

GENERAL PLAN FOR PRESCRIBED BURNING ON TPWD LANDS

A. Purpose

Fire is a major ecological force in many terrestrial ecosystems throughout the world. Historically, fire in conjunction with other environmental factors such as topography and climate, has played a major role in determining the distribution of many plants and plant communities.

This plan establishes minimum standards and requirements for all wildland fire activities on TPWD managed lands which are essential for the protection of human life, property and for the stewardship and sustainability of Texas' natural and cultural resources. ***Wildland fire is considered any fire that is not a structural or vehicle fire. Structural and vehicle fires are not covered in this plan.***

Four distinct categories of fire management activities may occur on TPWD managed lands:

Prescribed Burn: Any fire intentionally ignited for management actions to meet specific objectives. A written, approved prescribed burn plan must exist prior to ignition.

Wildland Fire Use: The use of a naturally-ignited wildfire to accomplish specific resource management objectives in pre-defined areas as outlined in a site specific wildland fire use plan.

Wildfire: An unplanned wildland fire including unauthorized human-caused fires, escaped prescribed burns, and all other wildland fires where the objective is to extinguish the fire.

Brush/Debris Pile Burning: The burning of brush and debris, composed entirely of organic matter that naturally grows at a site and exclusive of any man-made or man-modified materials.

Fire has the potential to drastically alter vegetation and wildlife habitat, and may contribute to or hinder the achievement of a site's resource management objectives. A site's fire management plan will be designed to meet resource management objectives, ensure facility protection, and ensure the safety of the public and department personnel. The Incident Command System (ICS) and firefighting standards set forth by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) will be adopted for all TPWD fire management activities, except where noted.

Division specific requirements and procedures may be implemented by the Division Director or designee.

B. Wildland Fire Training and Fitness Requirements

All TPWD staff participating in wildland fire activities with active fire will have completed the minimum training requirements for a Fire Fighter Type Two as described in National Incident Management System (NIMS) Wildland Fire Qualifications System Guide, PMS 310-1. TPWD staff leading a burn (Burn Manager or Prescribed Burn Boss) must meet or exceed the training and experience requirements of the Texas Prescribed Burning Board. Each Division shall be responsible for developing minimum training and experience requirements for burn crew members.

All personnel participating in wildland fire operations must be screened annually for physical fitness according to the Wildland Firefighter Medical Standards Program adopted by the NWCG. The minimum fitness level required for staff participating in operations position roles on wildland fire operations managed by TPWD shall be “moderate” as measured using the Work Capacity Test (WCT). The fitness level required for staff participating in support position roles on wildland fire operations managed by TPWD will be identified in division operating procedures. The fitness level required for staff participating with cooperators will be guided by *NIMS Wildland Fire Qualifications System Guide, PMS 310-1, Federal Wildland Fire Qualifications Supplement or cooperator agreements*.

C. Use of Prescribed Burns

The primary purpose of prescribed burns on TPWD lands is to utilize fire as an ecological process and simulate the effects of natural fire events. The application of fire fulfills numerous management objectives including reduction of excessive fuel loads, increased herbaceous species and available browse, control of invasive species, increasing species diversity and richness, and facilitation of the long-term objectives for natural habitat and community restoration and maintenance.

Prescribed burns on TPWD lands shall be conducted in association with these management objectives and/or other research endeavors in order to document the long-term effects of this practice on habitat quality or habitat restoration.

Prescribed burns are the most effective and efficient method to reduce fuel loadings. Fire hazard is directly correlated to fuel loads, therefore, reducing the fuel loads will not only reduce the fire hazard, but also the impact a wildfire could have on a site, its facilities, and its natural communities.

D. Prescribed Burn Planning

A site-specific prescribed burn plan must be completed and approved by staff as designated by the Executive Director in the Division operating plans, prior to implementing a prescribed burn.

Site-specific prescribed burn plans shall contain: a description of the project area, including fuels and any potential hazards; purpose and objective of burn; pre-burn notifications, burn prescription parameters, expected fire behavior; pre-burn considerations and preparation requirements; ignition

and holding strategies; required staffing, equipment, and contingency resources; smoke management, contingency plan for escapes; mop up plan; and maps including individual burn units, pre-burn actions, and surrounding areas and access routes for contingency actions. Prescribed burn plan templates and formats may be Division specific.

