



Hoosier National Forest Highlights



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Hoosier Exceeds Prescribed Burn Target with Assistance from local Partners



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Prescribed burning is used to achieve many natural resource objectives. The process starts years in advance of the actual burn. Areas which might benefit from burning have to be identified and checked, the burn plan has to be written, and fire lines put in around the area. Then the Forest identifies qualified people to implement the burn and waits for the weather to be perfect. The weather and the people turn out to be the two hardest parts of the process.

The weather is, well, the weather, and we all know how variable that is. Meanwhile, depending on an area's size and complexity, it takes specialized equipment and between 12 and 30 people of varying qualifications to carry out a burn.

The fire staff on the Forest is relatively small. Currently, six field-going staff are dedicated to fire. Many other Forest staff are also qualified firefighters, including foresters, biologist, engineers, technicians, surveyors, and administrators. However, when you add all of them, there are only about 25...and that is if everyone is available. There are many conflicts on any given day such as meetings, appointments, family functions, emergencies, etc...the same things that complicate everyone's lives.

To complicate things further, not just anyone can conduct a prescribed fire on Federal lands. Individuals have to be qualified in certain tasks from burn boss, to engine boss, to basic firefighter, and everything in between. Some of these qualifications are difficult to attain, and take many trainee experiences over several years to complete.

This is true for any agency that conducts prescribed burns. Others who carry out prescribed burning in southern Indiana include the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, the Fish and Wildlife Service at Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge, and The Nature Conservancy. Additional qualified resources can be brought in from out-of-state, but it is expensive. With every organization adapting to tightening budgets, money for travel and even filling currently vacant positions is hard to come by. So, it only makes sense to work together to achieve a common goal.

In 2011 work started on developing local partnerships to share resources. Many details had to be hammered out including mutual interest, finances, liability, and responsibilities. Luckily, agreements already in place nationally ensured that partner qualifications were equivalent to those of the Forest Service. After several months local agreements were signed and put into practice.

The first use of these partner agreements began in the spring of 2012 and continued into the fall. Resources were exchanged between the Hoosier and all three of our partners for eight burns totaling over 3,000 acres. On the Hoosier alone, partners helped on four burns completing over 2,500 of prescribed burning. Without the help of these partners we would not have completed our goal.

As the Hoosier moves toward another spring with 2,600 acres prepared for prescribed burning, Forest staff looks forward to another productive year of working with partners to accomplish mutual objectives.

For more information on prescribed burning contact Jeremy Kolaks at 812-276-4722 or jkolaks@fs.fed.us.



Firefighters from the Hoosier National Forest, The Nature Conservancy, and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources gather before a prescribed burn in 2012



Firefighters from three agencies work together to monitor a control line along the Fork Ridge burn in March, 2012.