



Conservation Conversation

Official Newsletter of the Barber County Conservation District

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Kansas NRCS and The Nature Conservancy Providing \$1.4M Financial Assistance

Conservation partners work together to help landowners protect native prairie and wildlife habitat.

To improve the health of some of the last native prairie in Kansas and Oklahoma, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Kansas State University and other partners have joined in a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to offer financial assistance to help landowners institute conservation practices on their land. NRCS is providing funding through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

In Kansas, the Flint Hills and the Red Hills are the targeted areas where EQIP funds will be available for landowners interested in implementing conservation practices. Funding will go toward practices such as removal of red cedar trees or other invasive vegetation such as sericea lespedeza, developing grazing plans, or conducting prescribed burning. Funding from this project can also be used to clear dead cedar trees still standing after the Anderson Creek wildfire in south central Kansas. Without removal, new cedar trees will grow up under the dead trees. The deadline for applications from those in the Flint Hills and Red Hills is April 21, 2017.

The Nature Conservancy is the lead partner for this project. "The Nature Conservancy in Kansas is appreciative of the efforts of NRCS to make this opportunity possible, as well as contributions from other partners to allow these funds to come to landowners in Kansas. For me, the best part about this project is that the funding will go directly to landowners in Kansas wishing to improve the health of their grasslands and grazing lands," said Kris Knight, Director of Conservation Programs for The Nature Conservancy in Kansas.

Besides financial assistance to landowners, funding from the Kansas State University will be used for research to quantify the changes in stream base flows after red cedars are removed. "We think there is real merit in understanding not only how removal of red cedars can restore grassland health, but also for improving availability of water for fish and wildlife, and for livestock use," said Knight. Red cedar removal restores the prairie to its natural state and takes away the fuel that can intensify a wildfire such as the Anderson Creek wildfire in south central Kansas.

"This partnership addresses a gap in the country's conservation efforts," said Monty Breneman, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs at Kansas NRCS. "Preserving native prairie grassland doesn't receive as much attention as other efforts, yet native grassland is critical habit for many declining species such as the lesser prairie-chicken."

Besides NRCS's \$1.4M in EQIP funding, The Nature Conservancy and other partners were instrumental in providing additional funds to Kansas include Kansas State University, the Kansas Forest Service, Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, Kansas Land Trust, and the Kansas Prescribed Fire Council.

For more information, go to the Kansas NRCS Web site www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/programs or visit your local U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Service Center. To find a service center near you, check on the Internet at of-fices.usda.gov. Follow us on Twitter @NRCS_Kansas.

April is State Cost Share Sign-Up

Applications are now being accepted throughout the month of April for cost share assistance through the state's Water Resources Cost Share Program (WRCSP) and the Non-Point Source Pollution Control Program (NPS). A few of the practices which are available through these two programs are erosion control structures, pipe outlet terraces, construction of terraces and grassed waterways, range and pasture seeding, livestock water developments (to include tanks, wells, and pipelines), fencing, and dry hydrants for rural fire protection. Also included in the NPS program specifically are abandoned water well plugging and repair of failed septic systems.

All applications will be ranked according to a priority based ranking worksheet, and funded corresponding to their ranking until all funds are allocated. Projects cannot be started prior to contract approval by the state. To apply for these funds, call or stop by the conservation office and let us know about your project needs.

Funding provided by the Division of Conservation, Kansas Department of Agriculture through appropriation from the Kansas Water Plan Fund.

Spring Wildflower Tour—May 13

Join us on May 13 for the 32nd annual Spring Wildflower Tour. Knowledgeable tour guides will inspire a new appreciation of those beautiful wildflowers, native to the Gyp Hills of Barber County. Cost of the tour is \$20 for adults (kids 12 and under are free) which covers a continental breakfast, transportation to two identification sites, and a hearty barbeque lunch at the Gyp Hills Guest Ranch.

Don't miss this educational event and unique Mother's Day gift opportunity. Paid reservations are due to the conservation office by May 8th. For more information contact us at 620-886-5311.

