##

## Niobrara River Valley Prescribed Fire Training Exchange

## Participant Information

## March 14-29, 2015

Congratulations! You have been selected as a participant in the 2015 Prescribed Fire Training Exchange to be held at Ft. Niobrara and the Niobrara Valley Preserve March 14-29, 2015. We are excited that you will be joining us for these fire training and learning opportunities. All of the prescribed fire partners here are enthusiastic about sharing their fire projects and their landscapes, and we are equally excited to learn from you.

First and foremost, this event is for you; completion of both training and treatment objectives are given equal consideration. To ensure this exchange is a great success we’ll need your commitment, energy and willingness to work hard, share your knowledge and skills and be open to learning from others.

If you are unavailable to attend please notify us as soon as possible. We have a waiting list.

##### *Location*

This training will occur on lands owned and managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and The Nature Conservancy along the Niobrara River in the Sandhills of Northcentral Nebraska. The Niobrara River Valley encompasses majestic pine-clad canyons and extensive grasslands that support a diverse ecosystem. There are significant cultural and historic treasures in the valley; even today the idyllic rural communities have a deep connection to and depend on, their relationship with and use of the land.

Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge in Valentine, Nebraska is managed to restore, preserve and enhance the exceptional diversity of native flora and fauna and significant historic resources of the Niobrara River Valley and Sandhills. Learn more here: <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/fort_niobrara/>

The Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Valley Preserve is one of the largest Conservancy preserves in the U.S., and is a model for grassland management using bison, cattle and fire. Learn more here:

<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/nebraska/placesweprotect/niobrara-valley-preserve.xml>

##### *Organization*

The training is organized as an incident, using the Incident Command System. Participants will serve in qualified and trainee firefighting positions on a burn team and will assist with preparing, scouting, briefing, igniting, holding, mop-up, and patrol on numerous controlled burns in the area. We will also complete pre- and post-fire monitoring, train with various apparatus, equipment and tools as well as practice fire line leadership skills, and learn about local fire ecology.

There will be field trips focused on local land management issues and to areas burned in recent controlled burns and wildfires. We’ll incorporate presentations from local community members, scientists, land managers and fire practitioners. Participants will also present briefings about the fire regimes in their home region and discuss management challenges and opportunities there. In addition, participants will practice for and possibly be featured in local media interviews.

***Pre-work***

Participants will be required to complete some pre-work reading and prepare a 7-minute briefing about the ecological system they work in and the fire management challenges and opportunities. The pre-work is focused on burn plans, Great Plains fire ecology and prescribed fire operations.

***Performance Evaluation***

Participants should bring copies of their open position task books that they intend to work on; and any specific evaluation forms and other documentation that their agency may require. We will work with the cooperating agencies to ensure as much progress is made on task books as appropriate. All task books MUST be issued prior to arriving and neither TNC nor USFWS will issue a task book for participants. Final evaluations will be provided if appropriate; however- *Agency Certification* is the responsibility of your home unit. To learn more about position task books and the interagency standards you can review the *National Incident Management System Wildland Fire Qualification System Guide* here: <http://www.nwcg.gov/pms/docs/pms310-1.pdf>

##### *Safety*

Safety is foremost in all operations. Maintaining a safe work environment is everyone’s responsibility. Further, you are expected to address any practices you feel are unsafe.  Also, by committing to this training, you are acknowledging that you have completed and are current (or will be by the date of the training) with your agency’s work capacity test, annual refresher requirements and other requirements for firefighter qualification. A daily Incident Action Plan will outline the day’s activities, a medical plan will be in place, and EMTs will be identified. A daily briefing will be provided and tailgate safety briefings will be used prior to the start of tactical operations.

***Arrival and departure dates***

**All Participants** If your arrival dates differ from our requested schedule below, please ensure we have your specific travel itinerary.

**Coaches, cadre, Incident Management Team and burn boss trainees** should arrive before 17:00 Saturday, March 14, 2015. A team dinner will be served promptly at 18:00. This early arrival will allow time for the leadership to familiarize themselves with burn units, organization, equipment and facilities so that they are ready to receive the other incoming participants. Coaches, cadre, IMT and burn boss trainees are requested to remain until Sunday March 29 to assist with demobilization and final patrols of burn units.

