



PRESCRIBED FIRE

Harnessing the power of fire to conserve and restore Texas lands

conservation profile

Partnerships

In addition to implementing prescribed fire on our preserves, The Nature Conservancy partners with private landowners and organizations throughout the state to conduct prescribed burns on public and private lands, share resources and training methods, and assist in battling dangerous wildfires.

In Texas, our fire program partners include the National Park Service, Texas Forest Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Army, municipalities such as the city of Austin, local volunteer fire departments and private landowners across the state.

Through these partnerships, we've conducted prescribed burns on thousands of acres of Texas land. In addition, our fire personnel frequently conduct workshops and demonstration burns to share the benefits of prescribed fire with landowners who may be interested in this important habitat management tool.



Working the fire line at Barton Creek Habitat Preserve. (© Larry Belles)

The practice of using fire to manage land in Texas dates back hundreds of years. Evidence suggests that pre-European settlement, some Native American tribes burned the Texas plains to promote the growth of new grasses.

Hunting, improving wildlife habitat, enhancing forage for domestic animals, controlling pests and easing travel are all facilitated by using fire. Today, prescribed fire remains one of the most effective and efficient land management tools used in conservation.

With the expansion and development of cities and towns, naturally occurring fires have been suppressed to protect human life. Unfortunately, the removal of fire from an ecosystem can have an adverse effect on wildlife and land—as well as water quality and quantity—and pose a direct threat to human safety. In the absence of fire, woody plant species can proliferate and cause wildfires to burn hotter, spread faster and pose a greater threat to human safety.

The Nature Conservancy uses prescribed fire—the application of carefully controlled burns under



A Conservancy burn crew member surveys a prescribed fire. (© Merlin D. Tuttle/Bat Conservation International)

defined fuel and weather conditions with a written plan—to maintain the viability and health of various ecosystems.

The prescribed fire management program is grounded in science and participating personnel meet rigorous training and certification criteria established by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group. Firefighter and public safety are always the first priority in the fire management program. The program comprises more than 30 individuals—including a full-time professional crew based in the Victoria area—and focuses on providing prescribed fire technical assistance to private landowners and assisting with other fire needs throughout the state. The Conservancy uses prescribed fire and maintains fire response and preparedness all across Texas.

In the Edwards Plateau Ecoregion of **Central Texas**, fire operations are centered at the Barton Creek Habitat Preserve and Fort Hood Military Installation. At both locations, fire is used to control woody brush and restore habitat for the federally listed endangered black-capped vireo. At Fort Hood, Conservancy managers also provide expertise, assistance

and manpower to the installation's prescribed burning program.

In **North Texas**, fire is used at four locations—Clymer Meadow, County Line Prairie, Cowleech Prairie and Tridens Prairie preserves—to conserve the last remnants of the Blackland Prairie, one of the most endangered ecosystems in North America. Without fire, these remaining grasslands would rapidly convert to woodlands and be overrun by invasive or exotic species.

In the Tamaulipan Thornscrub Ecoregion of **South Texas**, four preserves require wildfire preparedness and suppression: Mesquite Brushland Preserve, Las Estrellas Preserve, Chihuahua Woods Preserve and Lennox Foundation Southmost Preserve.

Two preserves along the **Gulf Coast** are managed with fire: Texas City Prairie Preserve and the Clive Runnells Family Mad Island Marsh Preserve. At both sites, fire benefits coastal prairie habitat by controlling invasive tree species such as baccharis and Chinese tallow. At Texas City Prairie Preserve, prescribed fire has drastically improved habitat for the endangered Attwater's prairie

chicken. Our statewide fire operations are based at the Refugio-Goliad Prairie Project, which aims to restore prairie habitat along the Gulf Coast.

In **East Texas**, the Conservancy uses prescribed fire to conserve some of the last remaining stands of longleaf pine forest at the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary, Timber Lake Preserve, Big Thicket Bogs and Pinelands Preserve and Little Rocky Nature Preserve. Prescribed fire is also used on the Lennox Woods Preserve to sustain short-leaf pine and loblolly pine regeneration.

In **West Texas**, prescribed fire is used at a variety of locations. At Independence Creek Preserve, fire helps maintain a healthy watershed and contributes to black-capped vireo habitat restoration. At Dolan Falls Preserve, prescribed fire helps protect preserve facilities and rare species such as the Texas snowbell from unwanted fires. At Diamond Y and Sandia Springs preserves, prescribed fire rejuvenates grasses, leading to a healthier desert spring ecosystems. In the Davis Mountains, fire is used to manage ponderosa pine communities and restore historical savanna conditions.

When used in conjunction with other land-management tools, the careful application of prescribed fire can create a healthier, more ecologically balanced landscape. To learn more about how fire benefits lands and waters around the world, visit nature.org/initiatives/fire today.

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