

## Nebraska's Policy for Participation in the Planning and Application of Prescribed Burns

***“NRCS supports and encourages the use of prescribed burning on rangeland, pastureland, forest land, hayland, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land, and wildlife land to meet specific resource management objectives.”***  
 NRHP, rev. 1, December, 2003, Appendix A-1.



### POLICY

NRCS personnel must be adequately trained and receive certification and job approval authority to provide assistance to clients regarding the conservation practice, Prescribed Burning (338) during the planning process. Prescribed Burning Job Approval Authority will be assigned to personnel by the State Resource Conservationist Designee (i.e. State Prescribed Burn Specialist). Nebraska Prescribed Burn Policy supports the NRCS Policy on Prescribed Burning on Grazing Lands, GM Part 413 and Appendix A of the National Range and Pasture Handbook.

### PRESCRIBED BURNING JOB CLASSIFICATIONS

| BURN CLASS | KIND                  | SIZE (ac)                                    | VEGETATION  |              |            |       | SLOPE (%) |
|------------|-----------------------|--|---|--------------|------------|-------|-----------|
|            |                       |  | volatile  | Non-volatile | herbaceous | woody |           |
| I a        | Conservation planning | <i>Conservation planning and contracting</i> |   |              |            |       |           |
| I b        | Maintenance           | <640   |   | X            | X          |       | ≤ 5%      |
| II         | Maintenance           | <100   | X   | X            | X          | <4'   | ≤ 15%     |
| III        | Maintenance           | <640   | X   | X            | X          | >4'   | ≤ 15%     |
| IV         | Maintenance           | >640   | <i>No restrictions on size, fuels, or terrain</i> |              |            |       |           |
| V          | Reclamation           | <i>Not authorized in Nebraska</i>            |   |              |            |       |           |

#### CLASS I a— Conservation Planning

Allow for the Prescribed Burning (338) and burned Firebreak (395) practice to be scheduled in a conservation plan or contract. Taking the computer Basic Rx burn module, scoring 70% or above on the test, and attendance of an 8 hour NRCS or approved partner training is required.

#### CLASS I b - Maintenance Burn

\*Size of area: less than 640 acres  
 Vegetation: non volatile herbaceous  
 Terrain: 5% slope or less-no significant area > 5% slope

#### CLASS II – Maintenance Burn

\*Size of Area: Less than 100 acres  
 Vegetation: Same as Class I b plus volatile herbaceous species and live volatile woody species less than 4 feet tall. No significant presence of live volatile woody species > 4 feet tall, i.e. scattered live volatile woody species >4 feet tall may be present.  
 Terrain: 15% slopes or less No significant area > 15% slope

**CLASS III - Maintenance Burn**

\* Size of Area: Less than 640 acres

Vegetation: Same as Class II plus live volatile woody species greater than four feet tall and dead volatile woody species.

Terrain: 15% slope or less No significant area > 15% slope

**CLASS IV - Maintenance Burn**

\* Size of Area: no restrictions

Vegetation: no restrictions.

Terrain: no restrictions

**CLASS V – Reclamation Burn**

\* Size of Area: no restrictions

Vegetation: no restrictions

Terrain: no restrictions

***Planning for Class V Reclamation burns in Nebraska is not authorized at this time.***

A reclamation fire is an intense fire used to reclaim brush-infested land. Such a fire is considered the most damaging and hardest to control, because it must be very hot. The primary purpose is to destroy or retard growth of undesirable species that usually are present in large quantities. In general, results from the first reclamation burn only partially achieve the desired results. The first burn usually opens the canopy, allowing more uniform fuel to grow in amounts adequate for subsequent fires. Maximum benefits usually are not achieved until the second or third fire. Reclamation burns should be considered the most dangerous and difficult to control burns. Maintenance fires are relatively cool fires used to maintain a desirable vegetation balance. Such fires usually generate enough heat to destroy brush and to remove re-sprouts. Maintenance fires are usually easier to control than reclamation burns, although the fire fuel load often is greater for the maintenance burn.

