

**LOESS HILLS
COOPERATIVE**

**BURN
WEEK**

2025





POST-EVENT SUMMARY

The Loess Hills Fire Partners held the 10th Annual Cooperative Burn Week from March 31 to April 4th. This event provided an opportunity to join with participants and partners from across the region to achieve fire management and training in an atmosphere conducive to building personal skills across the full array of experience levels. It was also an opportunity to build relationships, share knowledge and techniques and work within a more complex organizational structure utilizing an expanded Incident Command System.

The Cooperative Burn Week was based at Waubonsie State Park owned by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources near Hamburg, Iowa. This year's event had a southern focal area of Fremont, Mills, Pottawattamie, and Washington (NE) counties. Burn units located on Iowa DNR's Nishnabotna Wildlife Unit and Turkey Creek Preserve lands were identified as available areas to meet

weather parameters. The southern Loess Hills have experienced prolonged drought since 2019, with very little precipitation over the winter months. A switch in weather patterns to cool temperatures, higher wind speeds for a day, and precipitation presented challenges, as well as opportunities, for the week's event. Participants were able to complete live fire operations on two different dates throughout the week. Operational shift #1 was a suppression-focused operation with all participants working on initial attack exercises, size-up and giving briefings to their crew. Participants were split into four divisions and simultaneously burned units at four different locations on day one, and 7 different units simultaneously on day 4. We had participation ranging from 80-107 personnel on any given day of the week. This allowed for pairing of trainer/mentors and trainees to facilitate a one-on-one working environment. Participants were paired based on their qualification system

(agency, NWCG, Iowa DNR IFIRE qualification system).

A total of 119 participants from 45 conservation agencies and organizations, volunteers and volunteer fire departments participated. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources was represented by 14 different wildlife units, state parks, forestry districts, and bureaus. Participants attended this year's event from 12 different states, plus Alberta, Canada. The event also saw 8 guests join the event in a variety of capacities. Guests attended from the Bendix King radio, Agren, the Statewide Interoperability Communication Bureau, and Iowa DNR Communications & Outreach.

Twenty-eight individuals received evaluations for their NWCG or IFIRE Position Task books: 18 FFT1/ICT5 (squad boss), 12 Faller, 4 FIRB (firing boss), and 5 ENGB (engine boss) task books within the NWCG system; 4 LINB (line boss), 1 IGSP (ignition specialist), 2 IGNB (ignition boss), and one RXBB (burn boss) within the IFIRE system. Of those twenty-eight, one task book received a final evaluation and completion status. Sixteen different personnel served in a burn boss or burn boss trainee role. Other personnel were able to fulfill roles as agency burn bosses, squad bosses, UTV and engine operators and mentors. Numerous trainees were able to work in their respective trainee role during more than one operational shift with their mentor. Other training opportunities included learning new or different engine and UTV setups, presentation on suppression and initial attack, presentation ignition tactics/techniques, 10-yr History of the Cooperative Burn Week, case study on the South Overlook

Rx from earlier in the spring of 2025, fuels, prescribed fire escape lessons learned, Burning with Wildlife in Mind, basic Hazmat, VFD interaction discussion, structure triage exercise, Stop the Bleed presentation, and working within a complex burn organization with multiple divisions organized under the Incident Command System (ICS). See Appendix A for a more detail breakdown regarding number of participants and acres treated. See Appendix B for pictures taken throughout the week.

Thirty personnel from multiple agencies served on the Incident Management Team (IMT) in a variety of roles to assist with the planning of the event. The team continues to grow and expand to meet the event capacity needs. Several members served in trainee or learning roles on the team to gain experience and build redundancy within the IMT and region. Public information officers and other key staff for the event also promoted and moderated coverage of the event on several social media platforms, enhancing the message of the importance of prescribed fire and collaborative partnerships.

