

Introduction

Welcome to *FireWorks for Missouri River Country*. This adaptation of the *FireWorks* Program (Smith and McMurray 2000), features the ecology of the Missouri River drainage, reaching from the spine of the Rocky Mountains east into the tallgrass prairie. *FireWorks* aims to increase the science literacy and fire literacy of students in grades K-12. The curriculum is structured so it can be complemented by activities and materials developed by Native American nations, thus perhaps increasing cultural literacy as well.

The original version of *FireWorks* focused on the ecology of forests in the northern Rocky Mountains and Cascade Range. In creating this version, we changed only the activities of Chapter 7, “Communities in Action.” Where other chapters in the curriculum refer to specific plants, animals, and plant communities, they use the organisms featured in the original curriculum (e.g., pileated woodpecker and western larch) rather than prairie organisms. This choice was partly due to time constraints and partly to the authors’ location, where it is not possible to collect specimens of the most important prairie plants for inclusion in the trunk. We hope you will not find this too great a challenge. We encourage you to collect your own specimens and thus fine-tune activities and materials to better fit your local ecosystems. We know that most teachers are remarkably resourceful; you not only can, but usually do, fine-tune materials to fit your students and to meet your educational objectives. To make *FireWorks* fit your local ecosystems better, consider making your own collection of species for the “Mystery Trees” and “Buried Treasures” activities (4-3, 4-4, 6-2, and 6-3), and developing an alternative to the activities on fire history in Chapter 5.

The lesson plans here are adapted from the original *FireWorks* curriculum. If they refer to appendices or other information that you cannot find in this volume, please consult the original curriculum—available in the trunk (Box C) and online. The original curriculum and all electronic materials produced for this project are available online at <http://www.firelab.org/con-ed/92-fireworks>.

Development of *FireWorks for Missouri River Country* was made possible through a grant from the US Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Great Plains and Rocky Mountain Regions. We are grateful for their support.

Jane Kapler Smith
Nancy E. McMurray
June 8, 2012