

Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association

News



PRESCRIBED BURN
MID-MISSOURI RIVER
ASSOCIATION
LYMAN • BRULE • GREGORY • CHARLES MIX

Winter 2024

Focusing on cedar tree control and grassland health

Welcome

Excitement on the Horizon

By Keith Hovorka & Sean Kelly

After 2023 provided our first successful burn season in several years, the momentum to combat the green glacier of eastern red cedar is really picking up steam! We hosted three burn tours in August with excellent turn out. See highlights from those burns starting on page 4 of this issue. We also want to give a shout out to the Smikle family for being recognized with the Excellence in Range Management award for Area II by the South Dakota Society for Range Management. Read more about their stewardship efforts on page 8.

It's exciting to see awareness about woody plant encroachment continuing to spread across the state. MMRPBA board members Brad Christensen and Tom Hausmann have taken on new positions to help with this awareness campaign. Additionally, new prescribed burn associations in other areas across the state are starting to gain traction. We spotlight more about the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe's efforts on page 9.

This winter we are excited to partner again with our local FFA Chapters for our Annual Meeting, Sunday, January 14, 2024. For details about this upcoming event, see page 3. We hope to see many of you there.

Looking ahead, we anticipate another great burn season in 2024 with several thousand acres planned for burning. **Please remember to get your firebreaks complete this fall or winter if you have a burn planned in the spring of 2024.**

Continue to follow our website and Facebook page for other updates and information, www.midmissouririverpba.com/, and for anyone interested in becoming a MMRPBA member, see the information on page 3 of this issue.

Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association News Sponsored by the Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association and SDSU Extension

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**Stay connected to MMRPBA
and upcoming event details:**

Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/MMRPBA/>
Website:
www.MidMissouriRiverPBA.com

MMRPBA to host Annual Meeting Jan. 14 in Burke



The Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association will host their annual meeting on Sunday, Jan. 14 at 5 p.m. at the Civic Center on Main Street in Burke. This event is a great opportunity to enjoy a meal, review prescribed burn progress from the past year, network and visit with fellow landowners and managers, as well as the MMRPBA board, and hear from speakers discussing opportunities and continued efforts to control invasive species.

Speakers at this year’s meeting will include NRCS personnel discuss the new cost share program opportunities for prescribed burning. SDSU’s Sandy Smart will also speak on woody encroachment and highlight efforts by emerging partnerships to continue to help protect grasslands for the future. Laura Kahler will also speak on her new role with the SD Grasslands Initiative and the Great Plains Grassland Initiative.

Additionally, the Gregory County FFA Chapter will once again be hosting an FFA fun night on January 14th in conjunction with the MMRPBA annual meeting. Chapter members will help serve the meal and invite others to the speaker. After the presentation, the chapter will be setting up games, music, and hosting a dance. FFA members will extend invitations to others – both FFA and non-FFA to join the fun night and meet others. The South Dakota State FFA officers will also be attending this event.

Jan. 14, 2024 will be a great opportunity to network among the community and across the generations, make friends, and learn more about prescribed burning and FFA in a fun atmosphere. Mark your calendar to attend this event and show support for MMRPBA as well as FFA.

Editor’s Note: Looking ahead, see page 9 of this issue for information about several upcoming events in South Dakota in January.



Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association (Brule, Charles Mix, Gregory & Lyman Counties South of I-90) Membership Application

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

If you own land that may be burned in the future, which county is it located in: _____

Category of membership requested: (Check one)

Individual Membership: (May vote, dues \$25) _____

Organizational Membership: (1 vote/organization, dues \$25) _____

Name of organization represented: _____

Associate Membership: (No vote, no dues) _____

I wish to become a member of the Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association and agree to pay the applicable \$25.00 membership dues, certify that I have never been convicted of a felony or crime involving arson, sexual misconduct or extreme immorality and, agree to a background check.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Return Application and Membership Fee To: Sara Grim, 35801 Old 1806th Road, Bonesteel, SD 57317

Make membership fee checks payable to: MMRPBA

About the Cover:

Shown is Rich and Sara Grim’s ranch in spring 2023.

The Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association is a non-profit 501(c)(3) formed to control cedar tree infestation and improve grassland health by conducting prescribed fires. MMRPBA’s efforts will focus on land along the Missouri River in Brule, Charles Mix, Gregory and Lyman Counties.

