NATURE
ALABAMA
Spring 2026 • nature.org/alabama

© Mike Dumas/TNC

Dear Friends,

The Nature Conservancy is working hard to restore and manage Longleaf pine across the U.S. Southeast. Over the past 20 years, TNC has helped to restore approximately 2 million acres of Longleaf pine across the coastal plain.

Restoration works. Across Alabama we are using a three-pronged approach of acquisition, restoration and careful manage-ment to help bring Longleaf pine back from the brink.

I am pleased to share with you this story from Joseph Dobbins II, one of our incredible burn crew managers. Joseph shares what it is like to be on the front lines of a burn, the incredible work that it takes, and what this career has meant to him.

I am grateful for Joseph and all the members of our fire crews. They, and I, appreciate your support of our efforts to protect Alabama's Longleaf pine.

Mitch Reid,
Alabama State Director

Prescribed burn at Flagg Mountain © Keith Tassin/TNC

A Day in the Life of a Burn

A prescribed burn is a complex undertaking with a lot of moving parts. Here, **Joseph Dobbins II** walks us through the steps, and what it's like to put fire to work for restoration.

© Joseph Dobbins II/TNC

Pre-burn

This is the most important part of the burn. I am definitely nervous before a burn. It is because of the what-ifs: What if we got an escape due to me not cutting that last snag located in a back corner somewhere, or what if I instruct someone to do something and they get hurt?

What cures the nerves is a simple positive action. Something such as getting the pump set up and charged or simply chatting with project partners and being injected with their positivity.

Being Prepared

Fireline preparation is so important to the burn plan. I physically go out into the woods, and I scout, weedwhack, chainsaw and blow items such as logs, grass, brush, etc. to get an open corridor with as little fuel on the ground as possible to ensure ability to keep the future fire "in the box."

As burn day closes in, I work with my supervisor to gather the resources required for the burn. I call local project partners to ask if they are available to come out and assist us. After gathering the personnel needed, I go prepare the equipment. I fill the Type 6 engine with 300 gallons of water, fill two UTVs with 40 gallons of water individually, ensure all radios are fully charged and on the correct operational channel, run the Honda mini-striker pumps to ensure they will pump water, and then I double check my gear, as well. Additionally, I go check the firelines once more to look for any potential hazards that may have developed.

Prescribed burn at Flagg Mountain © Keith Tassin/TNC; © Joseph Dobbins II/TNC

Getting Ready

On Burn Day, I generally come in early to ensure everything is in place. I double-check everything. I sit and have a briefing with my supervisor about what we expect to happen, and we share our thoughts to ensure we are on the same page prior to lighting a match.

A very important lesson to learn with fire is to minimize risk whenever possible. Fire and restoration management is a great job, but it involves a lot of risk. It is why we hold After Action Reviews (AAR) and have thorough briefings and spend so much time checking our equipment. It is all to reduce risk and to make it home at the end of the day.

Test Fire

After the conclusion of the burn briefing, I lead my assigned resources (people and equipment) to our assigned area to conduct a test fire. Before dropping the match, I check in with my people to ensure they are confident, capable and understand their assignment.

At this stage, fire is on the ground, and I am evaluating the fire effects. I am looking at smoke dispersion, flame lengths, if the fire is carrying and its speed, overall, I am looking to answer the question of can we meet the objectives outlined in the briefing safely and effectively.

The Burn

As the test fire stage is concluded, the truly the fun part begins. Everyone is working together to achieve the goal that was outlined, and I can see all the prep before and during to ensure safety and confidence paying off in real time.

It is fun being able to coach the next generation of firefighters on the "why." Although my stress has decreased, I am still on high alert for hazards, such as dead trees and fire getting onto private property.

Once the fire is going, my juices are flowing, I am always singing a song in my brain. I am generally walking the fireline with a huge grin on my face, humming some nonsense I was listening to on my way to work. In that moment, I would say I am in the zone, things are flowing, I am confident and I am aware of what is happening.

After Action Review

At the conclusion of the burn, we end by conducting a debrief, the AAR. We talk about any near misses that might have occurred (safety and or equipment issues) and share what we learned. Afterwards, I shake everyone's hand and thank them for taking the time to assist. Then my supervisor and I go for a spin around the unit and have a discussion on how it went and a plan for checking it the next couple of days.

The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy in Alabama
3700 First Avenue North
Birmingham, AL 35222
(205) 251-1155

Jeffrey Ware
Director of Philanthropy
nature.org/alabama
give.alabama@tnc.org

facebook.com/thenatureconservancyinalabama
instagram.com/nature_alabama