



Fire Learning Network Notes from the Field

Loess Hills Cooperative Burn Week

Fremont & Monona Counties, IA
April 4-8, 2016

Loess Hills Fire Partners hosted a week-long cooperative burn event (with an extra day on April 13) to provide partners an opportunity to join together to achieve fire management in an area where extra hands or resources were needed to accomplish the work at scale. It was also an opportunity to interact with partners, share knowledge and skills, and work within a larger burn organization than usual—all while helping colleagues in the Loess Hills achieve their fire management objectives.

The burn week was based at Waubonsie State Park and the surrounding area. Local staff identified priority burn units and worked across ownerships, including private lands, to create larger and more complex burn units than are typically feasible with local resources. Property recently

acquired by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IA DNR) with the assistance of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) was also targeted for work, along with two properties being held by INHF that will be transferred to the DNR in the near future.

Although high winds and dry weather limited the acceptable burn days during the week, three units were completed on state and private land in Fremont County and two units were burned on private property encompassing three ownerships near Smithland in Monona County. The 13-acre Rosie Hall unit was completed as a night operation with ignition starting at 8:00 pm to take advantage of mild weather conditions, including reduced wind speeds, during the overnight hours. In all, about 1,083 acres were treated.

Participant Organizations

Conservation Corps of Iowa
Iowa Department of Natural Resources—Parks, Wildlife, and Forestry Divisions
Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
Pheasants Forever—Iowa, Nebraska
Pottawattamie County Conservation Board
Smithland Volunteer Fire Department
The Nature Conservancy
Private landowners & volunteers

The 39 people who took part in the burning came from seven agencies and organizations, and also included local volunteers and private landowners; another 5 to 15 people assisted during mop-up and holding days following burn operations. Two people completed evaluations for their FFT1 (squad boss) taskbooks; other training opportunities included firing Very pistols (flares), using fusees, learning new or different engine and UTV setups, and working within a complex burn organization with multiple divisions and a large number of people. The burn at Rosie Hall was also a first night operation for some participants.

Support from numerous partners made this event possible. The Fire Learning Network provided project coordination, food and supplies. The Conservation Corp of Iowa (CCI) crew completed unit prep and follow-up treatment in the burn areas. Additional project support was provided by CCI through contribution



Staging prior to fire operations on private ground in Monona County

© Kody Wohlers



Night burn operation at the Rosie Hall property. Night burning allowed crews to avoid the dry, windy daytime conditions. For some participants this was their first experience with nighttime fire.
© Dan Smith

of crew time during the week of burn operations, by INHF's donation of CCI crew time to burn unit prep at the Rosie Hall unit, and by the participants and their agencies in the form of staff time and equipment. Other participants donated their personal time and labor to support this event during both unit prep and burn operations.

A stated goal of this event was a focus on Iowa and regional participants. The participation of 39 people speaks to the high level of interest in assisting and training with local partners. The involvement and assistance of the Conservation Corp of Iowa's Loess Hills crew was also identified as a key positive, both as crucial extra assistance for local staff with burn unit preparation, and as a training opportunity for crew members. Areas for improvement for future events include a longer planning timeline and improved radio communication, with additional testing of repeater locations and radio frequencies prior to the first operational period.

Feedback received during and after the Cooperative Burn Week has been overwhelmingly positive. Hosts and participants alike have remarked on the utility of the event for achieving multiple objectives, including fire management goals, training, and improving collaboration between partners in the Loess Hills region.

Cooperative Burns Completed

Burn Unit	Ownership	Location	Acres
Waubonsie Main	DNR Parks, Private	Fremont County	550
Wanamaker	DNR Wildlife, Private	Fremont County	277
Rosie Hall	INHF	Fremont County	13
Duke East	Private	Monona County	223
Duke South	Private	Monona County	20
TOTAL			1,083



A 223-acre burn was conducted on private lands in Monona County.

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At Waubonsie, staff restrictions make it difficult to pull off a burn operation at any scale, and what was accomplished here would have been impossible without the numbers and leadership that were present. Not only do events like this greatly and directly benefit the Loess Hills ecosystem, but I am certain that these group efforts will continue to invigorate our conservation efforts, on all fronts.

I would encourage anyone who might have an area under their care (and a few willing neighbors) that could benefit from a future cooperative burn, to step forward at the next opportunity. It's well worth it.

Dept. of Natural Resources Technician
Waubonsie State Park



A 550-acre burn was conducted on Waubonsie State Park and private land.
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The Fire Learning Network (FLN) is part of *Promoting Ecosystem Resilience and Fire Adapted Communities Together*, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior.

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