Three successful “post-burn” tours from 2023

Story and Photos by Sean Kelly

The MMRPBA hosted three burn tours this summer following the successful burn season of 2023. We were pleasantly surprised by the number of people who attended these tours, with attendance ranging from 30 to 50 people for each tour. The interest in prescribed burning to control woody encroachment continues to grow. The tours were conducted on burn units of Rich and Sara Grim, Jon and Abby Smikle, and Todd and Jennifer Olson.

Due to the remote location and size of the burn units, we tried a different approach and hosted the tours via UTV/ATV. Every participant had to bring their own machine to drive around the burn units. Every participant had a radio and was able to listen to narration from the lead UTV during the tour. The participant response to this type of tour was very positive and MMRPBA hopes to conduct more of these tours in future years.

Rich & Sara Grim



Jon & Abby Smikle



Todd & Jennifer Olson



Plan ahead for NRCS technical and financial assistance

By Rod Voss and Emily Rohrer,
South Dakota NRCS

The NRCS is providing significant technical and financial assistance for woodland encroachment and other resource concerns on grasslands. Funding levels for financial assistance is at historical highs for the agency, with funding available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and additional funding through the Inflationary Reduction Act (IRA).

The initial sign-up deadline for fiscal year 2024 funding was November 3, 2023, but landowners and operations are encouraged to sign-up through the year to be ready for the next funding cycle. The fiscal year 2025 funding cycle is also expected to provide high levels of financial assistance in EQIP, EQIP/IRA, Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and CSP/IRA.

Additionally, a special designation of money through EQIP is available to specifically address woody encroachment issues in parts of South Dakota, including the MMRPBA area. Funding for these programs must include the development of a conservation plan with an NRCS conservationist. The conservationist will do a complete resource inventory in the field to include such things as soils, ecological sites and plant communities as well as collect grazing records, crop rotations, farm and ranch infrastructure and management records. A completed inventory will identify all resource concerns and the conservationist will provide alternative conservation practices to address those concerns.

Owners and operators would then choose which resource concerns they may wish to address with or without financial assistance and

make application to the appropriate program(s). Development of the conservation plan will be based on the owner/operator's decisions and willingness to apply the appropriate management to focus on the resource concerns they choose to address. Similar resource inventories and consultations can be conducted by private consultants, but significant costs should be anticipated. Comparatively, **NRCS technical assistance is free**. Implementation of the conservation plan is the responsibility of the participant. Continued technical assistance will be provided to ensure projects are completed according to the conservation practice standard, which is required for cost-share to be approved.

Steps to Start

Owners/operators interested in technical and financial assistance should contact their NRCS office and have a discussion with a conservationist about their resource concerns and objectives and determine if they are ready for the development of a conservation plan. On-the-ground inventories of grasslands are best conducted during the growing-season, but other information and data could be collected during the winter months in preparation for the summer field inventory. Identifying conservation practices to address resource concerns will also include an estimate of quantities such as acres of brush management, acres and species of grass seeding, feet of pipeline or fence etc.

A decision made between the conservationist and the applicant will determine quantities of each practice to be applied. The amount of cost-share funding will be available to

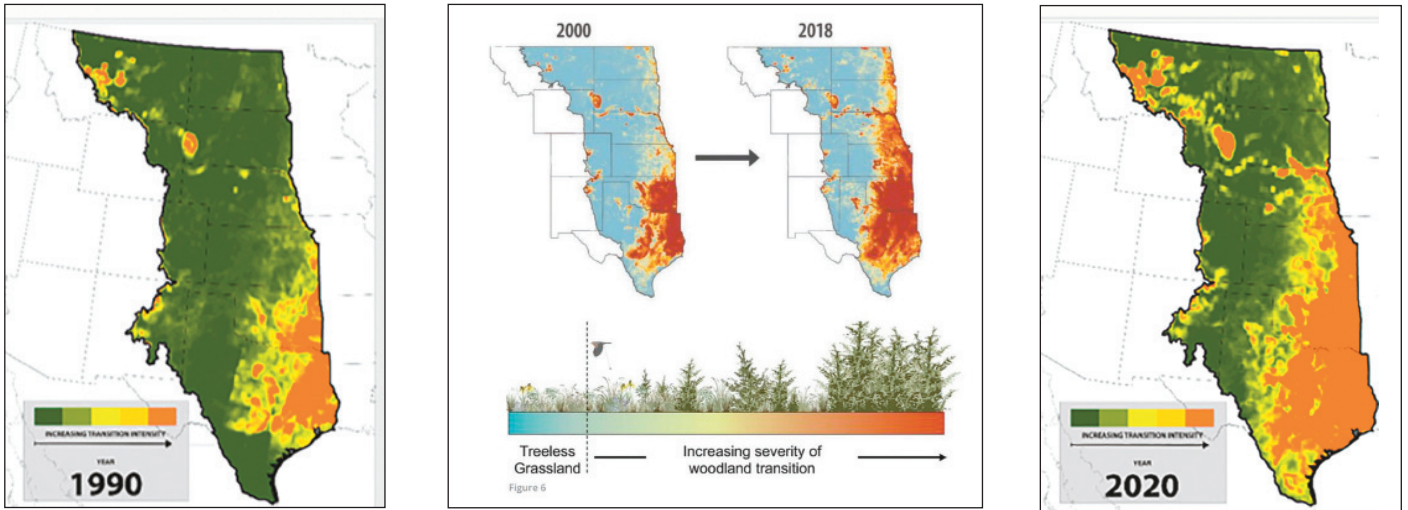
the applicant before committing to a contract. Once a contract is awarded, the participant is responsible to complete the projects according to the timeline established in the conservation plan and according to NRCS practice specifications. The conservation plan and the program contract are two different documents that support each other in accomplishing the producer's objectives.