John Farney Memorial Scholarship

The John Farney Memorial Scholarship is a \$1000 scholarship sponsored by the Barber County Conservation District. The scholarship will be awarded to a student who is entering at least his/her second year of college. Applicants must be pursuing a college degree in a conservation-related field. The applicant must also be a resident of Barber County. The deadline for applications is May 30, 2017. Applications are available at the conservation office at 800 W. 3rd Avenue, Medicine Lodge, Kansas. You may also call (620) 886-5311 for more information.

Range Youth Camp Scholarship

Range Youth Camp is the most accepted and enduring activity of the Kansas Section of the Society for Range Management. The camp was first held in 1960 and is continuing to educate youth about the importance of Kansas rangelands to this day. The camp is designed to give students a basic understanding of the principles of rangeland ecology, including plant physiology, plant identification, ecological sites, range condition, and trend. Additional topics discussed at camp are animal behavior, animal nutrition, wildlife use of rangelands, and calculating stocking rates.

Upcoming High School Sophomore, Junior, and Senior students who have a serious interest in rangeland management, rangeland ecology, or grazing animals are eligible for a scholarship through the Barber County Conservation District to attend the camp June 20—23, 2017 at Camp Mennoscah in Murdock, KS. Registration deadline is May 15. Contact us at 620-886-5311 for information.

Defensible Space by Jess Crockford, Kansas Prescribed Fire Council

The following article was written In January of 2017, prior to the most recent devastating wildfires in our neighboring counties of Comanche and Clark Counties.

With last spring's wildfire season fresh in our minds, it might be well to discuss what can be done to lessen the dangers of wildfires to our homes. The Anderson Creek fire and the Burrton fire consumed a lot of invading cedar trees and brush which resulted in some positive ecological gains for the native pastures in the area but at a terrible cost to those who lost their homes. Because of the intensity of wildfires and the remoteness of some rural homes not every structure can be saved but preparations can be taken to reduce the risk around rural buildings. Fire professionals call this "defensible space". It is a buffer around your home or other structure created between the structure and the grass, trees, shrubs, or any wild land area that surrounds it. This space is needed to slow or stop the spread of wildfire to protect your home from catching fire-either from direct flame contact or radiant heat. Defensible space is also important for the protection of the firefighters defending your home.

To provide a good defensible space, the first 30 feet, minimum, out from buildings should be a closely mowed lawn. It is preferred this lawn be cool season grass if adequate water for irrigation is available. Keep the lawn mowed and well watered. In this area plants should be spaced out, low growing, free of resins, oils and waxes that burn easily. Trees should be pruned to six to ten feet from the ground. Trees should be spaced at least 30 feet apart. Trim back trees that overhang the house or other buildings. Deciduous trees are preferable to cedars or other conifers. You can create a 'fire-free' area within five feet of the house by using non-flammable landscaping materials and/or high-moisture-content annuals and perennials.

From 30 to 100 feet out from the building leave at least 30 feet between clusters of two to three trees or 20 feet between individual trees. Use a mixture of deciduous and evergreen trees. Create firebreaks by using drive-ways, walkways, gardens, and flower beds to break up the path of flames. Passed 100 feet out to 200 feet, remove smaller cedars that are growing. Remove heavy accumulations of woody debris and other flammable material, firewood, post piles, old tires, brush piles, etc.

Although there are no guaranties, creating defensible space is essential to improving your home's chances of surviving a wildfire. The good news is that you don't have to spend a lot of money to create defensible space around your home and fire safe landscaping can beautify your home and farmstead.

If you are interested in learning more about prescribe fire, burn associations, getting assistance in developing a prescribed burn plan, contact your local Conservation District or Natural Resources Conservation Service office at 620-886-5311 or the Kansas Prescribed Fire Council at 785-532-3316.

BY THE WAY...

- The Conservation District carries a large inventory of high density polyethylene (HDPE) corrugated pipe and components for all your drainage needs. Let us be your one-stop shop for your next project; tile outlets, culverts, ponds.
- We also carry New Zealand lite cable, SunGuard fiberglass posts, metal clips, and lots of other components for cross fencing. Producers love the 19-strand lite cable for its' "no-slinkey" characteristics.
- If you are installing a livestock tank through cost-share, chances are you will be required to install a "bat-ramp" - we have'em!
- As a registered seed dealer, the Conservation District would be happy to fill your orders for native grass seed, cover crop mixes, cool season grasses and much more.