*\* Size of Area: Contiguous acres to be burned on a single management unit during the same growing season are considered to be one prescribed burn regardless of the number of individual segments the fire is divided into. Total acres for any prescribed burn can't exceed the Size of Area limits for the appropriate job classification.*

**REQUIRED: EXPERIENCE SEPARATE PRESCRIBED BURNING PLANS MUST BE DEVELOPED FOR EACH IDENTIFIABLE PRESCRIBED BURN**

For Class I b and above an employee must: complete a formal NRCS prescribed burn training course, write 3 burn plans per level of JAA, and participate in at least three prescribed burns per level up to the level for which they are seeking Job Approval Authority. These burns must be at or above each consecutive level as it is completed; i.e., certification at a level I b will require writing 3 approved burn plans of I b complexity or above, and participation in 3 level I b or above burns. A level II will require 6 plans (3 at I b or above, 3 at II or above) and 6 burns (3 at I b or above, 3 at II or above). **The completed burn plans and the burns you participated in to certify for the level I b will count as 3 of your plans and burns for level II. The objective is to build your JAA and subsequent expertise over a period of time. To qualify as a level IV burn planner, you will need to have written at least 12 approved burn plans and participated in at least 12 burns.**

These burns must also have an approved burn plan, and the burn boss or the technical advisor must be an NRCS approved trainer, trainer candidate or partner. The individual must also demonstrate good judgment, knowledge, and skills in prescribed burning.

The following are the requirements for job approval authority:

CLASS I a- Taking the computer Basic Rx burn module, scoring 70% or above on the test, and attendance of an 8 hour NRCS or approved partner training is required. The training module and test are located on the 0 drive under: "O:\Prescribed Fire\Ia cert docs".

CLASS I b- Individuals must have written burn plans for at least three Class I b or above burns which have been approved, and assisted in conducting at least three Class I b or above burns as described in the first paragraph, The individual must also demonstrate good judgment, knowledge, and skills in prescribed burning for Class I b burns.

CLASS II - Individuals must have Class I b authority, must have written burn plans for at least three Class II or above burns which have been approved, and assisted in conducting at least three Class II or above burns as described in the first paragraph. The individual must also demonstrate good judgment, knowledge, and skills in prescribed burning for Class II burns.

CLASS III - Individuals must have Class II authority, must have written burn plans for at least three Class III or above burns which have been approved, and assisted in conducting at least three Class III or above burns as described in the first paragraph. The individual must also demonstrate good judgment, knowledge, and skills in prescribed burning for Class III burns.

CLASS IV - Individual must have Class III approval authority, must have written burn plans for at least three Class IV or above burns which have been approved, and assisted in conducting at least three Class IV or above burns as described in the first paragraph. The individual must also demonstrate good judgment, knowledge, and skills in prescribed burning for Class IV burns.

### **TRAINING**

Nebraska NRCS employees shall complete 16 hours of awareness training in prescribed burning to receive certification and job approval to offer prescribed burning as an alternative practice utilized in the conservation planning process. Training topics will include as a minimum:

- Fire ecology
- Fire behavior
- Fire Safety
- Smoke management

NRCS encourages employee participation in approved prescribed burn training activities and workshops, including those conducted by other agencies or organizations.

### **Training Burns**

NRCS will conduct prescribed burns for the purpose of training NRCS field personnel, landowners and managers in prescribed burning. A reasonable amount and kind of fire control equipment will be on site prior to ignition, as well as a fully completed and certified prescribed burn management plan and valid burn permit. Approval authority to conduct prescribed burning for training purposes is vested in the State Resource Conservationist Designee (i.e. State Prescribed Burn Specialist) and certified prescribed burning trainers as assigned.

NRCS personnel may participate in the following activities on authorized training burns:

- Serve as fire boss if qualified
- Serve as designated fire boss under the direction of a trainer
- Serve as a trainer for a burn boss if certified to do so
- Determine and monitor field and weather conditions for compliance with the burn prescription
- Serve as team leader for the implementation and completion of the burn
- Direct field operations and make decisions, adjustments, and corrections necessary to ensure that the fire meets the planned objectives and that all participants follow the safety rules as described in the pre-burn briefing.
- Assist with the ignition of the fire. NRCS employees or persons supervised by NRCS will not ignite any prescribed fire except in properly scheduled training sessions.

The client or his/her designee must be on-site throughout the prescribed burn period. NRCS personnel **will not** serve as the client's designee.

