

Agenda Item # 22a
Date 1/26/22

Initial Outreach for County Boards—Cover Letter

(Email to County Clerks for County Boards)

To: County Boards
cc: Emergency Managers
From: Sandy Benson, Nebraska Forest Service
Subject line: Community Wildfire Protection Plan Steering Committee Designation - Please respond!
Attachments (2): Background info sheet; Statewide CWPP Map

*(Note to County Clerks: Please include this as an agenda item for your next county board meeting. Please print this email and the attached background document and maps for board members. **Please let me know via reply to this email the date of the meeting that will include this agenda item.** Thank you!)*

County Boards:

My name is Sandy Benson, and I am a fuels management specialist with the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS). I work with communities and landowners in wildfire preparation efforts throughout the state. The NFS is developing Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) statewide to help obtain funding for wildfire mitigation, maximize safety, bolster communications between local and state resources, and help communities understand the evolving role fire plays in Nebraska's landscape. Landowners in counties that have a CWPP in place are eligible to apply for a fuels reduction cost-share program that helps defray the costs of protecting structures and emergency access routes from wildfire.

Your county is in Nebraska's Missouri River East regional planning area, and **we invite you to designate an individual to participate on the steering committee to help identify local issues important to your citizens.** Some counties have designated emergency management staff. Others have selected fire department personnel or other individuals with expertise in wildfire response. Due to the large size of the planning area and everyone's busy schedules, no travel will be required, and we estimate a maximum of four hours of committee members' time will be needed over the course of the entire planning process, which should take less than eight months. Committee work is designed to occur via email and teleconference.

The attached document explains the details of this process. County boards will be invited to review and provide feedback on the draft plan and, when it is finalized, will be invited to adopt it.

It is important that local officials are aware of the planning process, and we welcome your county's participation. Most county boards are pleased to learn that there is **no cost** associated with CWPP preparation. The primary reasons for having a CWPP are:

- A CWPP is a wildfire-specific resource that coordinates with local emergency and hazard mitigation plans
- Lands within CWPP regions are eligible for cost-share funding

If you have questions, please contact me at 402-684-2290 or sbenson4@unl.edu. If you would like to speak to me by phone during your board meeting, please let me know the date and time so I can be available.

Thank you!

Community Wildfire Protection Plans

The Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) is in the early stages of preparing a **Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)** for the Missouri River East region of Nebraska, which includes Burt, Cuming, Dodge, Douglas, Thurston, and Washington Counties. This wildfire-specific resource coordinates with local emergency plans and allows local landowners and others to apply for federal and state cost-share funds for vegetative fuels treatment (such as eastern redcedar reduction) and other hazard mitigation efforts within the CWPP region. There is no cost to counties.

What is a CWPP?

A CWPP is one of the most successful tools for addressing the challenges and responsibilities that arise from living in a wildfire-prone environment. CWPPs specifically define wildfire risk areas within and adjacent to communities, the measures necessary to mitigate those risks, and a plan of action to implement these measures.

The collaborative CWPP process is effective in maximizing coordination and communication between emergency response agencies and the community. Developing a CWPP helps clarify priorities to protect life, property, infrastructure, and valued resources. Protecting communities and resources from wildfire is a team effort that cannot be accomplished by any one person or entity.

The CWPP complements local emergency operations plans. It addresses wildfire concerns including risk assessment, critical infrastructure, and preparedness. It recommends an action plan to increase the overall safety and effectiveness of wildfire protection planning within your communities. Local officials collaborate with planners to guide the process.

Some background

After the large wildfires in 2012, the state legislature passed the Wildfire Control Act of 2013, which provided funding for single-engine air tanker bases, cost share for hazardous fuels reduction, and expansion of programs to provide volunteer fire districts with more fire suppression equipment. As these programs were implemented, Nebraska Forest Service staff realized there were very few Community Wildfire Protection Plans in place across the state. CWPPs are needed for an area to qualify for many wildfire-related grants and cost-share programs.

The Missouri River East CWPP is one of nine new plans that the NFS is preparing in Nebraska to create a statewide CWPP network. NFS is also updating the five CWPPs that were completed in 2014 and 2015 and are now due for their periodic review.

Why should we have a CWPP?

- Past wildfires throughout Nebraska have presented many challenges and issues
- A CWPP is a mitigation and preparedness plan to reduce wildfire risk
- It establishes a collaborative relationship among entities BEFORE a fire occurs
- It develops a pre-attack plan to maximize firefighter readiness and safety
- It increases grant application success by documenting wildfire planning and projects
- Fuels reduction grant funds are only available for areas that have a CWPP

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Community benefits

- Define planning boundaries that address local concerns
- Identify and prioritize areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments
- Recommend treatment methods
- Strengthen local efforts to reduce structural ignitability
- Enhance emergency management and communication
- Foster public education/action to reduce wildfire risk

How much does it cost?

