

# PREScribed BURNING

## and Landowner Assistance Programs

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Prescribed burning is one of the most cost effective forest management tools that the forest landowner has at his disposal for pine stand management. It provides multiple benefits for both timber and wildlife. Prescribed burning controls undesirable vegetation as well as low value woody plants and shrubs. Over time, a regular program of prescribed burning will actually change the species mix of herbaceous weeds to a more palatable and desirable food mix for wildlife. In turn, controlling competing vegetation will make water, sunlight, and soil nutrients and minerals more available to the individual pine trees in the stand.

### Where is the Rx in Prescribed Burning?

Why is the application of fire in forest management called “prescribed burning?” Looking at one widely accepted definition, one can see that prescribed burning is more than just controlled burning. Consider the following:

**Prescribed burning is fire that is...**

- Applied in a skillful manner
- under exacting weather conditions
- in a designated place
- to achieve specific results.

Let’s see what you get when you examine this definition more closely.

Fire **applied in a skillful manner** means that you can achieve various results by applying fire in different ways. For example, you would want a more intense fire on a site preparation burn in

a clearcut for tree planting, and a less intense fire for a fuel reduction burn in a young pine stand.

Add **under exacting weather conditions** and you have to take into consideration air temperature, relative humidity (RH), surface wind speed and direction, transport wind speed and direction, atmospheric stability, mixing height, and how these and other weather factors affect the way the fire burns. Fires burn much hotter and faster in March with 25 mph winds and 22 % relative humidity than in

scription” for a successful burning program.

The **specific results you wish to achieve** will come with periodic burning in the right amounts.

### What are the Results of a Burning Program?

During my fire suppression days of not too long ago, I would hear all sorts of reasons for burning. (Most often it was someone else’s property that ended up burnt.) People would tell me they were

burning to get rid of rats, bugs, pine worms, flies, trash, snakes, “haints,” ghosts, insects, brush, ticks, chiggers, “‘cause I can’t see through the woods,” “the deers are eating up my pea patch,” and my all-time favorite: “everybody knows my Daddy’s allergic to grass pollen.” I had to think about that last one for a while, but I finally decided that it may have been the most legitimate reason of the whole bunch.

You may not have a “haint” or grass pollen problem on your property, but consider the list below for some additional benefits from a prescribed burn program:

- **Manage Competing Vegetation** – Understory trees and shrubs less than three inches in diameter can be controlled by fire.
- **Improve Wildlife Habitat and Forage for Grazing** – Burning stimulates growth of forbs, herbs, legumes, and open grown plants preferred by wildlife and livestock.



Prescribed burn in a young longleaf plantation, with disked fire break in the foreground.

December when it is overcast, with light and variable winds and 85% RH.

The **designated place** in the equation takes into account both fuels and topography. Light, flashy fuels such as sage grass or pine straw on flat ground will burn differently than heavy logging slash on the side slope of a mountain. The physical characteristics of fuels such as their shape, size, arrangement, volume, and moisture content, in addition to the terrain, determine how a fire will burn. Combine your fuel, weather, and topography with the right mix of skill and the knowledge of how those ingredients affect fire behavior, and you have a “pre-

(Continued on page 10)

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(Continued from page 9)

- Control Insects and Disease** – Brownspot disease in longleaf is one of the most well known diseases controlled by fire. Annosus root rot and the white pine cone beetle are controlled to a lesser extent by controlled burning.
- Manage for Threatened and Endangered Species** – Everyone knows about longleaf pine being dependent on fire, but other plant species such as pitcher plants and types of orchids are also maintained by fire.
- Enhance Appearance and Improve Access** – Burning underbrush can increase recreation and aesthetic values by improving access and visibility in timber stands.
- Reduce Hazardous Fuels** – Wildfires in stands with heavy fuel buildup (pine straw, leaves, etc.) can damage or kill valuable timber.
- Dispose of Logging Debris** – Tops and limbs can take up planting space, clog roads and trails, hinder access to the tract, as well as be a hazardous fuel problem.
- Prepare Sites for Seeding or Planting** – Fire can control small woody stems and herbaceous plants that would compete with pines. Fire can clean up areas for site preparation for planting.

### Additional Benefits

Prescribed burning, especially when done through a cost share program, is one of the most cost effective tools the landowner has for managing his property. A periodic burning program does not have to be limited to pine stands. Mixed pine-hardwood stands will also benefit if managing the midstory and understory is an objective.

The benefits from a burning program are worth the cost, even if not done under one of the landowner assistance cost share programs. Prescribed burning costs can be expensed out on your income taxes in the year they are incurred. Burning is a great timber stand improvement (TSI) activity. Permanent firelanes, initiated as part of a prescribed burning program, provide multiple benefits by serving as roads or trails (horseback,

ATV, walking, nature, etc.) and linear food plots for wildlife. One of your management objectives should be locating the firebreaks where they not only serve as access to your property, but also delineate different timber types.

### What Help is Available for Prescribed Burning?

Currently, there are several state and federal programs that provide cost-share assistance to landowners for prescribed burning. These programs have different sign-up periods and certain criteria that must be met in order to qualify. Contact the appropriate agent for more details on the various programs.

#### Cost Share Programs

**Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** – Contact the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) for details.

**Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** - Contact the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for details.

**Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)** - Contact the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for details.

**Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP)** (the Alabama Forestry Commission Prescribed Burning Program) – Specifications for this program have not been finalized at this time. However, cost share funds will be available for prescribed burning and firelane construction practices, with priority given to longleaf stands. Contact your local Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) office for details as they become available.

New programs will be forthcoming in the hurricane damaged areas. See your county forester for details.

If you have questions about managing your property, seek advice from a professional forester or biologist. They may give you other options to consider. Contact your local AFC county office for more information or visit the Alabama Forestry Commission’s website at <http://www.forestry.state.al.us>. This website has links to more articles on prescribed burning, telephone and address lists of registered foresters and wildlife biologists, and a lot more information on becoming a good steward of your property. 🌲

Source: *A Guide for Prescribed Fire in Southern Forests*, USDA Forest Service, Rev. 1978.

Program Guidelines				
Program Information	CRP	EQIP	WHIP	FLEP
Administering Agency	FSA	NRCS/FSA	NRCS	AFC
Sign-up Location	FSA	NRCS/FSA	NRCS	AFC
Cost-Share Rate	50%	60%	60%	50%
Length of Contract (Years)	10-15	5-10	5-10	1
Prescribed Burning for Site Preparation	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Stand Improvement Burning	No	No	No	Yes
Permanent Firelanes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Habitat Improvement Burning	No	No	Yes	Yes