

PRESCRIBED BURNING FOR WILDLIFE HABITAT

Purpose:

Prescribed burning for wildlife habitat is applying a controlled fire to a predetermined area as a habitat management tool. It is used to improve wildlife habitat on early successional/grassland areas and certain woodland areas by setting back the successional stage of an area, controlling undesirable vegetation, and reducing wildfire hazards. Ground nesting habitat is improved by reducing stand density. Prescribed burning in late winter to early spring is the preferred method for maintaining healthy stands of native warm season grasses. This practice increases stand diversity, reduces weed competition, increases plant vigor, recycles nutrients, and reduces thatch and ground litter.

Requirements:

- **Must have a written burn plan notarized prior to the burn.** Smoke management must be part of the plan.
- **Must obtain a burning permit from Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC).**
- Burn must be conducted by a qualified representative of MFC **or** by a Certified Prescribed Fire Manager.
- A firebreak must be established between burn area and surrounding areas.

Considerations:

- Limit individual burn areas to 50 acres or less. Manipulating prescribed burns is much easier on smaller units and limits stem and crown damage if the prescribed burn becomes a wildfire.
- Burning should be managed with consideration for wildlife needs such as nesting and feeding cover.
- For wildlife benefits, late February or early March is the best time to burn. To avoid interference with ground nesting activities, burning is not recommended between April 1 and October 1 in Mississippi. However, to control problem excess woody vegetation, growing season burning in late May or early June may be necessary. [Burning during the nesting period of April 1 to August 15 established for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is prohibited for land under CRP contract.]
- Notify adjacent landowners on day of burn.

Maintenance:

- To maintain quality habitat for wildlife, the area should be burned on a 3-year cycle. Approximately one-third of managed area should be burned annually.
 - **Note:** Strips or blocks may be left unburned within the burned area to provide a continuous source of cover and nesting habitat.

Primary Habitat Consideration:

- Improve natural food and cover for deer, doves, quail, turkeys, rabbits, and various songbirds.
- Maintain early successional/grassland conditions. However, some shrub/woody vegetation scattered through the area is desirable.

General Information:

NRCS technical specifications (such as Practice Codes 338 - Prescribed Burning, and 645 - Upland Wildlife Habitat Management), bulletins, technical notes, and other job sheets can be referenced for additional details. **USDA program policies and procedures may restrict or supercede information in this job sheet. Therefore, check with the appropriate agency for guidelines pertaining to lands under USDA programs.**

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