

Utah Interagency Fire Information

Cooperating Agencies:



Bureau of Indian Affairs



Bureau of Land Management



National Park Service



State of Utah,
Forestry, Fire and State Lands



U.S. Forest Service



US Fish and Wildlife Service

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PRESCRIBED FIRES: A COST EFFECTIVE WAY TO TREAT VEGETATION

Salt Lake City, Utah --- Some Utah residents may see smoke in the air this spring. Although fire season is approaching, it is likely that the smoke will be a prescribed burn rather than a major wildfire. Utah's land management agencies plan to conduct approximately 60 prescribed burns in hopes of reducing hazardous fuels which in turn reduces the risk and severity of unnaturally hot wildfires this summer.

"Treating vegetation with fire is a common practice used by land managers in both the private and public sectors. Fire is an effective tool to manage overgrown areas, and it is nature's method for keeping fuels at normal levels." said Dick Buehler, State Forester. "The decision to use fire over other methods, including chemicals and mechanical treatment is based on several factors. Resource managers must consider the type of vegetation to be treated, the desired outcome or objective of the treatment, the best tool to meet the treatment objective, terrain, the cost per acre, and so forth."

Last year more than 36,000 acres were treated via prescribed burning in Utah. Burning is conducted in the spring and the fall. Agency statistics for 2007 include:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1 prescribed fires totaling 2,000 acres.
- Bureau of Land Management, 19 prescribed fires totaling 8,781 acres
- Fish and Wildlife Service, 4 prescribed fires totaling 2,175 acres
- National Park Service, 5 prescribed fires totaling 1,177 acres
- State of Utah, 10 prescribed fires totaling 9,609 acres
- US Forest Service, 42 prescribed fires totaling 15,042 acres.

Buehler continued, "Many Utah residents may be surprised at the amount of prescribed burns conducted each year. The public usually only hear about the ones that got away. Regretfully, escapes do happen, but they are rare and significant precautions are taken to ensure that prescribed burns are safe."

Vegetation buildup is heavy in many areas of the state, due to years of aggressive firefighting. Prescribed burning is intended to reduce fuel near inhabited areas, to improve wildlife habitat by providing a variety of vegetation for foraging, thermal cover and escape, or to modify the characteristics of a watershed.

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A prescribed burn always occurs in a “window” when the prescription – temperature, humidity, wind speed, fuel moisture, and other factors, can be accomplished. When the window is “open,” fuels specialists complete a go-no-go checklist to ensure all aspects of the plan can be accomplished. Answering “no” to a question on the check list will stop the prescribed burn.

During the actual burn, weather conditions are monitored to ensure the prescription window is still open. If the parameters of the burn move outside the prescription, burning ceases. During the burn, the fire’s behavior is monitored carefully to ensure treatment objectives are being met. Following the burn, additional monitoring will help determine the success of the operation.

Prescribed burning is a cost-effective means of treating vegetation. A benefit of burning over other treatment methods is that there is no slash and little standing dead vegetation remaining. And, the nutrients of the soil and the burned vegetation are naturally recycled on site. While prescribed burning appears to be far more exciting and risky than using chemicals or mechanical treatments, the vast majority of burns are routine and are completed flawlessly.

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