

# Nebraska Wildfire Control Act of 2013 (LB 634)

## Nebraska Forest Service

2012 was the worst wildland fire year on record in Nebraska, with nearly 500,000 acres burned, 65 structures lost, at least \$12 million in suppression costs, and more than \$112 million in negative economic impacts. Higher temperatures, more frequent and intense droughts, increased forest fuel loads and the rapid spread of eastern Redcedar have created an explosive potential for very large wildfires across the state. These megafires occur far more frequently than in the past, spread and grow very rapidly immediately upon ignition and burn over large areas for weeks. They are difficult to control, overwhelm local suppression capacity, cost enormous amounts of money, and put lives and property of residents, visitors and emergency personnel at great risk.

### LB 634 Goals

1. Substantially improve the **protection of life and property** across Nebraska by increasing the capacity of volunteer fire districts.
2. Help to **reduce wildfire size and intensity** through rapid and effective initial aerial attack, better trained firefighters, improved fire suppression equipment, and expanded forest fuels reduction activities.
3. **Reduce costs** to the state's emergency fund for wildfire suppression by keeping fires small.
4. **Mitigate damage** to watersheds caused by catastrophic wildland fire

### LB 634 Accomplishments to date:

1. NEMA contracted with a private aviation company (New Frontier Aviation) to place one Single Engine Air Tanker (SEAT) during the fire season, typically July – September, at the Valentine airport to provide rapid initial attack and keep fires small. Two Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) staff are being trained to qualify as SEAT Base Managers and assume the role after 2014. A non-NFS qualified SEAT Base Manager was contracted for the 2013 and 2014 fire season.
2. Using federal dollars from a US Forest Service grant to South Dakota, and state dollars appropriated by LB 634, three SEAT bases have been established in Valentine, Alliance (heavy tanker base), and Chadron. A fourth SEAT base will be completed in the summer of 2014. A mobile SEAT base has also been developed and operated by the NFS.
3. A state-funded Forest Fuel Treatment cost-share program, administered by the NFS, was established to thin coniferous (pine and cedar) forests to reduce fuel loads, substantially reducing wildfire risk, intensity, and rate of the spread, and reduce risks to residents, communities and emergency personnel.
4. A state-funded Burned Forest Restoration cost-share program, administered by the NFS, was established to help restore forests damaged or destroyed by wild fire.
5. A "Trees Heat Nebraska" program is being developed to promote and help fund the utilization of woody biomass and other forest products, facilitate new market development, and foster market-driven approaches to accomplish forest fuels reduction
6. Two new Fire Management Specialists that will have wildfire training and SEAT Manager responsibilities were hired by the NFS to expand training programs for volunteer firefighters, private landowners, and communities in order to increase fire suppression effectiveness and safety. Their offices are located in Chadron and Valentine.
7. The NFS Fire Shop, located near Mead, NE, hired an new Office Manager and an additional mechanic to expand the capacity of the Federal Excess Property Program, which provides volunteer fire districts with specialized and affordable fire suppression vehicles and equipment.

