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# THE RURAL FIRE FIGHTER

INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN



Issue 01-07

February 2007

## Fuels Reduction Legislation Introduced

### 50/50 Grants

Even though nothing is firm yet, every indicator is that Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) grants will again be available for 2007. As in years past, these are federal dollars that can be used for the purchase of fire and communications equipment, SCBA, protective clothing, etc. Keep a few things in mind as you consider your application. First, the fire department's half of the grant can not be funded by another federal grant program. Second, your fire department must comply with the training requirements

of the National Incident Management System to be eligible for the program. Be sure to answer that question on the project application.



An application is included with the Fire Chief's copy of this newsletter. For full consideration, applications must be returned by April 13, 2007. If you have questions, give us a call.

### Legislative Issues

#### *Forest Fuels Reduction - LB105*

For Senator Leroy Loudon, the summer of 2006 was surely one to remember. Of the 90,764 acres reported to the National Interagency Fire Center as burned in Nebraska last year, 76,754 acres, or 85 percent, were burned during intense, catastrophic wildfires in two counties within his 49<sup>th</sup> Legislative District. Senator Deb Fischer also isn't likely to forget the fire season of 2006 soon. Although District 43 experienced fires of "only" 8,600 acres, those fires resulted in the loss of 30 structures, including 10 homes along Valentine's wildland/urban interface.

No doubt those statistics weighed heavily on the minds of both senators as they introduced LB105. Nine other senators also pledged their support. If passed, LB105 would appropriate \$425,000 per year to the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) to expand fuels reduction efforts. This funding, combined with



substantially increased matching federal funds would provide cost-share grants to individual land owners for fuels reduction in the Pine Ridge, Niobrara Valley and other areas at risk from catastrophic wildfire.

No one can stop a lightning strike. Each summer will bring hot, dry conditions and Nebraska's forests will continue to grow more dense and at risk to fire. Fuels reduction is the best way to reduce fire intensity and the risk to firefighters, residents, homes and infrastructure. Passage of this legislation is an important step toward that goal.

#### *Fire Equipment Donation - LB160*

Last year, legislation was introduced by Senator Abbie Cornett (Bellevue) and a host of other senators, with the support of the Nebraska State Volunteer Firefighters Association (NSVFA) and the Nebraska State Fire Chiefs Association (NSFCA). The bill addressed the removal of civil liability in the donation of fire equipment from one fire department to another. Unfortunately, the bill didn't make it out of committee due to the senator's workload. The NSVFA and NSFCA are again pursuing this as a goal for the 2007 legislative session. Senators Cornett, Flood, Lathrop, Rogert and White have again introduced legislation addressing this subject - LB160.

The Nebraska Forest Service also recognizes that LB160 is a valuable piece of legislation for many small & rural fire departments and would encourage members of the Nebraska fire service to make their voices heard. This bill would allow open transfer of much used, but still useful, equipment to those departments that need it.



The NSVFA has named three additional legislative goals for the year: a state income tax credit for active volunteer firefighters/EMTs, safe cigarette legislation and the return of levy authority to fire protection districts. Legislative news can be found at [www.nsvfa.org](http://www.nsvfa.org).

## Tips from Tex

**W**ow, how time flies! Just a few weeks ago we were ringing in the New Year and here it is, February already. I'd like to address a few items that are near and dear to my heart and to also solicit your help on a few.

**First** – Fire School is May 18-20, 2007. This year “Elected Officials” class will have a few new/redesigned classes. My planning class is revamped and will address the need for the rural boards, towns, villages and fire departments to come together in developing a strategic plan for their community/fire district. A second class, “Marketing your FD,” developed by myself, will discuss the “hows and whys” of marketing your FD. Like all good businesses, you must advertise. And yes, your FD is a business. We will also have speakers who will discuss finding grants, grant writing tips, how alcohol affects you, and of course everyone's favorite—the Jim, Jerry and Tim show.

**Second** – Included with *The Rural Firefighter* is the 2007 edition of the “Yellow Book.” As in the past, read



it before you need it. If you have never used aerial applicators on a wildland fire before and would like to learn, the SFM is offering a class at Fire School this year. This is a great opportunity for some great training.

**Third** – The “Mutual Aid Task Force.” You should have all received the information pertaining to this new concept with the November edition of the Rural Firefighter newsletter. I have only received three phone calls asking for more information, so I'm assuming everyone understands what we are trying to accomplish with this program. Thus far, I have only received information from 10 of the 53 Mutual Aid Associations across the state. I want to reiterate that the intent is for each Mutual Aid Association to develop a task force that would provide a single piece of equipment from each of its members' fire departments and label this as their task force. Should the need arise that your task force is needed, it can deploy to help your neighbors in need, yet still have equipment and manpower to protect your home front. If you have any questions, please contact myself, Ron Chada or Pat Gould. If your Mutual Aid Association should elect not to participate, please let me know. That way I won't have to bug you for your information.

