

Prescribed Woodland Burns

What is the difference between a prescribed burn and a wildfire?

A prescribed burn is one that is carefully planned by trained professionals. Everything from wind direction and speed, temperature, humidity and fuel conditions are taken into account when planning a burn. The "prescription" or condition must be optimal to execute a burn, that is why there is such a narrow window of opportunity to do a prescribed burn. DNR certified workers are on site from the beginning to the end, to ensure a successful burn. On the other hand, a wildfire is not a planned event. Often, it is started carelessly by a campfire or a cigarette. Other times nature may start the fire by a lightning strike. While prescribed burns are beneficial, unplanned fires can be disastrous to humans, animals, and dwellings.

Are prescribed burns necessary?

Before urbanization, fires were common and natural occurrences. As areas became populated, fires were quickly extinguished because of safety concerns. This has had a negative impact on our urban grasslands, and remnant forests because fire can help control "plant invaders" such as buckthorn seedlings. Buckthorn seedlings do not tolerate fires, but native fire-adaptive plants do quite well. When a prescribed burn is done it stimulates the native seeds in the ground to germinate. The plants grow and outcompete the non-native species.

What are the benefits of a prescribed burn?

Fire helps manage undesirable plants, stimulates trees, shrubs and plant seeds to germinate, and puts nutrients back in the soil. Diversity increases and native plant communities and animal habitats thrive.

What happens to the animals during a burn?

Surprisingly, animals seek out areas free of humans. Before the burn begins there are workers in the area so animals will naturally move temporarily to another place nearby. Once the burn is complete and the humans have left, the animals return. Sometimes an animal will be overcome by the fire, but this is not common. Timing for burns is done with the least impact to the animals. The long-term benefits far outweigh any negative ones.

What will the area look like after the burn?

Immediately after the burn, there will be no plant litter and it will look like there has been a fire because there will be ash on the ground. However, the trees will still be there though they may be scorched and some lower leaves could be wilted. Usually within a week or so you will start seeing the green plant growth peeking out. This growth will continue at a rapid pace in the following weeks.

Need more information about our project?

Call Peggy at 651-698-4543.