On grazing land, prescribed grazing (rotational grazing) will be necessary management for most cost-shared grassland practices. Prescribed grazing will consist of providing the right number of livestock to ensure grasses are properly grazed (50% maximum use by weight) and not over grazed. It will also require rotating cattle during the growing season and providing adequate recovery time after grazing so that plant vigor is maintained or improved. Pastures will need to be rested prior to prescribed burning and a post burn deferment will also be required.

Applicants wishing to address woody encroachment concerns can include such practices as brush management, fuel/firebreak establishment and prescribed burning in a conservation plan along with prescribed grazing management to improve grasslands. Prescribed burn plans developed by the Mid-Missouri Prescribed Burn Association are accepted by NRCS and encouraged for cost-share assistance. Technical assistance from the burn association relating to fire break establishment is strongly encouraged. Fencing, pipeline and water development may also be included in the conservation plan to address grassland resource needs and improve plant community through proper stocking and rotational grazing.

" Owners/operators wishing to apply for fiscal year 2025 funding, should contact their local NRCS office now to begin the process of developing a conservation plan for program ranking."

Taking action against cedars better sooner than later



By Tom Hausmann

Sometimes it takes technology to help people realize what is happening right in front of them. I know that's true because even though I had little access to technology years ago, I didn't realize what was happening in my pastures until my renter brought it to my attention in a not-so delicate manner.

For forty or fifty years, I was oblivious to the fact that cedar trees were slowly, continuously, and methodically taking over my pastures. Time after time, my dad and I would comment on how the cedars were getting worse, even making travel high up on the ridges difficult in some places. However, I waited too long to do something about the trees, and now it has cost me an average of \$45/acre over all my acres – and on some acres as much as \$438/acre where the trees were thick and tall.

Today, infrared satellite imagery over time shows a slow, consistent advancement of cedar trees flowing north from Nebraska to our South Dakota. The cedar infestation actually started years ago in Texas and has progressed steadily in our direction. As many of us are now aware, cedar trees have completely taken over areas of Gregory County.

The infrared map images distinctly show that progress (see map insets). Satellite photos also point out areas, as illustrated in yellow on the maps, where cedars are just getting started.

Moving North

Since July, I have been working on a contract basis for SDSU in conjunction with NRCS in six counties encompassing the James River to help stop the cedar trees' gradual progress northward. Initially, I have been trying to raise the awareness of vested parties to the problem. Looking back, I wish someone had helped me realize the problem earlier. It isn't that I didn't know the trees were getting worse. I just needed to be pushed a little harder to find the motivation to do something about them.

My objective is to help form prescribed burn associations (PBAs) like MMRPBA in the James River Valley. In Yankton County, where the James River empties into the Missouri River, some pastures are inundated with cedars as much as Gregory County. When I drive further north and into Sanborn County, people I've contacted make comments like "I've noticed a few here and there, but they don't seem to be much of a problem." Or, "I have a few cedars, but they're all small and no big deal." To those people, I say "Good! You are exactly the person I'm looking for." I know then that I'm on the front edge of the cedar tree glacier. Once I show the satellite photos of the progression of cedars in my pasture, it helps people realize the potential problem.

I think we have an obligation to take whatever steps necessary to stop this "glacial" movement--maybe even a moral obligation. The first step is raising awareness, but the next step is more difficult: taking action.

