



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet Nebraska 2025



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2024 Final
Community Forests and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$121,000
Forest Legacy	\$25,000
Forest Stewardship	\$212,551
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$495,000
State Fire Assistance	\$2,541,247
Urban and Community Forestry	\$1,024,065
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$327,220
Total	\$4,746,083

NOTE: This funding is for all entities within the state, not just the State Forester's office.

Nebraska's forests play a critical role in supporting both our environment and economy. They provide essential benefits such as conserving soil and water, offering habitat for wildlife, producing wood and specialty forest products, reducing wind erosion, and enhancing the natural beauty of our state. Despite their importance, many rural woodlands remain unmanaged, and our community forests continue to face significant decline. Today, Nebraska is home to approximately 1.5 million acres of forestland and 1.2 million acres of land with trees, including nearly 490,000 acres of community forest. These community forests help improve air and water quality, enhance stormwater management, lower energy consumption, and contribute to the quality of life we call "The Good Life" in our towns and cities. This is especially vital as around two-thirds of all Nebraskans live and work within community forest boundaries. Beyond our city and town spaces, Nebraska's rural forests include native woodlands and strategic conservation plantings such as windbreaks, shelterbelts, and riparian buffers. These landscapes help filter pollutants, improve water quality, conserve topsoil, and shield rural homes, farms, and livestock from wind and weather extremes. The Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) remains deeply committed to the care and sustainable management of our state's forest resources. By expanding programs, fostering strong partnerships, and providing both technical and financial assistance, we continue to deliver meaningful results. In 2024, NFS worked alongside tens of thousands of Nebraskans and hundreds of communities to fulfill our mission: To enrich the lives of all Nebraskans by protecting, enhancing, and utilizing our tree and forest resources.

Program Goals

- Keep our mission relevant by aligning it with the current and emerging needs of Nebraskans, and clearly communicating our vision and role in addressing those needs.
- Effectively manage NFS operations, including our people, programs, and resources, to ensure long-term sustainability and impact.
- Promote species diversity across both rural and community forests to strengthen resilience, ecological health, and local economies.
- Build and strengthen partnerships, including new collaborations with non-traditional partners, to deliver greater benefits to Nebraskans and Nebraska's forests.
- Strengthen fuels reduction efforts in wildfire-prone areas, especially within the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI), by promoting strategic forest thinning and sustainable forestry practices. These efforts reduce wildfire risk, protect lives and framework, and improve forest resilience
- Deliver direct, on-the-ground technical support to woodland owners, farmers, land stewards, and priority landscapes to maximize resource benefits statewide.
- Improve forest health in both rural and community areas by educating landowners on tree care, invasive pests, and best practices for forest management.
- Advance forest product innovation by promoting the use of biomass, cross-laminated timber (CLT), mass timber, biochar, and other emerging technologies to add value and reduce management costs for landowners and communities.

- Restore forests damaged by wildfires and natural disasters, supporting long-term recovery and ecosystem resilience.
- Reduce the number of human-caused wildfires.

Key Issues

- High fuel loads in unmanaged forests pose a significant wildfire risk, increasing the likelihood of high-intensity, catastrophic wildfires
- The uncontrolled spread of Eastern Red Cedar (ERC) threatens Nebraska's grasslands, forests, and fire safety.
- Invasive pests, including the emerald ash borer, threaten tree health across the state.
- Community tree canopy cover is decreasing, reducing the environmental and social benefits of these forests.
- Herbicide drift poses a serious threat to both rural and community tree health.
- The loss of conservation forest plantings such as riparian buffers and windbreaks (shelterbelts) reduces critical protection for soil health, water quality, and wildlife habitat.
- Lack of economically viable markets for forest products which leads to a decline in management.
- The need for hazardous tree removal on public and private lands in communities.
- Over 90% of wildfires in Nebraska are human-caused, with debris burning identified as the leading ignition source. Most of these fires occur when burns are conducted outside of prescribed conditions

Forest Facts and Accomplishments

Selected Facts	Value	FY 2024 Accomplishments	Value
Population	1,961,504	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	2,932
Acres of Forest Land	1,433,522	Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans	13,821
Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land	1,227,194	Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans	9,145
Number of NIPF Landowners	21,091	Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted	384
Acres of Federal Land Under State Fire Protection	741,247	State Fire Communities Assisted	217
Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection	48,342,273	Coop Forest Health Acres Protected	0
Number of Rural Fire Departments	494	Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions	0
Cities and Towns	529	Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	86
Forest Based Employment	2,200	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	1,310,732
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	34,000,000	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	10,279
State Forestry Budget (All Sources)	5,306,217		

