

Nebraska Forest Service



UNIVERSITY OF
Nebraska
Lincoln

Strategic Plan
2016-2020



Our History

Recognition of the need for forestation and care of existing forests is a consistent priority for Nebraska. For more than 100 years, forestry has been a part of Nebraska’s work and mission, performed under the scope of several different state and university entities.

As early as 1903, the University of Nebraska Department of Forestry offered a four-year Bachelor of Science degree. Francis Miller was the first professor of forestry. In a publication entitled College of Agriculture of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln: The First Century, Elvin Frolik and Ralston Graham wrote, “That the university had high hopes for forestry is evident from the extent of the forestry curriculum as listed in the 1904-05 bulletin.” Eight different courses were offered at that time, including classes such as forest measurements, utilization, and policy and farm forestry.

Though the department had distinguished graduates and an “excellent reputation,” it was abolished in 1915. The Nebraska Forestry Department faced increasing competition from nascent forestry schools across the country, and had lost its biggest advocate and spiritual father, Dean Charles E. Bessey. When the University was faced with a severe budget crisis in the spring of 1915, the regents and the state Legislature decided to focus its reduced resources on courses directly related to agriculture.

From 1916 to 1924, forestry duties were consolidated under the University’s extension horticulturist. This individual primarily shared the principles of effective windbreaks, tree planting and nurturing, and fire prevention with farmers and ranchers across the state. In 1920-21, the University again offered a farm forestry course.

The Clarke-McNary Act, passed in 1924 by the U.S. Congress, established an extension forester position for duties that included tree distribution, education, establishment of fire control districts, and efforts toward fire suppression. Clayton Watkins was the first to hold this position in 1925, followed by Earl Maxwell and Carl Loerch.

In 1921, a Conservation and Survey Division was created at the University. Duties included surveying and describing the forests and other natural resources of the state. Myron Jenkins would serve as Forestry Survey and Research Director from 1936-1943, and he would correspond with residents across the state concerning tree planting, windbreaks, fire prevention, etc.

The Game, Forestation, and Parks Commission was formed in 1929. However, little attention was given to forestry. Actual forestry activity continued to be performed by the extension foresters and the Director of Forestry Survey and Research.

The Nebraska extension foresters and the survey director promoted and educated the public about the Prairie States Forestry Project from 1935 to 1942.

Horning Farm was bequeathed to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) in 1950 for “forestry purposes.” Formal research in forestry was initiated in 1955 when Walt Bagley was hired and given responsibility for a tree improvement program.

In 1957, the University entered into an agreement with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Federal funds would be matched with state extension forestry funds. Many activities at that time focused on fire: turning federal excess property into rural firefighting equipment and training in rural fire protection. Other efforts involved educating communities about how to deal with challenges such as Dutch elm disease and the distribution of tree seedlings.

In 1959, forestry was added to the Department of Horticulture and renamed the Department of Horticulture and Forestry. That same year, the UNL Department of Horticulture and Forestry was assigned management responsibility for the farm. Cooperative research began in 1960 with UNL and USFS. Today, the farm is known as the Horning Farm State Demonstration Forest.

The Nebraska Legislature created the office of state forester in 1967, removing this position and its responsibilities from the “Game, Forestation and Parks Commission” and placing it under the authority of the University. Ellsworth Benson was the first acting state forester.

Forestry remained combined with the Department of Horticulture until 1974, when a new Department of Forestry was designated with State Forester Benson as its acting head. It remained its own department until 1977 when it was included as part of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Wildlife (FFW). The Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) was formally created that year as a division of the new FFW.

In 1998, the NFS became a separate unit (essentially the state’s forestry agency) within the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR). In 1999, management responsibility for Horning State Farm was transferred to NFS, and in 2004 became part of the University of Nebraska system, administratively located within IANR.

In 2009, the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum (NSA) merged with NFS and began operating as a NFS program. NSA’s mission of “sustainable landscapes for healthy homes and communities” is fulfilled through initiatives in education, community landscapes and the environment. In 2013, the Wildfire Control Act made cost-share funding available to landowners to help reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.



Several crews of men work to saw limbed trees in the Pine Ridge. Operations such as this one in 1944, created fence posts for the state’s growing agricultural needs.



