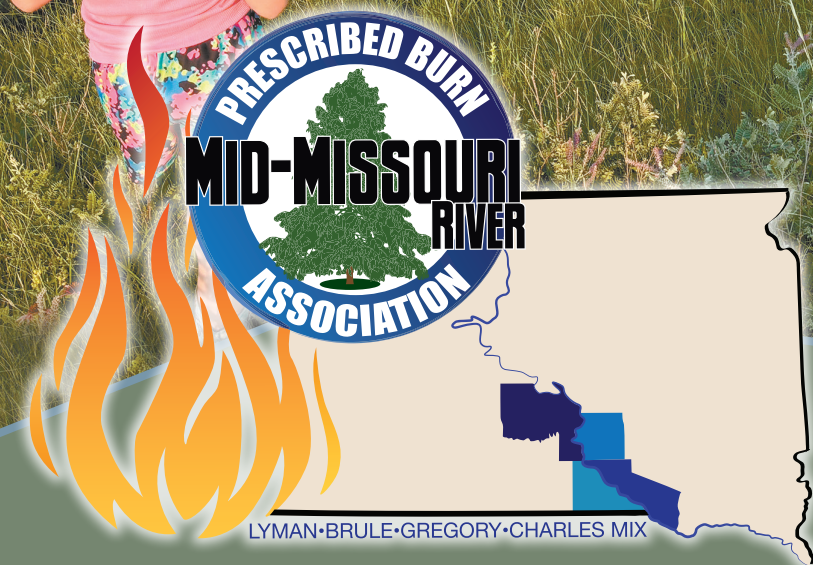


Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association

News



Fall 2026

Focusing on cedar tree control and grassland health

Welcome

Getting back to business

It's been a tumultuous couple of years for the Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association (MMRPBA). After our most successful burn season in 2023, we faced a major setback when our Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to burn Title VI state land along the Missouri River was terminated in the spring of 2024. This action essentially ended all our planned prescribed burns because nearly all of our burn units need the Missouri River as a firebreak.

Two years of intense negotiations with the Department of Public Safety, South Dakota Wildland Fire and South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks led to the passage of HB1001 during the 2026 legislative session. This new law will once again allow landowners along the Missouri River to burn across Title VI land and utilize the river as a firebreak. (See the article on page 2 for more information).

Many of our members were excited to get back to burning this spring, but Mother Nature had other ideas. Extreme drought conditions and wildfire risks shut down nearly all our prescribed burning. As drought conditions have persisted throughout the summer, chances for fall burning seem slim.

As we look forward to Spring 2027, we hope to get back on track with many of our prescribed burns that have been delayed for the last couple of years. Also, the emergence of four new prescribed burn associations is extremely exciting! (See the article beginning on page 3 highlighting their efforts). We are excited that the awareness of woody encroachment and the threat it poses to our grasslands is really gaining traction and attention in South Dakota.

With the addition of these new burn associations, this will be the last MMRPBA newsletter, and our future newsletters will be a combined effort among the prescribed burn associations in South Dakota. Please continue to follow the MMRPBA website and Facebook page for other updates and information.

Enjoy reading about our continued efforts,

Keith Hovorka,
MMRPBA Chairman

Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association News
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**Stay connected to MMRPBA and
upcoming event details:**

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Website:
www.MidMissouriRiverPBA.com

New law is a win for SD landowners

In a win for conservation, HB 1001 was signed into law by South Dakota Governor Larry Rhoden on Monday, March 9, 2026. The law allows adjoining landowners to burn state-owned (Title VI) ground along the Missouri River, in conjunction with landowners' private ground, if the landowner has written permission from the associated state agency, reasonable forces available to suppress the spread of fire, and assumes all liability.

Sara Grim, [Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association] board member and rancher from Bonesteel said, "So many people were involved in this, it's amazing how the simplest things take the most work. I am looking forward to the spring burn season."

Woody encroachment, especially of the Eastern Red Cedar, has been identified as an issue along the Missouri River corridor, and many local ranchers and landowners have turned to prescribed fire to combat the spread of the trees, as well as a means to improve the health of their grasslands. However, landowners have been prevented from using the Missouri River as a firebreak since April of 2024, severely limiting the usage of prescribed fire in South Dakota.

