

Kansas Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan: Impact on Kansas Ranchers

The following is a slightly edited transcript of the fourth in a series of K-State's Agriculture Today radio broadcasts on the Kansas Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan. This is an interview with Jeff Davidson, Greenwood County Extension Agent, conducted by Eric Atkinson of the K-State Radio Network. Podcasts of all Agriculture Today interviews on the Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan can be found at: <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/news/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=197>

Q: The new Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan will be implemented in full on a pilot basis during the spring of 2011 in two Flint Hills counties. One of those is Greenwood County and the other is Chase County. How will this plan actually play out at the farm and ranch level?

A: K-State Research and Extension, both on campus and a couple of county Extension agents in the Flint Hills, were involved with the small group that put together this plan. We tried to develop a plan that we thought would be workable for our local ranchers as well as accomplish the air quality goals that were needed.

Q: A lot of stakeholders were involved in putting this plan together. Was this a successful formula?

A: Yes, I think so. Seems like once we sat down and started talking about it, everybody described what they thought needed to happen. Once we sat around the table and had some dialogue, the plan began to fall into place. It took some time, but I think everybody on that committee will say that we accomplished some things and met some goals. We think we've put together a plan we can all live with, and that will help mitigate the air quality situations in our metropolitan areas.

Q: And hopefully for the landowner in the Flint Hills, this plan will help avoid far more stringent regulations in the future, correct?

A: Exactly. That was really the goal of our plan, was to reduce the problems with air quality in the metropolitan areas in a way that would prevent more stringent regulations from coming down the pike.

Q: How do you see this being implemented at the ground level?

A: I'm planning to visit at a lot of public meetings, and I started doing that just this last week. A synopsis of the plan will be handed out. I've visited with various groups in the county already. The communications effort is going to involve the sheriff's dispatch office as well as the county fire marshal. They will be involved when people call in to state that they are planning to burn on a particular day. Then they'll make a return call when the fire is out, which we're already doing. We will just fine-tune that a bit and try to get a better count of the acreages involved that have had prescribed fire on them. And I also have a check sheet or survey that I'll send out after the fire season is over. That will

be asking the fire practitioners if the plan was helpful to them, and whether they think they put up a little less smoke or if they were more aware of whether their smoke avoided going toward Kansas City. K-State is working on developing a web site as well that's going to have quite a lot of information.

Q: Do you think this will be a management system for your landowners? It's a little out of the ordinary, but is it cumbersome at all?

A: Well, there is a little hassle to it so I suppose you could say it's a little cumbersome. But I think they can manage that, at least as they plan is today. It's not the biggest hurdle they've had to jump.

Q: Part of the goal is to help spread out burns over a longer time period so there isn't that two- to three-day concentration of smoke. From the grass management point of view in Greenwood County, will that be a workable option for the producers?

A: Yes, at least to some degree. Unfortunately, when we talk about spreading fires out, weather comes into play big time. A good day to burn is a good day for me, and also my neighbor, and right on down the line. If it's raining or extremely windy then we can't burn, but that's going to be the same for everyone in the area. So when we talk about spreading the burning out -- yes, the plan will encourage that. I think that will happen to the degree that it is possible.

Q: You've talked about this informally with producers already. What's been their response?

A: Actually, pretty positive. The fellows I've talked to understand they don't want to smoke out, so to speak, Kansas City or Wichita. A lot of our Flint Hills ranchers have kids and grandkids that live in and around these metropolitan areas, so they're aware of the situation. No matter where we live, we all share some common things and this is a common problem to both of us. So they're fairly positive about it and want to see what they can do. They still want to be able to burn because they need to in order to maintain the prairie.

Q: In addition to the web site, K-State Research and Extension has come out with a handy little publication on fire management that will give still more information, and information is the key to making this work.

A: Correct. We've got a nice little pamphlet available at the local Extension offices. And there's also the full smoke management plan that can be downloaded off the KDHE web site: http://www.kdheks.gov/bar/air-monitor/flinthillsinfo/SMP_v10FINAL.pdf

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