

The Firing Line

Plan In Works To Protect Northeast Neb. From Wildfires

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

Wildfires happen. It may be due to a lightning strike, a combine malfunction, a prescribed burn that got out of hand, even a spark from a passing train in a grassy ditch. Sometimes, it may be from a campfire not double-checked to make sure the coals are dead.

However they start, wildfires pose great risks. No matter their size, whether to structures or agricultural land or recreational areas, they are a hazard not to be underestimated. They are always a threat, especially during dry, windy days seen often here in the Yankton area, which can enable rapid and dangerous spread across acres in sometimes only minutes.

Thanks to the quick actions of rural and city fire departments, wildfires rarely get out of hand in Northeast Nebraska.

But there are still risks, some of them growing as fast as houses are being built on the woody bluffs of the Missouri River.

That's why the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) is developing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) specific to the Missouri River corridor from Knox County through Cedar, Dixon and Dakota counties, including the Lewis and Clark Recreation Area.

The CWPP area covers 27 fire districts.

The CWPP is designed to facilitate collaboration among community leaders, local governments, fire departments and residents to identify potential problem areas and solutions within at-risk communities and rural areas.

CWPPs were developed as part of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. Areas selected for a CWPP need to have been identified as at-risk.

According to the NFS, the specific threat to the Missouri River corridor include encroaching cedar and other vegetation, mostly invasive weeds, that have changed the landscape's fire ecology.

In addition, there is an increase of residential structures — both from expanding communities like Yankton and seasonal homes — amongst "wild" land along the Missouri River, especially around the Lewis and Clark Lake.

The purpose of the CWPP is to bring the area back to a natural fire ecology through healthier ecosystems, both improving wildfire prevention and creating safer firefighting conditions.

The benefit will be not only to resi-



PHOTO: METRO GRAPHICS

dents but also surrounding rangeland used by livestock owners for grazing.

Nebraska has four other CWPPs already in place: Pine Ridge, North Central, Loess Canyons and Wildcat Hills.

Kim Slezak, a forestry consultant from Milligan, Neb., who is serving as the coordinator of the Missouri River Northeast CWPP, is gathering input through the end of June from fire departments and community leaders as well as the public, meaning also farmers and ranchers, included in the targeted counties.

"We need input from the area experts, the community leaders and firefighters," she said. "They know the land. They know the local issues. Collaboration is imperative to achieve a true snapshot of conditions and resources at risk and to arrive at a workable CWPP that will benefit all citizens."

Slezak can be contacted at 402-629-4383 or kim@slezakag.com. For more information, visit www.nebcwpp.slezakag.com.

Commentary

South Dakota Working To Cope With Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

BY LUCAS LENTSCH
S.D. Secretary of Agriculture

While Memorial Day marks the beginning of summer grilling season, recent news may have some worried about the cost of eggs or the Thanksgiving turkey. Avian influenza has been devastating to many of our poultry producers, but be assured that our nation's food supply remains safe and abundant.

In the last few months, highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) has taken a tremendous toll on the poultry industry in South Dakota and a number of other Midwest states. To date, seven million turkeys and 33 million laying hens have been impacted by HPAI. Nationwide, more than 40 million birds have been affected.

Here in South Dakota, the Animal Industry Board (AIB) is working closely with the poultry industry and individuals who have poultry in backyard flocks. Avian influenza is detected through visual observation and surveillance of poultry flocks. When a producer suspects that their birds may be infected, the state veterinarian is contacted and a disease investigation is initiated. Samples are collected by



Lentsch

swabbing the mucus coating the throat of live birds, a process which does no harm to the birds. These samples are sent to the Animal Disease Research and Diagnostic Laboratory in Brookings. The lab in Brookings works with the state veterinarian

and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service National Veterinary Services Laboratories at Ames, Iowa to confirm whether a flock is infected with HPAI.

If HPAI is confirmed, the farms housing the infected birds are quarantined and the birds are humanely euthanized. To help slow the spread of HPAI, the AIB establishes a 10-kilometer zone around each infected farm. Animal health officials contact those in the zone to determine if poultry are present and schedule a time for any poultry to be sampled.

