

Nebraska Wildfire Control Act of 2013 (LB 634)

Nebraska Forest Service

2012 was the worst wildland fire year on record in Nebraska, with nearly 500,000 acres burned, 65 structures lost, at least \$12 million in suppression costs, and more than \$112 million in negative economic impacts. Higher temperatures, more frequent and intense droughts, increased forest fuel loads and the rapid spread of eastern Redcedar have created an explosive potential for very large wildfires across the state. These megafires occur far more frequently than in the past, spread and grow very rapidly immediately upon ignition and burn over large areas for weeks. They are difficult to control, overwhelm local suppression capacity, cost enormous amounts of money, and put lives and property of residents, visitors and emergency personnel at great risk.

Wildfire Control Act Goals

1. Substantially improve the **protection of life and property** across Nebraska by increasing the capacity of volunteer fire districts.
2. Help to **reduce wildfire size and intensity** through rapid and effective initial aerial attack, better trained firefighters, improved fire suppression equipment, and expanded forest fuels reduction activities.
3. **Reduce costs** to the state's emergency fund for wildfire suppression by keeping fires small.
4. **Mitigate damage** to watersheds caused by catastrophic wildland fire

LB 634 Actions/Components:

1. NEMA will contract with a private aviation company to place one Single Engine Air Tanker (SEATs) during the fire season at the Valentine airport to provide rapid initial attack and keep fires small. Create an NFS SEAT Base Manager position for on-the-ground assistance.
2. Using federal dollars from a US Forest Service grant to South Dakota, and state dollars appropriated by LB 634, SEAT bases will be established in Valentine, Alliance (heavy tanker base), and Chadron. A mobile SEAT base will also be developed and run by the NFS.
3. Provide cost-share funds to thin coniferous (pine and cedar) forests to reduce fuel loads, substantially reducing wildfire risk, intensity, and rate of the spread, and reduce risks to residents, communities and emergency personnel.
4. Create a strategic investment fund to promote the utilization of woody biomass and other forest products, facilitate new market development, and foster market-driven approaches to accomplish forest fuels reduction
5. Create 2 new Wildfire Training positions in the NFS to expand training programs for volunteer firefighters, private landowners, and communities in order to increase fire suppression effectiveness and safety (to be located in Chadron and Valentine);
6. Expand the Federal Excess Property Programs managed by the NFS to provide volunteer fire districts with more and a wider range of fire suppression equipment.
7. Provide cost-share funds for restoring forest lands that have been damaged by wildfires.