The weather conditions this year were favorable for live fire on two of the five days of the event. The suppression training day gave participants scenarios and repetitions at initial attack exercises, going through the size-up process, different tool usage, equipment familiarity, and briefing crew members before engaging the fire. Chainsaw operations were implemented on one of the non-burn days at two site locations. Sawyers were able to assist local organizations with hazard tree felling, brush thinning and trail edge improvement to enhance

accessibility with equipment. Prior to the event week, an extensive new firebreak was installed on the Waubonsie Main unit to modify the pre-existing unit design.

Within our landscape and organizations, the squad boss (FFT1) and single resource levels continue to be the most crucial and critical for fire operations. Firefighters at these levels possess the local knowledge that aids in their ability to control both the holding and firing within their divisions, while also controlling the tempo for the day. Focusing additional time, knowledge, and experience towards these position levels is a necessity for all organizations within the Loess Hills and region to continue to build fire capacity, proficiency, and efficiency. The overall planning for multiple simultaneous divisions continues to stretch the overhead for further learning and creativity.



Photo courtesy of Haley Nichols.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANTS, AGENCIES & ACRES TREATED

Participating Agencies/Organizations:

Agren
Audubon Society of Omaha
Bendix King Radios
Bur Oak Land Trust
Carter Lake VFD
Conservation Corps of Iowa/Minnesota
Ecological Fire Solutions
Farragut VFD
Fontenelle Forest
Golden Hills RC&D
Great Plains Audubon
Harrison County Conservation Board Iowa
Hornick VFD
Department of Natural Resources:
Parks Division (4 State Parks) Wildlife
Division (2 units)
Loess Hills State Forest
District Forestry (2 districts) Private Lands
Fire
Conservation & Research
Outreach & Communication
Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
Iowa State University
Kansas Forest Service
Kirkwood Community College
Lefthand Fire Protection District
Lincoln Parks & Recreation (Nebraska)
Madison County Conservation Board
Mondamin VFD
Monona County Conservation Board
Oak Township VFD
Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo
Onawa VFD
Pheasants Forever (Iowa, Minnesota, and
South Dakota)
Plymouth County Conservation Board
Pottawattamie County Conservation Board
Preservation Society
Riverton VFD
Salix Resource Management (Alberta)
Smithland VFD
Southwest Rural Fire Protection District
(Lincoln, NE)
Story County Conservation Board
The Nature Conservancy- Iowa, Nebraska,
and Oregon Chapters
The Nature Conservancy- North American
Fire Crew (IA, CA, CO, AK, NC, WA)
Turkey Creek Preserve University of
University of Nebraska- Omaha Glacier
Creek Preserve
Upper Iowa University
US Army Corps of Engineers
US Fish & Wildlife Service
Van Meter VFD
Warren County Conservation Board
Woodbine Fire & Rescue
Woodbury County Conservation Board
Volunteers of numerous entities



Photo courtesy of Jacob Smith.

# of Participating Agencies/ Orgs:	45
# of Fire Departments:	11
Total # of Participants:	119
Personnel-Hours:	5392 Hours
Equipment Utilized:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 Engines • 26 UTVs • Countless Agency Vehicles and Hand Tools

Photo courtesy of Kody Wohlers.



Burn Unit Completion Summary

Burn Unit	Ownership	County	Date	Acres
Grant Center- Metcalf/Longlee	DNR- Missouri River Wildlife	Monona	3/13/2025	266
Grant Center- North	DNR- Missouri River Wildlife	Monona/ Woodbury	3/25/2025	813
Grant Center- Main	DNR- Missouri River Wildlife	Monona	3/27/2025	1568
Riverton- Jensen Tract	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	3/31/2025	186
Botna Bottoms WMA- Deng Tract	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	3/31/2025	241
Poosum Lodge Burnout	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	3/31/2025	30
MU Payne- East Levee	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	3/31/2025	546
TC- North 38 Complex	Turkey Creek Preserve	Douglas, NE	3/31/2025	120
Eli Slusher WMA- Wanamaker	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	4/3/2025	168
OS Wing WMA	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	4/3/2025	127
Poosum Hollow WMA- South Tract	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	4/3/2025	49
St. Mary's Island- Windy Hill	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	4/3/2025	192
St. Mary's Island- Bob Sieck	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	4/3/2025	105
St. Mary's Island- Adkins West	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	4/3/2025	209
St. Mary's Island- Adkins East	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	4/3/2025	52
Riverton- Swanson Tract	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	4/3/2025	271
Lake Shawtee- Aistrophe	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	4/3/2025	133
Lake Shawtee- Martin Tract	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	4/3/2025	61
Lake Shawtee- Conner	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	4/3/2025	54
Lake Shawtee- Dashner	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	4/3/2025	32
Lake Shawtee- East 80	DNR - Nishnabotna Wildlife	Fremont	4/3/2025	75
Waubonsie Main	DNR- Waubonsie State Park	Fremont	4/9/2025	582
			Public Org Acres	5479
			Private Acres	401

