

## Participation

Membership in the Michigan Prescribed Fire Council is open to any individual, organization, or agency interested in utilizing or promoting prescribed fire as a management tool in Michigan. Members are encouraged to attend annual workshops and other training opportunities organized by the Steering Committee. Members are also invited to participate in the Education/Outreach Committee, Legal/Legislative Committee, or the Training/Certification Committee. See opportunities at [firecouncil.org](http://firecouncil.org).

Besides individual members, the Fire Council is a coalition of private sector and governmental agencies including representatives from the following:

- Colleges and Universities
- Conservation Groups
- Firemen's Associations
- Local Government
- Private Non-Profit Organizations
- State Agencies
- Federal Agencies
- Tribal Governments

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Cover Photo: Accompanied by a safety observer, a burn-crew member uses a drip torch to carefully select the area needing burning for ecological purposes.

# A Prescription for FIRE



**A look at the benefits of prescribed burning**

**Produced by the Michigan Prescribed Fire Council**  
[www.firecouncil.org](http://www.firecouncil.org)

*The scene was beautiful beyond description. The timber consisted of large oak trees standing several rods apart and the space between them was covered with bright green grass and beautiful wildflowers. The whole country had been burnt over every fall or spring, I presume, for centuries, and everything had been destroyed except these giants of the forest. It did appear as if one half of the vegetation was flowers. Most of them were about eighteen inches high and when moved by the wind the effect was wonderful. I have never seen in any of our large cities a park that was its equal.*

— J.W. Wing, June 1839  
Washtenaw County, Michigan



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The rare Karner Blue butterfly (right) depends on lupine, as seen in this prairie (above), for its foodsource. In turn, lupine depends on fire to reinvigorate and help it compete against fire-sensitive species.

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## Why We Burn

Many ecosystems are vitally linked to fire. In fact, many of our native Michigan plant communities are part of a fire-dependent landscape. The fires historically common in Midwestern prairies, wetlands and woodlands were primarily burns conducted by Native Americans for a variety of reasons. By reintroducing fire, we are reviving an essential ecosystem process.

Fire's exclusion in recent decades has had a dramatic effect on our landscape. Healthy prairie, wetland and woodland ecosystems are rich with a diversity of plant and animal life. However, in the absence of fire, many fire-intolerant plant species outcompete the native, fire-adapted plants. As a result, our natural areas have a tendency to become thickets of shrubs or invasive plants with very little diversity. Fire clears the way for native plants by helping to control these invasive plants and enrich the soil. Fire also encourages forest regeneration, helps with brush management, removes fuels to help encourage wild-fire safety, and supports agricultural needs.

In addition to ecological objectives addressed through prescribed burning, fire can be and is used for other reasons. Farmers use fire to prepare fields for planting or to clean up fence rows that have become congested with grasses and shrubs. Foresters burn for forest site treatments to enhance tree growth and to prepare sites for tree planting. Fire Specialists use fire to help in constructing fire breaks and to reduce fire fuels that might kindle additional acreage if not removed. Fire has a long history of use in many different ways.

## Fire: Wild vs. Prescribed

Prescribed burns differ greatly from wildfires. Wildfires often do great harm because they are unpredictable and difficult to control, threatening people's safety and their property. Prescribed burns, on the other hand, are set intentionally and only after considering the safety of people, property and wildlife.



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Burn breaks are established prior to any burns to help prevent fire from escaping the area being burned.

Prescribed burns are planned to achieve specific management objectives which may include simulating the benefits of natural fires. Prescribed burns are conducted in a designated area during appropriate weather conditions and in cooperation with the proper authorities. Trained crews using specialized equipment keep fire under control throughout the process.



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Crew members carefully observe the burn, looking for any escapes or unexpected fire behavior.

## Safety

In every prescribed fire, safety is the number one priority. Long before the moment of ignition, a burn plan or *prescription* is developed and reviewed to address the *specific objectives within a defined area*.

### A plan details:

- Atmospheric conditions such as humidity, wind speed, direction and temperature
- Vegetation fuel types and conditions
- Fire breaks
- Equipment and personnel needs
- Ignition plan
- Smoke management
- Contingency plans
- Public notification



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Professional burn crews always notify neighbors before a burn and alert passing motorists with proper signage.

## Smoke Management Plans

Where there is fire, there is smoke. Smoke management is an important consideration when conducting a prescribed fire. Prescribed fires are conducted when atmospheric and vegetative conditions will minimize the amount of smoke produced and its impacts on people. Great care is taken to minimize this temporary inconvenience.

## Michigan Prescribed Fire Council

The mission of the Michigan Prescribed Fire Council is to protect, conserve and expand the safe use of prescribed fire on the Michigan landscape.

- Promoting the safe and responsible use of prescribed fire
- Promoting the public understanding of the benefits of prescribed fire
- Promoting the development and utilization of prescribed fire practices to achieve desired environmental and ecological resource management goals
- Anticipating prescribed fire issues and concerns and suggesting courses of action
- Providing a framework for communications related to prescribed fire objectives, techniques and issues
- Disseminating technical information on prescribed fire and its application



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Burn-crew members listen to instructions before carrying out the day's burn plan.



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Extensive planning and preparation goes into each prescribed burn, and everyone involved is highly trained in managing fires.

## Who Should Participate in the Fire Council?

- Private land owners
- Natural resource managers
- Fire suppression professionals
- Native-plant enthusiasts
- Habitat restorationists
- Wildlife researchers
- Natural-area users
- Burn contractors & consultants

**MICHIGAN  
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[www.firecouncil.org](http://www.firecouncil.org)