

## Prescribed Burning for Beginners

Prescribed burning, also known as controlled burning, is basically a fire set intentionally. Despite the word “fire” generally brings to mind very negative images a prescribed burn can be a good thing. It is a management tool used by land managers and landowners to improve diversity of their vegetation. It can also be used to control any invasive plants that are present in your pasture. When used along with other management methods prescribed burning can be used to improve the overall health of your pasture. Getting the most of out prescribed burning takes more than just setting some fires. To ensure the safety of both you and your neighbors it requires some serious planning.

So Why do we use prescribed burning? Fire is a very important ecological force that has influenced the natural history of North America. It has been a way for nature to control any non-native species. But as populations have grown fire became to be viewed as destructive to people and property. Because of this fire suppression became the norm. The problem with this mentality is that as we prevented fires forests and rangelands started being overgrown with thick underbrush. This provides fuel for an out of control fire to spring up. Benefits of prescribed burning are: To stop growth of undesirable/invasive plants, To promote regrowth of warm and cool season grasses, To replenish soil nutrients, To improve habitat for wildlife, To aid in prevention of wildfires and to increase diversity on our pastures and rangelands. While prescribed burning does have it’s benefits there are also some risks or concerns that should also be considered like the possibility of the fire getting out of control or causing visibility issues for drivers on nearby roads or highways. To do a prescribed burn properly it will require nearly a dozen highly trained people.

So what are some of the considerations before you burn? As already mentioned doing a prescribed burn requires more than just lighting some fires and hoping for the best. It requires extensive planning and preparation. So before you go pyromaniac here are some things to consider. Have a grazing plan in place, Having a solid grazing rotation plan in place is a very important first step in developing a burn plan. You should consider what you will do with your cattle before, during, and after a pasture is burned. You should look at if you will have enough forages for the livestock both before and after the burn. Before this happens you should remove livestock for a growing season before. In order to have enough for the livestock to eat you should wait till after mid-growing season.

Another question is do you have enough to burn? You should determine the fuel requirements for the desired burn results. Plans must be made for any undesirable plant changes, drought and erosion possibilities. Another is do you have the right equipment? When developing your fire plan you will need to decide what equipment will be needed. You should take stock of if you already have the equipment needed or if you will need to buy or rent them. Some equipment that you may need are things like dozers and spray trucks. And do you have enough people for the job? Making sure that you have enough people for the job is very important. The number of people that you will need will depend on the size of the fire. In planning this one person should be designated the “fire boss”. This person will have command of the crew and will make job assignments. Do you and your crew have the proper training? This step is very important so as to not have a fire that will get out of control. I highly recommend that you do not skip this step at all. If you are wanting to do this yourself your local extension service does offer prescribed burning classes so you can get certified. If this seems a little daunting you can always hire a licensed professional. The benefit to doing that is that they will have

insurance in case anything happens. And have you notified the correct authorities? Several agencies should be notified of any burns that may happen. This is just common sense so it won't cause a panic when people see the smoke. Your local police, fire department, neighbors, and anyone with equipment or interest in the area being burned should be notified. And lastly, do you have a fire plan in place? The fire plan is a systematic and highly methodical plan for the burn. When you develop and follow a well-constructed plan the risk of the fire turning into an out of control wildfire is greatly reduced. When developing a fire plan there are many things that you should look at. Fuel characteristics, topography, and climate conditions should be considered. The wind speed and direction, relative humidity, air temperature, season and time of day all affect the fire's behavior and ease of control. A prescribed burn can be a useful tool and method to improve the overall health and diversity of your pastures and rangelands. A great resource is the Texas Prescribed Burn Handbook put together by Texas A&M Agrilife Extension so visit this site <https://agrillife.org/rxburn/> for all kinds of good information and everything you need to know about planning and implementing a prescribed burn.