

Mild Fire or Wildfire? It's Your Choice!

By John Stivers, Registered Forester, Alabama Prescribed Burn Council

Photo by Brad Fite

The majority of Alabama's landscape is either fire dependent or fire adapted so it can function as the way the nature intended. **Prescribed fire is a safe way to apply a natural process, ensure Ecosystem health, and reduce wildfire risk.** When prescribed fire is excluded from forest or range systems, things will get out of balance and there will be consequences.

The most noticeable consequence would be wildland fire that could damage timber, property, soils, air quality, watershed values, and wildlife habitat, as well as expended financial resources to suppress the unwanted fire. Many of these "impacts" are borne by the landowner and general public.

It is in the best interest of the public to be supportive of sound use of prescribed fire to meet resource objectives, **Only YOU can promote prescribed fire!**

Other consequences that are less noticeable by the general public include:

- Loss of key habitat required for threatened/endangered plants and animals
- Conversion of understory species
- Decline in habitat value for many game and non-game species
- Risk increased to wildland fire personnel, and
- Less aesthetic value from managed open stands

Prescribed fire has many resource benefits including, but not limited to:

- Hazardous fuel reduction
- Wildlife habitat improvement
- Forest site preparation for tree planting or natural seeding
- Timber stand improvement
- Control of undesirable species
- Range improvement
- Agricultural debris management, and
- Disease control



The Alabama Prescribed Fire Council (APFC) was formed in October 2007 and is part of the national coalition of prescribed fire councils. The mission of APFC is to "protect, conserve, and expand the safe use of prescribed fire on Alabama's fire adapted landscape. "The purpose of APFC is sevenfold:

- Provide a focus for issues and concerns regarding prescribed fire in Alabama (including agricultural burning and range management)
- Facilitate communication and the exchange of information regarding the benefits of prescribed fire
- Provide a forum where all interested parties may participate in meetings and share in the benefits from information generated by APFC
- Promote a general public understanding of the benefits of prescribed burning and distinguish between wildland fire and prescribed fire
- Promote safety, training and research in the art and science of prescribed fire
- Provide a forum for discussion on prescribed fire practices, regulations, and policies as well as a means to defend prescribed burning rights, and
- Promote and facilitate an increase in acres treated annually by use of prescribed fire



Photo by John Pirtle



Photo by Kelvin J. Daniels

The APFC is governed by a 15-person steering committee that is elected by the general membership. This committee is composed of a diverse representation from groups: landowners, consultants, forest industry, and non-profit organizations. The steering committee meets twice each year and the general membership meets annually. There are nine working groups of volunteers from the APFC's general membership to work on issues and present recommendations to the steering committee to be taken to the general membership. These working groups include:

- Policy and legislation
- Fire effects
- Equipment
- Litigation, claims, and insurance
- Public relations, education, outreach, and grants
- Website
- Fuels and fire behavior
- Smoke management, and
- Vendors and contractor pools



Photo by John Pirtle

When fully developed and active, the APFC website will be www.alabamaprescribedfirecouncil.net. It is the vision of APFC to be one of the key "go to" locations for the public in Alabama, both for information and to complement the Alabama Forestry Commission public services for landowners who use this important tool called prescribed fire.

To become a member of the APFC is simple and it is free. Simply drop an email to rxburning@aol.com with your name and contact information. Annual meetings are in October of each year for the general membership.

The national coalition of prescribed fire councils is comprised of individual prescribed fire councils to give a national voice to prescribed fire. Currently, 28 US states (including Alabama) have established councils or are currently developing councils, Mexico, and one province in Canada are also part of the coalition.

The APFC is working to get all 67 counties in the state to adopt resolutions that support prescribed fire, as well as a Governor's Proclamation declaring February as "Prescribed Fire Awareness Month" in Alabama. Prescribed fire is a landowner right and a benefit to society, and the APFC supports the Certified Prescribe Burn Manager program in Alabama.

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