Nebraska Forest Service Strategic Plan

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On the cover: Chat Canyon Wildlife Management Area was purchased in 2013 as a joint effort with the Nebraska Forest Service-University of Nebraska, U.S. Forest Service, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Nebraska Environmental Trust, The Conservation Fund and the National Wild Turkey Federation. This significant 400-plus-acre property is bisected by the Niobrara River. Photo by Eric Fowler, NEBRASKAland Magazine. Used with permission.



Executive Summary

The Nebraska Forest Service (NFS), as part of the University of Nebraska and the UNL Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR), provides comprehensive forestry education, technical and financial assistance, and many other services to Nebraskans. NFS is firmly committed to leading the state in sustaining and improving Nebraska's tree and forest resources, caring for and utilizing these resources wisely, and developing wood product markets to foster greater utilization.

Trees and forests provide many benefits to the citizens of Nebraska. They create valuable wildlife habitat, provide recreational opportunities, clean our water and air, save energy, and contribute to the "Good Life" that all Nebraskans enjoy. These resources also bolster Nebraska's forest industry, helping create thousands of jobs and generate substantial economic growth.

Globally, forests are facing many challenges, including land use conversion, deforestation, introduced pests and invasives and a changing

climate. These same pressures impact Nebraska's tree and forest resources. Increasingly severe and intense fires, storms, floods, drought and pests all threaten these vital resources across the state.

This strategic plan focuses on actions that will ensure that Nebraskans continue to enjoy the many benefits generated by healthy, resilient, and



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productive trees and forests, long into the future. NFS works to protect and enhance our tree and forest resources through the Wildland Fire Protection, Rural Forestry, and Forest Health programs.

The Community Forestry and Sustainable Landscape program focuses on creating a better life in communities through trees. The Forest Products Utilization program enables NFS to assist landowners and entrepreneurs in the profitable management of their forests and wood products businesses.

NFS, together with partners and the people of Nebraska, implements effective programs that plant, care for, restore, manage and utilize Nebraska's trees and forests. This strategic plan charts the agency's course over the next 3-5 years to ensure that these programs remain relevant and impactful in a rapidly changing world.



Vision

The Nebraska Forest Service leads the state by inspiring and assisting others to create and sustain healthy, productive forests.

Mission

Our mission is to enrich the lives of Nebraska's citizens by protecting, restoring and utilizing Nebraska's tree and forest resources.

Core Values

Our core values are integrity in all interactions, responsible and sustainable stewardship, and outstanding service in addressing Nebraska's needs.



(Above): NFS provides training, equipment, financial support and technical assistance to rural and urban fire districts.



Our Mission

Protecting Our Forests

Nebraska boasts unique and diverse forests—ranging from large expanses of ponderosa pines in the Panhandle's Pine Ridge, to thousands of miles of riparian forests along our rivers, to dense hardwood forests hugging the rolling Missouri River bluffs.



For a long time, trees have made a profound difference in our especially challenging Great Plains environment. Natural riparian forests were of enormous value to Native Americans for winter shelter and heat for themselves and their animals. Settlers also valued trees for their protection and beauty. They planted thousands of trees that continue to alter Nebraska's landscape. More than 37,000 miles of trees still work hard as part of farm and ranch windbreaks. These critically important buffers protect crops and soils, clean air and water, shelter farmsteads and livestock, enhance wildlife habitat, and provide wood for clean-burning renewable fuel and commercial products.

Trees also help define our communities. Healthy trees connect people and nature, enhance the beauty of a community, enrich our quality of life, and benefit our economy. Trees shade and extend the life of roads, provide vital green spaces, increase real estate values in communities, and support thousands of jobs.

But these forests—community trees and conservation plantings—face multiple threats such as drought, floods, severe weather events and invasive pests and diseases. Unnaturally dense, highly stressed pine and cedar forests are at great risk for insect and disease epidemics as well as catastrophic wildland fires.

Emerald ash borer, mountain pine beetle and thousand cankers disease of walnut all threaten Nebraska's trees and demand attention.

NFS maintains a comprehensive array of programs specifically designed to address these threats. To reduce the risk of wildland fire, NFS trains firefighters, provides millions of dollars of surplus equipment and grants to rural fire districts, and thins tens of thousands of acres of overly dense forests to reduce forest fuel loads. NFS continually monitors Nebraska's forests for pests and diseases and works with others to rapidly respond to these growing threats. NFS serves as an advocate for planting the right trees, in the right place, in the right way. This creates resilient community forests essential to helping communities cope with a warming world. NFS foresters help landowners protect and manage their forests for an array of profitable uses. NFS also provides information, training, education and assistance services statewide.

