

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Prescribed fire

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

The U.S.D.A. Forest Service recently announced prescribed burns near a pair of popular Western North Carolina recreation areas – Max Patch and Harmon Den, both in Haywood County.

After 60 years of Smoky Bear, forest fire is something that can get a lot of people worried. Truth is, fire is a natural part of the landscape, however complicating things is the fact we've suppressed fire for so long that flammable material has built up and we've built our communities into the forest, putting life and property at increased risk. These factors make wildfires a more dangerous and threatening phenomenon. An antidote? Prescribed fires.

Prescribed fires are intentional, very controlled burns, carried out under specific weather conditions with plenty of staff on the ground to ensure they don't get out of hand. An often-used land management tool, they reduce buildup of flammable materials, decreasing the chance of severe wildfire. Smoke from wildfires usually has a greater impact on nearby communities and carries more pollutants than smoke from prescribed burns. Prescribed burning also helps restore ecological systems to their natural resilience, restoring native vegetation, and protecting people and resources from catastrophic fires.

Many ecosystems throughout North Carolina include fire-adapted species, including imperiled plants like green pitcher plant and Heller's blazing star. Numerous native plants and animals need fire in their habitats to reduce competition from invading species, and to add nutrients back into the soil.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.