Consumers should know that HPAI is not a food safety concern and is not transmissible by eating properly prepared poultry. Additionally, as part of

the USDA HPAI response plan, infected birds do not enter the food supply. USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service inspection program personnel are assigned to every federally inspected meat, poultry and egg product plant in the U.S. to ensure that our food supply is safe.

The H5N2 avian influenza virus has not been found to infect humans, and additional information can be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website (<http://www.cdc.gov/>). Additional information on the national HPAI incident can be found on the AIB website (<http://aib.sd.gov/>).

Here in South Dakota, we are fortunate to have an experienced and dedicated team at the AIB responding to the HPAI outbreak. I am thankful for their hard work during this difficult time. Losing animals can be incredibly difficult for producers and their families, either because of natural disasters or unpredictable and quick moving diseases. I am keeping our poultry farmers, and those assisting them, in my thoughts and prayers as this disease takes its toll on our agricultural industry.

Certify Conservation Compliance By June 1

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reminds farmers to file a Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification form (AD-1026) with their local USDA Service Center by June 1, 2015.

The 2014 Farm Bill requires producers to have the form on file in order to remain eligible, or to become eligible for crop insurance premium support.

Many farmers already have a certification form on file since it's required for participation in most USDA programs including marketing assistance loans, farm storage facility loans and disaster assistance. However, farmers who only participate in the federal crop insurance program must now file a

certification form to receive crop insurance premium support. These producers might include specialty crop farmers who may not participate in other USDA programs.

"USDA is making every effort possible to get the word out about this new Farm Bill provision," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "We've deployed a variety of informational documents and online resources including fact sheets, frequently asked questions and brochures to help farmers understand what they need to do. We've also conducted informational meetings and training sessions for nearly 6,000 stakeholders across the country. We want to make sure that those who are required to act do so by

the June 1 deadline. We want all eligible producers to be able to maintain their ability to protect their operations with affordable crop insurance."

USDA has conducted extensive outreach over the past year, especially to producers who only participate in the federal crop insurance program and may be subject to conservation compliance for the first time. Along with the outreach done by crop insurance agents and companies, USDA efforts have included letters, postcards, phone calls, producer meetings and interaction with stakeholder groups to help them reach their members. While there are procedures in place to correct good faith errors and omissions on eligibility forms, the

deadline cannot be waived or extended and a form must be filed by June 1.

The Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Certification form AD-1026 is available at local USDA Service Centers or online at www.fsa.usda.gov/AD1026form. When a farmer completes this form, USDA's Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service staff will identify any additional actions that may be required for compliance with highly erodible land and wetland provisions.

USDA's Risk Management Agency, through the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation, manages the federal crop insurance program.



"GIVE HER THE TICKET... SHE'S DOING THE DRIVING. I'M JUST SITTING BEHIND THE WHEEL AND STEERING."
Earl Bostick
Big Dry Syndicate

Dairy Fest 2015 In Brookings June 5-6

BROOKINGS — Area dairy producers invite you to enjoy free family events during the second annual Dairy Fest Celebration held in Brookings at the Swiftel Center June 5-6.

Dairy Fest is an annual event put on by dairy producers, processors and industry leaders to bring the community together to celebrate the dairy industry. This two-day event provides something for everyone, from youth to adults and will prove an opportunity to learn about all aspects of the dairy industry.

Festivities kick off at 10 a.m. Friday June 5, with a carnival for youth groups to attend. The carnival is open until 2 p.m. Groups are requested to pre-register for this day of the carnival. Group registrations will be taken on a first come, first serve basis, attendance is limited to 225. Contact Tracey Erickson at 605-882-5140 or email tracey.erickson@sdstate.edu for the Dairy Fest Youth Carnival Group registration information.

Saturday, June 6, the Dairy Fest Youth Carnival opens up to the general public for attendance. Phil Baker will perform at 9-11 a.m. The SD Dairy Princess will also be on hand to greet attendees. Youth and adults will rotate between carnival stations in a FUN environment learning about the dairy industry, starting at the farm all the way to the consumption of dairy products. This carnival is made up of several hands-on "myth busters" style learning stations set up throughout the Swiftel Center.