Restoring Our Forests

Large areas of trees and forests in Nebraska have suffered severe damage over the past decade, primarily due to severe drought, wildfires, and unprecedented flooding. Millions of trees have died and formerly forested areas are littered with dead and dying trees. In some cases, only a few live trees remain to help

regenerate the forest. Future damage will almost certainly occur to 43 million ash trees due to the unavoidable invasion of the emerald ash borer.

NFS has a number of programs designed to help restore these damaged trees, and to enhance the resiliency and health of existing forests so they are better adapted to a changing climate. Financial and technical assistance to landowners is available to aid in removing dead or dying trees and replanting devastated forests. Unburned coniferous forests are being thinned to reduce fuel loads and the risk of catastrophic wildfire. New tree species and cultivars that are adapted to both present and expected climatic conditions are also being tested and planted in communities by NFS.

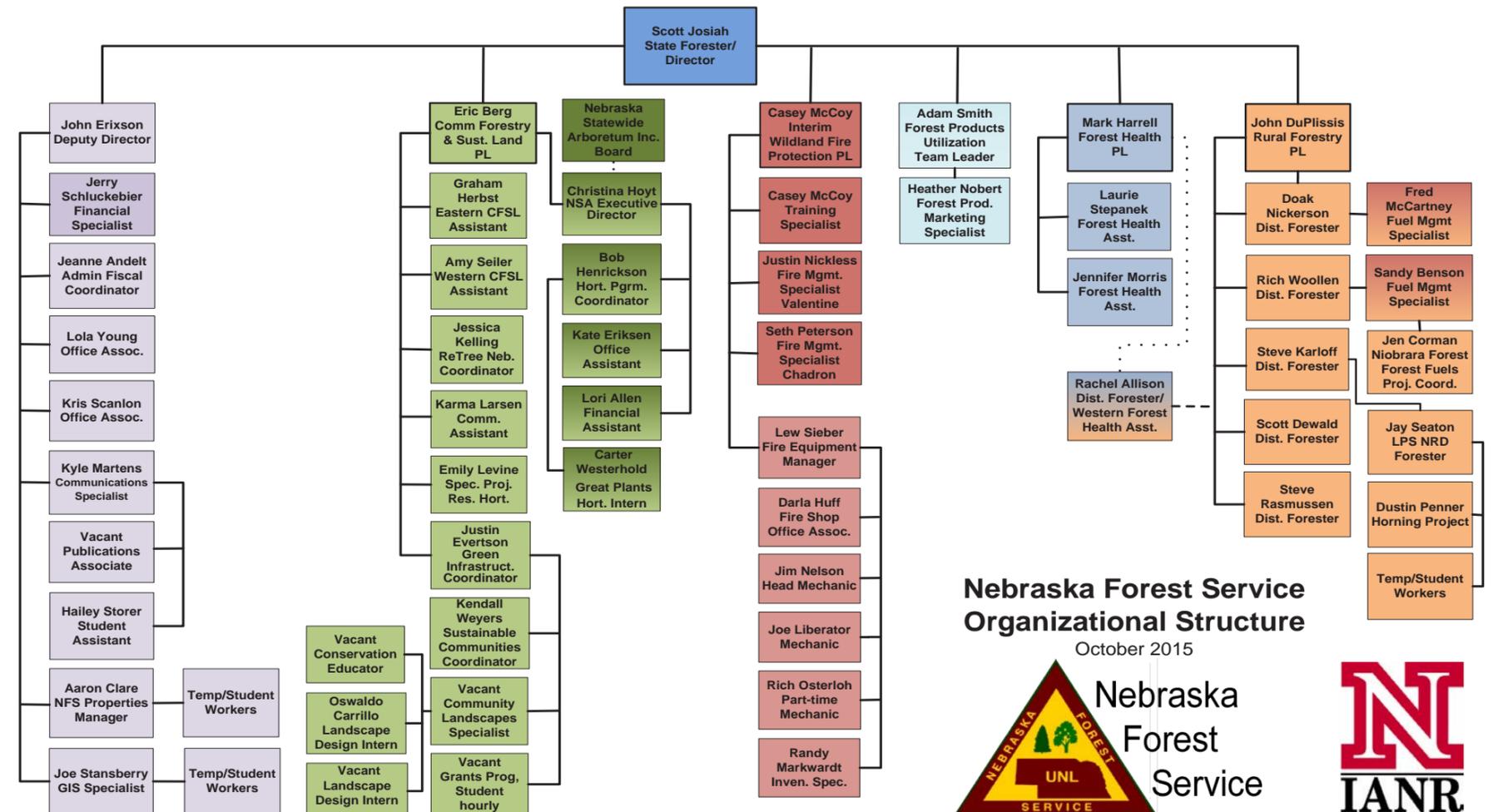
Utilizing Trees: A Renewable Resource

Trees and forests are renewable resources. Actively managing forests responsibly and sustainably is crucial to maximizing trees' economic benefits and ecological resilience and stability.

NFS also assists efforts to market and utilize forest resources for traditional wood products, specialty forest products and woody biomass. Thinning, harvesting and other forest management practices can provide a sustainable supply of wood products and woody biomass for fuel, mulch, biochar, lumber, posts and other value-added products. These practices improve forest health and generate substantial income and jobs in rural areas where it is badly needed.



Nebraska Forest Service Organizational Chart



Nebraska Forest Service Organizational Structure

October 2015





Strategic Initiative 1: Connect People to Trees, Landscape & Forests, and Engage Them in Stewardship

Overall Strategy: Change attitudes about the environment by providing the proper knowledge and skills that lead to on-the-ground action

Goal 1

Develop relevant information for stakeholders and the public for on-the-ground action.

Objectives:

1) Identify information gaps within key stakeholder groups; 2) Audit and utilize currently available and up-to-date information resources; 3) Develop relevant communication resources based on stakeholder needs.

Work collaboratively with partners to identify gaps in information, resources and knowledge which, if addressed, could lead to a change in tangible and effective actions. NFS will do this by assessing project work following workshops, collecting and analyzing data from stakeholders and partners, and evaluating workshops and training effectiveness.

Identify and review current Nebraska State Abortemum (NSA), NFS and other state and federal agency education material, pictures, information and data, and update and revise as needed. Create a simple, comprehensive package to provide consistent information on NFS/NSA programs.

