



# NEB NEWS

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## EQIP Helps Control Cedar Trees

By: Joanna Pope, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

When people think about protecting the environment they probably don't think about cutting down trees. But cutting down cedar trees was exactly what Gary Bruns' rangeland needed to help restore his mixed grass prairie in southern Lincoln County.

Over the years Bruns' rangeland had become heavily infested with eastern red cedar trees. The trees had become so thick that his grazing land acres had been greatly reduced.

Bruns sought help with his cedar tree problem from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and enrolled his grassland into the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is cooperating with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to work with landowners to remove cedar trees through the Nebraska Natural Legacy Project. NNLP is a special initiative available in designated areas to address the specific needs and opportunities within biologically-unique landscapes.

EQIP and NNLP are being utilized together in Lincoln County to help restore the Loess Canyons area. According to the NRCS the Loess Canyons area in south central Nebraska is losing 2% of its grazing land acres each year to cedar tree encroachment.

EQIP, when coupled with NNLP, provides qualified landowners with the cost to remove cedar trees. The trees are sheared off at the base, and then stacked in large piles. To help keep the trees from becoming a problem again, NRCS designs a grazing management plan and recommends landowners conduct a prescribed burn every three to five years after the initial tree cutting has occurred. A prescribed maintenance burn will be required periodically thereafter to maintain the grassland ecosystem.

See "**Cedar Trees**" on page 2

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## Helping People Help the Land

## Cedar Trees continued from page 1

NRCS Resource Conservationist Jeff Nichols worked with Bruns to develop a grazing land management plan. Bruns said he learned a lot from the planning process.

“Jeff really knows what he’s talking about regarding pasture management practices. A lot of what he recommends is just good common sense, but I really appreciated his approach to the problem. He helped me see that it all comes down to proper management,” Bruns said.

Nichols stresses that once the cedars are cleared from the rangeland, it is imperative that landowners stay on top of controlling the trees’ regrowth.

“For every tree you cut down there are 100 little trees ready to spring up in its place. The key is to not let those trees grow too large and become unmanageable. The most economical way to keep tree growth down is by prescribed burns,” Nichols said.

Bruns utilized EQIP on a portion of his property and is also enrolled in a five-year NNLP contract. He is now responsible for following a grazing management plan, and burning the large piles of cut cedar trees. According to Bruns, his grassland is much more manageable now, and he’s dedicated to keeping it healthy.

“If I hadn’t received the financial and technical assistance from NRCS and Game and Parks I’d probably still be procrastinating. But I’ve already seen big benefits from removing the trees. More grass is coming back from where the trees had been. I’m really committed to keeping my grassland well managed,” Bruns said.

For more information about EQIP and other conservation programs available from NRCS visit [www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov/programs](http://www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov/programs) or your local USDA Service Center. ♦



Photos by: Jeff Nichols, NRCS

*The photo on the left shows Gary Bruns’ pasture land before the cedar tree removal. The photo on the right shows what this same area looks like after receiving assistance from NRCS to restore of his grazing land through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program in partnership with the Nebraska Natural Legacy Program.*

## Nebraska Wins Two National Earth Team Awards

By: Joanna Pope, State Volunteer Coordinator

The Nebraska Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has won the Chief's Cup for the second year in a row. The Chief's Cup is the Agency's highest volunteer management distinction, and is presented to the state that most creatively uses volunteers to meet the mission of NRCS.

Steve Chick, NRCS state conservationist, was presented the Chief's Cup on Feb. 2, 2009, at the National Association of Conservation Districts' annual conference in New Orleans.

"We take great pride in being selected for this award for the second year in a row. This amazing accomplishment was only made possible by the commitment of our employees and partners," Chick said.

Nebraska NRCS was also the recipient of the Chief's Field Award, which recognizes the best NRCS field office in the nation for utilizing Earth Team volunteers. The Holdrege field office received this distinction for using Earth Team volunteers to meet workload challenges.

