

The Southeast Nebraska Flagship Initiative is a partnership whose purpose is to work collaboratively on conservation within the biologically-unique landscapes in southeastern Nebraska. Flagship steering committee members include;

- Northern Prairies Land Trust
- Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Nebraska Game & Parks Commission

The Flagship Initiative was formed through the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project

[www.nebraskanaturallegacy.org](http://www.nebraskanaturallegacy.org)

## The Current State of Controlled Burning

The use of prescribed (controlled) burning by landowners in eastern Nebraska has been rapidly increasing over the last decade. Fire has become a valuable tool in the fight against eastern red cedar invasion, as well for other purposes, including habitat management, forage quality management, and suppression of invasive species. Landowners are better trained and more experienced than ever in the use of prescribed fire, and many are banding together in burn cooperatives to share equipment and people. In addition, more and more local fire departments are getting involved in conducting prescribed fires; some using it as a fundraiser for their department.

The success and more widespread use of fire has drawn attention from the public, the media, and public officials. The state fire marshall's office and the Nebraska Forest Service, both of whom have oversight and regulatory controls over prescribed fire and wildfire in the state, are supportive of prescribed fire, but want to ensure that landowners who burn have the necessary training and experience to do it safely. In addition, the legislature announced that they will carry out an interim study this summer on the use and safety of prescribed fire in Nebraska.

There does not appear to be an overwhelming negative slant to this increased attention on prescribed fire, but the next year or two will be an important time for landowners who want to preserve their right to use fire as a land management tool. It will be a tricky balancing act to build training standards for landowners that will ensure that they are burning safely without stifling their ability to burn at all. The legislature's study could lead to some positive outcomes, including legislation that could limit liability for landowners burning their land, but could also react to risks of wildfires and air quality concerns in ways that could make burning more difficult. Hopefully, both the legislature and agencies will focus on maintaining the right and needs of landowners to burn their grasslands and will work to provide additional training opportunities. In the meantime, watch for opportunities to make your voice heard on the importance of prescribed fire, and help showcase the value of this important tool.

**Reminder: One of the most important aspects of safe controlled burns is weather. Because weather forecasts can change frequently, it's critical to monitor those forecasts before and during your fire. The National Weather Service has excellent weather forecasting tools available through their website, including a graph showing wind, temperature, and humidity forecasts by the hour (Click on "Hourly weather graph" at the bottom of the forecast page.) In addition, you can call your local National Weather Service office and ask to speak with the public forecaster to get up-to-date and detailed information before burning.**



### Nebraska Natural Legacy Project Seeks Input

LINCOLN, Neb. – The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is seeking input as it prepares to revise its wildlife action plan, the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project.

The following is a list of public input meetings scheduled across the state. All meetings begin at 6 p.m.:

April 28 – Beatrice, public library; May 17 – Lincoln, Lower Platte South Natural Resources District (NRD); May 20 – Kearney, Yanney Park ERC Building; May 26 – Omaha, Papio-Missouri River NRD; May 27 – North Platte, West Central Research and Extension Center; June 2 – Norfolk, Lifelong Learning Center; June 15 – Scottsbluff, North Platte NRD; June 16 – Chadron, Upper Niobrara White NRD; June 22 – Valentine, Niobrara Lodge

For more information about the program, visit [OutdoorNebraska.org/wildlife/programs/legacy](http://OutdoorNebraska.org/wildlife/programs/legacy) or contact Melissa Santiago at [melissa.santiago@nebraska.gov](mailto:melissa.santiago@nebraska.gov) or (402) 471-5708, or Kristal Stoner at [kristal.stoner@nebraska.gov](mailto:kristal.stoner@nebraska.gov) or (402) 471-5444.

## New Prescribed Burn Association

Landowners are the key to preserving wildlife habitat in Nebraska and certainly here in the southeast. While some have been using prescribed burning to improve and maintain habitat for years, many have only recently begun to adopt the practice. Two major hurdles were the equipment and expertise needed to conduct safe, effective burning. Thanks to Pheasants Forever (PF), a Nebraska Environmental Trust grant, and other supporting organizations, those hurdles are being overcome. Late last year, the Tri-County Prescribed Burn Association (TCPBA) was formed. Thus far the 10 members are mostly from Lancaster, Seward and Saline counties, with more joining soon. PF sponsored a prescribed burn workshop in Denton on March 4, during which burn experts covered the fine points of conducting a safe effective burn. Also at the training was a new \$26,000 mobile burn unit that is now on loan to the TCPBA. On April 6, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, a member of the TCPBA, hosted a training burn in order to allow new members hands-on experience with the mobile burn unit equipment. A partial list of equipment included: two 200-gallon pumper units that can be mounted on a pickup and used to provide a wet-line or conduct minor suppression. Back-pack sprayers, drip torches, and radios are also provided; even Nomex clothing for safety. Thus far this April, TCPBA members have conducted 8 burns for 5 landowners and burned about 316 acres. Several additional burns are in the works and expected to be completed in the next few days. Other burn associations are forming around the state. Privately owned native prairie and other grasslands are beginning to see the return of a natural process (fire) that helped create and maintain these amazing grasslands in the first place.

