



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Prescribed Burning on Private Lands

There are three reasons for assisting private landowners with prescribed burning activities on their lands to benefit the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

1. To implement or facilitate the implementation of a refuge Fire Management Plan. A refuge can work directly with a private landowner when the prescribed burning activities are associated with the implementation of an approved refuge Fire Management Plan. This includes working with individuals or organizations (i.e., The Nature Conservancy) where resources are shared equally (i.e., mutual aid agreement).
2. To implement a Wildland/Urban Interface project. The National Fire Plan recognizes the importance of providing outreach, education, and support for local communities who must play a primary role in reducing fire hazards in and near their communities, hence the management of private lands in this wildland/urban interface has become a key factor in the fire-risk equation. A top priority for reducing risk is to reduce fuels in forests and rangelands adjacent to, and within communities. Particular emphasis is placed on projects where fuel treatments can also be accomplished on adjoining State, private, or other nonfederal land so as to extend greater protection across the landscape. Prescribed fire on private lands in the wildland/urban interface is an acceptable hazard fuel reduction option.
3. To conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. All such activities should coordinate through The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. Contact the Partners for Fish and Wildlife coordinator in your area for more information. Wildland Fire Preparedness and Wildland Fire Operations funds are appropriated for use only on Federal lands and cannot be used for private lands. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program can provide funding and other assistance for private landowners. The Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service and the U. S. Forest Service also has a number of conservation and landowner assistance programs that can support prescribed burning activities. State agencies also have similar landowner assistance programs. The local NRCS, USFS, and State agency office is probably the best source of private landowner assistance information because they have experience in administering the programs locally.

The Department of the Interior Fuel Treatment Program Development and Collaboration Process is used to select projects funded with Wildland Fire Preparedness and Wildland Fire Operations subactivities (i.e., 9251, 9263, or 9264 personnel salaries, equipment, and support services, etc.). Private lands prescribed fire projects not identified by this process must be paid by the appropriate benefitting activity (i.e., 1121, 1261, etc.).

When assisting a private landowner (for any reason), the roles and responsibilities of all parties must be identified (i.e., who will do the planning, permit application, smoke management coordination, actual burning, etc.) and the safety risks and legal liabilities of implementing the prescribed fire project must also be evaluated. Only after there is an agreement on the roles and responsibilities and risk and liability concerns are satisfied should the Service agree to assist with the burning. The regional solicitor, contracting officer, and Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program coordinator should be contacted concerning project specific legal and/or contracting/agreement questions or concerns. The roles, responsibilities, and risk and liability concerns need to be reflected in an appropriate formal agreement between the Service and landowner.

Assistance to rural fire organizations is available through the The Rural Fire Assistance program. Agreement templates are available at <http://www.blm.gov/natacq/FIRE/contracting.html> (bottom of the page).