



Habitat Management Technical Guidance Sheet

Prescribed Burning For Wildlife

Purpose

Prescribed fire is a cost efficient and effective tool that is used to restore and maintain groundcover in open forest stands, openings, and grasslands. Prescribed fire promotes a lush growth of grasses and herbaceous vegetation that provides food and cover for many species of wildlife. Prescribed fire benefits many important game species and rare plants and animals, reduces wildfire impacts, controls undesirable vegetation, and prepares sites for forest regeneration.

Objectives

Sunlight must be available to produce lush groundcover vegetation. Prescribed fire, either alone or in combination with mechanical or herbicide treatments, can be used to open forest stands and remove litter to stimulate native groundcover or prepare sites to reestablish groundcover. A series of carefully conducted prescribed fires over several years may be necessary to rehabilitate sites with a long history of fire exclusion. Once a grass or herbaceous groundcover is established, fire applied on a one-, two-, or three-year rotation will maintain a healthy and diverse groundcover. Burn block size, season of burning, and fire intensity can be modified to meet wildlife objectives.

Timing of Burns

Restoration burns may be prescribed during the winter to reduce the litter layer in small increments to prevent damage to over-story trees or, where fuel levels allow, in summer to top kill mid-story hardwoods. Maintenance burns are typically applied in late winter or early spring to minimize the time until green up. Rotating the use of growing season and dormant season burns will often maximize the diversity of wildlife habitat.

Fire Lines

Prescribed fires are controlled by a break in fuels. Existing landscape features such as streams, fields, and roads can often serve as fire lines. Fire lines should be cleared of all flammable materials. This may be accomplished using heavy equipment or farm tractors. Short lines can be constructed with rakes, leaf blowers, or ATVs with drags. Fire lines should be planned and constructed in advance to facilitate maintenance and safety.

Safety and Logistics

A burn plan which describes goals, techniques, smoke sensitive areas, weather parameters, block size and location, and safety issues must be prepared for each burn block. Work in conjunction with your local N.C. Forest Service office to address these issues. Contractors are available to conduct prescribed burns in many areas of the state. Always contact your neighbors, local Volunteer Fire Departments, 911 centers, and the N.C. Forest Service on the day of your burn.



North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

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