

WILDLIFE & FISHERIES

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Fire



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ire is a tool that is often overlooked when people think about range improvement and maintenance. Basically, there are two types of fire—prescribed fires and wildfires. Prescribed fires are intentionally set to achieve a specific management goal. They are generally beneficial, both to wildlife and livestock. Wildfires, on the other hand, are unplanned, often accidental, fires that are usually harmful and destructive.

The end results of prescribed burns can be many and varied. Things such as soil type, soil moisture, timing of the burn, post-burn precipitation, post-burn grazing practices, etc., all influence the final result. However, some generalizations can be made about the benefits to be derived from prescribed burning.

One benefit is that it is possible to manipulate the species composition of herbaceous vegetation through prescribed burning. The timing of the burn is very important. For instance, late winter-early spring burns generally favor perennial warm-season plants, while

reducing cool-season plants. Legumes, many of which are good wildlife food plants, appear to be especially stimulated by burns of this type.

Other benefits that can be derived from burning include: 1) setting back woody plant invasion by using fire to top-kill young woody plants; 2) increasing the availability and palatability of the vegetation to wildlife and livestock by using fire to remove “rough” standing dead vegetation; and 3) removing litter and mulch accumulations, thereby stimulating plant production and making seeds and insects more available to ground feeding birds such as quail.

While the benefits mentioned herein are not all-inclusive, they do illustrate the potential of fire as a management tool. An added plus of prescribed fire is that presently it is the most economical range improvement practice available. Prescribed burning may or may not be for you, but it is a management practice certainly worth considering.