The Nebraska Forest Service is covering the costs associated with the CWPP. Counties and fire departments will not be asked for monetary contributions.

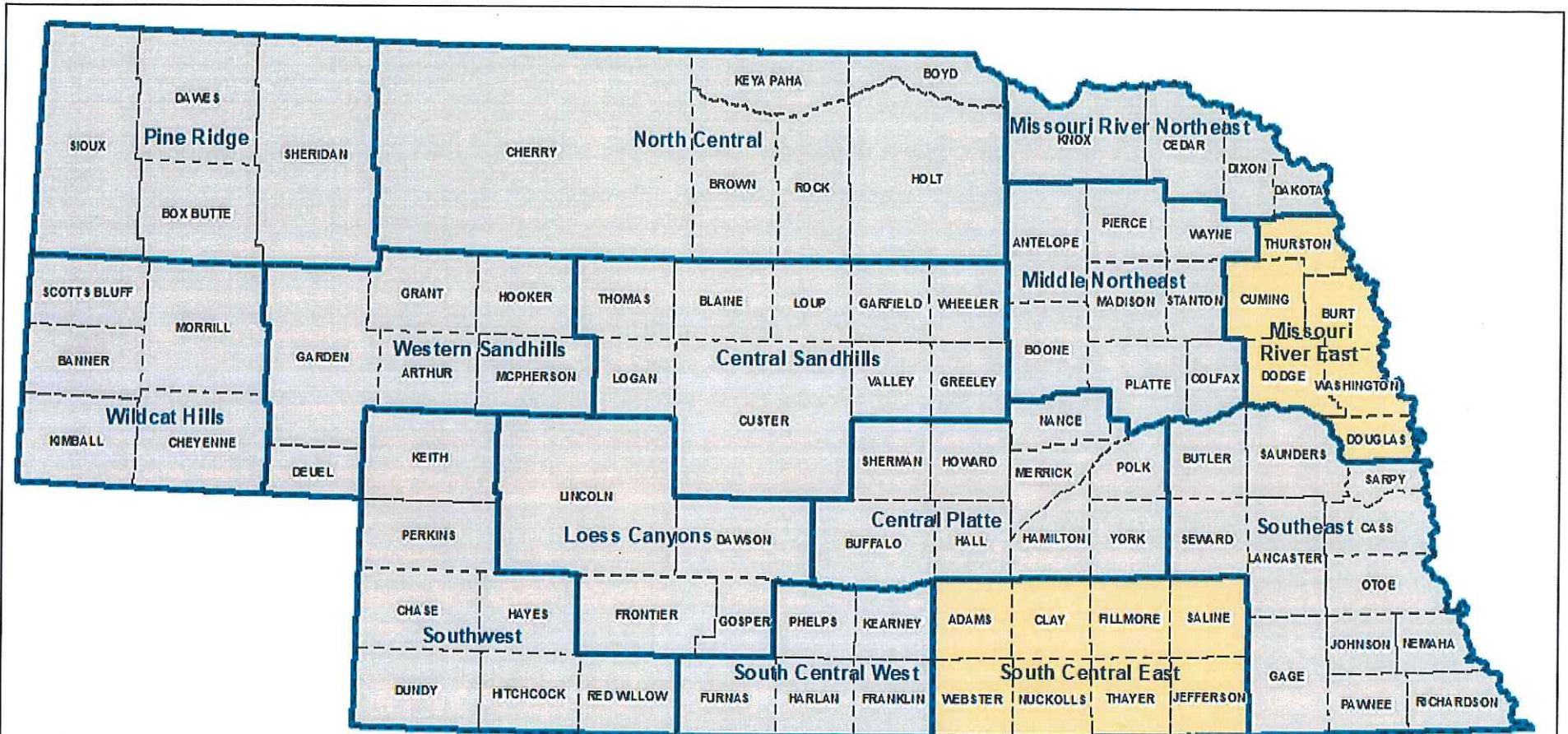
How does it work?

The first step is to put together a steering committee to guide the process and ensure that local issues are front and center in developing the plan. Steering committees may include county board representatives, emergency managers, fire department personnel, natural resources professionals, and other interested individuals. The committee defines priority areas, identifies topics and issues important to local emergency responders, and provides general guidance as the plan is prepared.

Once we have gathered the information, we will prepare a draft plan for review, incorporate edits and changes, then finalize the plan and make it available to all. This process should be complete within about eight months. Counties are invited to sign the finalized plans.

Further information is available by emailing sbenson4@unl.edu or call Sandy Benson at 402-684-2290.

Nebraska Forest Service Current and Planned Community Wildfire Protection Plan Regions



Legend

--- County Boundaries

Nebraska CWPP Regions Status

Current

Proposed

Estimated Completion Dates

2021: South Central West, Middle Northeast
 2022: South Central East, Missouri River East
 Scheduled Updates 2021-2022: Wildcat Hills, Missouri River Northeast, Loess Canyons

