



RESOURCE MANAGEMENT Prescribed Fire

Prescribed fire is a key tool for CAL FIRE and its cooperators to use in reducing fuels at a landscape scale while improving ecosystem health in California. Prescribed fire, or the use of fire under planned conditions, is now well-recognized as one of the most versatile and cost-effective tools available to reduce fuels buildup in the wildland and forests to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires while increasing climate resilience. Beneficial Fire, which includes prescribed fire, cultural burning and managed fire has a long history as a vegetation management tool in California used by Native Americans, ranchers, USDA Forest Service and rural communities.

Fire is an essential ecological process in fire-dependent ecosystems, such as California forests. Fire exclusion has led to forests, woodlands, and rangelands unable to withstand normal droughts, insect outbreaks or wildfires. Prescribed fire is used to alter, maintain, or restore vegetative communities, achieve desired resource conditions, and to protect life, property, and values that would be degraded or destroyed by catastrophic wildfire.



Before a prescribed burn is ignited, a burn plan, or prescription must be written, and a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review must be complete. A burn plan includes comprehensive information about weather, topography, fuel moisture, and values at risk. For a burn to be 'in prescription,' the real conditions on the ground must meet the specifications in the burn plan. A prescribed burn can only take place when all conditions are within the designated parameters outlined in the burn plan. This is called the burn prescription 'window'. Being within the burn window helps mitigate risk and helps ensure the goals and objectives of the burn are met.



California's Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan calls for increasing the use of prescribed fire in California, including the expansion of cultural burning by California Tribes. The Strategic Plan for Expanding the use of Beneficial Fire (March 2022) describes how increasing the use of prescribed fire can be accomplished through cooperative partnerships among State, Federal, Tribal, and Private landowners. CAL FIRE and the USDA Forest Service are working to support and expand California Tribes' ability to conduct cultural burns. By the year 2025, CAL FIRE has a goal of treating 50,000 acres per year with the use of prescribed fire.

CAL FIRE may be involved in a prescribed burn through the Vegetation Management Program (VMP), a cooperative burn project with other organizations, or with a CAL FIRE issued burn permit. CAL FIRE requires that all CAL FIRE prescribed fires and VMP burns use the California Prescribed Fire Information Reporting System (PFIRS), hosted by the California Air Resources Board (CARB).

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