



Cherokee National Forest
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News Release

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Fire – A Useful Land Management Tool Annual Prescribed Burning Program

CLEVELAND, TENN – March 7, 2016--- USDA Forest Service officials say prescribed (controlled) fire is a useful tool for managing National Forest lands. Approximately 20,000 acres are scheduled for burning throughout the 656,000 acre Cherokee National Forest during 2016. A significant portion of the prescribed burning is planned for early spring.

To many people the word fire creates visions of great devastation and waste. While this concept can be true of wildfires, it is the opposite with prescribed fires. The term prescribed fire means exactly what it implies. It is a recommended treatment for a specific area. Before prescribed burns are conducted on national forest land, a well thought out and documented "prescription" is written by Forest Service resource specialists. A prescription identifies objectives of the proposed burn, examines possible environmental impacts, addresses smoke dispersal, describes how and when the burn will be conducted and under what weather conditions. After a prescription has been approved and scheduled, fire management personnel go about the task of organizing and conducting the burn.

Marty Bentley, Fire Management Officer for the Cherokee National Forest said, "At any point during a prescribed burn a decision can be made to stop burning if conditions are not right. Weather conditions are carefully monitored before and during the burn. Weather is a major factor and has great influence on whether or not a burn achieves the desired results."

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Prescribed fire is used in the Cherokee National Forest for several reasons including: 1) **Hazardous Fuel Reduction:** Fuels (vegetation) such as grass, leaves, brush, downed trees, and pine needles accumulate and create a fire hazard. By burning the area under favorable conditions these fuels are removed, decreasing the amount of vegetation that is available to burn during a wildfire. Reducing heavy vegetation build up helps protect communities from the threat of wildfire, as well as being beneficial to the forest. 2) **Site Preparation:** Certain trees cannot tolerate shady conditions created by other species. In areas being managed for pines, prescribed fire reduces certain types of vegetation that compete for light, moisture, and nutrients. Prescribed fire also reduces the leaf litter on the forest floor which often prevents seed germination for natural reproduction of desirable vegetation, including native grasses. 3) **Wildlife Habitat:** Prescribed fire promotes new sprout and herbaceous growth that serves as beneficial food and cover for many animals.

Although other methods of treatment have been used, none have been found that can produce the same benefits as prescribed fire for the same cost. Other methods may cost many times as much, with far more impacts to the environment and less benefit to the forest.

Wildfires usually burn with great intensity and cause damage to the forest environment and can be a threat to life and property.



On the other hand, low intensity prescribed fires (right photo) are beneficial and very important to the management of national forest land. →



Bentley explained that, "Growing conditions in east Tennessee allow burned areas to quickly green up within a relatively short period of time. In most cases, shortly after a burn is conducted, a casual observer would scarcely notice that this beneficial tool has been used."

"We are about to begin a very busy prescribed burning effort in the near future. We want to ensure that folks are aware of what we are doing. Because of changing weather conditions it is difficult to say exactly what days we will be burning. However, the next several weeks should provide us with some days of ideal burning conditions. In many cases we really won't know exactly when we are going to burn until the day before."

If you have questions concerning the Cherokee National Forest prescribed fire program in your area contact one of the following Ranger District Offices: Ocoee/Hiwassee – 423-338-3300; Tellico/Hiwassee – 423-253-8400; Unaka – 423-638-4109; Watauga – 423-735-1500.

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