**TOTAL 22 Burn Units
5880 Acres**

APPENDIX B: PICTURES

To see the complete photo album, go to:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/ZHXmFd37SXystu1Y9>

To see video compiled
by Iowa Department
of Natural Resources,
go to:

[https://youtu.be/
YcsxBWoLRHo](https://youtu.be/YcsxBWoLRHo)



The Yellow Division has their division breakout prior to operational shift #1. Day one consists of introductions, crew preparedness, equipment familiarity, and mobilization to designated areas. *Photo courtesy of Jason Andersen.*



Interior cedar pockets torch out on the Grant Center Rx Complex, having a volcanic appearance. *Photo courtesy of Douglas Today.*



Crews wait for another repetition for suppression exercises. *Photo courtesy of Haley Nichols.*



New radios purchased from a grant from the Gilchrist Foundation aided in improved communication throughout the week. *Photo courtesy of Haley Nichols.*



Pink division works the Bottom Bottoms line after prepping interior poles. *Photo courtesy of Kody Wohlers.*



Ample drip torch time is always a priority for getting participants opportunities to light different ignition patterns, and observe fire behavior. *Photo courtesy of Jason Andersen.*



Participants got hands on training with tourniquets, and packing wounds during the Stop the Bleed presentation. *Photo courtesy of Sarah Bell.*



Chainsaw operations are part of prescribed and wildfire operations, as well as daily land stewardship work. Crews assisted in felling hazard trees, and improving trail corridors for our host. *Photo courtesy of Gary Barrineau.*



Operational briefings are performed to increase awareness, divide duties, and provide needed information to crew members prior to ignition. *Photo courtesy of Megann Schmidt.*



Ample equipment is needed to make the week a success. Organizations are willing to provide the UTVs and Engines needed to safely complete the burn operations. *Photo courtesy of Kody Wohlers.*



Ignition patterns and techniques can manipulate fire behavior to your advantage when used correctly. Instructors present on the various uses to better prepare participants for the future. *Photo courtesy of Ryan Schmidt.*



Interior ignition team set to go at Grant Center!
Photo courtesy of Melanie Schmidt.



The southern Loess Hills are blessed to be rich in biodiversity, including yucca and red buds!. *Photo courtesy of Kody Wohlers.*



Always prepared for the unexpected. A crew member observes while a unit burns out off of the highway. *Photo courtesy of Alissa Puffett.*



Crew members compare notes and placement on the map prior to ignition. *Photo courtesy of Jason Andersen.*



Operational crew for the Grant Center Rx Complex on March 27, 2025. *Photo courtesy of Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.*



Operational After Action Reviews (AARs) are a great time for discussion on improvements, successes, and failures. Valuable input comes out of these debrief conversations. *Photo courtesy of Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.*



An interior igniter makes visual contact with adjacent resources. *Photo courtesy of Kody Wohlers.*



Converging convection columns combine prior to the unit being rung. *Photos courtesy of Kaleb Kaster.*



Thousands of cedar show their mortality reflection on the Grant Center Rx Complex. A well planned and timely implemented prescribed fire can be the most economically efficient tool a land steward can do to promote the longevity of a prairie system. *Photo courtesy of Kody Wohlers.*