In January and February of 2024, along with NRCS personnel, we will be holding landowner meetings to raise awareness of the issue amongst producers, but more importantly to stimulate action within a prescribed burn association (PBA). With each person operating on his or her own, the cedar issue may feel overwhelming. However, by joining a prescribed burn association, members can support each other by pooling their resources, labor and encouragement to eventually reverse the trend of slowly losing pasture productivity.

In the meetings, we are also beginning the process of changing the culture from one of preventing wildfires to one of understanding when and how to use fire as an effective pasture management tool. Through forming PBAs and utilizing NRCS expertise, South Dakota can become the first state to be proactive in addressing this issue.

Start Small

Smaller trees are an ideal place to learn about recommended burn practices. When cedars are about five feet tall or less, a fire is much easier, safer and more successful than waiting until the trees get thicker and much taller.

Smikles awarded Excellence in Range Management Award

Jon and Abby Smikle of S&S Cattle Company in Herrick, S.D. were recently awarded the 2023 South Dakota Section, Society for Range Management Excellence in Range Management award for Area 2. The Smikle ranch has become a premier example of superb rangeland management in south-central South Dakota. In 2023, Jon started implementing prescribed fire to combat cedar tree encroachment. In addition to adding prescribed fire, Jon has implemented a successful rotational grazing system that Smikle Family Award, edit allows for necessary pasture deferment to build adequate fuel for successful prescribed burns, while also utilizing the deferred acres as part of his drought plan if needed.

About the Ranch

The Smikle ranch lies in the river break country north of Herrick in Gregory County, South Dakota. The ranch was started by Jon's great grandfather in 1947, then soon after his grandfather took over the ranch and ran it until Jon's father started managing it in the mid-1970s. In 2010, Jon officially took over management of the ranch with his wife Abby.

Jon manages the day-to-day operations while Abby works as the Dean of Students at Dakota Christian Schools, east of Platte.

Jon and Abby have two young sons, Dale and Tucker, who help on the ranch every chance they get. The operation is predominately Wagyu and commercial cattle. Jon and Abby also operate a custom welding business and commercial hunting operation on the ranch.



Jon and Abby Smikle of S&S Cattle Company in Herrick, S.D. along with their sons, Dale and Tucker were presented the 2023 South Dakota Section, Society for Range Management Excellence in Range Management award for Area 2. They are shown with Sean Kelly.

Ranch Management

When Jon took over managing the ranch in 2010, he wanted to decrease the number of herds from four to one while increasing the amount of rotational grazing on the ranch. Jon also had to start addressing the cedar tree encroachment problem on the ranch that was spreading at an alarming rate. Jon attended the South Dakota Grassland Coalition Grazing School in 2018 and continued to work with the late Dave Steffen from the SD Grassland Coalition Follow-Up Program and the MMRPBA to incorporate a plan for rotational grazing, cedar tree control, and prescribed burning. The ranch grazing plan is reviewed annually by Jon, and changes are made as needed.

Jon and Abby utilize a Wagyu 1 herd rotational grazing system that matches their rough topography with supplementation of commercial yearlings if forage is adequate. They also incorporate rest and deferment for various pastures within their grazing system to stockpile grass for drought years while also building fuel for future prescribed burns to control cedar tree encroachment.



Management practices that the Smikles have utilized

Rotation Grazing: 1 herd rotation with supplementation of commercial yearlings if forage supplies are adequate.

Cross Fencing and Water Developments:

Jon's father installed the first water pipeline in the early 1990's. One artesian well gravity feeds into 28 tanks with rural water taps feeding the remaining 26 water tanks on the ranch. These tanks are incorporated into numerous grazing paddocks facilitating the rotational grazing system.

Cedar Tree Control: Jon started shearing and cutting cedar trees roughly 15 years ago when the woody encroachment problem was becoming evident on the ranch.

Prescribed Burning: The first prescribed burn to control cedar tree encroachment was conducted on the ranch in the spring of 2023. The 1500-acre burn was a tremendous success in not only controlling cedar trees but also rejuvenating the native grasses on the ranch.

Lower Brule Sioux Tribe takes steps toward forming regional prescribed burn association

*Meeting set for Jan. 11;
Training to be held in May 2024*

By Sheldon Fletcher

Producers on the Lower Brule Sioux Reservation have been meeting for the last year with discussions focused on starting a prescribed burn association. The Lower Brule Sioux Tribe is located on the west bank of the Missouri River and is roughly 230,000 acres.