**Lastly** – I'd like to ask you for your assistance in updating your Mutual Aid Associations information. As you hold elections, please contact me and let me know who the new President and/or Secretary/Treasurer are and their contact information. In the mean time, please give me a call or send an e-mail and let me know who the current officers are. I know my records are not current, and I hate to bother someone when they are not the one I need to talk to.

I look forward in seeing you in the coming year. Should you need any assistance, give me a call or e-mail. Stay safe, watch out for each other and **Everybody Goes Home.** George Teixeira, Fire Resource Manager.

## Nugget of the Day

courtesy of [www.firenuggets.com](http://www.firenuggets.com)

*“I have no ambition in this world but one, and that is to be a fireman. The position may, in the eyes of some, appear to be a lowly one; but we who know the work which the fireman has to do, believe that his is a noble calling”* – Chief Edward F. Croker, New York City Fire Department.

## Calendar of Events

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Feb 17-18   | Nebraska Society of Fire Service<br>Instructors, Les Lukert Winter<br>Conference, Howard Johnson Riverside<br>Inn, Grand Island |
| Feb 24-25   | Nebraska State Fire Chiefs Assoc.<br>firefighter seminar, Nickerson   |
| April 21-22 | Nebraska State Fire Chiefs Assoc.<br>firefighter seminar, Chadron   |
| May 18-20   | 70 <sup>th</sup> Annual NSVFA State Fire School<br>Fonner Park, Grand Island  |

## Fire Weather Tools

In October 2006, the National Weather Service (NWS) began providing a red flag climatology service in Nebraska. Included within the program are terms most firefighters have probably heard before—fire weather watches and red flag warnings.

These terms typically capture public attention fairly quickly. Firefighters should consider using them as a tool, but should also be wary about placing too much weight on them before they are more proven in our state. Currently, fire weather watches and red flag warnings will be issued based on outputs from the National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS). The NFDRS primarily functions as an asset for federal fire suppression agencies in determining staffing and preparedness levels. NFDRS has not been shown to be a good predictor of fire occurrence in a grassland dominated area. A proven method exists in the Grassland Fire Danger Rating (GFDR) system. Comparisons done here at NFS have shown a distinct connection between the adjective (low to extreme) provided by the GFDR and the historical occurrence of fires. As the GFDR increases from low to extreme, the number of fires also increases at roughly the same rate.

While more information is almost always better, NFS recommends that fire chiefs and incident commanders use this new tool not to replace existing weather resources, but to back them up. For a look at some of the resources that are available, see the list below.

### Internet Fire Weather Resources

#### Vegetative Greenness

<http://www.nfs.unl.edu/Fire/GreennessMapRecent.asp>

#### Grassland Fire Danger Rating

<http://www.crh.noaa.gov/oax/?n=oaxfirewx>

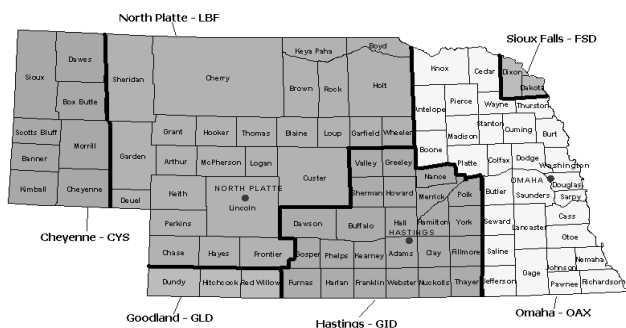
#### National Fire Weather Forecasts

<http://fire.boi.noaa.gov>

#### Your local National Weather Service page

<http://www.crh.noaa.gov/XXX>

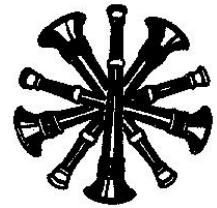
(locate your county below, replace XXX above with the appropriate three letter identifier for the NWS office)



## Coach or Quarterback?

If the fire chief didn't show up at the next call, what would happen? Chaos? If the chief was involved in an accident and was unable to perform the duties of the job, who would step in? Is anyone prepared to fill the chief's shoes? If not, why not?