Curtis Scheele, NRCS water quality specialist in the Holdrege office, submitted the winning Chief's Field Award nomination. His nomination highlighted how using volunteers greatly reduced NRCS' heavy workload during the busy irrigation season.

According to Chick, that's how to best use volunteers – recognize a need, and then find volunteers to help meet that need.

"We work with our employees to help them be prepared by assessing needs, training, and actively recruiting volunteers. Staff are responding with over 2,300 volunteers in 2008 contributing more than

63,000 hours. Nebraska also had 100 percent of our offices using volunteers, which is well above the 60 percent national average," said Chick.

Winning National awards is great, but Nebraska NRCS employees are the real winners when it comes to the Earth Team, according to Joanna Pope, state volunteer coordinator.

"Volunteers help NRCS in many ways - from answering office phones, to helping with surveying or writing success stories. Earth Team volunteers help employees achieve more," Pope said.

Anyone over the age of 14 may volunteer. For more information about the Earth Team visit [www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov), or contact Joanna Pope at (402) 437-4123 or at [joanna.pope@ne.usda.gov](mailto:joanna.pope@ne.usda.gov). ♦



Photo courtesy of Kearney Hub NRCS Water Quality Specialist Curtis Scheele (left) trains Earth Team Volunteer Josh Hohanson how to install and operate an ultrasonic flow meter on an irrigation pipe. Scheele submitted the winning Chief's Field Award nomination highlighting the interns' help.

# Conservation Tree Initiative Underway

By: Pat McGrane, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

*A partnership of conservation agencies and organizations has set a goal to plant 1.7 million trees annually - or one tree for every citizen in Nebraska.*

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is working with several conservation partners on a three year “Conservation Tree Initiative” to encourage landowners to plant more trees and shrubs in ranching, farming, wildlife land uses.

Dennis Adams, NE Forest Service forester said, “Since the 1990’s, tree planting in Nebraska has declined from about 2.2 million trees annually to just about 1.1 million in 2008.”

The decline in conservation tree planting in Nebraska can be attributed to multiple causes, but the partnership feels there is opportunity to plant more trees by taking a few actions. The partnership has set a goal to plant 1.7 million trees annually - or one tree for every citizen.

Organizations participating in the Conservation Tree Initiative include: NRCS, Neb. Forest Service, Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) and Neb. Association of Resources Districts (NARD), Neb. Department of Agriculture, and the US Forest Service. Actions of the partnership include:

- Producing a fact sheet listing cost share programs available to producers.

- Presenting at the NARD annual conference.
- Submitting a Neb. Environmental Trust Fund grant proposal to increase financial incentives for planting conservation trees.
- Approaching local work groups and the state technical committee about upgrading tree planting practices in EQIP applications.
- Extending the cut-off date for NRD tree sales into April or May.
- Encourage staffs of NRCS, NRDs, Neb. Forest Service and other partners to include tree planting options in discussions with producers.
- Enhance media promotions - a series of 10 news articles, special exhibits, and other “promotional” events like county fairs, landowner workshops and Husker Harvest Days to encourage planting windbreaks.
- Individual NRDs are also doing tree planting promotions, which include mailing a flyer about conservation trees to landowners and placing tree-promoting stickers on the front page of three Sunday newspapers.

The initiative hopes that increasing awareness among Nebraskans will increase the number of trees planted across the state. ♦

Photo by: Joanna Pope, NRCS





# Acres Planted Using No-Till Increasing

By: Pat McGrane, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

The amount of acres planted using no-till have expanded over the last four years, according to crop tillage surveys conducted by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The percentage of no-till planted wheat has expanded from 4 percent in 2004 to 29 percent in 2008. Over half, 53 percent, of the soybeans in 2008 were planted with no-till, compared to just 37 percent in 2004. In 2008, 42 percent of the corn was planted using no-till. This is about a 4 percent decrease since the 2006 survey, but is up from 2004 when only 34 percent of corn was planted no-till, according to Steve Chick, NRCS State Conservationist.

For other western Nebraska crops like millet, edible beans and peas there is a slight increase in acres planted with a no-till system, Chick added.