Program Highlights

Cooperative Fire Protection

The Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) Fire Program is committed to protecting lives, property, and natural resources through a proactive, all-hazards approach to wildfire management. In 2024, the program emphasized prevention, rapid response, training, and partnerships to strengthen wildfire preparedness and response across Nebraska and the region. Aerial support was a key asset in firefighting efforts. A Single Engine Air Tanker (SEAT) was operational for 116 days, from July 8 to November 1, responding to 34 wildfire incidents in Nebraska and South Dakota. The NFS SEAT program also contributed to Wyoming's wildfire suppression by refilling a SEAT plane six times during the Pleasant Valley incident. Training remained a foundational focus. NFS conducted 39 training sessions totaling 16,016 contact hours, enhancing the capabilities of wildland firefighters across the state. Additionally, over 1,000

firefighters received advanced instruction through the 17th Western and 6th Eastern Wildland Fire Academies, which offered National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) courses. Field response efforts demonstrated the program's agility and commitment. Fire staff were deployed throughout the spring as part of the Wildland Incident Response Assistance Team (WIRAT) and IMAT teams. By November 22, Nebraska had experienced 914 wildfires, burning a total of 110,475 acres. The program also maintained a strong focus on prevention. By late November, NFS had conducted 119 prevention activities, reaching 221,494 individuals with wildfire awareness and mitigation education. To support local capacity, the NFS Fire Shop, to date, has refurbished 1,186 pieces of military surplus equipment, converting them into wildland fire engines for 350 Volunteer Fire Departments (VFDs). The shop now manages over \$116 million in firefighting assets. In addition, 123 Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) grant applications were reviewed, and more than \$350,000 was awarded to support VFDs across Nebraska.

Economic Action

The Nebraska Forest Service Forest Products Unit drives the sustainable use and management of Nebraska's forest resources by promoting innovative partnerships, offering technical expertise, and supporting value-added wood utilization. The unit reduces waste, creates opportunities, and maximizes the value of Nebraska's forests through targeted programs and initiatives.

One of the year's standout moments was the sawmill demonstrations at Husker Harvest Days. In collaboration with Reinke Irrigation, the Forest Products team showed how trees removed during irrigation pivot installations, often seen as waste, can be repurposed into valuable products. Logs from O'Neill Wood Resources and a storm-damaged walnut tree were milled on-site, offering visitors hands-on insight into tree utilization, tree maintenance practices, cost-share programs, and services provided by NFS.

South Sioux City and its public schools joined the program to repurpose trees that had been removed for canopy management. Supported by UCF grants, the initiative secured a sawmill and is preparing for training sessions involving the city and schools. Plans are underway to retrofit an insulated truck container for kiln drying.

On the national stage, Nebraska joined the Urban Wood Network's national marketing strategy to elevate awareness of urban wood's potential. At the Partners in Community Forestry Conference in Chicago, the team unveiled marketing materials aimed at both the public and professionals--arborists, architects, and planners--highlighting the unique benefits and uses of urban wood in construction, design, and planning.

Through these innovative programs and partnerships, the Nebraska Forest Service Forest Products Unit continues to lead efforts in reducing waste, creating economic opportunities, and promoting sustainable forestry practices.

Forest Health Protection

In 2024, the Nebraska Forest Service Forest Health team advanced efforts to protect and strengthen the state's rural and community forests through a combination of research, diagnostics, education, and outreach. Their work addressed critical forest health threats while equipping Nebraskans with the knowledge and tools to respond effectively. A key focus was Bur Oak health research, supported by the Bur Oak Grant. The team collected acorn, twig, and weekly leaf samples from three Nebraska sites, resulting in 68 total tissue samples. At one location, young bur oaks showing herbicide damage were carefully dug up for additional root, stem, and leaf analysis. Preliminary testing of 2023 leaf tissue revealed varying levels of 2,4-D and dicamba, while 15 other growth-regulator herbicides were undetectable.

The Forest Health team also conducted tree pest surveys on 500 trees across 30 locations, monitoring for high-priority invasive species. This included 450 ash trees surveyed for emerald ash borer, 32 walnut trees for thousand cankers disease, and 22 tree-of-heaven trees for spotted lanternfly. Public education remained a cornerstone of the program, with 15 presentations delivered--three with hands-on demonstrations to help participants identify emerald ash borer. An additional five outreach efforts, including interviews, videos, and articles, helped raise awareness and promote early detection.

In western Nebraska, the team coordinated the Nebraska Invasive Plant Management Grant, supporting treatment on 350 acres and an inventory of 5,500 acres in Sioux and Dawes counties. The effort targeted non-federal lands, including state, local, and privately owned properties, emphasizing proactive invasive

plant management. These initiatives reflect the Forest Health team's ongoing commitment to science-based stewardship, healthy ecosystems, and resilient forests for all Nebraskans.

Forest Legacy

NFS continues to promote and work on the development of potential Forest Legacy projects in the State. We are continuing to work with the R2 coordinator to determine which projects are worth pursuing due to the unique nature of the Forest Legacy Program. NFS has also updated our Forest Action Plan and the priority forest landscapes which now align more with the Forest Legacy Areas in the state.