Richard Gasaway writes "Volunteers Corner" in *Fire Engineering* magazine. He addressed this subject in the December 2006 issue, providing some very good points to ponder. If you want the short version, Mr. Gasaway's article essentially says



no fire chief is or should be indispensable. Those chiefs who feel they can't be replaced typically hold most information very close at hand, often to maintain a sense of power within the organization. Others withhold information fearing that to share the information makes it easier to be replaced. That kind of management of the fire department does much more harm than good. It is the duty of every fire chief (and every leader for that matter) to groom a replacement. As Mr. Gasaway states, to do anything less "...denies the organization an essential component to long-term success." To put it in real life terms, what will the department become when a new chief takes over without knowing where to start?

With that in mind, the article lists three steps to take in developing replacement leaders. First, write down the things you do as fire chief. Successful chiefs spend much of their time working with their active members to develop their talents. If most of your time is spent completing routine tasks, that's a good indicator that you are not developing your subordinates.

Second, make an 'A' list of officers and supervisors who have good potential to become future leaders of the department. Determine if they have an interest in becoming a leader. If so, give them a helping hand. If not, find out why or if there is another way they can become more involved.

Finally, make a 'B' list of members (non-officers) with leadership potential. These are typically the folks who may lack experience but have lots of new ideas and energy. Give them an opportunity to try some of those new ideas. Even if they fail, it often provides a "teachable moment" along with the realization that they can have a positive impact on the fire department.

Mr. Gasaway uses a football analogy to illustrate the point. Very few quarterbacks become successful without the influence of a good coach. Similarly, new leaders will assume a leadership role much faster and with less heartburn with the help of someone who has covered that ground before. As the fire chief, do you consider yourself a coach or a quarterback?

## Sandy's Corner

### Fire Reporting, It's a "Good" Thing!

It's here! Fire chiefs have been waiting for this moment for a long time. Effective February 1<sup>st</sup>, chiefs (or their designees) have the opportunity to report wildfires on-line by going to the Nebraska Forest Service website: <http://nfs.unl.edu> and clicking on "Wildfire Reporting" in the Navigation panel on the left near the bottom.

#### Wildfire Reporting log-in:

- Select your fire department from the drop down box.
- Enter your county name for your password. These names are case-sensitive and must begin with a capital letter. (counties like Red Willow, Scotts Bluff and Box Butte require the space between the two words and a capital letter to begin each word)
- Click the "Login Button"

*Next Screen:* Is the following information correct for the current fire chief?

- Select Yes and go to next screen
- Select No, enter correct information, go to next screen

*Next Screen:* What do you want to do?

- Submit a wildfire report – to report a wildfire.
- View fires - you can view two groups of fires:
  - Pending submission – shows wildfires you reported already but that haven't been finalized yet. You can still make changes to this data.
  - All approved wildfires – shows the wildfires you reported which have been finalized. You will actually be able to see all the wildfires you have reported since the year 2000. This data will be available to you for your reference and use (think of the fire prevention benefits to your department). Since location information (Latitude and Longitude) is just now starting in 2007, the previous years data will not have locations. From this year forward, though, the information will be there and will be available for your use (mapping).

*Next Screen:* What type of response would you like to report for your department?

- Wildfire response in your district
- Mutual Aid given on a wildfire
- End of the month notification of no response to a wildland fire.

For more information on how to fill in each data field on the on-line form, click on the name of the field ( if colored) to view instructions and samples.

Everyone still has the option to report by mail; however, we hope you will give the on-line reporting a try. It's quick and easy and will soon become much easier and cheaper for us all.

All departments will still receive a yellow "Monthly Report of Wildfires" card in the mail each month. At first glance it will look like the one you have been receiving, but it is not. A number of new columns have been added: people injured or killed, structures threatened or destroyed, location by latitude and longitude and ownership class.

On the paper report card there are two columns under Date/Time.\* This is where we ask for the date and time of dispatch and the date and time you returned from the

fire. To make the best use of the space provided, we recommend you put a horizontal line through the box and write the date above the line. Then write the time beneath the line for both the dispatch time and time returned. See example below.

Date/Time*	
Dispatched	Returned
2-16-07	2-16-07
14:50 hrs	15:20 hrs



When reporting on-line, remember to follow the date and time format shown and please enter the colon in the time. In this case, we need the colon no matter how you enter the time, civilian (02:50 PM) or military (14:50).

A word about latitude and longitude. For those of you reporting online, there will soon be a feature provided which will greatly simplify the entry of this data into the report. Until this part of the reporting system is functional you have some other options: locating the fire on a map showing latitude and longitude; using your GPS unit at the fire scene or using the Google Earth free program on the Internet. Here you would simply move the cursor to the fire location and read the latitude and longitude from the bottom part of the screen.

We're excited about this new reporting system and trust that you will find it very straightforward and simple to use. If you have any questions or suggestions please don't hesitate to give Don or Sandy a call.

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**Visit us on the Internet at [www.nfs.unl.edu](http://www.nfs.unl.edu)**