NFS/NSA will continually evaluate new educational opportunities and publications to provide cutting edge, science-based information to stakeholders.

Metrics: Increase number of acres treated, forest stewardship projects initiated, and breadth and use of NFS educational materials that are available.

Goal 2

Enhance training and technology transfer capabilities of NFS and partners to foster tree and forest stewardship.

Objectives:

1) Train NFS staff on current education models (environmental, youth and adult education); 2) Establish new avenues for sharing and releasing information to stakeholders.

Continually enhance staff effectiveness by investing in training and education that increases the impacts of NFS workshops and training programs.

Work with traditional and non-traditional collaborators to effectively share printed and electronic information and materials.

Utilize technology as well as traditional teaching techniques to provide state-of-the-art workshops and to disseminate information to stakeholders of all ages. Provide information to promote the mission of NFS to the public to increase awareness, knowledge and service relevance.

Metrics: Increase number of successful efforts with stakeholders, collaborative educational efforts between NFS and partners, number of people trained (# of people/training hours, etc.), and number of workshops/training events offered. Measure skills and knowledge gained through pre/post assessments.

Goal 3

Create relevant services and programs that provide stakeholders with resources necessary to accomplish their goals.

Objective:

1) Create and support relevant grants and programs that help stakeholders accomplish specific goals or address critical needs.

NFS will be the experts in the state for all forestry issues and will provide this information to stakeholders.

Utilize NFS properties as demonstration sites and develop programs that inform and engage the public of the environmental, economic, psychological, social and human health benefits of trees and forests, including green infrastructure.

Provide effective cost-share programs that encourage people to plant the right tree, at the right place, at the right time and encourage participation in active management of Nebraska's forests. Disseminate information in ways that maximize participation.

Investigate trends and issues affecting trees and forests then develop and target programs to address these issues.

Metrics: Increase number of cost-share programs completed, number of trees planted, amount of cost-share dollars distributed, demo and workshops held, and number of overall participants.



Strategic Initiative 2: Manage Nebraska Forest Resources to Maximize its Benefits

Overall Strategy: Improve the social, environmental and economic productivity of Nebraska's forest resources

Goal 1

Effectively serve Nebraskans.