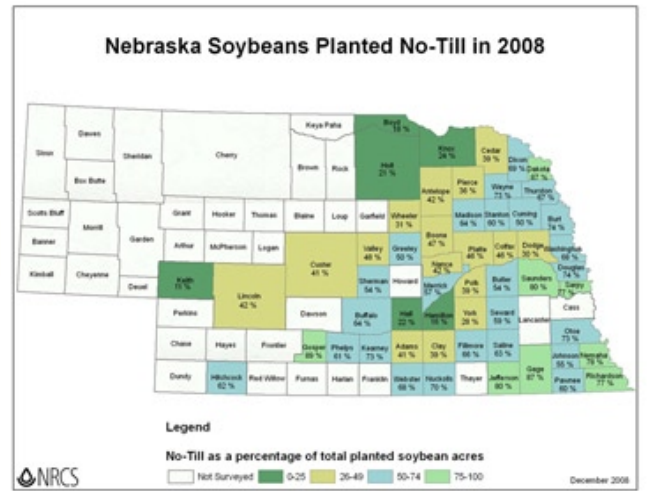
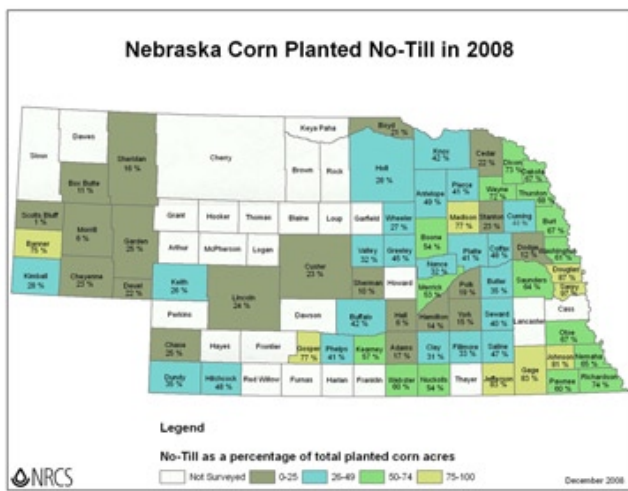
Dan Gillespie, NRCS no-till specialist and Madison County farmer, has been in continuous no-till for 19 years on his farm. No-till is a farming method where the current year's crop is planted

into the previous year's crop residue or stubble without tilling the soil.

Gillespie says, "There are numerous benefits from no-till like increasing soil organic matter, improved infiltration, less energy to plant a crop, less tractor time, and less labor for the producer.

"We encourage producers to leave at least 30 percent of the previous year's stubble on the soil surface for erosion control. There are other farming methods that achieve these residue goals like mulch tillage, or ridge till," said Gillespie. "But since many of these involve some type of soil disturbance many of the other benefits of a continuous no-till system cannot be achieved," he added.

The NRCS, Extension, Natural Resources Districts and others have formed a cadre of staff that host no-till meetings around the state in order to educate producers about the benefits of no-till planting. For more information about no-till farming contact your local NRCS office or visit <http://www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/notill.html>. ♦



# Nebraska NRCS Wins **BIG**

Nebraska NRCS is the winner of the Workforce Diversity Award and the Two Chief's Partnership Award. Both awards - along with two national Earth Team awards - were presented to State Conservationist Steve Chick on Feb. 2 at the National Association of Conservation Districts' annual conference in New Orleans.

"These awards are all about the outstanding work of our employees in Nebraska," Chick said.

The diversity award recognizes Nebraska's efforts to achieve agency goals of building a diverse workforce through their student program.

"We are making good efforts in our student and full-time employee recruiting. These actions were made possible from a team-effort that included Pat McGrane, Public Affairs Specialist; Margaret Styles, Black Emphasis Program Manager at the time; Kris Ethridge, Disability and Veteran Em-

phasis Program Manager; Alvin Perez, Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager at the time; Don Preston, American Indian Emphasis Program Manager; and Astrid Martinez, Federal Women's Program Manager at the time," Chick said.

