



Prescribed Burning for Wildlife

PURPOSE:

Prescribed burning is used to apply a controlled fire to a predetermined area as a habitat management tool. Burning is a cheap, effective habitat management tool which should be used on grassland, woodland, and wetland habitats. Fire improves wildlife habitat by setting back the successional stage of the plant community, improving structure, controlling undesirable vegetation, and reducing wildfire hazards. Time of year (season) and frequency of fire (time since last burn) are major considerations when planning a prescribed burn.



SPECIFICATIONS:

- Prior to burning, develop a written burn plan to outline the burn job requirements and objectives.
- Individual objectives and fuel types determine the ideal time for a prescribed burn. For example, summer and spring burns both help control woody vegetation. However, late spring burns are ideal for managing against invasive cool season grasses like fescue and smooth brome. In native grasses, summer burns are excellent for increasing beneficial forbs the following year.
- Summer, fall, and winter burns (July – Feb.) favor broadleaf flowering plants and legumes in native warm season grass stands. These burns improve plant diversity by setting back native grasses allowing for forb and legume growth and seed germination the following year. (*Figure 1.*)
- Invasive cool season grasses, such as smooth brome and fescue, should be burned with 4-6" of new growth (April – May). This opens up thick stands of these cool season grasses which encourages forbs and legumes.
- Burning at different times of the year contributes to a healthier grassland. It is important not to do the same thing year after year. If burning 1/3 of your property each spring is in your management plan, periodically burn 1/3 in the summer as opposed to the spring. This will help to achieve a greater level of diversity for both plants and wildlife.
- Burn on approximately a three year cycle to maintain native grasslands in eastern Kansas. In far western Kansas, burning may only need to be conducted approximately every 5 to 10 years due to less rainfall and slower woody encroachment.
- When burning to control undesirable woody vegetation, it may be necessary to burn two or more consecutive years in a row.
- Patch burning can be used in conjunction with livestock grazing to provide desirable livestock grazing and wildlife habitat. Burning up to 1/3 of a pasture each year has been shown to improve grassland bird populations while maintaining cattle gains.

MAINTENANCE:

- Burn approximately one-third of the managed area annually. This provides a continuous source of cover and nesting habitat.
- If burning one-third of a field is not feasible, then burning should take place no more than once every 3 years.
- Maintain firebreaks according to the burn plan. (Figure 2.)

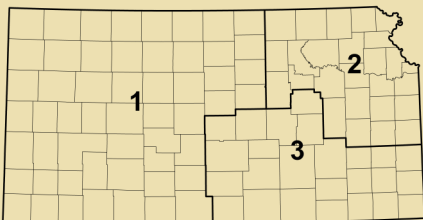


Figure 1. Summer burn conducted mid-July and regrowth 2 months after burn.



Figure 2. Mowed firebreak.

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