NRCS employees will be trained in the use of specialized prescribed burning equipment. Training in the use of burn equipment shall be directed under the supervision of the fire boss, team leader or designee. The use of prescribed burn equipment may include, but is not limited to:

- Hand tools such as flappers, council rakes, McClouds, pulaskis
- Chain saws
- Drip torches
- Flare guns
- ATV 's mounted with sprayers
- Pumpers and engines
- Back-pack pumps
- Weather kits

NRCS employees or NRCS supervised employees may attend prescribed burns for purposes of training or observation even if they have not had the basic prescribed burning training. Their participation will be supervised and restricted to activities such as collecting weather data, note keeping, taking photographs, etc.

#### Participation in other burns

NRCS employees may participate in burns not specifically designated as training burns if an certified NRCS trainer or trainer candidate also participates, or the burnboss is approved as such by the NRCS. On these burns, NRCS employees may not function as burnboss, or igniters. These activities are only permitted on NRCS official training burns.

#### **Certification and Authority**

NRCS employees desiring prescribed burning certification should make a request through their supervisor to the State Resource Conservationist Designee (i.e. State Prescribed Burn Specialist). Each employee is responsible for certifying and requesting the training needed to maintain or upgrade their certification.

Employees shall provide written documentation of burning experience and training to the State Resource Conservationist Designee (i.e. State Prescribed Burn Specialist) who will issue a determination of Job Approval Authority. The documentation will be completed using Prescribed Burning Experience (NE-ECS-71). The State Resource Conservationist Designee (i.e. State Prescribed Burn Specialist) will evaluate experience, certify training, recommend additional training as needed and issue job approval authority for employees involved in the planning and application of prescribed burns. Direct supervisors will concur in and sign job approval authority forms.

The original Job Approval Authority for Prescribed Burning (NE-ECS-70) shall be kept by the employee, with a copy on file with the employee's supervisor and with the State Resource Conservationist Designee (i.e. State Prescribed Burn Specialist). The State Resource Conservationist Designee (i.e. State Prescribed Burn Specialist) will review, approve and maintain copies of all documentation for employees.

Levels of certification are defined on the back of NE-ECS-70, Job Approval Authority for Prescribed Burning. For employees to be considered as acting within the scope of their duties, refer to the job classification description. The controlling parameters of size, vegetation, terrain, and type of burn will determine Job Class. The most limiting parameter will determine which class is assigned to the burn.

| EXAMPLE 1.                                    |                     | Job Class | Final Job Class |
|---|---------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| Size of area (acres)                          | 200                 | III       | III             |
| Vegetation (kind)                             | Live volatile woody | II        |                 |
| Average height of volatile woody species (ft) | <4'                 | II        |                 |
| Slope (%)                                     | <15                 | II        |                 |

Example 1: A prescribed burn is planned on a unit that is 200 acres in size and has live, volatile eastern red cedar trees that average <4 feet in height. Slopes are <15%. The Job Class for this burn would be Class III, due to its size.

| EXAMPLE 2.                                    |                          | Job Class | Final Job Class |
|---|--------------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| Size of area (acres)                          | 90                       | 1b        | II              |
| Vegetation (kind)                             | Live volatile herbaceous | II        |                 |
| Average height of volatile woody species (ft) | NA                       |           |                 |
| Slope (%)                                     | <5                       | 1b        |                 |

Example 2: A prescribed burn is planned for a 90 acre switchgrass dominated pasture which is considered a volatile herbaceous fuel. Slopes are less than 5%. The Job Class for this burn would be Class II due to the volatility of the fuels, even though no live woody species are present and the slope is <5%.

The minimum level of prescribed burn job approval authority for Nebraska NRCS field employees is Class I a. This authority affords the opportunity for the conservationist to discuss, recommend, and schedule prescribed burning in conservation plans and program contracts. All Job Approval Authority is valid for a period of five years.

## **Re-certification**

### **Class I a**

Employees can apply to the State Resource Conservationist Designee (i.e. State Prescribed Burn Specialist) for re-certification at Job Class I a without attending an additional training or workshop in prescribed burning only if all of the following are met:

- The employee has completed a 16 hour prescribed burn workshop, self-certification modules, or equivalent within the past five years.
- The employee has been actively planning and contracting prescribed burning and/or firebreak practices as a conservation treatment in the planning and contracting of conservation plans within the past five years.