The Two Chief's Partnership Award - the "two chiefs" being the Chief of NRCS and the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service - recognizes exemplary forest stewardship efforts. Steve Chick and Scott Josiah, director of the Nebraska Forest Service, were cited for their partnership efforts in implementing forestry practices in Nebraska.

"Working with the NE Forest Service has been critical for NRCS since we only have one forester serving the entire state. For years both NRCS and Nebraska Forest Service have taken an active role in each agency's forestry committees to coordinate programs and practices," said Chick.

For more information about these awards visit [www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov). ♦



Photo by: Joanna Pope, NRCS

*Members of the Civil Rights Committee who assisted with increasing NRCS' workforce diversity include (L-R) back row - Kris Ethridge, Josh Bowers, Diane Hooper, Suzy Riedel, Margaret Styles, Roger Reichmuth, Julie Breuer, Don Preston. Front row - Scott Wilett, Steve Chick (holding the Diversity award), Pat McGrane, Juan Hernandez.*



Photo by: Stuart Lee, NRCS

*Steve Chick (center) was presented the Two Chief's Partnership Award by Ted Beauvais, U.S. Forest Service assistant director of cooperative forestry (left) and Acting NRCS Chief Dave White (right) at a recently held National meeting.*

## NRCS Sponsors Another Exciting Science Bowl

By: Joanna Pope, NRCS Volunteer Coordinator

**Q:** Which of the halogens is a liquid at room temperature?

**A:** BROMINE

**Q:** What is the unit for electric current equal to 1 coulomb per second?

**A:** AMPERE

These are the types of questions competing teams were asked at the Nebraska State Science Bowl where over 400 middle school and high school students competed.

The Science Bowl encourages top science and math students from across Nebraska to showcase their knowledge, network with other science students, and to excel in academics.

The principal component to the success of the Science Bowl is its NRCS Earth Team volunteers. Over 80 volunteers assisted with this year's competitions held at UNL Jan. 31 and Feb. 7. Volunteers served as time keepers, moderators, rules judges, score keepers and more. According to Science Bowl volunteer coordinator Arlis Plummer, if it weren't for volunteers the Science Bowl wouldn't happen.

"Volunteers expose students, professors, and the general public to NRCS, its mission and opportunities. The students, their coaches/teachers and parents leave the competition with glowing compliments on the high quality of the Science Bowl," Plummer said.

The coach for the Gibbon, Neb., team said, "What a wonderful experience the Gibbon students had at the Science Bowl! They loved every minute of the competition. We plan to attend next year." ♦



Photo by: Brett Gross, Science Bowl volunteer  
(L-R) Gene Brass, NRCS design engineer and Ian Plummer, Earth Team volunteer, conduct a round of competition during the High School Science Bowl.



Arlis Plummer, NRCS hydraulic engineer and volunteer coordinator for the Nebraska Science Bowl, welcomes students to the competition.



Photos by: Joanna Pope, NRCS  
(L-R) Stacy Modelski, NRCS design engineer, Ted Huscher, NRCS geologist and Gary Wells, NRCS landscape architect, work at "Science Bowl Central."



## Drought Seminar a Success

By: Tamara Choat, Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition Coordinator

On Jan. 29, 2009, the Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition partnered with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Twin Platte Natural Resources District (NRD) to host a drought management seminar titled “Adapting Your Ranch to the Changing Environment” in Arthur, Neb. Norma Van Nostrand, Rangeland Management Specialist from the Ogallala NRCS office and Bill Carhart, Range Programs Coordinator of the Twin Platte NRD, (pictured right) were the primary organizers of the day long workshop.



Photo by: Tamara Choat, NCLC

More than 60 people attended the seminar, which ran from 11 a.m. - 3 p.m. at the Vet’s Memorial Hall.

Survey responses from the audience showed a positive reception to the workshops. Attendees commented they enjoyed learning about potential changes in climate; matching cows to the weather cycle; methods and ideas for monitoring and improving grazing land; and hearing different ideas and thoughts on range management processes.



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