The passage of HB 1001 is the culmination of two years of negotiations between local landowners, South Dakota Game Fish & Parks, the Department of Public Safety,



March 9, 2026 HB 1001 was signed into law by South Dakota Governor Larry Rhoden. Pictured from left to right: Robert Perry and Tyler Stein of the Department of Public Safety, District 21 Representative Jim Halverson, District 26 Representative Rebecca Reimer, District 21 Representative Marty Overweg, Lt. Gov Tony VenHuizen, Governor Larry Rhoden, seated, Mid-Missouri River PBA board members, Brad Christensen, Heather Hammerbeck, and Tom Hausman, District 21 Senator Mykala Voita, MMRPBA board member, Sara Grim, SDSU Extension, Sean Kelly, and legal counsel Stacy Hegge.

SDSU Extension and local legislators to create a piece of legislation that will allow landowners to burn their river pastures efficiently and safely.

"I think our unwillingness to give up, persistence, paid off," said MMRPBA board member Tom Hausmann.

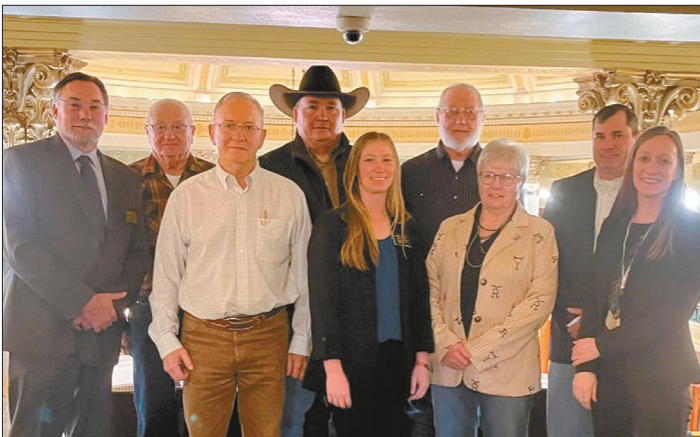
"It has felt like a long time, and we've learned a lot about the legislative process" said MMRPBA board member Heather Hammerbeck, "but I'm excited that now the real work can start and we can get some burns done this spring and push back against the trees."

The law allows landowners to reclaim grasslands from the clutches of woodlands, and do it safely, using the river as a natural firebreak," added Hammerbeck, "and to do it without fear of legal consequences."

MMRPBA board member Doug Feltman said, "Hopefully it will allow us to stop this green glacier and let us pass our operation on to the next generation."

This article was contributed by MMRPBA board member Heather Hammerbeck, and was initially published in the Gregory Times Advocate.

Continued on page 11



HB 1001 was passed with the help of several state legislators and landowners who gave testimony.

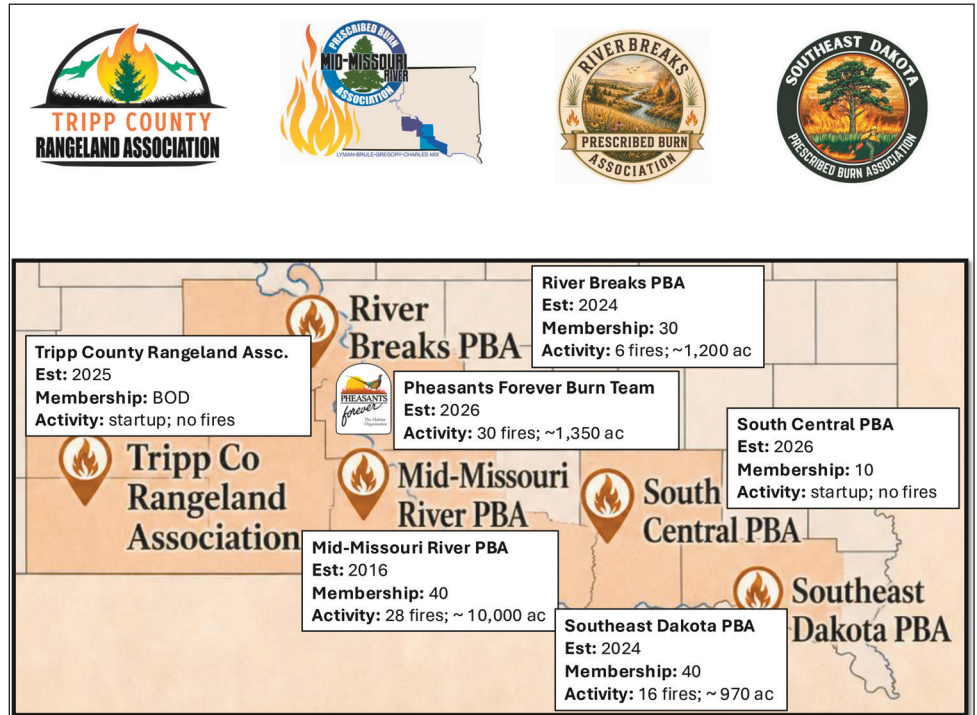
About the Cover:

Grandchildren of Rich and Sara Grim look over the Missouri River breaks which has become increasingly overgrown with cedar trees.

The Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association is a non-profit 501(c)(3) formed to control cedar tree infestation and improve grassland health by conducting prescribed fires. MMRPBA's efforts focus on land along the Missouri River in Brule, Charles Mix, Gregory and Lyman Counties.

New Prescribed Burn Associations expand SD land management efforts

In 2015, the Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association was formed. Today, eleven years later, four additional prescribed burn associations have been established to assist in land management efforts to control invasive species, particularly Eastern Red Cedar encroachment on grasslands. Following are highlights of the emerging efforts of each of these prescribed burn associations. Future newsletters will feature information from all five associations.



River Breaks Prescribed Burn Association



Founded in 2024, the River Breaks Prescribed Burn Association had a successful year in 2026. Each burn allowed members to gain more experience and work with existing tools. Like other burn associations, the biggest battle was finding ideal burn weather amidst the wind and drought conditions this spring.

The River Breaks PBA includes burning within the Lower Brule Sioux Reservation, and appreciates the support received from the tribe. A prescribed burn school was hosted at Lower Brule in April, and the class was well attended by a couple of dozen attendees from around the state. Weather conditions did not allow

burning that day, but the participants worked with burn tools, equipment, and state experts.

Two sizeable burns were completed this spring and association members helped with several other smaller burns. The two primary burns were the David and Brenda Reis cedar burn covering 296 acres and the Sheldon Fletcher river burn on 200 acres. Both burns were completed successfully. The Reis burn utilized black line fire breaks completed in early 2026. Several new and potential members attended this burn to learn from a proper black line fire. The burn was completed in less than 2 hours and most of the help was done within 4 hours. Pheasants



A prescribed burn school was hosted at Lower Brule in April 2026.

Forever is planning a tour of this burn unit in the fall.

The Fletcher fire took less time and was a textbook example of planning a prescribed burn with solid burn lines. This included a gravel road on the west side and the Missouri River on the east side. The burn was completed in less than 2 hours and had a great kill on the cedar trees.

The River Breaks PBA has potential burns scheduled for the next couple of years. The group will finalize planning and begin to inspect burn lines and preparation this fall. They remain concerned about next year's burn season with the continued drought conditions.



An overview of the David and Brenda Reis Ranch that utilized black line fire breaks completed in early 2026.

South Dakota Prescribed Burn Associations



Tripp County Rangeland Association

The Tripp County Rangeland Association was started in the spring of 2026 through efforts from the South-Central RC&D to build interest and understanding of prescribed burn associations. After a few initial meetings with guidance from the Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association and Pheasants Forever, the Tripp County Rangeland Association has established itself as a state registered nonprofit 501(c)(3). The TCRA membership area includes Tripp, Todd and Mellette counties south of I-90.

A few TCRA members attended the Lower Brule prescribed fire training this spring. Members hope to pursue more opportunities to gain live fire experience on prescribed burns in the future.



Landowners in Colome, South Dakota met in Spring 2026 at the local Legion to formally form the Tripp County Rangeland Association.

South-Central Prescribed Burn Association

The South-Central Prescribed Burn Association was formally organized in 2026 and covers all of Charles Mix County and Bon Homme County west of Highway 37. Efforts have included establishing a board of directors and filing proper organization paperwork.

As they move forward, the group is eager to get the word out about the new association. Information meetings are being planned, with dates and places yet to be determined. As is common with prescribed burning, the burns that were planned have been held up by

weather and drought conditions this spring. The group looks forward to being ready when conditions allow burning. If anyone is interested in finding out more about the SCPBA, contact Clint Bultsma (605)680-3635 or cbultsmains@goldenwest.net

Southeast Dakota Prescribed Burn Association



So far in 2026, the Southeast Dakota PBA has burned 480 acres across eight separate prescribed burn events, according to Dan Johnson Chairman for SDPBA. For comparison, in 2025 we burned seven times for a total of 479 acres. We were hoping to assist with several more large fires totaling about 1,000 additional acres, but due

to the drought, landowners needed the available forage for livestock and decided to forgo burning for now.

