**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PRESCRIBED FIRE:**

**1. What is prescribed fire?**

Prescribed fire or prescribed burning is wildland fire that is planned, ignited, and managed by professional fire managers. It is one of the most effective tools for restoring healthy ecosystems and meeting desired resource outcomes, while avoiding the environmental damage that can be caused by an unplanned wildfire. This type of managed fire is used to reduce wildfire risks and benefit natural resources by thinning overgrown vegetation. A prescribed fire is only allowed under specific conditions, depending upon available resources, time of year, weather and desired results.

**2. Why do you need to use fire?**

- Fire is a natural occurrence in the forest and rangelands. Tree ring samples from older trees show that fire occurred naturally here every 3-7 years. The prescribed burns are meant to mimic Mother Nature.
- Native species of plants are able to return after years of lying dormant due to the accumulation of layers of grass and forest debris. This debris layer would be consumed regularly under a natural fire regime. Fire stimulates the resurgence of young healthy vegetation and many of the local plant and animal species are fire dependent for regeneration and forage.
- Decades of suppressing all fires have left the forest and rangelands overgrown with fuels and vegetation. This unnatural accumulation of dead and live vegetation has contributed to forest and range health issues such as epidemic bug and beetle kill of trees, oak wilt, cedar encroachment and adverse impacts to watersheds that benefit our communities, habitat loss for wildlife, and extremely hazardous conditions to nearby communities should a wildfire occur.
- By conducting prescribed burns we are able to return fire to its natural role in the ecosystem in a safe and prescribed manner.

**3. What is being done to reduce the smoke impact to the community?**

Fire managers recognize that smoke is a concern to many people in our communities and unfortunately all fires produce smoke. Over the last several years fire managers have been responsive to public concerns about the effects of smoke. Special attention is directed towards measures that reduce potential impacts to communities and the environment:

- Minimize smoke impacts by allowing fuel moistures to become dry enough that they burn rapidly, significantly reducing the smoke produced.
- Fewer burn days are scheduled to shorten the season when burning occurs.
- Burning operations are conducted in such a manner that optimum venting and smoke dispersal will occur. Time of ignition, burning patterns and terminating the day's operation are carefully executed and monitored to minimize smoke in adjacent communities.
- Fire managers burn only the amount of fuels or vegetation necessary to meet resource objectives. Many projects have a mosaic pattern that leaves unburned areas to mimic fire's natural process and landscape characteristics.

We are required to follow all state and federal air quality laws. Air quality approval and monitoring are conducted according to National Air Quality Standards as established by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). .

**4. What about the pollution from the smoke?**

Smoke produced on a prescribed burn occurs only for the duration of that burn. Prescribed fires produce low intensity smoke that dissipates into the air and mimics that of fires that have occurred naturally over hundreds of year. The smoke impact to the area is short term.

In comparison, smoke from a wildfire where years of hazardous fuels have accumulated can impact an area for weeks or sometimes a month. This type of impact on the air has a negative effect on the environment and humans

not only in the area of the fire but for hundreds of miles away. By using prescribed fire, we eliminate these large concentrations of fuels that cause this effect.

Prescribed fire removes dead and decaying vegetation and promotes the resurgence of young, healthy vegetation. This young, healthy vegetation is actually natures "air filter".

**5. Why not use mechanical thinning instead of burning?**

The various land management agencies mechanically treats thousands of acres every year but it is much more expensive. It would take decades to chip or remove the large amounts of dead trees killed are a result of drought, beetle kill and oak wilt, invasive cedar , down logs, and dead materials on the forest floor and range lands.

Mechanized equipment treatment is limited to relatively level ground and is hampered by steep terrain and access issues. It also causes ground disturbance creating watershed and soils damage.

Mechanical treatments have a time and place but they are not natural.

Fire dependant plant species do not benefit from this treatment.

**6. How do fire managers ensure the prescribed fire will not escape?**

Public and firefighter safety is our first priority on every prescribed burn.

Prescribed burns are conducted after a thorough level of planning (often years in length) in conjunction with biologists, scientists, academics and fire professionals well in advance of any ignition.

A prescribed fire is only allowed under specific conditions, depending upon available resources, time of year, weather and desired results. Computer programs are used to model potential fire behavior and burns generally occur when conditions favor low intensity fire behavior.

All appropriate safety and control mechanisms are factored in to every burn plan.

**7. How do I know when and where they are going to burn?**

Fire Managers create a map of prescribed burns on a yearly basis. Locations and dates are planned with some flexibility for ignition depending on weather and vegetation conditions. Notifications are sent to local government agencies and local media 24-48 hours prior to the scheduled burn date.

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