



Woodland owners should work with natural resource professionals to determine if fire is an appropriate management tool for their property.

IMPLEMENTING CONTROLLED FIRE ON YOUR PROPERTY

by Chris Garland

The historical use of fire for habitat management and the beneficial uses of prescribed fire for wildlife management are both well documented.

Some of these benefits include reducing invasive species, managing grassland communities, removing excess leaf litter, releasing seed for germination, increasing species diversity, controlling disease, and reducing hazardous fuels.

The first step for landowners interested in using controlled fire as a management tool is to have a resource professional evaluate both the property and habitat objectives to see if controlled fire is needed or feasible. Wildlife biologists are available through the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources to provide assistance ranging from technical guidance to a full management plan based on your interests and objectives for your property.



You can get started by determining the private lands biologist for your area at www.fw.ky.gov or 1.800.858.1549. Other state, federal, and non-governmental organizations may also be able to provide technical assistance.

Depending on your property's size, location, and your management objectives, your private lands biologist can assist you in determining if fire is a viable alternative for your property or if other management practices would be more suitable.

If burning is the management practice needed to achieve the desired result, the next step is to develop a prescribed burn plan. This plan should detail the size and location of the burn and how the burn will be carried out. Items typically included in the burn plan are as follows:

Map: The map should include the area to be burned, notation of adjacent landowners, topography, control lines, wind and smoke direction, smoke-sensitive areas, water sources, roads, and structures.

Equipment needed to safely conduct the burn.

Fire Prescription: This information will detail the weather and fuel parameters needed to safely conduct the burn, the time of year, and time of day you plan on conducting the burn.

Firing Plan: This plan includes insuring fire breaks are within suggested guidelines and choosing the correct ignition points and firing pattern based on current weather parameters and desired results.

Once the plan is developed, the landowner must install the control lines or fire breaks around the perimeter of the burn unit in accordance with the burn plan. There are several types of fire breaks, including natural firebreaks, constructed breaks, existing vegetation, etc. Your burn plan should detail the types and locations of all firebreaks needed to conduct the burn.

The final step is to monitor weather and plan for conducting the burn during the months specified in your burn plan. Notify all surrounding landowners, local dispatchers, and resource agencies at least 24 hours prior to and again immediately prior to ignition. It should be pointed out that safety should be the first priority when conducting any prescribed burn. Weather conditions can change drastically during a burn, and conditions can become too unsafe to continue.

Several natural resource agency professionals are available to provide technical assistance for habitat improvement on private properties. The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources or a private vendor may also be able to provide a prescribed burn plan or assistance in conducting the prescribed fire. The availability of assistance with the actual burn is widely dependent on location, program participation, scheduling, weather, and timing with available staff and should be planned at least a year in advance through your local resources professional.

For more information, contact your resource professional or KDFWR private lands biologist at www.fw.ky.gov or 1.800.858.1549.

About the Author: *Chris Garland, assistant director of the Wildlife Division of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, oversees the five wildlife regions and regional coordinators for each region as well as the state's Wildlife Management Areas.*

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