



Protecting Our Resources

Prescribed Burn Management During County Burn Bans

Overview

Prescribed burning is a management tool widely used by foresters, parks departments, range and wildlife managers, ranchers and other landowners to manage excessive natural fuels under very specific and safe conditions. Many states across the United States have a large percentage of public land, making statewide coordinated prescribed burn plans feasible. However, 98 percent of Texas' land is privately held, which makes having a statewide plan more difficult. In Texas, better utilization of prescribed burning as a management tool will require state, local and landowner collaboration to ensure we are managing over resources in a way that will actually reduce wildfires, rejuvenate wildlife habitat, provide control of invasive brush and improve watersheds.

As a result of discussions with stakeholders, as well as federal, state and local governments, the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) has created a template for landowners and local governments to utilize in establishing burn bans or allowing exceptions to burn bans. The template provides for prescribed burning under specific criteria to ensure natural fuels can be managed when conditions are often most favorable to safely achieve the desired results.

Recommended Requirements for Exceptions to a Burn Ban

When possible, criteria for exceptions should be included in the original burn ban order. This is more desirable than amending a burn ban already in place.

A template should include the minimum requirements necessary for an individual or group to conduct a prescribed burn within a burn ban including:

Written Burn Plan

The county should require a written burn plan prepared by an appropriately trained and experienced individual, association or entity. Examples include but are not limited to: an appropriately trained individual with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Texas Forest Service (TFS), Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), Texas Agri-Life Extension Service or Texas Agri-Life Research; an individual who holds a private or commercial certified prescribed burn manager license issued by TDA or a local prescribed burn association; or any individual determined by the county to have significant experience in prescribed burning.

Counties are also encouraged to utilize state and federal staff expertise when evaluating burn plans if the county does not have the resources to determine if a burn plan meets prescribed burn standards.

A written burn plan should at minimum include the following (see attached example):

- Purpose of the burn
- Prescribed burn manager information
- Burn site information (location, directions, etc.)
- Personnel requirements for conducting the burn
- A description of areas to be burned (fuel types, topography and previous treatments, number of acres to be burned, etc.)
- Preburn factors (fireguards, pumpers, crew size, tools and equipment, weather monitors, smoke sensitive areas, special precautions, etc.)
- Safety and contingency plans addressing smoke intrusions
- A detailed notification list that includes notification requirements for: the Texas Commission of Environmental Quality, local law enforcement, local fire marshal, local emergency coordinator, Department of Public Safety fire coordinator, neighbors, local volunteer fire department, and/or other appropriate entities
- A “Burn/Do Not Burn Checklist” (see attached)
- Demonstration of fire suppression ability, proving the ability to have proper fire suppression equipment and manpower to manage the burn

Exception categories

The burn ban exceptions should be clearly identified in the Commissioners Court Order establishing the burn ban. It is also recommended that the burn ban clearly articulate that the ban does not apply to already exempted activities as outlined in the Chapter 352 of the Local Government Code.

Counties should consider establishing a category of exception for federal and state agencies and institutions of higher education to ensure park and other state managed lands can be adequately managed during burn bans. Additionally, many of these entities conduct research and demonstration projects throughout the year to educate landowners about properly developing a burn plan and conducting a prescribe burn. An exception for these activities would also be useful. Examples of entities include: NRCS, TPWD, TFS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Agri-Life Extension Service and Texas Agri-Life Research

There are many challenges facing counties during the extreme weather and drought conditions that precipitate a countywide burn ban. However, prudent use of prescribed burning can be an extremely beneficial tool for counties to help mitigate the impact of wildfires, which can devastate communities across this state. Through cooperation and coordination at the landowner and local, state and federal government levels, we can create an opportunity to ensure better communication and understanding of prescribed burning and its benefits to communities during difficult times.

Prescribed Burn Plan

Worksheet

The following is designed to assist you in developing a burn plan during a burn ban.

