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Chadrad Communications, Inc.
226 Bordeaux St - Chadron, NE 69337
308-432-5545 fax 308-432-5601
E-mail: kcsr@chadrad.com

(Neb)-Sioux County Slash Piles Burned Monday



By: Chris Fankhauser Posted at: 04/17/2013 08:33 AM

(Nebraska Game and Parks Commission biologist Shelley Steffl monitors a burning slash pile at Gilbert-Baker Wildlife Management Area north of Harrison.)

(Harrison)-The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission used prescribed burning to remove 68 slash piles from the Gilbert-Baker Wildlife Management Area on Monday.

Seven crew members were on the project site in Sioux County to begin the burn at 10 a.m. Game and Parks biologist Greg Schenbeck said all the piles were mostly incinerated by late afternoon, as they burned "hot and clean" in calm and cool weather on ground covered with snow. Forecasted snow blanketed the burn area by the following morning, when a crew was on the scene to monitor the situation.

Schenbeck said Game and Parks personnel place importance on forest thinning and management, cleaning up and timely treatment of slash after thinning and burning under only proper conditions, prescriptions and permits. The burn was conducted under a permit from the Harrison fire chief and an approved burn plan.

According to Schenbeck, burning was the best way to remove the slash piles from the WMA, especially considering that distance makes it economically unfeasible to transport chipped refuse to the wood-fired heating and cooling system at Chadron State College.

The piles, which were located about 5 miles north of Harrison, are left over from thinning and ladder fuel reduction projects completed in 2011 and 2012. The projects reduced fuel loads for potential wildfires and helped create a more sustainable ponderosa pine habitat for wildlife in the area.

"Although there are some inherent risks with the use of fire, burning the slash piles during periods of extended snow cover and ideal weather conditions is a better alternative than leaving them in the woods, where they can pose significant risks and challenges to firefighters during the summer fire season," Schenbeck said.

(Story courtesy of Justin Haag, Nebraska Game & Parks)