

AGREEMENT FOR SHARED STEWARDSHIP

Between

NEBRASKA FOREST SERVICE

And The

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE FOREST SERVICE

ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

This Agreement for Shared Stewardship is hereby made and entered into this fourth day of September, 2020 (“Effective Date”) by and between The Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska, a public body corporate and governing body of the University of Nebraska, by and on behalf of the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS), which is administratively housed within the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR), the State of Nebraska, and the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS).

I. BACKGROUND

Nebraska boasts a diverse array of forest resources. From the ponderosa pine forests of the Panhandle’s Pine Ridge to the hardwood forests of the Missouri River bluffs, our trees and forests play an important role in the lives of all Nebraskans and in the stability of ecological systems across the state and region.

State law (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 85-161) requires NFS to “provide education and services to the people of Nebraska for the protection, utilization and enhancement of the state’s tree and forest resources... The Nebraska Forest Service shall provide education and services covering all aspects of planting, protection, care, and utilization of the state’s tree and forest resources and shall provide fire protection to all rural land in cooperation with the state’s rural fire protection districts... The Nebraska Forest Service shall work cooperatively with all federal, state, and local entities to maximize services and funding”.

With approximately 1.5 million acres of forestland and over 1.3 million acres of non-forestland with trees, Nebraska is rich in tree and forest resources. NFS staff provide professional guidance and management to our citizens to help use, protect and enhance natural resources across the state. NFS is an active partner in the management of all natural resources in the state regardless of ownership and in cooperation with many partners and landowners. NFS is an active partner in implementing Community Assistance Funds Adjacent to National Forest (CAFA) projects since 2008 and NFS implemented its first Good Neighbor Authority project in 2018.

The mission of the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS) is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The USFS manages 193 million acres of National Forest System

lands with tribal governments, state and private landowners, and maintains the largest forest research organization in the world. Being a “good neighbor” is an essential component in both USFS’ and NFS’ work.

Nebraska’s forests, whether found in our urban communities or in rural settings, provide clean air and water, extend the life of infrastructure, provide storm protection for the state’s billion-dollar livestock industry, increase real estate values and save tax dollars. Trees save money on heating and cooling costs and preserve “The Good Life” in Nebraska by creating more beautiful, livable communities. In Nebraska, it is clear, trees can and do make a difference. Yet urbanization, invasive species, expansion in the rangelands by undesired species, and catastrophic wildland fires either jeopardize our state’s trees and forests or reduce opportunities for their rejuvenation. Whatever the impacts, these serious issues are complex, interrelated, defy single remedy solutions and must be addressed. Therefore, a collaborative, all hands approach for protecting high priority state resources is needed.

II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Agreement for Shared Stewardship is to develop a framework for the NFS and USFS to work together to protect, enhance and maintain the natural resources and specifically the forest and trees of Nebraska. It is our mutual goal and of our common interests to effectively respond to the increasing challenges facing our trees and forests in Nebraska.

Challenges continue to threaten our forest and range resources in Nebraska. Catastrophic wildfires are threatening North America’s easternmost extensions of ponderosa pine. Epidemics of insects and disease, including Emerald Ash Borer and walnut twig beetle, threaten our trees and forests. Natural disasters, such as the flooding and subsequent failure of the Spencer Dam in 2019, have degraded watersheds and forever changed the riparian forest of the Niobrara River. Invasive and aggressive species continue to threaten natural plant communities across the state including the encroachment of eastern red cedar into the hardwood forests and the Sandhill prairie lands.

Another key concern is large wildland fires. On average, large fires occur every 6 to 10 years and fires tend to be 200 to 250 thousand acres or more. Our last large fire season in 2012 burned over 500,000 acres.



Figure 1: Fire burning into Chadron, NE in 2006

These fires tend to threaten our communities:

- In 1989, wildfire forced the evacuation of Crawford, Nebraska. In the spring of 1990, a heavy thunderstorm in the same watershed resulted in severe flooding, massive erosion and one fatality.
- In 2006, wildfire burned into the city limits of Chadron, Nebraska, destroying three homes and forcing evacuation of much of the community.
- In 2012, fire, which escaped the pine forest, burned pasture and crop ground forcing the evacuation of Whitney, Nebraska.