PRESCRIBED BURN MANAGER INFORMATION				
Mr. Mrs. Ms. _____	First Name	M. I.	Last Name	
Certificate No. - -		Burn Unit		
Date of fire / / month day year		Signature of Responsible Party		

BURN SITE INFORMATION			
Land Owner Name			
Address			
City		State	Zip
County	Ranch/Site Name	Pasture Name	
Acres to be Burned		Longitude/Latitude	
Record of Previous Burning			
Date / / month day year		Result	
Burn Justification _____			

Name _____ Ranch/Site Name _____

AGENCY NOTIFICATION	PERSON CONTACTED
<input type="checkbox"/> Texas Commission on Environmental Quality	Name _____
<input type="checkbox"/> County Sheriff	Name _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Texas Forest Service	Name _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Regional Fire Coordinator	Name _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	Name _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	Name _____

DESCRIPTION OF AREA	
Live fuels	Type _____ _____ Size _____
Dead fuels	Description _____ Time-lag _____
Typography/elevation	
Previous treatments	

Name _____ Ranch/Site Name _____

PREBURN FACTORS	
Fire guards: specify width (attach map). plow  _____ mow  _____ wet line  _____ blackline  other 	
Crew size: Minimum number required:	
Pumpers (number/names):	
Ignition crew:	
Hand tools:	
Weather monitor:	
Equipment needs:(describe)	
Protection needs:(buildings, powerlines, oil/gas facilities, hunting blinds, etc.; see map)	
Ignition Procedures (see map):	
Smoke sensitive areas: (see map)	No  Yes 
Special Precautions: (see map)	No  Yes 

PRESCRIPTION		
Date of burn (Blacklines)	Time of burn (Blacklines)	
Date of burn:	Time of burn:	
DESIRED PRESCRIPTION RANGE (BLACKLINES)		Actual
Temperature (°F)		
Relative Humidity		
Wind Direction		
Wind Speed		
Fuel Load (lbs/acre)		
Fuel Load (tons/acre)		

Name _____ Ranch/Site Name _____

Dead Fuel Moisture (1-hr)		
Dead Fuel Moisture (10-hr)		
Dead Fuel Moisture (100-hr)		
Live Fuel Moisture		
DESIRED PRESCRIPTION RANGE (HEADFIRE)		Actual
Temperature (°F)		
Relative Humidity		
Wind Direction		
Wind Speed		
Fuel Load (lbs/acre)		
Fuel Load (tons/acre)		
Dead Fuel Moisture (1-hr)		
Dead Fuel Moisture (10-hr)		
Dead Fuel Moisture (100-hr)		
Live Fuel Moisture		
SMOKE MANAGEMENT		Actual
Mixing Height		
Transport Wind Speed		

ACTIVITY	PERSONNEL ASSIGNED
Maintain close observation of the burned area until the fire is completely extinguished	
Maintain contact with weather station until the fire is extinguished	
Take immediate positive action to ensure safety of the fire should a dangerous change in the weather occur or be forecast	
Check perimeter for firebrand sources such as trees, posts, cow chips, logs, etc	

Name _____

Ranch/Site Name _____

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES OR COMMENTS

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS
Consider not burning log-littered areas if the weather forecast is for strong winds within three days following a burn.
Consider not burning within 12 hours of a predicted wind shift.
When graded or bladed strips are used as fireguards, rolls of soil should be left on the side of the area next to the fence or away from area to be burned.
Continuously monitor weather factors affecting fire behavior.

Name _____

Ranch/Site Name _____

Map(s) of Area to be Burned

Include items such as legend, magnetic north, water sources, roads, gates, safety zones, escape routes, fire guards, areas to be protected, ignition area, smoke sensitive areas, special precautions etc.

Burn/Do Not Burn Checklist

****For prescribed burns conducted during a burn ban with express authorization of the county.****
The following questions should be completed before conducting a prescribed burn.

The following questions should have a YES response in order to conduct a prescribed burn during a county burn ban.	
1. Is the individual approved to conduct the prescribed burn on site?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2. Is an approved written prescribed burn plan established for the proposed burn?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3. Are safety requirements met for the proposed burn?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
4. Are planned burn personnel and equipment on site?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
5. Have the following entities in the county where the burn is to take place been notified:	
County judge	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
County commissioners court	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Local volunteer fire department(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
County sheriff's office	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Texas Forest Service regional fire coordinator	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
6. Have all necessary fire suppression units been briefed on the burn plan?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
7. Have risks been determined to be acceptable?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
8. Has a current weather forecast been obtained?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
9. Is current weather within the burn plan parameters?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
10. Is fire behavior projected to be within the burn plan parameters?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
11. Are projected fire effects acceptable?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
12. Does smoke management adhere to TCEQ guidelines?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Any "NO" responses create a DO NOT BURN situation

¹ BURN MANAGER SIGNATURE	
Burn Unit	Date of fire / / month day year
Printed Name	Signature

These are recommendations only and not inclusive of all considerations and factors affecting a prescribed burn.