Objective:

1) Coordinate and align program efforts.

Provide effective leadership by aligning NFS human resources, budgets and programs to meet with current and emerging needs. Maintain programs that are flexible and proactive to best serve NFS clients in changing conditions. Create mechanisms to identify emerging needs. Focus effort in priority forest areas for maximum impact. Develop a single NFS accomplishment reporting system to better track program impacts and inform all NFS personnel.

Coordinate and cooperate with partners to share technology and investigate other avenues of cooperation between state agencies, UNL, NGOs, and private and federal partners. Participate in interagency committees (local, state, federal) to better serve NFS clients.

Metrics: Develop a single reporting system in 2015. Increase the number and effectiveness of partnerships.



Goal 2

Maintain healthy and productive forests.

Objectives:

1) Update inventories of forest resources to expand service beyond traditional treatment areas; 2) Increase resilience of rural, urban forests and conservation plantings to extreme weather events and a changing climate.

Utilize state-of-the-art forest inventory techniques and technology to characterize the forest resources in the state. Compare to historical forest cover and track trends and changes in the forest resources of the state.

Utilize inventory information to identify and prioritize areas for focused programmatic effort and impacts. Better serve stakeholders through targeted technical assistance and cost-share programs in high-priority areas.

Work with partners and clients to identify and implement ways to reduce risks and enhance resilience of trees and forests to severe weather events and a changing climate. Outcomes include reduced risks of catastrophic wildland fire, enhanced tree and forest health and vigor, identification and testing of species for emerging conditions, and supporting post-disaster recovery and restoration.

Metric: Complete baseline inventory by 2016. Focus program effort in priority areas.

Goal 3

Improve markets for forest products.

Objective:

1) Expand forest product markets.

Provide technical and financial support to the forest products industry statewide. Strengthen relationships with industry partners, facilitate the development of new markets, and increase the utilization of Nebraska's forest products.

Work with industry, UNL and other partners in the development of technological advances for better utilization of forest resources. Provide technical support and/or funding for startup forest product businesses and market development.

Both traditional and non-traditional uses of Nebraska's forest products provide further opportunities for Nebraska's forest owners to manage and utilize their forest. Facilitate, promote and investigate opportunities in non-traditional forest products and partner with non-traditional/specialty forest products companies.

Metrics: Increase number of outlets for forest products, number of producers assisted, and number of acres harvested. Increase revenue generated by sales of wood products and create economically stable wood markets.



Strategic Initiative 3: Anticipate and Address Catastrophic Events

Overall Strategy: Be the state resource for addressing wildland fire, severe weather and climate events, and other catastrophic tree and forest resource threats through planning, capacity building, monitoring and detection.

Goal 1 Strengthen preparedness planning.

Objectives:
1) Focus and prioritize efforts; 2) Clarify and define NFS role with partners in catastrophic events; 3) Conduct continuing education of staff; 4) Develop thorough preparedness plan and promote readiness.

Characterize the frequency and seriousness of catastrophic and non-catastrophic events that could affect forest resources, and identify areas where preparedness funds will be most effective. Expand opportunities to collaborate with and provide planning assistance to agencies, rural fire districts and others. Work with landowners, communities and agencies to better evaluate tree hazards and response needs prior to (when possible) catastrophic events.

Work with communities, landowners and organizations to provide state-of-the-art tools and technology to prepare for catastrophic events. Provide training, workshops and resources to stakeholders to better prepare for these events.

Metrics: Develop 20 emergency preparedness plans identifying response to tree damage for and in cooperation with communities, counties or municipalities by 2016. Establish a new FireWise community by 2016.

Goal 2 Strengthen state capacity to deal with catastrophic events.

Objectives:
1) Strengthen partner preparedness capabilities and capacity; 2) Strengthen regional preparedness and coordination; 3) Demonstrate NFS leadership in preparedness; 4) Ensure effective delivery of information to others.

Provide training, equipment, financial support and technical assistance to rural and urban fire districts. Work with partners within and outside the state to provide firefighters the highest quality services and support.

Respond to catastrophic events with highly-trained staff participating in interagency leadership disaster and response teams. Evaluate each event to determine severity, urgency of response, and level of personnel necessary for the event.

When a catastrophic event occurs, seek opportunities for cost-share programs to aid in recovery and provide other post-event support, including evaluating cause and possible mitigation measures.

