



Crowd attends prescribed fire and wildlife workshop

LYNCH – Fifty landowners and others interested in prescribed fire turned out for a workshop and tour here last Thursday. Prescribed Fire and Managing for Wildlife on Private Lands in the Niobrara Valley was the topic of the event, co-sponsored by the Niobrara Valley Prescribed Fire Association, the Northern Prairies Land Trust, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Pheasants Forever, and the North Central Nebraska RC&D, with support from the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

Carl Simmons of Cherry County, president of the NVPFA, welcomed the participants and provided an update on the association, now in its third year. The association provides prescribed fire information and training to its members, facilitates communication between members to form neighborhood prescribed fire teams, and it administers two mobile fire caches, each containing enough equipment to outfit a ten-person burn crew.

During the morning presentations, speakers discussed fire ecology, burning in deciduous woodlands and the effects of fire and grazing on grassland birds.

Several landowners and natural resource agency employees from South Dakota were in attendance, and they commented on the knowledge and enthusiasm for prescribed fire displayed by the Nebraska landowners.

The afternoon tour featured four areas near Lynch that were burned this past spring to reduce cedar encroachment. The pastures were brilliantly green with healthy new grasses and forbs, and dotted with dead cedar trees. Gerry Steinauer, a botanist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, held an impromptu plant identification session as the group toured the burn sites.

NVPFA board members Perry DeKay and Rick Pritchett described how each unit had been burned, including weather conditions, crew numbers, the equipment they used, and challenges they faced. One of the units had been burned later than the others, after green-up was well underway, and after the burn was completed, nobody was quite sure if it had done the job or not.

“By the next day we could see that we had killed a lot of cedar after all,” said DeKay, “and the landowner was really satisfied.” Pritchett added that often it takes some time before the effectiveness of a burn can be seen.

Simmons was pleased with the large turnout. “I think this was one of the best workshops we’ve had yet,” he said.