

Fact: Fire does not destroy the land; Oklahoma's native plant communities are adapted to fire and require frequent fires to regenerate, control plant diseases, and reduce pest problems.

Fact: Because of the lack of prescribed fire, many important wildlife species are declining, such as Lesser Prairie-Chicken, Black-capped Vireo, Bobwhite Quail, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, and most of the prairie songbirds.

Fact: Oklahoma's vital livestock and forest products industry and the health of Oklahoma's ecosystems are compromised by fire suppression as the result of the infamous "Smokey Bear" advertising campaign.



John R. Weir
Research Associate

Terrence G. Bidwell
Professor and Extension Specialist

Karen R. Hickman
Associate Professor

Samuel D. Fuhlendorf
Professor

Dwayne Elmore
Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist

Natural Resource Ecology and Management

Oklahoma State University
<http://nrem.okstate.edu>
405.744.5438



Sponsored by USDA-NRCS EQIP education funds.

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, age, religion, disability, or status as a veteran in any of its policies, practices, or procedures. This includes but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert E. Whitson, Director of Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President, Dean, and Director of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of 20 cents per copy. 0407 JA

L-321

Fire

Myths and Facts



Natural Resource Ecology and Management
Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Oklahoma State University

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.

