



## Our History

Since the middle of the 2000's more and more landowners have realized that the struggle to keep ahead of invading eastern red cedar by mechanical means is becoming a huge problem. The trees are aggressively taking over pastures, canyons, and prairies, reducing available forage for livestock and wildlife alike. A few ranchers in the middle Niobrara River valley began working with their neighbors to use prescribed fire to help keep the invasion in check. The three biggest challenges they encountered were:

- Lack of proper equipment,
- Lack of training, and
- Insufficient people-power to conduct large burns safely

Landowners in other parts of the state were beginning to establish prescribed fire associations to address these issues, and there was no reason not to do the same thing in the Niobrara Valley.

In 2008, several middle Niobrara Valley landowners began crafting such an association. They worked with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to outfit a pair of mobile fire cache units, each containing enough equipment to supply a 10-person burn crew. As word spread about the fledgling association, the middle Niobrara valley landowners discovered that there were groups of landowners in the lower Niobrara valley that had been informally conducting neighborhood burns for over 20 years. These folks came on board as well, and the Niobrara Valley Prescribed Fire Association was born.

The group put together bylaws, elected a board of directors, and initiated the process of becoming a 501(c)3 entity. This takes time, so the North Central RC&D Council adopted the association as a project, allowing the NVPFA to use the umbrella of the council's 501(c)3 status. It also helped the association with other services such as getting the word out to the public about the NVPFA and their activities.

By the spring of 2009 NVPFA conducted its first training burn on the properties of two members whose lands adjoined. By 2010 the new mobile fire caches were ready to put into service, and NVPFA worked out an agreement with NGPC to administer them. The NVPFA was awarded a mini-grant from the Nebraska Environmental Trust to provide prescribed fire training to landowners. One member with the appropriate technological skills launched a website and a facebook presence.

In February, 2010 NVPFA sponsored its first mid-winter training seminar, and the new mobile fire caches were put on display. In the spring and fall of that year training burns were again conducted, and neighbor members formed local neighborhood networks to get the job done. The association sponsored a summer tour and workshop to show off the results of several of the burns.

The NVPFA launched its 2011 season with another winter seminar, and has plans to continue with annual workshops, tours, and training.