Gothenburg, Kearney, Elyria and Wellfleet have been selected as the sites for the 2013 Prescribed Burn Schools, according Ben Wheeler, Prescribed Burn Task Force president.

One of the primary uses of prescribed fire in Nebraska is management of eastern red cedar trees, which have been increasing in extent and density on the state's grasslands for more than 50 years.

An Oklahoma State University researcher has calculated Nebraska is losing 700 acres of grazing land per day. Prescribed fire, if properly planned and executed has been a safe, effective and economical management tool.

The schools' lead speaker will be Jay Wickham, fire management officer for the Division of Wildland Fire, South Dakota Department of Agriculture, Custer State Park Field Office.

In addition to his fire-suppression duties, Wickham is a leader in the division's prescribed-fire program. He will discuss fire behavior, burning methods and techniques, and equipment and crew needs. Other speakers will address prescribed-fire planning, fire weather and Nebraska burn laws.

All schools will meet from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., with registration at 8:30 a.m. Cost is $10 and includes lunch. Separate trainings are scheduled for volunteer fire departments.

Dates and locations are:

Gothenburg—Thursday, Feb. 21, at Monsanto Learning Center;

Kearney—Wednesday; Feb. 20, at the Buffalo County Cooperative Extension;

Elyria—Tuesday, Feb. 19, at Elyria Community Hall;

Wellfleet—Friday, Feb. 22, at CCC Too Restaurant

Pre-registration is required for meal count. Contact Cooperative Extension offices at: Kearney, 308-236-1235; Gothenburg, 308-324-5501; Elyria, 308-872-6831; and Wellfleet, 308-532-2683.

School participants, who attend one class session and one of the training burns scheduled for later in the spring, are certified to use task-force equipment for a nominal fee to conduct their own prescribed fires.

The Prescribed Burn Task Force was formed in 1994. Since then it has held 60 schools attended by more than 1,600 students, while demonstration burns total more than 32,000 acres.

The schools teach safe and effective use of fire as a management tool, and school graduates can use task-force burn equipment. Instructors have included leading prescribed-fire experts from Nebraska and across the United States.

The task force includes landowners and agency personnel primarily from Buffalo, Custer, Dawson and Lincoln counties.

Members include volunteer firefighters, Central Platte, Lower Loup, Tri-Basin and Twin Platte natural resources districts, the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, University of Nebraska Extension Service, Pheasants and Quail Forever, and the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District.