

Final Project Report

Project title and Project number:

Prescribed Fire Education for Loess Hills Absentee Landowners, Project number 07-09

Organization's name, contact person, website, phone and e-mail:

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Reflect on your project, providing a self-assessment. At a minimum, answer the following questions: Did your project go as planned? Explain what went well and why. Explain what you would do differently if you did the project again, and why.

The project was carried out as planned, however, the initial methods of outreach were much less successful than hoped. Participation in both the small group meetings and the conference calls was disappointing. Eight absentee landowners participated in the Sioux City meeting, and seven absentee landowners participated in Omaha meeting. Seven individuals participated in the conference calls, some of them participating in more than one of the calls, and another five accessed the conference call recordings. An additional seven requested further information by mail. Therefore, a total of 35 landowners out of the original 320 landowners (about 11%) participated at this stage of outreach. Although the response rate was low, we do feel that this series of introductory contacts was very important to the success of the individual phone calls.

The one-on-one phone calls made directly to absentee landowners were extremely effective. Approximately 141 landowners who did not participate in the earlier means of outreach were reached via telephone, and messages were left for an additional 64 landowners. During this phone conversation, landowners were offered access to listen to recorded conference calls, Prescribed Fire Information Toolkits, and/or on-site consultations by a Loess Hills prescribed fire professional. 80 landowners (about 57 percent) requested additional information of some form through the phone call. However, we do not believe that this method would have been effective if the calls had not been prefaced by a series of other contacts. Many landowners indicated they recalled getting information in the mail from "Conservation Connect". Very few landowners responded with "I'm not interested" or hung-up on the caller. We do believe that the personality of the caller and interest shown in landowner needs are important in getting a good response to the phone calls.

Agren is working on several pilot projects to demonstrate and evaluate different outreach methods to absentee landowners. A "telemarketing" component is being planned for each of these different pilot outreach campaigns. However, the importance and appropriate content of a direct mail piece preceding the phone call has not been determined yet.

Please list the most relevant outputs,¹ and explain, if necessary.

- 320 Loess Hills absentee landowners received a direct mail invitation to learn about prescribed fire through various media.
- 15 landowners were educated at two different small group meetings.
- 12 landowners were educated through listening to conference call interviews or recordings.
- 141 landowners were phoned directly to discuss prescribed fire and opportunities to receive additional information.
- Approximately 90 landowners received Prescribed Fire Information Toolkits.
- Eight landowners received one-on-one consultation and/or site visits from a local prescribed fire professional.
- Presentations were made to conservation professionals at two Iowa conservation meetings.

¹ Measurements of production, such as number in attendance at a workshop.

Please list the outcomes,² and explain, if necessary. Be sure to include the outcomes outlined in your grant proposal.

Both a written attitudinal survey and a later telephone behavioral survey were used to gauge project outcomes. The sample population of “participants” was the same for each method of evaluation. Due to the short amount of time between the two surveys (less than six months), behavior changes were not successfully measured. The written survey yielded the following outcome results:

- 89% of absentee landowners benefited by an increased knowledge of prescribed fire and its benefits
- 56% of absentee landowners gained greater confidence to conduct a fire
- 50% of absentee landowners reported increased motivation to use prescribed fire on their land
- 33% of absentee landowners learned about available technical assistance and cost-share opportunities
- 60% of absentee landowners intend to conduct a fire on 1,860 to 3,200 acres in the Loess Hills as a direct response to their participation in the Conservation Connect program

The telephone survey, conducted in late 2007, did not confirm that any of the landowners who intended to burn their property had done so yet. However, 77 percent of landowners surveyed still intend to conduct a prescribed burn, and they voiced a strong intention to do so in 2008. If these 22 landowners follow through, 1200-2200 acres will be burned as a result of this project.

If the data collected from the surveys is inferred to the entire population of project participants (92 landowners), it is reasonable to estimate that 55 landowners (60 percent) intend to implement prescribed fire on their land. Using the range of acres reported that could benefit from prescribed fire, 8,525 to 14,630 acres could potentially be burned in the Loess Hills as a result of outreach conducted for this project.

Were there any negative outputs or outcomes, and/or concerns about the accuracy of your evaluation data, which you did not list above? If so, please identify the most relevant ones and explain.

Although response rates to both the written and telephone surveys were reasonable, the original sample size was small. The responses are helpful in characterizing the satisfaction of landowners with the work completed and their intentions to burn; however, the sample size limits the statistical validity of results. It is probably not reasonable to infer the survey results to all participants in an effort to determine an outcome of total acres impacted as a result of the project. Furthermore, there is probably an issue of non-response bias, as it is likely that the survey respondents were those most interested and motivated to implement conservation.

Identify your one to three most effective marketing tools (i.e., conferences, e-mails, flyers, news releases in local papers), describe your use of them, and why they were effective.

Personal telephone calls or conservation “telemarketing” was undoubtedly the most effective marketing tool used in this project. Each absentee landowner who did not actively participate in an earlier stage of outreach was contacted via telephone to ask if they were interested in learning more about prescribed fire. Each landowner on the list was called up to three times at different times of the day or evening until they were reached. If they were not reached by the third call, a message was left with the toll-free Conservation Connect Hotline number. 141 absentee landowners were reached in-person via phone, and messages were left for an additional 64 landowners. 80 landowners requested additional information of some form through the phone call. During this phone conversation, landowners were offered access to listen to recorded

² What important things happen as a result of the project, such as a documented change in behavior or new concepts learned.

conference calls, Prescribed Fire Information Toolkits, and/or on-site consultations by a Loess Hills prescribed fire professional.

These one-on-one phone calls were an extremely effective method of getting information to absentee landowners on prescribed fire in this instance. However, we do not believe that this method would have been effective if the calls had not been prefaced by a series of other contacts. Many landowners indicated they recalled getting information in the mail from “Conservation Connect”. Very few landowners responded with “I’m not interested” or hung-up on the caller. We do believe that the personality of the caller and interest shown in landowner needs are important in getting a good response to the phone calls.

At least one but no more than three photo(s) of activities in jpeg format.

Photos are not available.

