

Dispelling Common Myths about Fire

Myth: A controlled burn is the same as a prescribed burn.

Fact: A prescribed burn is a fire set under specific weather conditions, with adequate personnel, and suppression equipment to achieve specific land management objectives. A controlled burn is a fire set without specified weather conditions or vegetation management objectives. Examples of controlled burns are burning trash, brush piles, or leaving a fire unattended.

Myth: Fire destroys the land. Local headlines read "The wildfire ravaged over 200,000 acres of land."

Fact: Land is not destroyed by fire and in fact the opposite occurs. Fire, a naturally occurring ecological driver, enriches soils by adding nutrients and makes the plant community healthy again. Native plants including those in prairies, shrublands, and forests and associated wildlife are adapted to periodic fires that were historically set by Native Americans and to a lesser extent by lightning.

Myth: All fires create smoke that cause problems on roadways and negatively impact human health.

Fact: Careful planning and use of the smoke management model forecast available on the Oklahoma Mesonet can manage smoke from a prescribed fire. Areas where fire has been suppressed will eventually be burned by wildfire and the smoke from this situation is much more troublesome.

Myth: Fires that occur during the growing season kill plants.

Fact: Research from many parts of the country has shown that native plants and ecosystems are adapted to fire and are not killed by growing season fires.

Myth: When people set fires they always escape.

Fact: A few improperly set fires are the only ones that make the news. Experience with prescribed burning in Oklahoma over the past 20 years clearly demonstrates that hundreds of thousands of acres are burned each year without any problem.

Get the Facts about Prescribed Fire

Fact: In Oklahoma there are over 2.5 million acres burned by prescription annually. Compare this to the 500,000 acres burned by wildfires in 2005 and 2006.

Fact: Prescribed fire does not just benefit people in rural settings; it has many benefits to the urban population as well. These benefits include increased water quality and quantity, reduction of wildland fuels and resulting wildfire risk, and reduction of plants such as eastern redcedar that cause allergies.

Fact: Prescribed fire can protect lives and personal property by reducing wildland fuels in overgrown native forests and eliminating volatile fuels such as eastern redcedar. Removing these fuels makes fighting wildfires less dangerous to firefighters.

Fact: In 2004 trash and brush pile burning (i.e. controlled burns), along with arson caused 59 percent of all the reported fires in the southern United States on state and private forestlands.

Fact: Prescribed fire is the most economical method to manage and restore Oklahoma's prairies, shrublands, and forests.

Fact: Controlled burns often escape, endanger lives and personal property, create nuisance smoke, and cost taxpayers money.

Fact: Prescribed fire is the application of a natural and environmentally friendly land management practice.

