

Prescribed Fire FAQ

1) Why do we burn?

The Nature Conservancy uses prescribed fire to maintain the health and resilience of our forests and grasslands. It increases new growth of native vegetation, increases biodiversity of plant species, minimizes the spread of pests and disease, and recycles nutrients back to the soil. Prescribed fire has the added benefit of reducing wildfire risk by reducing fuel (vegetation) build-up. Our landscape is now fragmented by highways, byways, and housing developments that prevent fire's natural process to occur across the landscape. This is why it is crucial for us to implement prescribed fire to ensure that fire-dependent species and ecosystems are maintained for future generations' enjoyment.

2) How do Fire Managers and Burn Bosses maintain community safety during a prescribed fire?

Fire Managers and Burn Bosses take many steps to ensure public and firefighter safety. They spend time evaluating the type of vegetation within the burn area, where the fire should start and end, and what personnel and equipment are needed to adequately control the fire. Prior to the burn, Burn Bosses notify local emergency services and coordinate with the state forestry agency to ensure they are aware of the burn and can plan accordingly. Weather conditions are carefully assessed the day of a prescribed burn. If the weather conditions are not conducive to safe burning, we will not burn that day.

3) How are the fire and smoke contained and controlled?

Control lines with fire breaks are established before the ignition of the fire. These fire breaks consist of removing all the flammable vegetation so that the prescribed burn stops when it reaches the line. These lines usually consist of a disked or mowed line. The smoke is controlled by carefully selecting the days on which we burn as informed by weather conditions and wind direction. Weather forecast and advanced smoke modeling tools are utilized in the planning process.

4) How do you avoid injuring wildlife?

Due to the nature of a prescribed fire, it occurs throughout the duration of a day. Most of the animals have time get out of the area or seek refuge before the burn impacts them directly. Numerous research studies have shown that wildlife tend to retreat naturally when there is a fire due to instinct, and the overall wildlife population responds positively to the habitat benefits provided by the fire.

5) Is a prescribed fire dangerous?

Prescribed fire is a safe and controlled planned management activity. Prescribed fire is implemented by highly trained professionals and is a planned event that takes place under optimal conditions.

6) How is smoke controlled? Or how is the impact of smoke reduced?

As part of the planning process, we carefully select which weather parameters will be acceptable to burn under, making sure to avoid impacts to smoke sensitive areas. Prescribed fires mimic a natural process under chosen conditions, which help prevent the impacts of smoke. Prescribed burning can be used to mitigate the negative air quality, health, and safety impacts from wildfires by controlling the vegetation that fuels wildfires. Since prescribed burns are only conducted under specific weather

parameters, including those that influence smoke quantity and direction, the smoke emitted from prescribed burning emits fewer pollutants and is less harmful to human health than smoke from wildfires.

7) What happens after the fire?

After the fire, crews are careful to mop up or extinguish any burning and smoking material which could be a threat to the control lines. Staff then monitors the weather and checks the burn area, ensuring there are no holding concerns until the fire is completely out.

8) What is the difference between a wildfire and a prescribed fire?

The biggest difference between a wildfire and a prescribed fire is that a prescribed fire is a planned event and therefore it occurs under the best possible circumstances.

Wildfires often occur under extreme conditions such as prolonged drought whereas prescribed fires are implemented when the weather and natural conditions are desirable.

Prescribed fire reduces the risk of wildfires by reducing the amount of hazardous natural fuels and fills the important role of maintaining fire in fire dependent natural communities.

Prescribed Burns Protect and Preserve Natural Habitats

The right fire at the right place at the right time:

- Improves habitat for threatened and endangered species
- Promotes the growth of trees, wildflowers, and other plants
- Removes unwanted species that threaten species native to an ecosystem
- Provides forage for game
- Recycles nutrients back to the soil
- Reduces hazardous fuels, protecting human communities from extreme fires
- Minimizes the spread of pest insects and disease

PUBLIC NOTICE

Prescribed Fire Burn Window: March 5 – April 30, 2024

You may see smoke at times during the dates above because The Nature Conservancy will be conducting Prescribed Burns on our Pemberton Forest Preserve at Ponders Tract in Ellendale, along Route 16 and 30. These controlled burns are carefully planned and implemented and are a necessary management tool in the restoration of the forest at Ponders Tract. The burns also have the added benefit of decreasing potential risk of wildfires.

Prescribed burns are conducted under precise, closely monitored weather conditions and by a specially trained crew that is nationally qualified in prescribed fire. Every precaution is taken, and the prescribed burns will not take place if the proper weather and fuel conditions required by our Burn Plan parameters are not met.

If you have any questions about The Nature Conservancy or our fire program, please feel free to contact us.

Respectfully,

Natasha Whetzel
DE Stewardship Program Manager, The Nature Conservancy in Delaware

The Nature Conservancy
P.O. Box 327
Milton, DE 19968
P: (910) 783-9091
natasha.whetzel@tnc.org
www.nature.org