



National Park Service
Department of the Interior

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Lake Meredith National
Recreation Area

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Southern Plains Fire Park Group Fire Management: Prescribed Fire



The Southern Plains Fire Park Group, under the direction of Fire Management Officer Mike Davin, has completed a series of prescribed burns during FY03 at Chickasaw National Recreation Area, Washita Battlefield National Historic Site, and Lake Meredith National Recreation Area. Crews began prepping burn units in October 2002. Preparations included building fire lines along the parameter of each unit, removing vegetation around fences, power poles, and archeological sites, and completing archeological surveys.

The goals of these burn units included reducing non-native species, enhancing wildlife habitat, promoting ecological processes, and helping protect local communities from the catastrophic effects of uncontrolled wildfires. Many hours of planning and preparation went into these burn units and a total of 7,350 acres were burned. This is a part of a National Park Service initiative to reintroduce fire into parks throughout the system.



Crews burned 600 acres at Chickasaw National Recreation Area (CHIC) in 4 burn units with an emphasis on removal of eastern red cedars and a reduction in heavy fuels left behind from a devastating ice storm during December 2000. "There was lots of support from area volunteer fire departments and Murray County EMS was on standby if needed. Support from the community and homeowners helped to make this a successful burn and the timing of the fires was great, once the flames were out, rains moved in and settled the smoke and ash," said superintendent Rick Shireman. By using prescribed fire the effects of a destructive wildfire are reduced and protection of the urban interface community of Sulphur, Oklahoma, was improved. The project will help return the ecosystem to cross timbers-mixed grass prairie as it was in the late 1800s.

The Washita Battlefield NHS (WABA) burn consisted of two units with 100 acres burned. The goals of the burn included returning the park to its historic 1860s prairie condition through the use of prescribed fire, removal of exotic species including Johnson Grass, Kochia, Siberian Elm, Black Locust, and Eastern Red Cedar, improving wildlife habitat, and the increased protection of the community of Cheyenne, Oklahoma, from potential wildfires. An abandoned railroad grade was prepared ahead of time to serve as a firebreak. Crews also protected archeological



sites and an overlook with associated structures and a wooden fence. “The finesse and accuracy of the fire and ignition crews could be seen as redbud trees in full bloom were untouched by the fire yet inches away undesirable species went up in flames,” said superintendent Wendy Lauritzen. The two units, consisting of 67 acres and 33 acres, were burned three weeks apart. This series of burns was the first in a sequence of prescribed fires that will occur on a rotating basis every two years in the park.



Between January 20, 2003 and May 14, 2003 Lake Meredith National Recreation Area burned 6550 acres. Fire exclusion in this area has contributed to invasive species such as Salt Cedar and Mesquite taking over the short grass prairie that was common in the 1870s. “There is a cycle to prescribed burns to get the maximum benefit, the first entry burn will top kill the mesquite and about 7 years later a second fire will remove the dead branches and leave a 3-4 foot high basal sprout,” said

FMO Mike Davin. Neighboring landowners have been enthusiastic about participating in the burn program in an effort to return their ranch lands to the shortgrass prairie needed to sustain their herds. Holding crews, engines, and fire monitors were stationed at critical points along the burn units, often using ranch roads as fire breaks. Participating ranches include Plum Creek Ranch- Chris Scharbauer; Palo Duro Ranch-Clay Snell and Doc. Stevenson; Crawford Ranch- Sam Kiser; Sneed Ranch-Pam Barnes, Terry Ferguson and Darlene Aarons. “The burn reminded me of the past heritage of this country, the way Native Americans used to let fires burn to restore the land. Fire is nature’s way of taking care of undesirable plants and clearing the area for the short grass prairie. It takes 25 acres to sustain one cow and calf, that’s a lot of land. It would be a shame to see the ranching heritage of the Panhandle disappears because fire has been excluded from the ecosystem,” said rancher Chris Scharbauer. “A fair exchange has been provided to both landowners and the NPS by allowing us to use existing roads on ranch lands as fire control lines and is mutually beneficial for the ranchers in restoring the short grass prairie. A boundary line is not always a good place to stop a fire, nor do invasive species recognize boundary lines,” said Davin.



The park utilized aerial ignition in some instances through the use of a Plastic Sphere Dispenser (PSD) machine for lighting interior sections of the burn units. “This was the first year we have used this technology and it expedited the burn by allowing us to complete large units in one day that would have taken over three days- that saves both time and money,” said park Superintendent Karren Brown. Bandelier National Park’s Fire Effects Team is monitoring burn plots at LAMR and WABA

before, during, and after the fires to see the effects on vegetation. The data obtained gives firefighters information about the intensity of the burn and the intensity needed in future burns to eradicate targeted species. The unpredictable weather conditions in the Texas Panhandle were cooperative and added to the success of the burns at Lake Meredith NRA.



Prescribed fire gives a variety of local, state, and federal fire fighting agencies a good opportunity to practice for potential wildfires and build skills in working as cohesive components using the Incident Command System for all agencies participating. There were about forty cooperating agencies contributing to the success of this year's prescribed fires including Aerowest Helicopter, Anadarko Oil and Gas, Bandelier NM, Big Bend NP- Diablo Type 2 Hand Crew, Black Kettle National Grasslands, Black Kettle No. 1 Type 2 Hand Crew, Bugbee Estates Community, Canadian River Municipal Water Authority, Capulin Volcano National Monument, Carlsbad National Park, Chesapeake Oil and Gas, Cheyenne VFD, Chickasaw National Recreation Area, Cibola National Forest, Davis VFD, Dougherty VFD, Fritch VFD, Houston Helicopter, Hutchison County VFD, Intermountain Regional Office-Denver, CO, Lake Meredith National Recreation Area, Mesa Verde National Park, National Interagency Fire Center-

Boise, ID, National Weather Service-Amarillo, Contractor- North Texas Fire Service, Oklahoma Department of Natural Resources, ONEOK Oil and Gas, Pioneer Natural Gas, Potter County VFD, Skylane Helicopter, Stinnett VFD, Strong City VFD, Sulphur Fire Department, Texas Forest Service, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Texas Historical Commission, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and the US Fish Wildlife Service.