### **Class I b-IV**

The authority to write a prescribed burn plan is only authorized at job approval authority levels I b through IV. Recertification at these levels requires the following:

- The employee must have class I a authority, and have written at least 3 approved burn plans at or above the level being applied for in the last 5 years. The employee must participate in at least three prescribed burns at the job class equivalent to or above that being applied for in the last 5 years. These burns must have an approved burn plan, and the burn boss or technical advisor must be an NRCS approved trainer or partner. An individual with the appropriate level of job authority for the class of prescribed burns planned must approve the prescribed burn plans prior to delivery to the client.
- The NRCS employee has demonstrated good judgment, knowledge, and skills in prescribed burn planning, in order to maintain job approval authority.
- Certification expires after five years unless the employee submits an updated NE-ECS-71 documenting active participation in planning and conducting at least 3 prescribed burns at or above current JAA within the five years time period.

The State Resource Conservationist Designee (i.e. State Prescribed Burn Specialist) will evaluate the experience and update the Job Approval Authority for the appropriate Job Class. Authority levels are progressive in nature, allowing employees to plan more complex burns only when qualified to do so.

Job Approval Authority may be granted to employees who have documented evidence of previous training or experience that equal or exceeds NRCS prescribed burning training requirements. NRCS employees with extensive training, experience and education in prescribed burning and wildfire suppression may provide supporting documentation to the State Resource Conservationist Designee (i.e. State Prescribed Burn Specialist) to receive consideration for certification and job approval authority.

Any NRCS employee who violates NRCS Prescribed Burning policy will have their job approval authority revoked.

### **Trainer Certification**

Form NE-ECS-70 will also be used to issue trainer authority. Criteria that must be met to qualify as a NRCS prescribed burning trainer are as follows:

1. Completion of the Range Burning Training course provided by the State Resource Conservationist Designee (i.e. State Prescribed Burn Specialist).
2. Completion of the NRCS National Fire Ecology course or an approved equivalent course that focuses on fire ecology and fire effects offered by a partnering agency or group. Upon completion of requirements 1 and 2, employee will be a trainer candidate until item 3 is met. As a candidate, the employee may attend non-training burns to gain JAA as long as the burn has an approved plan, and the burn boss is approved by NRCS.
3. Supervised experience as an advisor/burn boss on a minimum of three prescribed burns at or above the level of JAA sought as a trainer approved by the State Resource Conservationist Designee (i.e. State Prescribed Burn Specialist).
4. Be an effective trainer, demonstrating good judgment, knowledge, and skills in prescribed burning.

Certified trainers must remain actively involved in the planning and participation of at least one prescribed burn at or above their current level of JAA every year to maintain a high degree of technical proficiency. Certified trainers also are encouraged to receive additional training from approved sources in order to maintain their certification. Some of the approved training resources for this purpose are:

- University of Nebraska
- The Nature Conservancy
- Nebraska Forest Service
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- Nebraska Game and Parks Service
- United States Forest Service
- Bureau of Land Management

NRCS prescribed burn trainers have the option to additionally certify themselves under the standards of the National Wildfire Coordination Group (NWCG), or “red card” system. The “red card” is part of the fire qualifications management system used by many state and all federal wildland fire management agencies. All workers assigned to a fire being managed by a federal agency, such as the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, or US Fish & Wildlife, and many state agencies are required to have a red card. The red card qualification system meets a portion of Nebraska’s training curriculum for prescribed burning. Additionally, a mandatory test to measure physical fitness is required to receive the red card. Nebraska NRCS will allow “red carded” personnel to participate in approved training opportunities in prescribed burning and wildfire suppression sponsored by other agencies and organizations contingent upon supervisor concurrence. Because maintenance of “red card” qualifications requires annual re-certification, participation in these events should be a regular part of the employee training plan.

### **Planning Prescribed Burns**

All NRCS prepared burn management plans will be reviewed and approved by another certified burn planner with the same or higher JAA for the level of burn planned.

With supervisory approval, employees without the appropriate level of JAA and certification may participate under the guidance of an employee with proper certification and approval as a means of receiving training and experience.

Cooperating land managers, partners, organizations and agencies may assist landowners in the development of prescribed burn plans that utilize NRCS cost-share programs. These plans do not have to be certified by NRCS, but the plans must contain all the information required by Nebraska law for obtaining a burn permit as described in

Nebraska State Statute 81-520.02. A post burn evaluation and certification that the prescribed burn practice was applied and met the intended resource objectives can be completed by NRCS employees with JAA level I a or higher.

