

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Fall 2013
Newsletter



Surviving Black Hills Wildfire 101 by David Hettick, Southern Hills Service Forester

“I moved here for the trees” and “I want the area to be natural” are two of the most common responses I hear from landowners new to the area.

Many new landowners think the Black Hills have always been heavily forested with ponderosa pine. Pictures from the Custer Expedition and other early documentation from around the turn of the century show a much different world.

Paul Horsted's comparison photos are a wonderful teaching tool when it comes to comparing the forest we have become accustomed to and consider normal and healthy today with “Mother Nature's” plan.



The first thing people notice is the trees, or should I say, the lack of trees in the 1874 photos. Fires, both natural and those set by Native Americans for improving wildlife habitat, thinned the pines; as did the native mountain pine beetle.

European settlement of the region brought with it fire suppression. Unfortunately, in our zeal to tame nature, we failed to realize we can only postpone wildfire with suppression. Fire suppression inadvertently created high fuel concentrations allowing fires to frequently burn with greater intensities today than a century ago.

Topography, weather and fuel had traditionally been the main considerations when it came to wildfire suppression. However, today, wildfire managers have to add the human component.

Weather and topography cannot be changed, but the amount and type of combustibles we have is the one thing we can modify to reduce wildfire intensity. Treating ground and ladder fuels, and increasing spacing between trees can help keep a wildfire on the ground where it is less intense and easier to control.

We want space between the tops and branches of coniferous trees. The steepness of the slope, structures and soils found on the site help a resource professional determine just how much thinning you need.

Basic fire knowledge can go a long way in helping reduce your risk of devastation during a wildfire event if you are thinking about building a new home.

The site at the top of the mountain with the best vista is not the safest location with an approaching wildfire. Fire burns more intensely on steep slopes because rising warm air (convection) carries burning embers and dries out the vegetation in front of the main fire. Likewise, avoid building sites at the head of narrow, steep drainages that form chimneys. South and west facing slopes are hotter and drier. Use fire resistant building materials, and have access roads designed to handle larger emergency vehicles.

In my career, the Black Hills area has changed dramatically. I've watched the land go from a rural ranch setting to a populated and developed area. Grazing cows have been replaced by houses, subdivisions and small communities, but wildfire will still be a part of the Black Hills environment for the foreseeable future.

The unpredictability of weather and fire behavior mean no house or forest can ever be considered completely safe. However, by understanding some basic fire principles and implementing recommended pre-fire practices, the odds of survivability for property and the lives of firefighters protecting your property are vastly improved.

South Dakota Wildland Fire Update

The SD Wildland Fire Division resources had a busy summer supporting fire suppression efforts in multiple states.

The Bear Mountain and Black Hat Hand Crews, Engine Crews from the Lead, Rapid City, Hot Springs and Custer State Park Field Offices, and division employees serving as single resources have accepted these out-of-state assignments.

Rocky Mountain Incident Management Team C was also assigned out-of-state and continues to be available.

Division firefighters have responded to the following states: Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Oregon, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Alaska.



East Peak Fire in Colorado where SD Firefighters responded.

SDDA Fall Happenings

Sept. 17, 2:15 p.m. MDT:

Ag Development County Site Analysis Presentation, Spearfish Holiday Inn Convention Center

Sept. 28: Women's Expo, SD State Fairgrounds, Huron

Oct. 4-6: SD Barrel Racing Finals, SD State Fairgrounds, Huron

Oct. 6-12: Fire Prevention Week

Nov. 19: Beginning Farmer/Rancher Symposium, SDSU, Brookings





SDDA Presents Harvesting with the Ag Stars

It's harvest time in South Dakota. The state's producers now get to see their hard work pay off. The SD Dept. of Agriculture (SDDA) has invited SD legislators to take part in this crucial part of agriculture and learn first hand from our producers about this incredible industry that offers much to our state.

Each legislator participating will ride along with a producer in their area during harvest and learn more about the industry, its challenges and its successes. This is a great time for our legislators to hear from their rural constituents.

Agriculture is more than a job to these producers--it is a career, a tradition, a passion and a way of life. The longevity of South Dakota's family farms shows the dedication and resiliency our farmers and ranchers possess. Legislators participating in this event will surely take home key points for the upcoming session.

Agriculture is South Dakota's #1 industry, with an economic impact of \$21.4 billion per year and over 122,000 people employed. South Dakota's farm and ranch families take great pride in being stewards of the land and providing the world safe, nutritious and healthy food.

SDDA Ag Policy Update

This month, SD Secretary of Ag Lucas Lentsch and Director of Policy Courtney De La Rosa traveled to Asheville, NC to attend the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) Annual Meeting. Major topics in agriculture were discussed, including the implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), the future of the Farm Bill, Country of Origin Labeling (COOL), animal health and welfare and consumer outreach.

Your Department of Agriculture is actively involved in advocating for the passage of a comprehensive five year Farm Bill. Both the House and Senate versions of the bill currently include important provisions for crop insurance, extending USDA's State Agricultural Mediation Program until 2018, increasing funding for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program and invasive species programs and reauthorizing the Healthy Forest Reserve Program.

For more information on legislation SDDA is tracking, contact Katie Konda at 605.773.5425.

BOARD ELECTIONS

Ms. Terri LaBrie, Loan Administrator for SDDA, was recently elected President of the National Council of State Ag Finance Programs (NCOSAFP) at the annual meeting, Aug. 11, 2013 in Des Moines, IA.

Division Spotlight: Ag Services Bio-Control Program by Ron Moehring, SDDA Specialist

The biological control program of the South Dakota Department of Agriculture (SDDA) is a diverse one.

Classic biological control is using an insect or pathogen to control an unwanted plant or pest. SDDA became active in biological control early on. We now have very diverse bio-control programs in the state. Bio-control for noxious weeds like Common mullein, Dalmatian toadflax and Spotted knapweed are a few.

SDDA only collects insects from previously released sites and transports them to other sites within the state to release them. For other noxious weeds like Leafy spurge, we hold major collections, inviting state, federal, and tribal landowners, land holding agencies and county weed and pest boards to participate.

With the help of participants, we collect the insects from the field, separate them from other insects, weeds, seeds and other debris and package them. The agents are then divided and given at no cost to the participants. The cost savings to landowners in the past 10 years, just for the insects, is well over a million dollars. The benefit of the controlled spurge far exceeds this amount.

We also work with USDA APHIS on new bio-control agents such as the stem borer for Yellow toadflax. After exhaustive testing to show they are safe for field releases, we acquire these insects from USDA and release and monitor them at selected sites around the state. If the insects become established, we collect and re-distribute them to other areas.

SDDA also cooperates with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, Niobrara NE School District and Mike Durfee State Prison along with many other partners, in two insect rearing facilities located at the Yankton Trusty unit. This unique program utilizes prison inmates to raise insects for release on Purple loosestrife and Spotted knapweed.

While bio-control is an important part of integrated weed control, it is not a silver bullet and may not always work in every situation. A good example is Canada thistle bio-control. Insects were released in the 1980s and surveys have found they spread nearly everywhere in the state, but their control activity was limited.

Weeds are not the only pest that bio-control is being used on. In the past, parasites were released to control alfalfa weevils. Agents have also been released to control soybean aphids and other plant pests.

SDDA will continue to work with USDA and others to find new bio-control agents for noxious weeds and pests. For more information on the SDDA bio-control program, contact Ron Moehring at 605.773.3724 or agmail@state.sd.us