

Red Cedar: A Burning Issue

Rein in Eastern Red Cedar Spread with Prescribed Fire



Best advice: Burn Before They Get Big

Eastern red cedar trees have invaded as much as 30percent of the grassland along the Missouri River in southern South Dakota, and are slowly invading grasslands to the north.

When the cedars grow thick, taller and develop a canopy, grass won't grow and the land has been lost for grazing purposes. Fire is an ecological process and recognized control method, but many ranchers are hesitant to use it because of the fear of a runaway fire.

Good planning with professional help can substantially reduce risks of runaway fires.

Key Points Before you Burn

1. Respect--but don't fear--fire
2. Burn when trees are small (1'-2' high)
3. Begin planning a year out
4. 3,000 to 5,000 lbs./ac. forage for fuel
5. Get professional help
6. Develop a burn plan
7. Expect to repeat burns in 8-10 years

Safety first: Get Help

A burn plan that carefully details what will be done, when, and under what conditions, is essential to a safe burn. The landowner-driven Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association, started in 2015, has experience and qualified volunteers who will assist landowners with safe burns in Brule, Charles Mix, Gregory and Lyman Counties, handling paperwork as well as the burn. Contact your local NRCS office or the MMRPBA online at www.midmissouririverpba.com



Dramatic Difference: Prescribed fire was used to restore grazing in the area in the lower left, but the thick canopied red cedars in the background will have to be clipped and pushed into other standing cedars to get enough ladder fuel for a fire hot enough to burn 20 to 30-foot tall cedars. It's much more cost effective and safe to use fire when cedars are small.

Cedar Creep along the Missouri near Chamberlain



Begin planning your burn a year or more ahead

A good deal of planning goes into pulling off a successful prescribed burn, considering everything from assuring enough fuel is available to kill the trees to mapping out all the water facilities, gates, escape routes, hazards, likely wind directions and ignition plans on GPS. Three to four field visits by burn professionals are needed to prepare for a prescribed burn.

