentworth	Keya Paha	July	6,373
Hall	Keya Paha	July	2,754
Ash Creek	Dawes	July	2,000
Steineke	Dawes	July	400
Eagle Canyon Hideaway	Keith	August	3,000
Otter Creek	Keith	August	40,000
McKeage	Keith	August	4,000
Ackley Valley	Keith	August	6,000
Glen Echo	Keith	August	7,500
West Ash	Dawes	Aug/Sept	56,470
Douthit	Dawes	Aug/Sept	29,730
Wellnitz	Sheridan	Aug/Sept	48,681
Stapleton	Lincoln	October	20,000
Various	Various	October	58,000

The 2012 Nebraska fire season far exceeded all others on record. Here's how the last big Nebraska wildfire seasons compared to last year.

Size Class	2012		2006		2000	
	Fires	Acres	Fires	Acres	Fires	Acres
A (0-¼ acres)	305	31	487	49	557	67
B (¼-10 acres)	804	1,609	961	1,884	964	2,064
C (10-99 ac)	294	9,215	356	10,827	342	10,507
D (100-299 ac)	50	8,061	45	6,376	61	9,308
E (300-999 ac)	37	18,257	31	14,053	33	17,047
F (1,000-4,999 ac)	15	29,036	9	13,861	18	43,298
G (5,000+ ac)	13	435,751	3	73,765	11	170,000
State Total	1,503	501,960	1,892	120,815	1,986	252,290

2013 Nebraska Wildland Fire Academy

Planning for the 2013 Nebraska Wildland Fire Academy (NWFA) is nearly complete. The dates for this year's NWFA are **April 13-21** at Fort Robinson State Park. By the time you read this, registration for the following courses should be open!



S-130/S-190/L-180 Basic Wildland Firefighter, S-131 Advanced Firefighter, S-133 Look Up, Look Down, Look Around, RT-130 Annual Fireline Safety Refresher (based on 2012 Nebraska fire season), S-211 Portable Pumps and Water Use, S-230 Single Resource Boss (blended learning), S-231 Engine Boss (blended learning), S-270 Basic Air Operations, S-215 Fire Operations in the Wildland Urban Interface, S-260 Incident Business Management, S-290 Intermediate Wildland Fire Behavior, L-280 Followership to Leadership, S-336 Tactical Decision Making in Wildland Fire, I-300 Intermediate ICS, I-400 Advanced ICS, FI-210 Wildland Fire Origin & Cause Determination, NWFA Incident Management Workshop, Elected Officials (not confirmed yet), RX-310 Introduction to Fire Effects.

Of course, some of these courses could change, but the schedule will be out soon, so pencil in the dates and stay tuned!

Website Updated

The Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) upgraded its website in December. In part, this was done to better align NFS with current University of Nebraska web guidelines, but it was also based on feedback received from the people we hope use it the most - YOU!



Current Nebraska Fire Danger and the wildfire and fire prevention reporting links are now in the right column for fast, easy access. Also, upcoming events, including wildfire training, are shown on the front page as well (click "See all NFS events" to see even more).

The Wildland Fire Protection Program page also improved. No longer is it a long main page with a confusing variety of links! Now, primary links to individual program areas are placed near the top for quick access. The Rural Firefighter also gained its own page,

complete with links to online archived issues of the newsletter back to 2007.

To see the new home of NFS on the web, go to nfs.unl.edu. As with any major upgrade, there could always be dead links or links pointing to the wrong page. If you run into any problems with the website, please contact Ryan Armbrust at rarmbrust2@unl.edu.



Truck Detail

Time to check the tires and (be prepared to) light the fires!!! Tires are often ignored until flats are discovered in the middle of a call and mutual aid is needed. You should be checking tire pressures weekly, or, not less than every time you have "truck check night", which is probably weekly anyway.

While you are down there with the air hose, check the condition of the tires. Look for low tread (remember, if you can see all of Abe's head). Your chances of flat tires and loss of traction increase greatly. Check the sidewalls for weather checking and separation, little cracks will only get bigger. Check to see if the tires are mated to each other on each side of the axle. Tires of different diameters will accelerate the wear on the bigger one, and believe

it or not, they can place a strain on the wheel bearings, also. New tires on one side of the axle and bald tires on the other can even put a strain on the suspension which will affect handling characteristics.



Tire height difference from front axle to rear axle can also raise problems with 4-wheel-drive power trains. It's also not a bad idea to clean out the mud that is all dried up and still between the duals from the last call. This dried mud can wedge between the tires and "scuff" the sidewalls, or even bend the valve stem.

I also would like all those who have military trucks, 2 1/2T and 5T 6X6's to inspect the rims and make sure that you have "welded" and not "riveted" rims. If you are not familiar with this, please call the shop and we can help you through the inspection. We stand by to help, just call.

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Sandy's Corner



Happy New Year Everyone!

We now have wrapped up the 2012 year (Tuesday, January 14) and what a year it has been! There were 1,518 fires reported with nearly 502,000 acres of wildland burned. Nearly 900 Mutual Aid reports were submitted and I was able to match 322. Unfortunately, we had a lot of departments that did not report; therefore, many fires could not be matched. I "preach" on this all year long about the importance of departments reporting, but there is just so much I can do.

Thanks to all of you who do report faithfully year after year. We could not pull this information together if it wasn't for each of you. We all hope 2013 is a better year than 2012 with much fewer fires and acres burned, but

from what I hear and read, that may not be the case if those raindrops don't start falling pretty soon. I think rain (and the lack of it) is going to be on everyone's mind in the coming months.

I want to apologize for the online reporting Google map being out this month due to reinstalling the new Google map. I received many emails and phone calls regarding this and I was just as unhappy as you were. It's a little late, but as of today it is up and running properly again. There is a change however! **In the past, you clicked on the map and the icon jumped to the new location, but now it is different. Now you will click on the icon and drag it to the new location.** This is a little different but workable for all of you. Anytime a new version is installed, there always seems to be something that doesn't work the same as the previous version and this was the case. If you have problems with this, please let me know.

Happy New Year to all of you from the fire staff and along with that wish, a sincere THANK YOU! We can't say often enough how much we appreciate your dedication and commitment to your local fire department and the people in your community.

Calendar of Events

- Feb. 8-10 Les Lukert Winter Conference, Kearney
- Feb. 12 Nebraska State Vol. Firefighters Assoc. Legislative Breakfast State Capital
- March 23 Wildfire on the Farm and Ranch (AM), Ignition Operations (PM), Springview
- April 13-21 6th Annual Nebraska Wildland Fire Academy, Fort Robinson State Park
- May 17-19 76th Annual Nebraska State Fire School, Grand Island

For additional wildfire training, visit nfs.unl.edu



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