Helping Your Neighbors

One of the truly inspiring traits of folks in this country is the willingness to help others in times of need. The following was provided by the Kansas Rural Center (KRC) in an effort to provide donation information to those who are interested in helping the landowners in Comanche and Clark Counties who were affected by the wildfire.

The Kansas Rural Center (KRC) urges you to consider helping our Kansas friends and neighbors whose homes, farms, ranches and pastures were devastated by wildfires last week, and below offer information on how to do so by going to any of the following:

Kansas Farm Bureau's website www.kfb.org/firerelief.

Cash, donations of hay and fencing supplies, and volunteer hours are all part of the relief effort. KFB and the Kansas Livestock Association are cooperating to provide fire relief services.

Kansas Livestock Association at 785-273-5115. Checks can be mailed to the **Kansas Livestock Foundation at 6031 SW 37th St., Topeka, Ks. 66614.** "Fire Relief Fund" should be written in the memo line.

Or these local entities:

Ashland Community Foundation www.Ashlandcf.com

Send checks to;

Ashland Community Foundation/Wildfire Relief Fund

P.O. Box 276

Ashland, Ks. 67832

Please note Wildfire Relief Fund in memo line

Ashland Feed and Seed (Hay Donations)

Call Ashland Feed & Seed 620-635-2856

Specific Individuals and Families

If you know a specific family or individual impacted, make checks payable directly to the individual or family and mail to:

Stockgrowers State Bank

Wildfire Relief

P.O. Box 458

Ashland, Ks. 67831

Or

Bank of Ashland

Wildfire Relief

PO Box 157

Ashland, Ks. 67831

The Recovery Years

Toni Flax, Rangeland Management Specialist
Hill City, Kansas

Drought has plagued most of Kansas for the last several years forcing farmers and ranchers to make tough choices on the management of their native rangelands. One tough decision is the reduction of cattle herd numbers. In 2016, normal to above normal precipitation provided the state with lush, beautiful rangelands with more grass than has been seen in several years. On the down side, it has producers wanting to build up herd numbers quickly to use the abundance of grass. Producers should be thinking about the recovery time for grasses. This recovery includes the roots as well as the leaf production and reproductive capabilities of the plants.

The root system makes up three quarters of an entire plant. The root's job is to take in water and nutrients for the growth and carbohydrate storage. These stored reserves are for plant production as well as for quick restart in the spring. Every time leaf matter is taken from the plant, root production slows so it can focus on re-growing leaves that soak up the light for photosynthesis. When a plant continually has to be making leaf material the roots weaken and die off, leaving the whole plant weak.

Native grass plants reproduce as much by roots and rhizomes as they do by seed. Making sure the grass plant gets the rest it needs after the drought will ensure it will be able to spread its rhizomes across the landscape as well as produce the seeds it needs.

Research suggests it takes two years of normal to above normal conditions to recover to pre-drought conditions. Looking across the pasture, farmers and ranchers may be tempted to put more head out there. The recovery process is more than the leaf material seen above the ground. Patience for the recovery of the root system will lead to bigger and healthier roots, and that means a healthy plant with more total forage production.

For more information, visit the Kansas NRCS Web site www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/programs or your local U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Service Center. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

**BE SURE AND VISIT US ON THE WEB @
WWW.BARBERCOUNTYCONSERVATIONDISTRICT.COM
AND
LIKE US ON FACEBOOK FOR UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION INCLUDING
SCHOLARSHIPS, COST SHARE, AND EVENTS!**

Barber County Conservation District Board of Supervisors

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MemberTed Alexander

The Board meets on the first Tuesday of each month at the Barber County USDA Service Center. If you have any questions or comments for the Board of Supervisors, or suggestions for this newsletter, please call (620) 886-5311.

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To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326 W. Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Ave., SW Washington D.C., 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (Voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.