

Chapter 17

Prescribed Fire

The FWS Fire Management Handbook incorporates, by reference, all guidance in the [Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations Handbook](#) (Redbook, NFES #2724) Chapter 18 in addition to the following FWS specific clarifications:

Prescribed Fire Management -- All FWS prescribed fires and hazardous fuels projects will be planned, implemented, and managed in accordance with all applicable policy, guidance, and standards (see http://www.nifc.gov/fire_policy/index.htm) including:

- *Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy January 2001*
- *Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program Review, Final Report, December 18, 1995.*
- *National Interagency Mobilization Guide (NFES 2092).*
- *Prescribed Fire Complexity Rating System Guide (NWCG, NFES 2474, PMS 424).*
- *Prescribed Fire Smoke Management Guide (NWCG, NFES 1279, PMS 420-1).*
- *Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (June 20, 2003).*
- *NWCG PMS 310-1 Wildland Fire and Prescribed Fire Qualifications System Guide (2000).*
- *Interagency Wildland Fire Use Implementation Procedures Reference Guide.*
- *Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Reference Guide (2006).*

In addition, all prescribed fires will be managed in adherence to the following FWS standards:

- Management
 - Prescribed fires will be funded in accordance with guidance in the *FWS Fire Business Reference Guide* (see Chapter 6.)
 - Any MOU's, agreements, cost shares or contracts must be in place prior to any on the ground implementation.
 - The Division of Fish and Wildlife Management and Habitat Restoration has issued clarification regarding the management of prescribed fire within private lands programs (see attachment 1).
- Planning
 - All hazardous fuels planning and implementation must be addressed in the applicable Fire Management Plan, and have the appropriate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and Endangered Species Act (ESA) analysis or justification (see Chapter 9 and 550 FW 3).
 - Fuels treatments should properly be planned on an interdisciplinary basis and be integrated as much as practicable with other resource management activities, and serve to implement the appropriate Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

- All prescribed fire plans will be prepared and reviewed per Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Reference Guide (Guide) requirements except that:
 - Qualified Prescribed Fire Burn Boss Type III (RXB3) may prepare and review low complexity (prescribed fire where all 42 complexity elements are rated low) prescribed fire plans until 1/1/08. After 1/1/08, a low complexity prescribed fire plan prepared by an RXB3 must be technically reviewed by two RXB2s; following the specifications in the Guide.
 - Prescribed fire plans will identify the organization (including qualifications and skill levels) that are required to safely implement the plan based upon the final prescribed fire complexity analysis and a risk management assessment. Plans should identify organizations for various phases of implementation (blacklining, ground ignition, aerial ignition, holding, patrol) and various ranges of the prescription and resulting fire behavior.
 - See the Guide for policy guidance for different stages of implementation that may result in multiple Complexity Analysis and ratings.
 - The final complexity rating is used as a basis for determining prescribed fire organization, Prescribed Fire Burn Boss level, and mitigation measures.
 - The Service interprets the phrase “where the possibility of spread or spotting outside the project area is negligible to nonexistent” on page nine of the Prescribe Fire Guide to mean that the potential for escape of a prescribed burn is low, as defined in the Prescribed Fire Complexity Rating System Guide.
 - Prescribed fire plans will identify contingency resources (and required qualifications and fitness levels) and minimum response times for use if the fire exceeds prescription parameters and the capability of planned on-site holding forces.
 - Units will maintain a project file for each hazardous fuels project
 - Project files will include:
 - Original copy of the implementation plan (mechanical or other) or prescribed fire plan
 - NEPA, ESA, and Archeological compliance documentation
 - Special documentation of planning requirements such as Wyden Act, MOU’s or Interagency Agreement references, landowner agreements, and other private lands, requirements
 - List of persons contacted during the development of the burn plan including Fish and Wildlife Service personnel, other agency personnel, concessionaires, in-holders, special interest groups, refuge neighbors, concerned publics etc. The date of contact and comments should be recorded as appropriate. Contact your local records management contact for any additional regional or local requirements.
 - Prescribed fire plans will assess and mitigate potential smoke impacts, and be coordinated with appropriate air quality specialists and Federal, State, Tribal, air pollution control district or county regulatory authorities to ensure compliance with their regulations. (see Chapter 11)
- Project Review and Approval