If interested in joining the TCPBA contact Denny at [TriCountyBurn@gmail.com](mailto:TriCountyBurn@gmail.com) or 402-944-7028.

Contact Pheasants Forever at 308-754-5339 about starting a prescribed burn association in your area.



## Seeking Conservation Easements in Southeast Nebraska

Northern Prairies Land Trust is seeking stewardship minded landowners interested in placing conservation easements on their prairie properties in southeast Nebraska. A conservation easement is a voluntary agreement to protect your piece of land in perpetuity, documenting and maintaining activities that are consistent with your conservation goals for the property. It offers you the opportunity to determine future management of your property in a legally binding document to protect your valuable native prairie.

Conservation easements allow landowners to provide long-term protection of their properties beyond their lifetimes. They also allow landowners to maintain full ownership of the land so that the land can be sold or transferred as desired. Easements can allow a working landscape to remain; keeping the rights to graze or hay prairie properties. Easements reduce the cost for conservation groups to help protect the landscape; allowing each dollar spent protecting precious habitat to go farther.

There are some significant tax advantages for both farmers/ranchers and recreational landowners to place a conservation easement on your property. The tax advantages relate to both income taxes and estate taxes for inheritors. As congress moves to pass legislation in the coming weeks and months these incentives could improve even more. If you have a native prairie or oak woodland that you'd like to protect please contact Nate Walker at the Prairie Partnership Office in Beatrice for more information at 402-228-0276 or [nate.walker@nebraska.gov](mailto:nate.walker@nebraska.gov). For a more in depth look at Conservation Easements you can check out <http://www.northernprairies.org/tools.htm>.

## Roadsides for Wildlife

A partnership between Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and Johnson County has been established to improve wildlife habitat and its management along secondary roads. The program will encompass 17 miles of roadway in southwest Johnson County and is designed to connect high quality habitats, create travel corridors, and provide pollinator habitat.

The Johnson County Roads Department will be clearing trees along the route this summer. Exotic species like Smooth Brome will be sprayed out, and a high diversity seeding will be done this fall. Annual weeds will be prolific the first one to three years, but over time the prairie plants will out compete the weeds. Signs will be placed along the route to identify the planted roadsides.

Adjacent landowners will play an important role in the success of the project. NGPC will be working with them individually to encourage ditch burning, reduced mowing, and spot spraying of weeds. For more information contact Michele Fuhrer Hurt at 402.228.0269.

## New Prairie Book

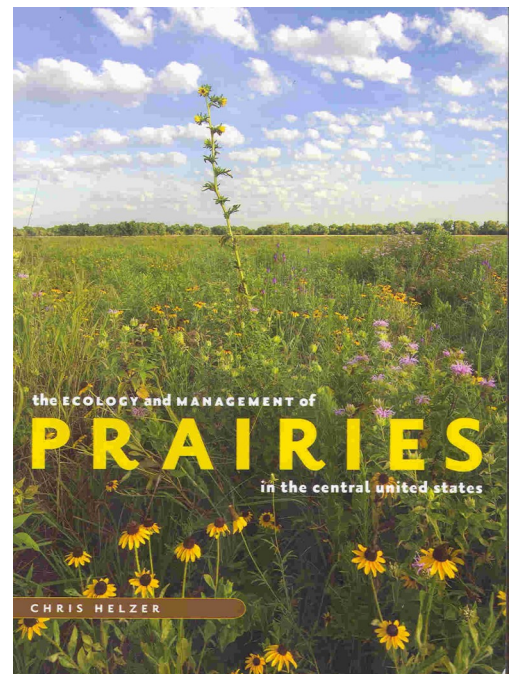
Landowners and others interested in grasslands and their management have a new resource to turn to. *The Ecology and Management of Prairies in the Central United States*, by Chris Helzer was published this spring by University of Iowa Press. The book provides background information on prairie ecology and guidance on managing prairies to increase and/or maintain biological diversity. Chris represents The Nature Conservancy on the steering committee of the Southeast Nebraska Flagship Initiative, and has been a regular presenter at the Annual Tallgrass Prairie Seminars in Beatrice. His book is available in bookstores or from most on-line book sellers.

## Welcome Michele

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) has hired a new Wildlife Biologist for the Beatrice Prairie Partnership office. Michele Fuhrer Hurt covers eight southeastern Nebraska counties: Gage, Saline, Jefferson, Johnson, Pawnee, Otoe, Nemaha, and Richardson. "As a Wildlife Biologist, I'll spend much of my time working with private landowners on improving wildlife habitat on their property and also with the various public access programs available to the public through NGPC," said Michele Fuhrer Hurt.

Michele and her husband, Tom Hurt, moved to Beatrice from Winterset, Iowa where she worked as a Wildlife Habitat Specialist. She is a graduate of Baker University in Baldwin City, KS and of the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls, IA. Her experience includes working in oak woodlands, oak savannas, and prairie landscapes through the US Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Michele's office is located in Southeast Community College's Adams Hall at 5109 West Scott Road, Suite 406. She can be reached at (402) 228-0269 or [michele.fuhrer-hurt@nebraska.gov](mailto:michele.fuhrer-hurt@nebraska.gov).



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