**University Chapters of Student Association for Fire Ecology** who are attending during their spring break should arrive Sunday evening March 15 or March 22. University fire crews should plan to demobilize and begin travel Saturday morning March 21 or March 28. At least one University has made alternative arrangements to participate for a full 8 days. If your chapter intends to arrive earlier or remain later, please ensure you have informed us.

**Other Participants** who are attending should plan to arrive on Sunday evening March 15 and plan to depart Saturday morning March 28, 2015.

###### Meals

Dinner on your arriving travel day will be available for participants who inform us they would like dinner and who arrive before 18:00. If you do not tell us you will be on site for dinner you must provide your own dinner. Breakfast on your departure day will be provided.

Hot breakfast and dinner will be provided daily by an excellent chef who has joined our TREX team. There will be a sandwich bar in the mornings where participants can make their sack lunches for the day. It is important that you indicate any food accommodations or dietary restrictions on your **Participant Information Form** so that our chef can take care of you.

We recommend that you bring your own travel mug for coffee and that you have plastic Tupperware to protect your sandwiches from being smashed in your line gear.

###### Lodging

Lodging during your stay will be in bunkhouses, crew quarters and historic homes at the Niobrara Valley Preserve. There will be enough indoor sleeping area for all participants; male and female sleeping areas are separate. There is also ample camping at the Preserve. Mattresses, couches, and ample floor space is available, but please come prepared with sleeping bag/pad/pillow/sheets or other personal bedding that you require.

***Internet and telephone***

Wireless internet is available at the Preserve. Cell phone service is only available in a few locations on the higher ridges and is mostly unavailable at the Preserve Head Quarters where we will be staying. A landline phone is available on a very limited basis. If you intend to use the landline for non-emergency calls, you must bring a phone card. The phone number at the Preserve is (402) 722-4440.

##### *What to Bring*

This is a wildland fire assignment and you should pack accordingly. See the attached packing list for firefighters. Also note that March can be a cold and wintery month in Nebraska; you should bring natural fiber (wool or cotton) long johns to go under your Nomex fire clothing. We will have a limited number of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) available to rent. If you intend to rent PPE you must indicate that on your application so we can have it ready for you. A couple washers and dryers are available for limited use.

##### *Home Unit Responsibilities*

Access may not be available for computer entry of time reports.  Please arrange for your home unit to take care of any electronic time entry.

***Additional Information***

Six important documents are attached to this email and are described below. Most of these documents apply to most people. If you are in doubt as to whether something applies to you, fill it out, just in case. We can provide clarification on site.

1. TREX Invoice - Your non-refundable $100 Registration Fee is required by the end of the day on February 23, 2015. Follow the instructions on the Invoice to make payment.
2. TREX Packing List - Contains suggested items to bring with you to TREX.
3. Participant Information Form - Return to Guy Duffner (gduffner@tnc.org) by February 23, 2015. Follow the instructions on the form to fill in your emergency contact information, dietary restrictions, travel details, PPE needs, and other essential information.
4. Fire Training Release - Required from all participants. Return to Guy Duffner (gduffner@tnc.org) by February 23, 2015.
5. Permission to Use Photographs Waiver - This allows TNC to utilize participant photos and video to report on and to promote current and future Training Exchanges and the use of controlled burning. Return to Guy Duffner (gduffner@tnc.org) by February 23, 2015.
6. Model Release Form - This is your permission to be photographed or videoed during TREX. Please return to Guy Duffner (gduffner@tnc.org) by February 23, 2015.

If possible, please send all four forms/waivers in a single e-mail.

Organizing TREX is a lot of work on behalf of a lot of people. *Please* do your absolute best to submit your payment, personal information, and the forms and waivers on time. It really helps make the process flow smoothly and allows us to spend time and energy on creating a successful Training Exchange (rather than tracking down fee/information holdouts)! Thank you.

Some things that we will likely be sending in the coming weeks:

1. Directions to the Niobrara Valley Preserve
2. A schedule for the first couple of days
3. Pre-reading/assignments
4. Trainee specific information (particularly for RxB2 trainees)
5. Participant list
6. Other things we haven’t thought about yet!

Again, we are thrilled to have you on board.  If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to give us a call or email.

Best,

Jeremy Bailey