Monitor progression of non-native invasive or destructive native species that threaten forests, both urban and rural. Whenever possible, provide alternative treatments or recommendations to avoid catastrophic die-offs of forest resources. Utilize technology and on-the-ground inventories to monitor, assess and mitigate risks to Nebraska's forest resources.

Metrics: Achieve a 10 percent increase in professional certifications (NWCG, arborist, etc.) and 75 percent of NFS fire staff trained in incident command to appropriate level by 2016.



Strategic Initiative 4: Communicate, Interact and Coordinate Between Partners

Overall Strategy: Develop a better appreciation for trees by playing an active role as a facilitator and information resource

Goal 1 Identify, strengthen, expand and support strategic partnerships.

Objective:
1) Evaluate, prioritize and strengthen partnerships.

NFS provides services and support to a wide array of strategic partners and stakeholders across the state and region. Continue to foster relationships through formal partnerships with these and other organizations.

Identify strategic programmatic areas where partnerships are needed to meet existing or emerging needs.

Review and assess current and potential partnerships to determine effectiveness and opportunities for improvement. Survey current partners and staff to determine expectations of partnerships. Look beyond traditional partnering opportunities to evaluate ways to promote tree and forest management care and utilization through new strategic alliances.

Develop criteria for establishing new partnerships and identify opportunities to promote trees in Nebraska. Create a database that contains contact information for both NFS and our partners. Provide a Memorandum of Understanding template to help NFS staff establish new partnerships.

Metrics: Evaluate current partnerships by 2015. Develop Memorandum of Understanding template for establishing new partnerships. Increase number of new partnerships developed. Develop and keep a current NFS database of partnerships by 2016.

Goal 2 Strengthen communication with partners to utilize NFS expertise and increase program relevancy.

Objective:
1) Define and broaden NFS staff roles relative to partner organizations.

Ensure communication within NFS and with partners is a joint effort between program and NFS communications staff. Develop and implement a consistent and logical communications strategy that staff members can use for events and activities.

Remain current and utilize state-of-the-art communications channels and technology to engage stakeholders and the public in tree and forest-related issues, programs and actions.

Encourage NFS staff participation with other partners in local, district, and statewide committees, as well as other groups and initiatives. NFS will have a representative present at the majority of environmentally-related initiatives in the state.

Metric: Increase collaboration and networking by all staff, measured by 10 new requests to partner with NFS in 2016.



NFS aims to change attitudes about the environment by providing the proper knowledge and skills that lead to on-the-ground action.



Strategic Initiative 5: Build and Support the Nebraska Forest Service Brand Reputation

Overall Strategy: Build awareness and promote the Nebraska Forest Service and its programs by implementing an integrated brand strategy to extend the organization's values throughout all agency interactions, services and visual representations.

Goal 1 Develop a comprehensive brand strategy.

Objective:

1) Evaluate a variety of brand strategies and choose one appropriate to NFS needs.

Increase awareness and visibility of NFS brand and the agency. Make brand identity more recognizable and identifiable.

Solidify and incorporate organizational values and brand attributes as part of each NFS product and service. Utilizing both information known from existing sources and from future research, increase stakeholder, partner and public knowledge of NFS brand and the agency's message. NFS will be known for its ability to adapt and adopt technology that furthers its mission.

Continually update, improve and adjust offerings to stay on the leading edge of forestry communications.

Metric: Conduct annual survey with Bureau of Sociological Research to determine Nebraskans' level of knowledge on specific subjects relative to trees and forest information and NFS products and services.

Goal 2 Integrate brand messaging into all interactions.

Objective:

1) NFS message fosters participation by employees and stakeholders.

Communicate NFS message and brand in a unified format. This applies to interactions with clients and other resource professionals as well as the presentation of NFS services. The agency will modify its approach to communicate with stakeholders in ways that best highlight the agency's outstanding personnel, services and products.

Metric: 200 articles published about NFS, 10,000 people/organizations request information from NFS annually. Fifty percent increase in workshop attendance and website page views; 40 percent increase in number of requests for cost-share programs and grant submissions by 2017.

Goal 3 Enhance agency's visibility.

Objective:

1) Develop and implement a comprehensive communications plan.