The Southeast Dakota service area covers Yankton, Bon Homme, Clay, and the southern portions of Hutchinson and Turner Counties. This boundary remains flexible, and we have assisted with prescribed fires outside these areas when personnel and materials were available. We continue to work closely with South Dakota Pheasants Forever and appreciate Cody Grewing's and Kendall Hettick's knowledge, experience, and assistance.

Currently, we have approximately 25 members alongside many others interested in our mission. Our funding sources include \$25 annual dues, private donations, the National Wild Turkey Federation, the James River Water Development District, the South Dako-

ta Chapter Sierra Club, and the Polaris Foundation.

On August 27, 2026, SDPBA co-hosted a Woody Encroachment Field Tour at the Todd Knutson farm. We burned native prairie pastures at this location both last year and this year with impressive results. The tour featured various forbs and grasses, recent and one-year follow-up burn results, and archaeological sites overlooking the James River Valley.

Additionally, SDPBA recently assisted the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) with several prescribed burns on native grasslands below the Gavins Point Dam near Yankton. We plan to burn another grassland near Cottonwood Campground on USACE land in September 2026 and hope to host another prescribed fire classroom event next winter.



Pheasants Forever prescribed burn assistance underway

By Cody Grewing,
Prescribed Fire Coordinator

Dry conditions and unusually windy weather – even by South Dakota standards – made for a challenging inaugural burn season for Pheasants Forever's South Dakota Prescribed Fire (Rx Fire) Program in spring 2026.

Persistent burn bans across much of the state and erratic weather forecasts forced many planned burns to be canceled the morning they were scheduled. Despite those challenges, the program assisted with 31 prescribed fire units totaling nearly 1,400 acres by mid-June, with staff also writing burn plans for an additional 400 acres and completing those burns.

Based in Chamberlain, the South Dakota Rx Fire Program includes Rx Fire Coordinator Cody Grewing and Rx Fire Specialist Kendall Hettick, with assistance from Fire Technician Lexi Fleury as needed. The team works with private landowners by designing burn units, writing burn plans, leading workshops and training sessions, assisting with prescribed burns, and providing additional equipment and resources.

The program is unique in South Dakota because it allows staff to work alongside private landowners and Prescribed Burn Associations during prescribed fires. By providing additional expertise and resources, the Pheasants Forever Rx Fire effort is designed to help accelerate the learning process among landowners so they can gain experience and confidence using prescribed fire as tool to meet their land management objectives.

The team will continue to assist with a handful of prescribed fires throughout the summer before ramping up again in the fall. The program will also look to host a number of outreach events on sites burned this spring in addition to other workshops and training opportunities.

The South Dakota Rx Fire Program was launched as part of Pheasants Forever's five-year Accelerating Prescribed Fire in South Dakota initiative.



Pheasants Forever's South Dakota Prescribed Fire crew have a location in Chamberlain to store their prescribed fire equipment, which is available for prescribed burn efforts.



The Pheasants Forever Prescribed Fire team assisted the Southeastern Prescribed Burn Association with a burn on Todd Druin's property.

Protecting the future of prescribed fire

Considering drought, community perception and local bans

By Shane Reis, Sean Kelly and Brad Christensen

Burn bans, drought conditions, red flag warnings, and the Nebraska wildfires have all made the 2026 prescribed burn season a challenge. We understand the difficulty and frustration of finding and waiting for the best weather days possible for a prescribed burn. Complicating matters further are the social concerns of drought management or political issues with burn bans, which may make finding those burn days even harder. As prescribed burn practitioners, we need to continue to have awareness for drought conditions, burn bans, and the overall image prescribed burning has in our communities.

Empathy and education are key in considering the weather conditions experienced this year, and every year. Take a moment and think from the perspective of your local fire personnel or from a neighboring rancher. The current weather could be ideal for your prescribed burn but think about how your local fire department feels about those weather conditions.

As an example, there were half a dozen wildland fires in four days in Lyman County this spring, which affected multiple volunteer fire departments. It was a tough week. The River Breaks Prescribed Burn Association hosted a prescribed burn at the end of that week. They reached out to local departments and talked through their weather parameters, discussed their burn breaks, and went so far as still asking permission from the local departments after that difficult week. Without that permission, even with ideal weather conditions, the RBPBA would not have gone ahead with the prescribed burn.

