

## Prescribed Fire in Ohio Did you know that:

- ❖ Prior to European settlement, it is estimated that, in some areas, fires burned every 7-9 years in Ohio's forests?
- ❖ Fire suppression over the last 100 years or so has significantly altered Ohio's forests and grasslands?
- ❖ With careful planning, prescribed fire can be a useful tool for promoting native vegetation, creating critical wildlife habitat and enriching forest soils?
- ❖ Each year, the ODNR Division of Forestry conducts several prescribed fires? These fires reduce the excessive buildup of forest fuels (such as standing dead trees, dead wood on the ground and leaf litter). These fuels would otherwise pose a threat to nearby homes and property, should a wildfire start.
- ❖ The ODNR Division of Forestry is a partner in several leading national prescribed fire research projects? Scientists are learning more and more about the benefits of fire from burns that are conducted routinely on Ohio's State Forests, Parks and private lands.

def **Prescribed Fire**: an intentionally or naturally ignited fire that burns under specific conditions, in a predetermined area, to attain planned resource management objectives.

## Want to Know More?

To learn more about the Division of Forestry's prescribed fires, visit:

[ohiodnr.com/forestry](http://ohiodnr.com/forestry)

Or, contact:

Ohio Department of Natural  
Resources  
Division of Forestry  
1-877-247-8733  
[forestry@dnr.state.oh.us](mailto:forestry@dnr.state.oh.us)



# Prescribed Fire in Ohio



## Managing the Role of Fire in Ohio's Forests

Ohio Department of Natural  
Resources

Division of Forestry

## Wildland Fire in Ohio

Wildland fire (fire that burns on forest, range and grasslands) is an historical component of healthy forests. Fire plays an important role in many of Ohio's diverse ecosystems. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry, in partnerships with Ohio's fire departments and private land owners, works hard to manage wildland fire so that it safely benefits Ohio's valuable natural resources.

The benefits of wildland fire are far reaching. When managed carefully, fire can:

### Promote Native Vegetation

Fire promotes the growth of native, fire-adapted vegetation, which is increasingly being crowded out by species that survive better in ecosystems that do not have fire. For example, in Ohio and other parts of the mid-west, maple stands are quickly replacing forests that were once dominated by oak, a valuable wildlife and timber species.

### Improve Forest Health

Routine, low-intensity fire can improve forest health by reducing levels of pests and disease. Vegetation growth after a fire is often more vigorous, improving forests' natural defenses against infestations. When managed carefully, fire may also help native species out-compete invasive, noxious species.

### Revitalize Ecosystems and Create Critical Wildlife Habitat

In Ohio, fire is often used to encourage healthy ecosystems. Fire increases soil nutrients, stimulates vegetation growth, and provides important habitat for wildlife, including shelter and food.

### Reduce Dangerous Forest Fuels

During most of the 1900's, the historical fire cycle was largely removed from Ohio's forests and grasslands. In the absence of fire, which once routinely cleansed and recycled dead trees and vegetation, many of Ohio's forests have accumulated large amounts of dead woody materials. This buildup has the potential to fuel large, uncontrolled fires that may threaten homes, communities and ecosystems. ODNR's Division of Forestry has begun to "fight fire with fire" by using controlled, or prescribed, burns to carefully return fire to its historical role and reduce dangerous forest fuel levels.

## Returning Fire to its Historical Role

In an effort to restore the historical fire cycle, the ODNR Division of Forestry uses prescribed burns that are carefully planned, watched, and tended. Trained fire managers burn parts of the forests every few years to remove weedy plants that choke out native species and to reduce the leaf litter and woody debris from the forest floor, creating space for native vegetation to return.



## Planning and Conducting a Prescribed Burn

Before a burn, highly trained personnel survey the burn site and create a detailed plan of action. Then, they carefully monitor the weather and wait until conditions are right, minimizing the chance that smoke will blow towards houses and roads. Prior to the burn, staff also inform neighbors of their plans so that people with health concerns can avoid smoke.



On the burn day, trained fire management personnel are on-site to ensure the safety of the burn crew, nearby residents and private property. The fire is kept under control with the use of fire breaks, or areas cleared of vegetation, which surround the area to be burned. The fires are patrolled and monitored carefully to ensure the fire stays within these fire breaks.

After a prescribed fire, forest vegetation quickly "greens up", as forest species thrive off of the nutrient-rich post fire soil. Prescribed burns often create openings in the forest canopy, allowing sunlight through to rejuvenate seedlings and other understory plants. Wildlife species forage on the vegetation growth and often use "snags" (dead trees left standing or on the ground after a fire) for shelter.