A key component of the USFS's new shared stewardship strategy is to prioritize investment decisions directly with states using the most advanced science tools to increase the scope and scale of critical forest treatments that protect communities, create and sustain jobs, and improve forest health and resiliency.

III. STATEMENT OF MUTUAL BENEFIT AND INTERESTS:

Both parties agree to collaborate with stakeholders and each other to address forest and range issues in the State of Nebraska. Both parties will proactively engage partners and landowners to reduce forest fuels and address threats to our forests and trees across the state. Further, both parties agree to carry out projects that improve forest resiliency and health of the forest, trees and rangelands of Nebraska.

To achieve landscapes that are more resilient to fire and other disturbances, NFS and USFS will take a more integrated approach to prioritizing investments where they will have the greatest impact across broad landscapes. A collaborative approach that addresses risk across different ownership boundaries and habitat types will have direct and positive effects on land management practices and the residents of Nebraska.

IV. THE USDA FOREST SERVICE AND THE NEBRASKA FOREST SERVICE SHALL:

- A. Jointly work with other stakeholders
 - i. Including federal, state, tribal, non-governmental organizations, communities, ag producers, and universities to identify land management priorities and desired outcomes
- B. Collaborate on projects and other work within priority landscapes identified through federal and state planning documents, such as National Forest Plans, the Nebraska State Forest Action Plan, Natural Legacy Plan and Community Wildfire Protection Plans.
- C. Work together to achieve the following goals:
 - i. Reduce forest fuels in the wildland urban interface
 - ii. Protect communities from wildfires and community forests from invasive insects and disease
 - iii. Create and sustain natural resource jobs through contractor development, professional development and experiential learning
 - iv. Develop forest markets
 - v. Manage forests to increase productivity
 - vi. Improve rangelands and forestland health and resiliency
 - vii. Strive to achieve consistency in planning
- D. Develop projects on a meaningful landscape-scale
 - i. Utilize all tools available to achieve goals
 - a. Including but not limited to Good Neighbor Authority, Landscape Restoration, Joint Chiefs, Wood Innovations, Wildland Urban Interface, and Community Assistance funding adjacent to federal lands
 - b. Look beyond borders and boundaries for project planning and implementation
 - ii. Implement a collaborative, all lands approach to management
- E. Work across ownership boundaries to improve forest health and resiliency
- F. Develop a plan to implement the actions described above.

V. MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND AGREEMENT BETWEEN PARTIES

In accordance with this agreement, the parties will coordinate and engage other governmental entities and partners to derive the highest priorities that best embody the purpose of this agreement. The parties agree to work together to identify projects and determine timelines for these projects. Furthermore, the parties agree to evaluate projects to determine if combining

them can accelerate and leverage these projects for the greatest good to the resource and priority landscapes.

The parties agree to the following:

- A. The parties will consider, in accordance with applicable law, sensitive sites in their planning including but not limited to:
 - i. Cultural, historic and/or heritage site
 - ii. Threatened and endangered species habitat
- B. Parties can conduct business related to this agreement by in-person and/or electronic means; however, at least one in-person meeting is required annually to (i) further the goals and deliverables of this agreement and make recommendations to leadership and (ii) to review the terms of this agreement and consider revisions to its terms, if necessary.

VI. TERM

This agreement shall commence on the (“Effective Date”) and will continue for a period of five (5) years from the date thereof (the “Initial Term”). This agreement may be extended for an additional three (3) year period thereafter upon written agreement of both parties (the “Renewal Term”). The Initial Term and the Renewal Term are collectively referred to herein as the “Term.”

Either party may terminate this Agreement in whole or in part for its sole convenience upon thirty (30) days prior notice.

VII. AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVES

By signature below, each party certifies that the individuals listed in this document as representatives of the individual organizations are authorized to act in their respective areas for matters related to this agreement for shared stewardship.

In witness whereof, the parties hereto have executed this agreement as of the last date written below.

United States Department of Agriculture:

Date: _____ **By:** _____
Sonny Perdue
Secretary

State of Nebraska:

Date: _____ **By:** _____
Pete Ricketts
Governor

University of Nebraska Board of Regents:

Date: _____ **By:** _____
Ronnie Green
Chancellor