- All prescribed fire plans must be reviewed and approved following the process identified in the Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Reference Guide before they can be implemented.
 - All non-fire hazardous fuels treatment plans must have an agency administrator approval.
 - Project Leaders are responsible for ensuring that all hazardous fuels and prescribed fire plans receive adequate review and are approved by a qualified Agency Administrators.
 - The Project Leader can delegate approval to Refuge Managers or Acting Project/Refuge Managers after considering the complexity of the project and the training, qualifications, experience, and demonstrated ability of the individual.
 - The Project Leader is responsible for ensuring that all hazardous fuels treatments are in compliance with the CCP, FMP, and Regional Guidance.
 - The Project Leader is responsible for the Pre-Ignition Approval Checklist for any prescribed fire projects with in their power of authority.
- Prescribed Fire Implementation
 - All prescribed fires plans implemented after 1/1/08 must meet all *Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Reference Guide* requirements. Until that time, all implemented prescribed fire plans must meet one of the following conditions:
 - Is prepared using the Prescribed Fire Plan Template found in Appendix B of the Guide; or
 - Is prepared using a previously approved agency format, and has a completed Agency Administrator Go/No Go pre-ignition approval checklist (Appendix B, element 2 in Guide) that specifically states the plan has been reviewed and meets the minimum implementation guide elements found in the Guide.
 - Assure assigned staffing meet qualification requirements and is adequate to safely implement the approved prescribed fire plan.
 - If moderate fitness rated employees are being utilized on the fire, ensure that all personnel are briefed regarding the limits of their use particularly as it relates to spot fires and potential escaped fires. (See Chapter 13)
- After Action Reviews and Reporting
 - All hazardous fuels projects and prescribed fires will receive an appropriate After Action Review (AAR)
 - All prescribed fires and hazardous fuels non-fire treatments must be documented including:
 - DI-1202 fire report entered into FMIS within 10 days
 - Accomplishment report entered into NFPORS within 10 days (hazard fuel projects only)
 - Short narrative of the prescribed fire or treatment plan, including a critique of effectiveness, future recommendation, and possible lessons learned by the burn boss or FMO is filed in the project file
 - All implementation documents such as implementation organization charts, logs, Incident Action Plans, weather forecasts, weather observations, and fire behavior observations should be filed in the project file.

See Chapter 19 for actions required by agency personnel in the event of an escaped prescribed fire or other significant event that may have occurred on a hazardous fuels project.

Fuels Management Effectiveness Monitoring - It is appropriate to use Hazard Fuel Reduction Operations and Wildland/Urban Interface (subactivity 9263 and 9264) funding to facilitate adaptive management when evaluating fuels management program and project effectiveness, and to ensure that refuge resource management goals and objectives are not compromised by the hazardous fuels management projects. The use of 9263 or 9264 funds is limited to monitoring the first and second order effects of fuel management projects (prescribed fires, mechanical or chemical fuel treatments, etc.) on fuel and wildlife habitat composition and structure, as recognized and well-described as measurable objectives in the approved refuge Fire Management Plan and/or an approved refuge habitat management plan.

Monitoring of specific resource protection objectives for values may be paid for by subactivities 9263 or 9264 only until best management process and techniques can be established and proven successful. It is suggested to limit this type of monitoring to those values that are most important.

Although funding wildlife population inventories or fire effects research or management studies on wildlife is not an appropriate use of 9263 or 9264 funds, evaluating fuel management treatment effects on wildlife habitat composition and structure is intended to complement these inventories, management studies and research projects.

Fuels management effectiveness monitoring requires the preparation and approval of a monitoring plan. This plan can be a separate Fuels Treatment Monitoring Plan or part of a holistic adaptive management program that integrates all refuge resource monitoring activities. Whether separate or integrated the plan should contain:

- a. A full description of the fuel and wildlife habitat monitoring attributes, monitoring objectives, approved monitoring protocol description in sufficient detail that a successor can continue the monitoring, and the approved refuge Fire Management Plan and/or habitat management plan reference identifying the monitoring need.
- b. Description of management actions to be taken when monitored habitat attributes reach established threshold levels.
- c. The refuge's commitment to implementing and completing the monitoring and management actions.

Regional Fire Management Coordinators will assure that before any fuel treatment monitoring (beyond the first order fire effects monitoring in the Prescribed Fire Plan) is approved for funding:

- a. The fuel and wildlife habitat monitoring activities are adequately described in the approved refuge Fire Management Plan and/or an approved refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan or Habitat Management Plan.

- b. The monitoring protocols conform to regionally established fuel and wildlife habitat monitoring protocols established under Fulfilling the Promise WH-10(1) action item or the Service's Fuel and Fire Effects Monitoring Guide.
- c. The regional fire ecologist and/or wildlife biologist to determine if the proposed protocols are the most cost effective and statistically defensible means of addressing monitoring objectives independently review the plan.
- d. All stakeholders are aware of management changes that may result from the monitoring results.

Attachment 1: Addendum to Chapter 18 of the Service Fire Management Handbook, guidance from the Division of Fish and Wildlife Management and Habitat Restoration,

Prescribed Burning Off-Service Lands: Standards for alternative mechanisms of implementing prescribed burning activities through the Service's private lands programs.

Use of Service personnel. Service personnel planning or implementing habitat restoration projects on off-Service lands, using prescribed burning, must be certified, and in compliance with all applicable departmental, Service, and regional fire management policies. The project must have an agreement signed by the landowner authorizing the use of prescribed fire on private land, and clearly stating the benefit to Federal Trust resources.