Forest Stewardship

The Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) is advancing a bold vision of forest stewardship—one rooted in collaboration, restoration, and long-term forest resilience. Through strategic partnerships and targeted investments, NFS continues to make meaningful progress in reducing wildfire risk, restoring fire-impacted landscapes, and promoting sustainable land management across the state.

Central to these efforts is the Shared Stewardship Agreement with the USDA Forest Service, which has enabled coordinated planning, funding, and action across priority forest regions. Through this collaboration, NFS secured funding for Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership projects in the Nebraska National Forest and Grasslands at Halsey and the Pine Ridge Ranger District. Key initiatives include timber salvage and product sales within the Bovee Fire footprint, helping to accelerate recovery and reinvest in the land. Plans are also in motion to expand Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) activities, including joint tree-planting efforts in Halsey and Pine Ridge designed to restore critical ecosystems while lowering costs for both agencies.

This stewardship-driven approach is amplified by NFS's ability to strategically leverage state, federal, and private funding, channeling millions of dollars toward wildfire mitigation across thousands of acres of coniferous forest, particularly in the Pine Ridge and Niobrara Valley. Over the past two decades, more than 42,500 acres in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) have been treated, reducing hazardous fuel loads and improving overall forest health.

Long-term restoration continues to define NFS's impact. In the Pine Ridge and Niobrara Valley, staff have planted over 800,000 ponderosa pine trees, with an impressive 90% survival rate after three years—proof of the agency's commitment to science-based, effective forest stewardship.

Landowner Assistance

In 2024, the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) forestry assistance staff provided critical technical assistance and support to public and private landowners through forest management planning and on-the-ground implementation. As part of its wildfire risk reduction efforts, NFS completed 140 fuels reduction projects, treating more than 2,123 acres of private and state-owned land within the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) and through the Community Assistance for Firewood Availability (CAFA) initiative. Engagement with landowners remains central to NFS's mission. Over the year, staff worked with 729 landowners, developing 143 tailored forest management plans to improve forest health, reduce fuel loads, and promote tree planting and windbreak establishment.

Landscape Scale Restoration

In 2024, the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) advanced its commitment to large-scale, strategic forest restoration through a series of ambitious proposals submitted under the Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) Grant Program. These proposals were designed to address a range of statewide priorities, from rural community canopy assessments to post-wildfire reforestation. Among the standout proposals was "The Future with Climate-Resilient Trees," which focuses on assessing tree canopy conditions in rural communities to guide data-driven, climate-informed decision-making. Another key initiative, "Nebraska Forest Restoration," supports reforestation efforts in wildfire-impacted regions such as the Wildcat Hills, Pine Ridge, and Niobrara Valley. To improve community forest management, the Canopy Assessment and Restoration Project was proposed to deliver high-resolution canopy analysis for enhanced planning and restoration. Additionally, "Small Projects, Wide Reach" aims to bring targeted forest restoration to 50 rural communities that were ineligible for IRA funding—ensuring no high-priority landscape is left behind. These efforts have already yielded success. NFS secured \$395,000 in LSR funding for forest restoration work across the Great Plains, specifically targeting Nebraska lands affected by wildfires. These landscape-scale projects reflect Nebraska's proactive approach to forest management, combining

science and long-term resilience to meet the challenges of a changing climate and growing wildfire risk.

Urban and Community Forestry

In 2024, the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) continued to strengthen community forestry across the state, helping cities and towns grow healthier, more resilient tree canopies through direct support, strategic partnerships, and impactful grant funding. NFS staff actively engaged with 153 communities, leading tree inventories, planting projects, and preparedness efforts for the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). These hands-on activities enhanced local capacity to manage and sustain community forests. Our collaboration with the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum (NSA) and Urban & Community Forestry (UCF) programs helped secure over \$11.8 million in grants, fueling lasting improvements across hundreds of communities.

In 2024, we:

- Conducted 13 full community tree inventories and provided 100 inventory assists to improve public tree management
- Supported 15 green space planning efforts
- Recognized communities through 88 Tree City USA, 3 Tree Line USA, 7 Tree Campus Higher Education, 19 Growth Awards, and hosted 2 Tree City USA celebrations

During the fall tree planting season, we facilitated 135 projects in 89 communities, planting 1,067 trees. These efforts engaged 588 adult volunteers and 442 youth volunteers, generating \$127,543 in tree value through federal and state investment. NFS also supported 11 communities in preparing community assistance proposals and led the development of a \$53 million proposal submitted to the U.S. Forest Service, demonstrating our commitment to expanding community forestry across Nebraska. While not awarded, the proposal underscores the scale of our vision. Through grants, technical support, and collaborative action, NFS continues to make a meaningful impact, growing stronger and greener communities across Nebraska.

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