The Tribe faces the same issues related to eastern red cedar encroachment as everyone along the Missouri River. The Tribe has held several meetings, and we were fortunate to have great speakers with first-hand knowledge of the cedar encroachment problems. Dirac Twidwell with UNL, Sean Kelly with SDSU Extension and several board members from the Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association have traveled to Lower Brule to speak and provide guidance in starting a prescribed burn association. We are grateful for their assistance.

A small group of Lower Brule producers conducted a burn on May 4, 2023, consisting of 30 acres. It was great to finally get some fire on the ground. We learned a lot, and this burn really got people interested in fire as a tool to control cedars.

We are still searching for more producers who may be interested in burning to ensure our success. Therefore, we have decided to create a regional prescribed burn association. We will host a meeting on January 11, 2024, at the Lower Brule Convention Center at 5:00 p.m. A meal will be provided. We would like to invite anyone in the area who is interested in controlling cedar trees to attend. Tribal members and non-tribal members are all welcome.

To be successful in controlling eastern red cedar encroachment, we all need to work together. The purpose of the meeting is to gauge support and take public comments on starting our own regional prescribed burn association.

The Lower Brule Sioux Tribe Environmental Protection Office recently met with Pete Bauman and Sean Kelly from SDSU Extension to plan and prepare for a prescribed fire burn training sometime in May 2024 at Lower Brule. We are excited about hosting this training. Keep an eye out for exact dates later this winter.

Editor's Note: Sheldon Fletcher is with the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe Environmental Protection Office. Contact him with any questions at: (605) 473-0163.



A May 4, 2023 prescribed burn conducted on 30 acres of LBST land produced great results.



South Dakota
GRASSLANDS INITIATIVE

The South Dakota Grasslands Initiative formed in 2023 when several grassland partners came together to apply for a cooperative agreement with NRCS through the SD Grassland Coalition. The South Dakota Grasslands Initiative (SDGI) aims to be a collaborative network of diverse organizations, agencies, and individuals who support grasslands as a means of retaining prairie ecosystems, both native and restored, while sustaining rural economies and healthy communities.

Efforts via this Initiative will also keep in mind how to best support the mission of the Central Grasslands Roadmap. Anyone who supports the vision and mission of SDGI is encouraged to participate in our discussions and activities. To join SDGI's email list, please fill out the interest form at www.SDGrassInitiative.org.

SD Grasslands Initiative plans events for Jan. & March 2024

SDGrassInitiative.org.

In January 2024, several quarterly partner meetings will take place in person around the state, offering an opportunity to meet others geographically near you, and delve into conversations on how South Dakota can be building off themes of the **Grasslands Roadmap (learn more at grasslandsroadmap.org)** for our state's grasslands. The ideas and themes developed from these regional meetings will be built off of during the action planning at the upcoming SD Grassland Summit. Virtual attendance is also an option for those unable to travel. Meetings include:

Tuesday, January 16th:

Wall, SD, 1-4 pm (mst)

Wednesday January 17th:

Chamberlain, SD, 1-4 pm (cst)

Thursday, January 18th:

Aberdeen, SD, 1-4 pm (cst)

Friday, January 19th:

Brookings, SD, 9:30 am -12:30pm (cst)

Please RSVP to Laura.Grass@sdconservation.net for one of these sessions by Thursday, January 11th. This will assure you are contacted if the January weather changes the ability to meet in person, and to provide you with the zoom link if you'll be joining virtually.

Also mark your calendars for the South Dakota Grassland Summit, planned for March 18-19, 2024 in Oacoma, SD. This event is designed for partner agencies and organizations, individuals, land owners, land managers, and agriculture lenders. We will hear from inspiring speakers as they share about the status of grasslands.

Watch your email for more details, and visit www.SDGrassInitiative.org website for a final schedule and registration information.

Getting to know the equipment used by MMRPBA



The Defender 6x6 parked next to the Ranger 6x6

By Brad Christensen

Steep terrain and large elevation changes make up the Missouri River breaks in the MMRPBA territory. This rough country limits the use of pickup trucks on prescribed burns to where they must stay on ridge tops and improved trails. Control lines on most burns are up and down hills and across drainages, creeks, and draws where it is not possible to safely drive a pickup.

Thus, UTV's and ATV's are the main vehicles used on most of the MMRPBA burns. Most 4-wheel UTV's can handle a skid unit with 50 to 60 gallons of water with an experienced operator in the river hills. A Polaris Ranger 6x6 can safely handle a skid unit with 70 to 75 gallons of water. A Can Am Defender 6x6 seems to handle a 100 gallon skid unit in steep terrain.

