

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Nebraska Forest Service Announces Grants to Rural Fire Departments

LINCOLN, Neb. – Providing financial assistance to fire departments in rural areas and rural communities is crucial to suppressing Nebraska’s wildland fires. This year the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS), through funding from the U.S. Forest Service, is providing a total of \$187,112 in Federal financial assistance for 91 Nebraska community projects through the Volunteer Fire Assistance Program (VFA).

“Nebraska’s rural firefighting resources are often the first line of defense in meeting expanded protection needs for wildland-urban interface fires,” said Don Westover, wildland fire protection program leader for the Nebraska Forest Service. “Of 490 local fire departments in Nebraska, 97 percent are volunteer. These departments provide, at no cost, wildfire and emergency protection service to 56 percent of the population and more than 99 percent of the state’s land area.”

The VFA program allows the NFS to cost-share up to 50 percent of the costs of firefighting equipment with Nebraska fire districts. Commonly purchased items are protective clothing, communications equipment, water tanks, breathing apparatus, safety equipment, fire prevention materials and firefighter training. Large items like fire trucks, fire stations and town sirens do not qualify.

Unfortunately, the need for rural firefighting equipment is much greater than the financial assistance made available through the Federal program. Rural fire departments submitted 142 project applications requesting more than \$983,000, leaving more than a \$795,000 shortfall.

Rural fire department needs are abundant. Some departments are working with equipment that is more than 20 years old. Their hoses leak, their protective clothing is worn and their equipment needs repair. Most departments do not have the financial resources that larger communities often take for granted.

The Nebraska Forest Service, an affiliate of the University of Nebraska, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR), works to enrich lives by protecting, restoring and utilizing Nebraska’s tree and forest resources.

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