The project officer or the person in charge of fire operations specifically must meet the Burn Boss certification requirements appropriate for the complexity level of the burn as derived from the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Prescribed Fire Complexity Rating System Guide. Based upon the outcome of the Complexity Analysis, the project officer qualifications (RXB1, RXB2, or RXB3) will be assigned to oversee the implementation of the project. The project must meet National Environmental Policy Act requirements prior to ignition (621FW 2, 4A(2)), and have all the necessary permits and approvals. All Service personnel participating in prescribed fires must meet the appropriate Service training and experience qualification requirements as detailed in the Fire Management Handbook. For all fire activities where the Service is involved a written prescribed fire plan must be prepared, reviewed, and approved according to Service and regional policies.

Non-certified Service personnel may provide technical assistance regarding the ecological benefits of conducting a prescribed fire on a project. They must clearly state that their recommendation for the use of fire is only to describe or project ecological improvements and they are not certified to provide any recommendations regarding the actual design and implementation of the prescribed fire, nor will they participate in the operational aspects of the prescribed fire.

Use of certified agencies. Local, State, Tribal and other Federal agencies could be the partner actually planning and/or implementing the prescribed fire on private lands. If these fires are determined to be of moderate or higher complexity (see NWCG Prescribed Fire Complexity Rating System Guide) the cooperator should adopt the NWCG standards contained within the Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualification Subsystem Guide, PMS 310-1. This guide identifies minimum qualification standards for interagency prescribed fire operations. Departmental policy requires all Service personnel engaged in interagency operations to meet these standards.

PMS 310-1 contains specific guidance concerning interagency wildland and prescribed fire qualifications. For prescribed fires evaluated to have low complexity (see NWCG Prescribed Fire Complexity Rating System Guide), the Service and its local cooperators will

jointly agree on qualifications required. A written prescribed fire plan must be prepared, reviewed, and approved according to Local, Service, and regional policies.

In some limited cases, the Service could provide funds to non-certified agencies for the restoration and enhancement of Federal trust species habitats on private lands where prescribed burning may or may not be used as a management tool. In these cases, the Service will not have “substantial involvement” as defined in 31 U.S.C. 6301-6308. The only mechanism to transfer funds to non-certified agencies where prescribed fire may be used is a Grant Agreement. Grant Agreements with a non-certified state agency are for the purpose of general habitat restoration activities. The Service cannot identify or stipulate the techniques to be used for these habitat restoration projects. The task of identifying these techniques is a responsibility of the state agency. Other funding mechanisms such as Cooperative Agreements and Procurement Contracts require “substantial involvement” of Service personnel and should not be used with non-certified agencies.

Use of private cooperators. Private cooperators conducting a burn that is funded by Service must be in compliance with NWCG, Service and regional policies regarding prescribed burning. PMS 310-1 allows the establishment of standards to meet Service-specific needs for operations that involve only Service personnel or, in some cases, local cooperators. A written prescribed fire plan must be prepared, reviewed, and approved according to Service and regional policies.

Hire private contractors certified by the Service. Private contractors who specialize in providing fire management services must meet the NWCG standards contained within the Wildland and Prescribed Fire Qualification Subsystem Guide, PMS 310-1, and meet any other Service standards for qualifications and personal protective equipment (PPE). The contract should specify these requirements as well as other regional and local standards or work accomplishments they are to meet. There are vendors that are certified as meeting the NWCG standards; however, the Service must still approve the burn plan. A written prescribed fire plan must be prepared, reviewed, and approved according to local, Service and regional policies.

Support only non-fire components. In the event one of the options above is not available, the Service maintains the ability to only provide funding and/or technical assistance on the non-fire components of the project. For example, the landowner is willing to implement a project using prescribed burning without financial or technical assistance from the Service, and the Service provides financial/technical assistance only to plant trees or conduct seeding after the burn is complete. Service personnel may acknowledge the potential ecological benefits of conducting a prescribed fire on a project, and that prescribed fire may be used to complement activities funded by the Service, but the planning documents and agreements must clearly state the limits of the Service’s involvement, that the Service is not responsible for the implementation of prescribed fire, that the decision to use prescribed fire is the responsibility of the landowner, and that the Service is not certified to provide any technical recommendations regarding the actual design or execution of a prescribed fire.

2007 Amendment**Prescribed Burning off Service Lands: Standards for prescribed burning activities under Service-administered grant agreements.**

When conducting prescribed burning off Service lands under a Service-administered grant agreement, State fish and wildlife agencies: (a) must comply with existing State protocols that include compliance with pertinent Federal, State, and local laws; and (b) do not have to comply with any requirements of the Fish and Wildlife Service Fire Management Handbook provided that the Service does not have "substantial involvement" in the project, as defined in 31 USC 6301-6308. Therefore, if these requirements are met, State grantees under a Service -administered grant agreement do not have to submit documentation under the grant agreement to reflect compliance with requirements of the Fish and Wildlife Service Fire Management Handbook.