In Gregory and Tripp Counties conditions were even drier with more severe drought conditions. Several of

our local fire departments along Hwy 18 from Fairfax to Winner were chasing wildfires most of the spring. Several of our departments were called to Nebraska for mutual aid fighting wildfires down there. The MMRPBA area was in D3 drought status a majority of the spring. A D3 drought status shuts down all prescribed burning in the MMRPBA area until drought conditions improve.

We encourage researching your counties' burn ban rules. Each county shares their burn ban information on their county websites. For example, the Lyman County courthouse website burn ban ordinance states: "no person shall conduct open burning outside any municipality in Lyman County when the National Weather Service has declared the South Dakota Grassland Fire Danger Index (GFDI) to be in the VERY HIGH or EXTREME category or has issued a RED FLAG WARNING for any portion of Lyman County."

Fire Chiefs and Emergency Management Directors work with their commissioners to put on or take off extended burn bans in most counties when the normal burn bans that are in effect by the GFDI are not enough. All counties have different burn ban laws, please review them online, and talk to your local fire chief, county emergency manager or county commissioners about your county burn ban rules. Always follow the burn ban laws.

Drought years are especially challenging, and prescribed fire has come a long way in South Dakota. However, in many places it's still an unknown activity. Even though we need to burn the pasture in front of us, we can't lose sight of the bigger picture, which is that prescribed burning is a team effort and a very impactful event within a community. If we ensure it continues to be seen positively in our communities, the impacts will benefit everyone.



Learning from Nebraska: PBA's valuable fire-fighting asset

Over the past year, Nebraska experienced a record-setting wildfire season. Three major wildfires alone burned more than 800,000 acres, with numerous additional fires destroying grazing land, miles of fencing, and threatening homes and outbuildings.

While dozens of volunteer fire departments battled the blazes, Nebraskans also recognized what a *Central Nebraska Today* article called the “much lesser-known warriors flying under the radar of publicity” — members of local prescribed burn associations (PBAs).

Writer Brian Neben reported that more than 92 fire departments and task forces responded to the Cottonwood wildfire. Lexington Fire Chief Bo Berry said the fire demonstrated “the necessity for the control of the spread of cedar trees” through prescribed fire because they are highly flammable and fuel wildfire spread.

Brady Fire Chief Mike Gruber said the Loess Hills Prescribed Burn Association was on the scene from the very first day, working alongside firefighters. Previous prescribed burns had already removed many cedar trees, making it easier to

contain the fire.

“It makes it a lot easier to handle a wildfire when they are involved,” Gruber said. “Basically, how we got it stopped was by putting fire on the ground.”

Frontier County Fire Chief Tim Nicholson echoed that sentiment, calling PBAs invaluable assets. “They were already there before we even got dispatched,” he said. “It’s kind of like having another two fire departments” because of their trained volunteers and specialized equipment.

Nicholson also credits PBAs with introducing local departments to techniques such as drip torches and backburning. “It wasn’t a tool we had in our toolbox,” he said, but prescribed burn practitioners have helped train volunteer firefighters. During the Cottonwood fire, “There was backburning going on all the time,” which significantly slowed the fire.

Loess Canyons PBA member Chad Stout said a previous 500-acre prescribed burn around Gruber’s home established a fuel-free blackline that helped stop the wildfire and protect the chief’s home and livelihood.

Founded in 2002, the Loess Canyons PBA was built around the idea of “members helping members.” Today it includes about 75 members, 13 to 15 fire units and has completed approximately 100,000 acres of prescribed burning to restore grasslands impacted by eastern redcedar. Stout is equally proud of the sense of community PBAs have rebuilt, bringing neighbors together to help one another during emergencies.



Equipment Considerations

An in-depth look at the features and costs of a UTV prescribed-burn skid unit

By Brad Christensen
MMRPBA Training Officer

A skid unit is a compromise. It needs to hold as much water as possible without exceeding the amount of the payload weight the UTV can safely handle. Rough terrain can further impact the amount of weight the UTV can safely handle.

The pump needs to supply enough water at adequate pressure to get the job done while making the water supply last as long as possible. The hose should be long enough to reach everywhere needed and large enough diameter not to cause much friction loss. The water tank should fully drain to make winterizing a quick process.

The skid unit featured below has

an engine driven system capable of 10.6 gallons per minute (gpm) and 590 pounds per square inch (psi). It is normally operated at 150 psi. Both spray guns will flow just under 4 gpm at that pressure. If more pressure is needed, the control unit is easily adjusted to 580 psi so the spray guns each flow close to 5 gpm. The hose reel holds 100 feet of ½ inch hose to maximize reach and minimize friction loss.