The 6x6's are much more stable in the steepest terrain and make crossing creeks, cat steps, and narrow drainages safer and easier. *(Polaris quit selling the Ranger 6x6 in 2016 so the only choice for a new UTV 6x6 is a Can Am Defender 6x6.)*

The MMRPBA has a 2016 Polaris Ranger 6x6 and a 2023 Can Am Defender 6x6. The Defender is bigger than the Ranger and has a larger engine with more horsepower. We've only had the Defender 6x6 a short while, but we really like it.

There have been several different brands and models of UTV's used on MMRPBA prescribed burns – and some worked better than others. UTV's with cabs don't work as well as ones without cabs, windshields, and back windows. If there's a cab, taking the doors off makes it more

useful. The issue with a cab is it limits which direction you can spray water without someone hanging out a window or door. A single operator can be effective without a cab or windshield, but with a cab it takes at least a crew of 2 to spray out either side depending on which way you're going around the burn.

ATV's work well for patrolling the control lines during the burn. Igniting off of ATV's saves a lot of steps. The limiting factor is the amount of water they can safely carry up and down the steep hills.

Water wisdom

It surprises most people how little water it takes when applied correctly to extinguish fires on a prescribed burn, where flame lengths next to control lines are usually less than 4 feet. A 15-gallon ATV sprayer with an electric 12

volt pump that is rated at 2.8 gallons per minute at 40 psi can be very effective if it's used correctly.

A 5-gallon wildland fire backpack sprayer with a trombone spray pump is also very effective in the right hands. While these smaller units don't replace the need for the UTV's with their bigger skid units, they can greatly enhance the ability to efficiently mop up the perimeter of the burn unit. Using the least amount of water necessary improves ignition efficiency especially on larger burn units that can have quite a distance between water tenders. Ignition stops when the wetline crew or mop-up crew run out of water and can't start again until the crews refill and return to the line.

Radio ready

Good communication is a requirement to provide for safety on a prescribed burn. Every crew member needs to know what everyone else is doing. Some prescribed burn associations use Family Service Radios (FSR) but they don't work dependably in the river hills. The MMRPBA purchased 10 portable Motorola

radios to supplement the 14 portable VHF Motorola radios that are available through a MOU with the Gregory County Emergency Management Director and the State of South Dakota for use in the four counties served by the MMRPBA. The burn association is allowed to use frequencies designated for use by first responders as long as there is no emergency that needs the frequencies.

There are enough MMRPBA burns planned for 2024 that there may need to be more than one burn on a good burn day. Both the MMRPBA's burn trailer and

box truck have similar equipment. There are enough tools, equipment and PPE's for more than one burn to take place at a time if crews are available.

The key to a safe successful prescribed burn is doing the preparation, the training, and following a good burn plan.

Editor's Note: Brad Christensen welcomes questions or comments contact him at (605) 830-0931 or email me at gregfire@gwtc.net. Stay tuned for the Summer 2024 MMRPBA Newsletter for an article from Brad focused on the skid units used by the MMRPBA.



Showing how much longer the Defender is than the Ranger trombone spray pump.

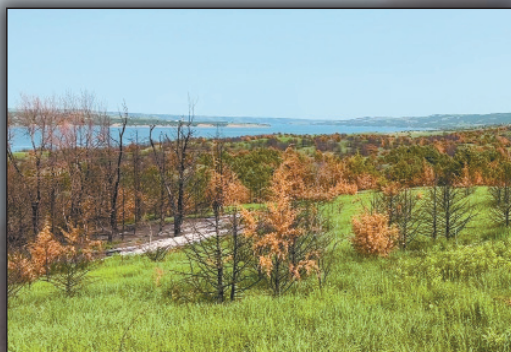


A 5-gallon wildland fire backpack sprayer with a trombone spray pump.



The SDSU Defender 6x6 with 100 Gallon Skid Unit.

Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association
Sean Kelly
33815 288th Street
Gregory, SD 57533



Join Us!
Annual MMRPBA Meeting
5 pm, Jan. 14th,
Civic Center, Burke, SD

The Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association is a non-profit 501(c)(3) formed to control cedar tree infestation and improve grassland health by conducting prescribed fires. MMRPBA's efforts will focus on land along the Missouri River in Brule, Charles Mix, Gregory and Lyman Counties.