

Mississippi Prescribed Fire Council

2015–2019 Strategic Plan



Introduction

Fire has been an integral part of the Southern landscape for centuries. Native Americans used fire for hunting purposes, agriculture, and understory brush control. European settlers recognized the benefits of fire and continued the practice. Fire not only shaped Mississippi's native prairies and picturesque pine-grasslands, it formed a deep-rooted culture among its people.

Prescribed burning is one, if not the most, economical and effective land management tools. It helps control undesirable hardwood encroachment, promotes growth of desirable grasses and wildflowers, and helps recycle nutrients. Moreover, the reduction in fuel loads is a key factor in minimizing catastrophic wildfire risk. For the wildlife manager, fire is essential in manipulating native plant communities to meet seasonal needs of wildlife.

Today, the absence of fire is glaringly evident in many parts of the Magnolia State. In the 1920s, the ant-fire sentiment was mounting, and efforts began to stop the "growing menace of man-caused fires." In September, 1928, the American Forestry Association sent the Dixie Crusaders, an organized group of anti-fire zealots, to the South to preach about the "evils" of woods burning and to change the mindset of the Southern fire culture. Other campaigns would follow with now infamous fire prevention slogans and posters. Although erroneous, one cannot argue the effectiveness of these brilliantly waged campaigns. These movements, coupled with increased liability issues and urbanization, have markedly decreased the prevalence of fire on the Southern landscape. For today's land steward, this poses quite the challenge.

To continue using fire as a management tool, its importance must be promoted and its use protected. In many states, prescribed fire councils are one such entity taking on the numerous challenges. These councils bring together those interested in prescribed fire to work for a common goal —prescribed fire promotion. In many states, councils have become *the* leading voice on prescribed fire issues.

The mission of Mississippi Prescribed Fire Council (MPFC) is to partner those with a vested interest in prescribed fire to increase occurrence of burning on public and private lands to restore ecological function, enhance wildlife habitat and plant communities, and reduce hazardous forest or grassland fuel loads. This focused group of natural resource professionals, land managers, and others' objectives are to:

- Promote public awareness about the value and benefits of prescribed fire.
- Protect the ability to use prescribed fire as a management tool.
- Develop expertise in prescribed fire by sharing technical and ecological information.
- Promote safety, training, and research in the art and science of prescribed fire.
- Review prescribed fire practices, regulations, and policy and suggest improvements.
- Promote and facilitate an increase in the number of acres burned annually by prescribed fire in Mississippi.

MPFC Vision

Multiple natural resource entities, consultants, and landowners in Mississippi are dependent on the right to use prescribed fire. MPFC's overall objectives encompass many goals shared by these groups. Thus, a particular charge of MPFC is to provide cohesion among the various interests and to coalesce fire advocacy, educational, and training efforts.

To guide efforts, MPFC's Steering Committee developed this 5-year strategic plan with specific objectives for accomplishing goals. The Steering Committee will also identify other potential entities to assist in addressing initiatives as necessary.

MPFC 5-year Goals

Technical Objectives

Technical Objectives address challenges related to prescribed fire practitioners and fire application. It will provide a means of supporting and enhancing certified burner and other current and future training programs designed to organize and train responsible, experienced prescribed burners. Charges for 2015-2019 include:

- 1) Identify key areas/counties to host *Introduction to Prescribed Burning* workshops.
- 2) Locate additional venues for the Mississippi Prescribed Burning Short Course.
- 3) Develop a field component for the Mississippi Prescribed Burning Short Course.
- 4) Implement Certified Prescribed Burn Manager number system and develop/assimilate reference resources for landowners seeking prescribed burn contractors.
- 5) Develop an advanced prescribed fire course for fire practitioners.
- 6) Develop and evaluate a prototype series of seminars on advanced fire topics for landowners to expand on topics covered in *Introduction to Prescribed Burning* (fire weather, fuels, etc).

Education and Outreach Objectives

Education and Outreach Objectives include developing educational material to promote prescribed fire and MPFC among the general public. Charges for 2015-2019 include:

- 1) Develop/assimilate I&E material (fact sheets, booklets, etc) to distribute at various natural resource events, via website, and to public contacts.
- 2) Develop a "trademark" for prescribed burning similar to that of Smokey Bear.
- 3) Develop a picture tutorial for the MPFC website.
- 4) Develop a promotional and technical guidance video about benefits and application of prescribed fire to place on the website and play in various venues.
- 5) Identify existing school programs promoting prescribed fire and determine methods to expand curricula and programs.
- 6) Develop social media information pertaining to prescribed fire.

Fire Policy Objectives

Fire Policy Objectives include identifying environmental and regulatory policy issues that could affect the use of prescribed fire and identify methods for providing an active voice as needed.

Additional objectives would include garnering MPFC support for prescribed fire among political groups and policy makers. Charges for 2015-2019 include:

- 1) Review pros and cons of a Prescribed Burner Code of Ethics and making final recommendation.
- 2) Garner support for a Prescribed Fire Awareness Day.
- 3) Develop specific process and identify specific entities and/or individuals for obtaining Board of Supervisor support of county resolutions in all 82 counties.
- 4) Review necessity to recommend changes to Mississippi Prescribed Burn Act to establish gross negligence as a basis for liability pertaining to damages caused by smoke generated from prescribed burning activities and retain simple negligence as a basis for liability involving all other damages caused by prescribed burning activities. Current law establishes simple negligence as a basis for liability in prescribed burning activities in Mississippi whether damages are claimed as a direct result of fire or indirectly by smoke generated from fire.

Contact Information

Mississippi Prescribed Fire Council

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**RESOLUTION
In Support of Prescribed Fire**

_____ County, Mississippi

WHEREAS, prescribed burning is the planned application of fire to naturally occurring vegetative fuels for ecological, silvicultural, agricultural and wildlife management purposes under specified environmental conditions and the following of appropriate precautionary measures which cause the fire to be confined to a predetermined area and accomplishes the planned land management objectives,

WHEREAS, prescribed burning shall not constitute a public or private nuisance when conducted pursuant to state air pollution statutes and rules applicable to prescribed burning,

WHEREAS, the application of prescribed burning is a landowner property right and a land management tool that benefits the safety of the public, the environment, and the economy of Mississippi,

WHEREAS, reducing fuel loads with prescribed burning reduces the risk and severity of major catastrophic wildfire, thereby reducing the threat of loss of life and property, particularly in urbanizing areas,

WHEREAS, prescribed burning is essential to the perpetuation, restoration and management of Mississippi's plant and animal communities and significant loss of the state's biological diversity will occur if fire is excluded from fire-dependent systems,

WHEREAS, prescribed fire assists both public and private land managers in managing game, non-game and endangered wildlife species,

WHEREAS, prescribed fire promotes and protects the forest lands that constitute significant economic, biological and aesthetic resources of statewide importance,

WHEREAS, fire-maintained forests contribute to long-term air and water quality of Mississippi by sequestering carbon and providing other vital ecological benefits,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the _____ County Board of Supervisors supports the appropriate and continued use of prescribed fire in Mississippi,

AND, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the _____ County Board of Supervisors supports the Mississippi Prescribed Fire Council, the Mississippi Forestry Commission and other entities as they continue to provide educational and technical assistance to landowners in an effort to recognize the benefits listed above,

This resolution adopted by this ____ day of _____, 20____