The electric pump was added for more efficient wet-lining. It's a completely separate system with its own suction, strainer, and return line. This allows both systems to work independently.

The electric pump system has its own battery. The LiTime battery's

capacity is larger than needed, but was purchased at a very discounted price. It will run the pump several days without additional charging. The 2 flat spray wet-lining nozzles are 40-degree nozzles flowing 2 gpm at 40 psi. Ball valves control each nozzle independently and a switch on the dash controls the pump. The nozzles are mounted to spray in front of the rear tires. The tires force the water to the ground, wetting all surfaces of the wet-line vegetation.

Because most of the components of this skid unit were purchased on sale, it cost less than \$2,000 to put together. A quick online search of retailers shows, today, it would cost just over \$3,400.



The Electric pump system

- Delavan 5850-201C PowerFLO electric diaphragm pump – automatic demand
- 2 VeeJet H-U4020 spray nozzles
- LiTime-USA LT114941 Lithium iron phosphate battery.



The Engine driven pump system

- Hypro 9910-D403GRGI diaphragm pump with 9910-GR40 control unit
- Harbor Freight Predator 212 engine
- Reelcraft CA32106-L Reel with 100 feet of ½ inch 800 psi sprayer hose
- 10 feet long ½ inch 800 psi whip hose
- 2 Greenmaster spray guns



A 2006 Polaris Ranger 700 6X6 with relocated radiator and skid unit consisting of a 60 gallon Enduraplas total drain water tank that actually holds 65 gallon.

Have a Burn You Would Like Conducted?

If a landowner wants more information on the application process to burn along the Missouri river, please contact: Sean Kelly, Cody Grewing, Kendall Hettick or the Chamberlain GF&P Office. See contact info below:

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RX Fire Specialist

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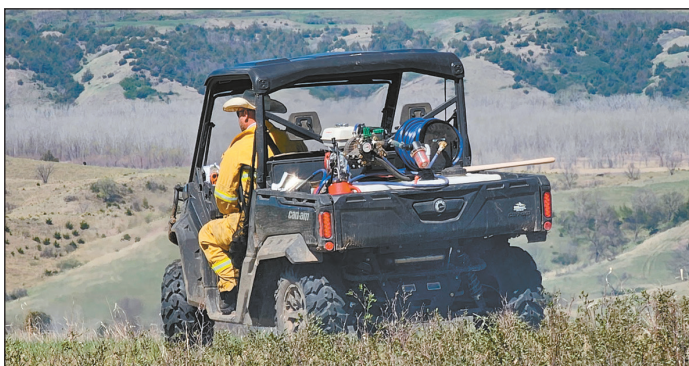
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605.734.4528



Shane Reis member of the River Breaks Prescribed Burn Association on the burn conducted on his family's ranch in Spring 2026.

New law is a win for SD landowners

Continued from page 3



A field visit/meeting in March 2025 at the Hammerbeck Ranch was a great start to a relationship between the MMRPBA and the State to bring a solution for burning along the Missouri River. Attending the meeting was Robert Perry (Department of Public Safety Secretary), Kevin Robling (Game, Fish & Parks Secretary), District 26 Representative Rebecca Reimer, Sean Kelly, along with ranchers Heather Hammerbeck and Sara Grim to see the scale of the woody encroachment along the river. Ultimately a new law, HB 1001 was formed, passed by the South Dakota legislature and signed by the Governor as a result of meetings like these and other advocating efforts by MMRPBA members, state agencies and local leaders.

Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association
Sean Kelly
33815 288th Street
Gregory, SD 57533

*Pictured: Future burn
unit on Heather Hammerbeck's
40 Bar Ranch along the
Missouri River.*



Four Woody Encroachment Field Tours were held in August and September in Oacoma, Mitchell, Yankton and again in Oacoma. Experts and producer testimonies were highlighted in how prescribed fire and mechanical and chemical control can be used in the prevention of eastern red cedar and other problematic species invading South Dakota grasslands. The field tours were hosted in a joint effort by MMRPBA, Audubon Great Plains, NRCS, Pheasants Forever, SDSU Extension, River Breaks PBA, Southeast PBA, and South Central RC&D.

The Mid-Missouri River Prescribed Burn Association is a non-profit 501(c)(3) formed to control cedar tree infestation and improve grassland health by conducting prescribed fires. MMRPBA's efforts will focus on land along the Missouri River in Brule, Charles Mix, Gregory and Lyman Counties.