

National Park Service

Homestead National Monument of America

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National Park Service News Release
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National Park Service to Facilitate Test of sUAS Technology During

Annual Prescribed Fire at Homestead National Monument of America, Nebraska

Homestead National Monument of America will conduct a prescribed fire on approximately 26 acres of its restored tallgrass prairie. This one-day event will occur the first day in which favorable and safe conditions exist after April 1, 2016 and before May 15, 2016.

This year's prescribed fire will include a live test of a University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) small Unmanned Aircraft System (sUAS). The UNL system is a greatly scaled down version of a manned helicopter aerial ignition device. A multidisciplinary team of UNL experts in micro-UAS technology, fire ecology, conservation and public policy is developing this unmanned aerial system for supporting prescribed and wildland fire operations.

Jim Traub, National Park Service (NPS) Unmanned Aircraft System Specialist, said: "UAS's in firefighting have the potential to reduce direct risk to firefighters doing ignition work while reducing costs and making an aerial resource more widely accessible to wildland firefighting efforts." Traub added, "The National Park Service is pleased to facilitate this unique and innovative opportunity with UNL, for this test of a sUAS in a fire situation."

Homestead National Monument of America, the NPS Midwest Region Fire and Aviation Program, and the NPS National Aviation Offices are collaborating with UNL's Nebraska Intelligent Mobile Unmanned Systems (NIMBUS) Laboratory and the Department of Interior Office of Aviation Services (OAS) for this operational test and evaluation of the integration of sUAS into wildland fire operations. The goal with the Homestead Prescribed Fire is to conduct a live test of the sUAS consistent with the intent of 2015 UAS Technology Overview approved by then NPS Associate Director of Visitor Resource Protection, Cam Sholly; Department of Interior Deputy Assistant Secretary, Kim Thorsen; Office of Aviation Services, Director Mark Bathrick as well as other National Interagency Fire Center Bureaus.

“Historically, fire has been a tool in the management of the prairie at Homestead National Monument of America.” said Mark Engler, Superintendent of Homestead National Monument of America. “Today, the National Park Service conducts carefully planned prescribed fires to control woody plants, invasive species, as well as reduce thatch. Though fire is often considered to be inherently dangerous, it is a natural occurrence that holds many benefits for the native prairie grasses. We are grateful for the assistance from local firefighters, fire departments and other federal agencies on our prescribed fire. We look forward to the live test of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s sUAS.”

The 2.5 miles of trails within the monument will be temporarily closed during the prescribed fire and will reopen as soon as it is deemed safe. Travelers on State Hwy. 4 should use extra caution if traveling through the monument while the burn is occurring. The public is invited to view the burning operations from the Heritage Center patio.

Remember, Homestead National Monument of America has an exciting schedule of events planned for 2016. Keep up with the latest information by following us on Twitter (HomesteadNM), Facebook (Homestead NM), and Instagram (HomesteadNPS). For information on the Monument’s programs or activities, please call (402) 223-3514 or visit <http://www.nps.gov/home/index.htm>

Homestead National Monument of America is a unit of the National Park Service located four miles west of Beatrice, Nebraska. Current hours of operation are 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on the weekends. Admission is free of charge. For additional information, please call 402-223-3514 or visit <http://www.nps.gov/home/index.htm>.