



Burning for Wildlife

Why Burn?

- Plants and animal species on most refuge lands evolved for millennia with fire. These ecosystems require fire at different intervals to thrive as productive wildlife habitat.
- Fire-adapted ecosystems on national wildlife refuges support hundreds of threatened and endangered species, migratory birds, and a plethora of other wildlife and plant species.
- There is no ecological alternative to fire. Charcoal carbon can only be produced by fire and is integral for soil ecological health.



Prescribed Burning

- Prescribed burning under planned conditions can emulate the ecological role, function, and effects of past fires.
- Planned burns provide a measure of safety for surrounding communities and firefighters.
- Burning at certain times of year protects nesting areas and optimizes plant growth by returning nutrients to the soil.
- In many cases, new growth appears within a couple of weeks after prescribed burns. Many species of trees, plants, and grasses thrive with stimulation from fire and smoke.



Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge

What Happens If We Don't Burn?

- Without recurrent fire, national wildlife refuges are more vulnerable to the effects of invasive species, climate change, and unwanted severe wildfires.
- Uncontrolled wildfires may result in serious injuries or even deaths for firefighters and the public, property loss and damage, as well as damage to soils, watersheds and water quality, upon which wildlife and people depend.
- Without regular fire, there is a loss of plant and animal species and their habitats, and the ecosystem fails to thrive. Without fire, the survival of the ecosystem itself is at risk.



Current Situation

- An average of about 420,000 acres has been prescribed burned every year on refuges to reduce hazardous conditions and maintain and restore natural ecosystems. This rate of burning is less than half of what is needed to meet management objectives each year.
- There is a critical need to increase and maintain prescribed burning on wildlife refuges and other treasured landscapes.
- Federal funding for prescribed burning is now focusing almost exclusively on populated areas adjacent to federal lands. There is minimal focus on maintaining and restoring natural ecosystems.
- The health and resiliency of many important ecosystems and species will continue to decline due to limitations on prescribed burning. Without intervention, this crisis will worsen over time.

Bottom Line

The current level of prescribed burning is not adequate to meet the ecological needs of refuges. Prescribed burning needs to increase an additional 660,000 acres per year to meet management objectives.