Stations will provide a wide range of activities from cheese making to feeding a baby calf. These activities are designed for youth between the ages of 5-14.

Saturday, June 6, begins with the second annual Cow to Cup 5K race a 7 a.m. Runners will be able to refuel with a free bottle of chocolate milk following the race. Funds from the race will go to South Dakota Ag in the Classroom and the SDSU Dairy Club. To register visit www.allsportscentral.com.

Another great opportunity on Saturday is a free bus tour of Hilltop Dairy. A modern dairy farm, just outside Brookings, these tours will take place from 9 a.m. and noon. Tour buses leave from the Swiftel Center in Brookings.

Besides the tour of Hilltop Dairy, the bus tour also includes an exclusive, behind the scenes tour of the South Dakota State University Davis Dairy Plant where the famous ice cream is made.

KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR OPEN FORUM

Have you ever had questions that you would like to ask a dairy farmer? At 10:30 a.m. June 6, the "Know Your Neighbor" open forum will take place.

All community members are encouraged to attend and ask questions to the dairy community and dairy farming neighbors. A free luncheon is open to the public following the forum.

This event is designed so attendees can go home knowing more about their dairy neighbors.

"As dairy farmers we enjoy the opportunity to share our dairy farming story, which is exactly what Dairy Fest is all about. We like to let people know how well cows are cared for," said Nicolien Hammink, an area dairy producer and Dairy Fest committee member.

For more information about Dairy Fest, contact Dairy Fest Committee Chair Darrel Rennich at (605) 695-3676 or drennich@diamondv.com.

Chamber To Host 10th Annual Ag Gala

The Yankton Area Chamber of Commerce Agri-Business Committee is holding the 10th annual Ag Gala on June 30 at the Pine Acres Kiwanis/4H Ice Arena at 709 Whiting Drive.

The Farm Family of the Year Award will be announced along with the eight P.A.Y. Scholarship recipients for 2015 from Crofton, Gayville-Volin, Hartington, Irene/Wakonda, Menno and Yankton.

Lt. Gov. Matt Michels is the master of ceremonies and South Dakota Secretary of Agriculture Lucas Lentsch is a speaker.

The Ag Gala begins at 5 p.m. and features a social hour, a Prime Rib dinner catered by Rollin' Smoke BBQ, a raffle and a musical program by Vern Kaul, the East River Cowboy.

Sponsorships for this event are still available.

To register for tickets and/or tables of eight or if you are interested in a sponsorship, contact Carmen Borden at Chamber@yanktonsd.com or 665-3636.

USDA Seeks Conservation Partnerships

HURON — Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced an investment of up to \$235 million to improve the nation's water quality, combat drought, enhance soil health, support wildlife habitat and protect agricultural viability. The funding is being made available through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), the newest conservation tool of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

"This is a new, innovative approach to conservation," said Vilsack. "This initiative allows local partners the opportunity to design and invest in conservation projects specifically tailored for their communities. These public-private partnerships can have an impact that's well beyond what the Federal government could accomplish on its own. These efforts keep our land and water clean, and promote tremendous economic growth in agriculture, construction, tourism, and other industries."

In January, USDA announced the first round of RCPP applications (which represented two years' worth of funding for fiscal years 2014 and 2015). In South Dakota, one project selected was the Central Big Sioux River Water Quality Project. This project will accomplish a wide diversity of agricultural and natural resource goals. The objectives of this project is to restore and protect the beneficial uses of the portion of the Big Sioux River and its tributaries by promoting and implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs) in the watershed that will reduce sediment loading, lower or prevent bacterial contamination and improve soil health.

RCPP, created by the 2014 Farm Bill, empowers local leaders to work with multiple partners — such as private companies, local and tribal governments, universities, non-profit groups and other non-government partners — along with farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners to design solutions that work best for their region. Local partners and the federal government both invest funding and manpower to projects to maximize their impact. This will be the second round of projects funded through RCPP. The RCPP program helps USDA build on already-record enrollment in conservation programs, with more than 500,000 producers participating to protect land and water on more than 400 million acres nationwide.

USDA is now accepting proposals for RCPP. Pre-proposals are due July 8. For more information on applying, visit the RCPP website.