If ground disturbing actions are anticipated or if cultural resources may be impacted, appropriate cultural resources clearance must be obtained in accordance with existing TPWD procedures prior to implementing the prescribed burn. Where there is the potential to impact state or federally listed endangered or threatened species or communities, appropriate concurrence shall be acquired as needed.

Prescribed burns shall only be implemented when there is an approved prescribed burn plan and the necessary personnel and equipment resources stated in the approved plan are available on the burn site and the prescription conditions can be met.

E. Outreach and Notifications

In coordination with the prescribed burn manager, site managers shall be responsible for providing adequate advance notice of the intent to conduct a prescribed burn(s) to neighboring landowners, appropriate state and local officials, and the community at large in the vicinity of the prescribed burn area. Notifications will be made as required by HB 801 (Section 11 Chapter 11 Parks and Wildlife Code, Subchapter M). Neighboring landowners are landowners whose property is both contiguous to department land and within one mile of the designated burn area.

Neighboring landowner notices shall include the planned start and end dates of the prescribed burn; any safety precautions the landowner should take to ensure the safety of the landowner's property before, during, and after the burn; a map of the prescribed burn area, including the location of any utility infrastructure within prescribed burn area; the methods proposed for use in conducting the burn; and contact information for the prescribed burn manager or site manager.

Notice to local and state officials shall include city or county emergency services dispatch center; local fire departments; water utility officials with water facilities within a two mile radius of the prescribed burn area, owners of any utility infrastructure within the prescribed burn area; and other parties identified in the Division's operating procedures or the site-specific prescribed burn plan.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) shall be notified and applicable approval documentation obtained in writing as required by Outdoor Burning Rule, Title 30, Texas Administrative Code, Sections 111.201-221 (www.tceq.state.tx.us/rules/).

Public notification to the community at large shall be published in a newspaper of general circulation in the county or counties in which the burn will be conducted or broadcast in the accepted media format

required by state law for official public notifications. Additional public outreach and notification may be defined in the Division's operating procedures or in the site-specific prescribed burn plan.

F. Prescribed Burn Implementation

The prescribed burn manager shall be responsible for ensuring required notifications are completed; adequate personnel and equipment are on site for the burn; burn crew has appropriate personal protective gear and has been briefed on objectives, fuels, expected weather and fire behavior, and appropriate safety precautions; burning is conducted only when observed or forecasted environmental conditions are within prescription parameters; all personnel are trained to levels commensurate with their level of responsibility on the burn crew and for that specific operation; all pre-burn and contingency measures outlined in the prescribed burn plan are complete.

It is the TPWD site manager's responsibility to coordinate prescribed burn activity with visitor use. The site manager, in consultation with the burn manager, shall determine if the department facility should be closed to visitors during the burn. If the facility remains open and public use areas occur within a prescribed burn project area, those areas should be closed during the burn, and all visitors should be notified of the planned burn.

Prescriptions will limit prescribed burning to those periods when atmospheric and wind conditions are within acceptable guidelines – these may be locally specific, and shall be identified in the plan in order to minimize risks associated with the potential effects of smoke on the local population and resources. Immediately prior to burning a weather forecast shall be obtained from the local National Weather Service office to determine the expected conditions for the day of the burn and any predicted changes in weather conditions within 24 - 48 hours.

All infrastructure and utilities shall be protected (i.e., electrical transformers, electrical conduit, phone and fiber optic lines, oil and gas wells, barns and buildings, etc.).

Development of a smoke management plan shall include plotting the expected direction of the smoke plume, identifying all smoke sensitive areas in the vicinity and their distances from the burn unit, identifying critical smoke sensitive areas, and minimizing the risk to adjacent properties and populations. Public roads and airports must be considered at risk for smoke, and appropriate precautions must be taken to minimize risks to traffic. Department personnel conducting prescribed burns shall comply with Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) requirements found in Title 30, Texas Administrative Code, Sections 111.201-221 (www.tceq.state.tx.us/rules/).

Prescribed burns shall be monitored and documented to record the significant fire behavior and decisions made during the operation and to determine whether specified objectives were achieved.

