

Students gain valuable 'hands-on' experience

By KRISTIN A. COTTLE

When forestry student Jeremy Flowers heard his instructor, Jim Slye, in FOR 240, Forest Protection, ask for suggestions for lab sites, Flowers immediately thought of his uncle, Luke Potter.

Potter had recently bought 15 acres of land to add to his farm holdings south of Seven Springs, but the land was in bad shape with scattered timber and a thick understory of layers of brush and briars that needed to be cleaned up before Potter could develop the land.

Potter called Jim Slye, forest management technology instructor, to offer the land as a lab experience for students.

Slye enlisted the help of his colleagues Dave Meador, and Brian Weaver, instructor in FWL 142, Wildlife Management, and on Wednesday, February 28, 2001, 16 students and the 3 instructors headed for Potter's land armed with drip torches, fire rakes, Pulaskis (pickaxes), and 5-gallon backpack pumps of water.

Slye said, "First, we had to determine weather conditions, including wind speed, fuel moisture, relative humidity, and mixing height (how high the smoke will rise and what loft will remove smoke efficiently without harm to people or livestock)."

The students burned off a downwind test line to ascertain that the fire would behave as they had planned.

They stripped in a head fire at points about 66 feet apart perpendicular to the wind, using the drip torches.

The drip torches contain about a gallon and one-half mixture of diesel fuel and gasoline, Slye said. "A wick on the end of the torch ignites the dripping fuel."

Students monitored the fire line to check for "jumps," fire that crossed the boundary. They used the fire rakes and Pulaskis to control jumping and to mop up smoldering snags and debris.

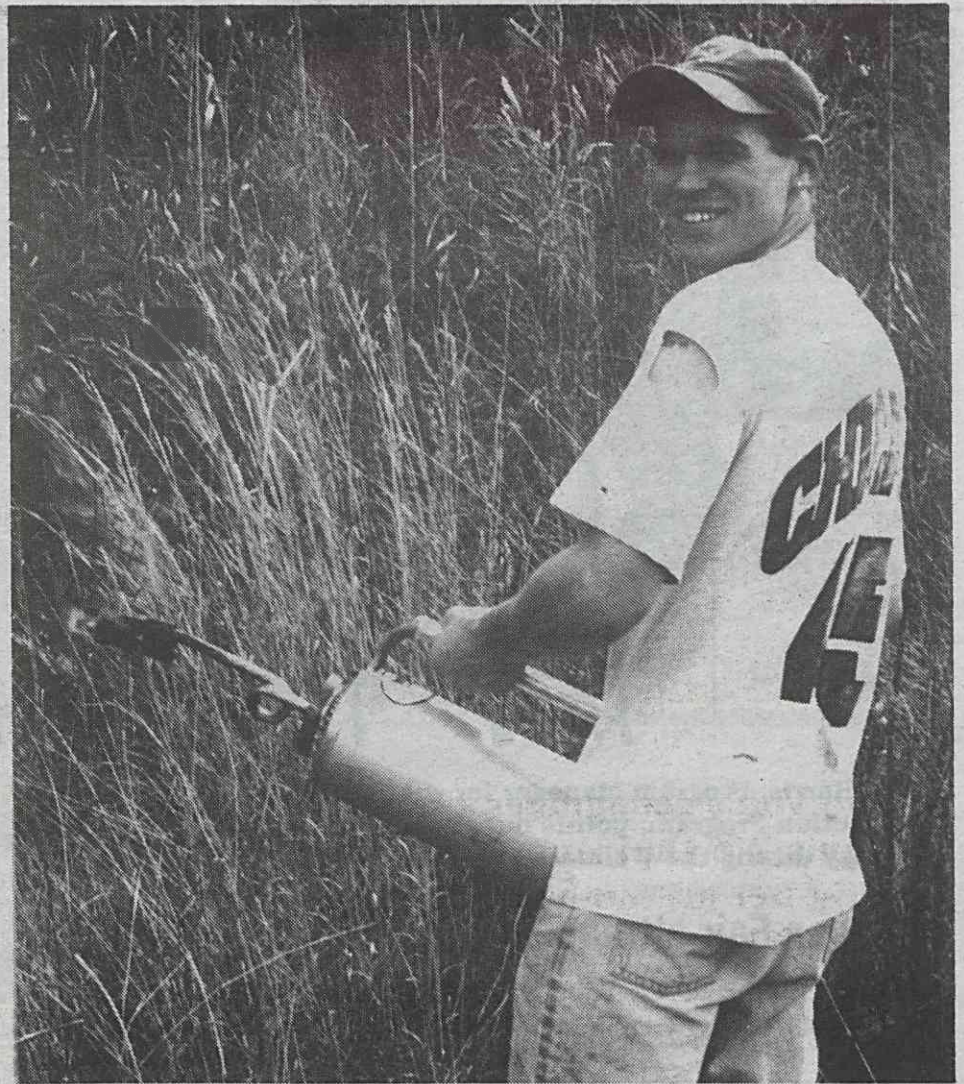
The 5-gallon backpack pumps filled with water and a tractor mounted with a 500-gallon water pump also helped to control jumps and clean up the tract.

Slye said he and the students had visited other tracts and developed plans depending on the landowners' goals for the land.

He said that Potter's land will need a winter and summer burn every couple of years before the land is under control.

Slye said the hands-on lab enabled students "to implement a prescribed burn" rather than just hear about it in lecture. "I'd like to do more of these labs if we can arrange them with the Forest Service and find landowners willing to allow students the opportunity."

Meador said the project is an example of the experiences students need before they enter the workplace of forest industry and land management.



WCC forestry management technology student Marty Best indicates that he is enjoying his work, burning away the brush as a step in the "prescribed burn" exercise.
PHOTO: DAVE MEADOR

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