All prescribed burns planned with NRCS assistance, must adhere to all Federal, State, Local and Tribal requirements regarding outdoor burning, fire control, smoke management, and air quality. Adherence to the Clean Air Act is required for all prescribed burns.

Field site visits are mandatory for burn plan development. All NRCS burn plans must have the date(s) of field site visit(s) by the burn planner documented on the Prescribed Burn Management Plan.

A written prescribed burn plan which meets the minimum prescribed burn conservation practice standard and design procedure must be developed prior to implementation and reporting.

Of the three burn plans prepared to increase or maintain JAA , the planner may include one plan developed during a prescribed burning training course, one as an active participant in a group planning an actual burn, and at least one as an individual planning a burn.

Prescribed burn management plans are valid only for the area planned and for the burning season planned. If the landowner decides to change the location of the burn or is unable to burn during the prescribed time frame, a new plan must be prepared prior to conducting the burn.

The landowner is responsible for obtaining all permits and clearances as required by Nebraska law. A statement of potential liability will be included in all NRCS prescribed burn plans.

### **Safety**

If unfavorable atmospheric, fuels, logistical, or other conditions exist, NRCS employees must advise the client and designated fire boss to postpone the prescribed burn. NRCS employees are required to inform the client and designated fire boss of any unsafe situation or act, as soon as it is apparent. If an emergency situation develops, NRCS employees are to follow the direction of the designated fire boss.

All NRCS employees or persons supervised by NRCS will adhere to the following safety requirements for prescribed burn trainings:

1. Clothing requirements - each person present during a prescribed burn will wear: fire resistant shirt of 100% wool, 100% cotton or Nomex; fire resistant trousers (without cuffs) of 100 % wool, 100% cotton or Nomex; all leather boots, at least 6 inch high, with fiber lug or traction soles; and leather gloves. In addition, anyone assisting with prescribed burns in/or adjacent to wooded areas will wear a hard hat. SYNTHETIC OUTER CLOTHING INCLUDING HEADGEAR, WATCHBANDS, DUSTMASKS, ETC., OTHER THAN NOMEX, WILL NOT BE ALLOWED ON FIRES.
2. All vehicles will be equipped with a shovel, flashlight and batteries, canteen or other water bag, fire extinguisher, and first aid kit.
3. Each person participating in a prescribed burn will attend a pre-burn briefing outlining the responsibilities of each person.
4. Each person participating as a crew member will receive training on proper use of equipment including ignition equipment prior to the actual burn.
5. There shall be adequate communications equipment (two-way radios) available on the burn site as listed in prescribed burn plan, equipment checklist.

Employees must be physically capable of performing the tasks assigned and activities associated with prescribed burning.

If an NRCS employee participating in a training burn believes that the prescribed burn plan is not being followed or a valid burn permit is not present the employee should remove themselves from the prescribed burn area. The employee will document the conditions, indicate the reasons why the employee is removing themselves, and notify the fire boss.

### **Employee Liability**

Employees acting in accordance with all Federal, State, tribal, and local laws and within the scope of their work accept a liability no greater or less than that associated with the performance of any other assigned duty. The scope of the work is defined by the job approval authority granted to the NRCS employee. Any questions concerning employee liability should be directed to the State Resource Conservationist Designee (i.e. State Prescribed Burn Specialist).

Employees operating outside of their job approval authority or scope of work or who violates Nebraska Prescribed Burning Policy will have their job approval authority revoked.

### **Quality Control**

Quality control will be established at all NRCS training burns during a pre-burn briefing with fire crews, landowners and other personnel involved in executing the prescribed burn. On all burn plans where NRCS provided technical or financial assistance, the burn objectives will be clearly defined and a post-burn evaluation of progress toward the objectives will be documented on NE-ECS-72

Certification of practice completion for the prescribed burn or firebreak practices that are receiving NRCS financial assistance will be documented on the Prescribed Burn Management Plan, (NE-ECS-72), or equivalent documentation. A copy of the burn permit is required. A certified burn planner with Job Approval Authority at Job Class I a can complete the post burn resource evaluation and certify all completed prescribed burns. The quality of the practice will be evaluated by how well the prescribed burn has met resource objectives. Acres of burn accomplished can be certified by actual measurements of the fire line using GPS technology or through visual estimations and mapping of acreage. The area treated will be documented on the conservation plan map with the month, year and acres treated described.

Prescribed burning plans and activities may also be reviewed during program and functional appraisals.