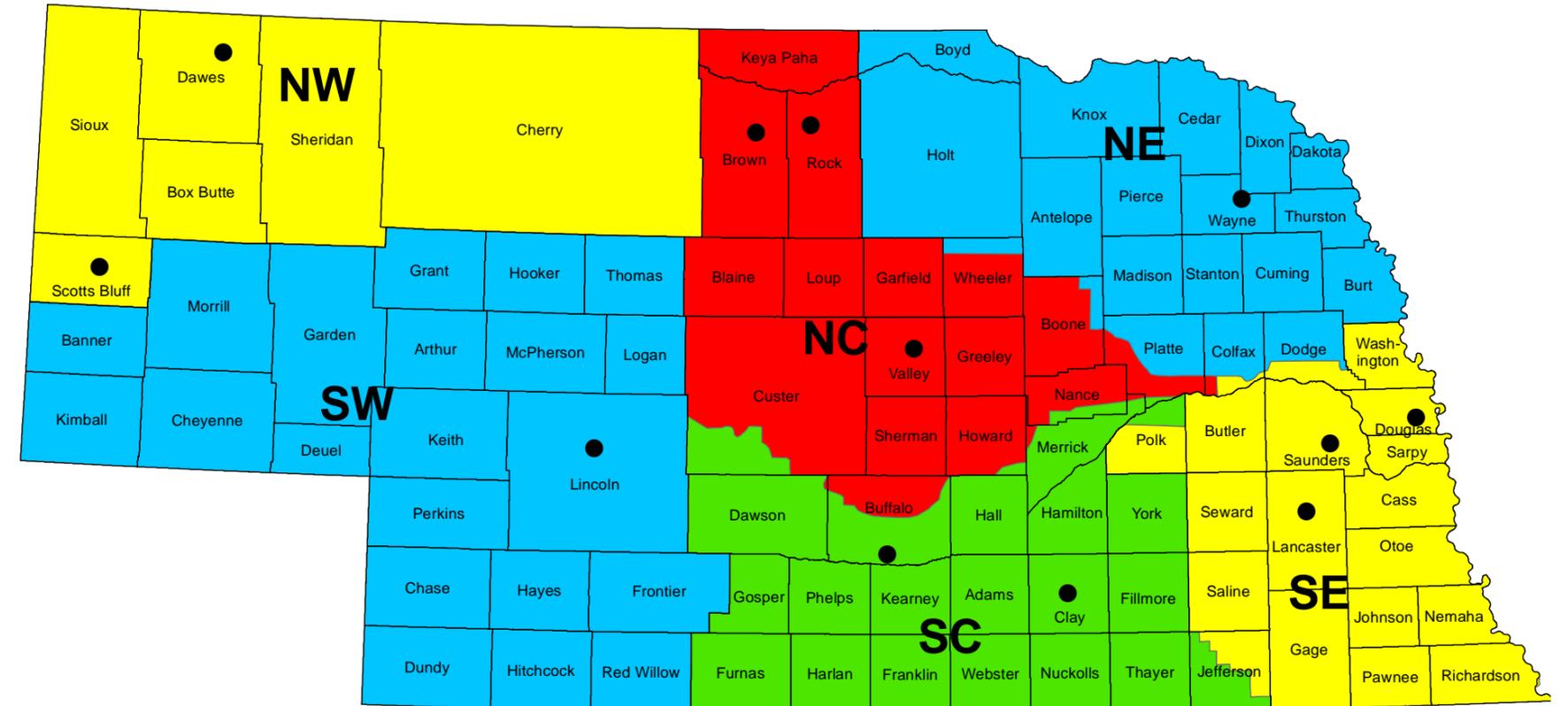
Utilize traditional and non-traditional means to communicate NFS message and brand to stakeholders and the public in Nebraska. Telling the agency's story and sharing case studies in print media, broadcast media, and web-based resources are critical to measuring NFS success and the agency's effectiveness.

Aggressively seek opportunities to share the NFS story. Highlight successes and provide support to others supporting a similar message. NFS will remain on the leading edge of forestry to ensure branding efforts are relevant. Adapt to technology changes as awareness and/or attitudes change.

Metric: Utilize survey with Bureau of Sociological Research to determine if communication techniques are effective. Attain 12,000 visits to website per month with a 25 percent increase in returning visitors to website. Increase the number of page views per visit on website by five, and the average visit duration to 15 minutes.



Nebraska Forest Service Districts and Offices





Nebraska Forest Service Personnel

Name	Title	Telephone	Email
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