Burn manager will work with county officials in determining appropriateness of burning during county burn bans. Division Director or designee approval is required to conduct a prescribed burn during a

burn ban. No fires shall be ignited when the Texas Interagency Coordination Center (TICC) has rated the "TFS Regional Fire Risk Level" at a "5 – extreme," which reflects the current demand on fire protection resources.

G. Wildland Fire Use

Wildland fire use is the application of the appropriate management response to naturally ignited wildland fires to accomplish specific resource management objectives in pre-defined areas, as outlined in the site's Wildland Fire Use Plan. Wildland fire use planning and implementation must ensure public and firefighter safety, natural and cultural resource benefits, and interagency collaboration.

A written, approved site-specific Wildland Fire Use Plan is required prior to utilizing natural ignitions as a management tool. The plan shall identify potential wildland fire use zones and describe the environmental parameters under which a naturally ignited fire may be used to meet predetermined management objectives. Until a Wildland Fire Use Plan is approved for a site, all unplanned wildland fires shall be suppressed.

Using wildland fire to meet site management goals and objectives may require additional cross-training of cooperator fire suppression resources and establishment of MOUs between fire suppression resources and neighboring landowners. Specific requirements for Wildland Fire Use Plans and implementation shall be described in the Division's operating procedures.

H. Wildfire Management

A Wildfire is considered any unplanned wildland fire including unauthorized human-caused fires, escaped prescribed burns, and all other wildland fires where the objective is to extinguish the fire. The protection of human life, facilities, equipment, and cultural and natural resources are all of the utmost importance.

All wildfires shall be reported to the appropriate staff as designated by the Division Director. If a wildfire occurs on the TPWD lands, control measures should be limited to natural barriers, existing roads, firebreaks, trails and established black lines. Planned control measures should be conducted for protection of personnel, facilities, and equipment. Under most conditions, fuels between firebreaks and the existing area of the wildfire should be burned out to help contain the fire. Spot-fires should be extinguished immediately.

The use of ground-disturbing activities should be limited to management unit boundaries and designated firebreaks or access routes as identified by local TPWD facility staff. If the evaluation of the fire behavior reveals that the fire cannot be safely controlled within a given unit, and/or life or property is threatened, then more aggressive control actions may be initiated considering the value of natural and cultural resources when using ground disturbing devices such as fire plows, motor graders, bulldozers, etc.

Site managers shall attempt to keep fuels from accumulating to hazardous levels along management unit boundaries or adjacent to facilities or structures. Appropriate firebreaks should be maintained around structures and facilities at all times. Leaf litter should be removed from the roofs of all structures at least biannually. Areas around structures and facilities should have the underbrush removed to reduce fire hazards. Bare ground or green lines should also be maintained under and around interpretive and similar structures. Special actions may be warranted during periods of extreme fire danger, such as widening of firebreaks, restricting visitor use, posting fire danger warnings, or prohibiting the use of open fires.

When trained personnel and equipment are available, TPWD staff with supervisor approval, may respond to requests for assistance from fire departments or other fire management agency incident commanders to assist in the suppression of wildfires off TPWD lands.

I. Emergency Response Equipment

Equipment used for prescribed burns can be a valuable tool in suppression of wildfires. Fire equipment used to conduct prescribed burns may also be used to suppress wildfires threatening structures or utility locations. TPWD staff should be aware of the location of all firefighting equipment and be knowledgeable in its use.

Emergency response equipment shall be routinely inspected, maintained in optimal operating condition, and used for fire management purposes only. TPWD staff likely to respond to fires should participate in training, coordination and incident command structure with the entities and organizations having jurisdiction for emergency wildfire situations.

J. Burning of Brush or Debris Piles

Trees, brush, grass, leaves, branch trimmings, or other plant growth may be burned on a TPWD property in accordance with the TCEQ outdoor burning requirements found in Title 30, Texas Administrative Code, Section 111.209 Subsection 4. (www.tceq.state.tx.us/rules/).

Burning of brush piles on TPWD lands should be completed only when conditions will limit and restrict the spread of fire through fine fuels, and when smoke will not cause a nuisance to sensitive receptors. Additional requirements for burning brush/debris piles shall be division specific, according to division operating procedures.

Acceptable conditions may include, but are not limited to, high relative humidity, appropriate fuel moistures, and/or adequate fire breaks around the brush pile. These conditions should be forecasted to last until the pile has been completely consumed, which could be several days.

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