

August 2004

FLN



DISPATCH

*Emerging Lessons From
The Fire Learning Network*

FIRE LEARNING NETWORK A cooperative project of The Nature Conservancy, the USDA Forest Service, and the Dept. of the Interior, the network was created in 2002 to catalyze efforts to reduce hazardous fuels across the country. Part of the larger joint program *Restoring Fire-Adapted Ecosystems* that includes fire education and training components, the network operates at both local and national levels to overcome barriers to implementing ecologically appropriate fuels reduction and restoration projects.

<http://tnc-ecomangement.org/fire>

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY FIRE INITIATIVE This 15-person team is working to assess, abate and prevent fire-related threats to biodiversity conservation around the world. In the U.S., the Initiative is working with a variety of partners to promote ecologically appropriate fire management, develop and implement science-based planning tools and monitoring techniques, and further fire education and training efforts.

<http://nature.org/initiatives/fire>

What's the best way to reintroduce large-scale, ecologically appropriate fire across privately owned, grazed, fragmented landscapes? That's one of the central questions behind the **Great Plains Fire Learning Network**, which convened its first workshop in Sioux City, Iowa, last month.

The network's two anchor sites—Loess Hills and Middle Niobrara/Nebraska Sandhills—have made impressive strides tackling this problem during the 2.5 years they've been involved in the national FLN. In addition to continuing with implementation, the two anchor sites are now focusing on sharing what they've learned, and accelerating the step-wise, collaborative process used in the first phase of the FLN, to catalyze fire regime restoration at similar sites across the Great Plains.

The importance of showing results—either through educational videos, computer simulations or with real-world, highly visible demonstration projects—



The Niobrara Council, Sandhills Task Force, Nebraska Game and Parks, NRCS and The Nature Conservancy are working to restore fire to the Middle Niobrara-Nebraska Sandhills area.

GREAT PLAINS FLN FAST FACTS

- **Key fire-adapted conservation targets:** *Mixed- and tallgrass prairie*
- **Most important agency partner across the region:** *Natural Resources Conservation Service*
- **Sites enrolled to-date:** *Eight, from Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Dakota*
- **Next workshop:** *Ainsworth, Nebraska; October 6-8, 2004*
- **Contacts:** *Susanne Hickey (402-558-8099) and Al Steuter (402-722-4351)*

was a recurring theme of the meeting. It's possible to achieve both ecological and economic goals with fire, but ranchers need to see the results for themselves.

A day-long field trip to Iowa's Loess Hills featured the Little Egypt demonstration area and the Broken Kettle Grasslands Preserve. The former is a 1,777-acre site owned by 13 people who are working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to reverse the spread of eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) across the native prairie. Prescribed fire and mechanical treatment cost approximately \$20 and \$300 per acre, respectively, in this region. Some combination of the two methods is often most effective because the cut trees can fuel hotter fires. Working with the landowners, local volunteer fire departments, The Nature Conservancy, and the Loess Hills Alliance, NRCS hopes to conduct its first burn this spring.

The Flint Hills team is unique among network sites in that they are working with landowners to alter the way they currently are burning. To maximize cattle gains,

many ranchers in the Flint Hills burn every spring, resulting in large areas with minimal residual cover. As a result, nesting habitat for a number of grassland birds has suffered. To counteract this, Conservancy staff at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve have demonstrated that patch burning (a fire-induced, rotational grazing scheme) increases habitat diversity while providing respectable economic returns. The Flint Hills team is now encouraging ranchers to consider this innovative fire/grazing scheme. About 5,100 private acres are currently under this management.

GET INVOLVED!

If you're interested in participating in a regional or national level meeting, representing your agency on the FLN advisory council, or just learning more:

- **Browse the FLN Web site**
<http://tnc-ecomangement.org/fire>
- **Join and contribute to the FLN listserv**
<http://tnc-ecomangement.org/fire/resources/#listserv>
- **Contact TNC or agency leads:**
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The Nature
Conservancy

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