

Did You Know

Restoring Nature with Prescribed Fire

Do you know the difference between a wild and a prescribed burn fire?

Fire: Wild vs. Prescribed

Prescribed burns differ greatly from wildfires. Wildfires do great harm and damage because they are unpredictable and difficult to control. Wildfires threaten the safety of people and their property. Prescribed burns on the other hand are planned to achieve certain management objectives which are specific to a designated burn unit or property intended for fire management. Highly trained personnel use specialized equipment to keep the fire under control throughout the process.

How much planning goes into a Prescribed Burn Plan?

Long before the moment of ignition, a burn plan or prescription is developed to address the specific objectives within a burn unit. Safety is always the number one priority. The burn plan includes:

- Vegetation fuel types and conditions
- Atmospheric conditions such as humidity, wind speed, direction and temperature
- Fire breaks
- Equipment and personnel needs
- Ignition plan
- Contingency plans
- Public notification
- Contact of the fire department
- Smoke management plan

Why do we burn?

Many ecosystems are vitally linked to fire. Here in southern Michigan, our plant communities are part of a fire dependent landscape. Native Americans used fire as a tool for a variety of reason in Mid-Western prairies, wetlands, and woodlands. By reintroducing fire into the landscape we are reinstating an essential ecosystem process. Fires exclusion in recent decades has had a dramatic effect on the landscape. In the absence of fire, many fire intolerant plant species out compete the native fire adapted plant species which support our wildlife such as white tail deer, waterfowl, ground birds and yes, even reptiles, amphibians and insects. Without fire our natural areas tend to become thickets of shrubs or weeds with very little diversity. A spring prescribed burn clears the way for native fire adapted plants. The fire sets back the invasive plants and blackens the earth which absorbs solar radiation creating heat and lengthening the growing season for native plants.

Does prescribed burning pollute the air? Does it increase our carbon footprint?

A prescribed burn produces significantly less carbon air emissions than if the same area was mowed. A prescribed burn will produce some smoke which contains water vapor, carbon dioxide, other chemicals and particulate matter. Steps are taken to minimize the amount of smoke produced and also to limit the public's exposure to it.

Does prescribed burning harm the wildlife?

During a prescribed burn most animals find cover by retreating into burrows, flying away or moving to surrounding areas that are not in the burn unit. Smaller animals need only to be half an inch under ground to easily avoid the heat of the fire. Animal habitats are commonly improved as a result of fire by stimulating a diverse healthy natural community. For example the rare Karner Blue butterfly depends on lupine, which occurs in a prairie fen as its food source. In turn, lupine depends on fire to reinvigorate and help it compete against fire sensitive species.

Picture

Our burn management is methodically planned and mapped out as you see here.

Map