




Wildland Fire Leadership Council

Joint Vision and Key Messages on Relative Benefits of Prescribed Fire to Wildfire

The Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC) member agencies and organizations, with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), recognize the critical role that wildland fire plays for many landscapes across the United States. WFLC members are responsible for the management and conservation of hundreds of millions of acres of land across the country, much of which is ecologically fire dependent. These lands are managed in a variety of ways, however, their fire dependency and potential for wildfires creates an important driver for the use of prescribed fire, which helps in safely responding to wildfires and creating resilient landscapes.

Enhancing and creating healthy forests and rangelands is a paramount national interest, as is maintaining clean air.

Prescribed fire can be carefully planned, timed, and managed to reduce wildfire risk and lower environmental and public health impacts as compared to the unplanned nature of wildfires. The issues that surround prescribed fire cross jurisdictional boundaries and call for interagency communication, policy, and program coordination, especially managing smoke and air quality. They are greater than any one agency or organization can effectively address alone and can impact a range of public/private resources and partnerships. In an effort to better address these challenges, WFLC members, along with EPA and CDC, are committed to working in a collaborative manner to support the use of prescribed fire in ways that improve ecosystem health and services, reduce wildfire risk, and prioritize public health and safety.

Our work to address these challenges is based on the following shared understanding of the issues:

- Our communities and local economies depend on healthy ecosystems and healthy watersheds. Prescribed fire is an important land management tool that leverages a natural process to help foster ecosystem health and decrease fire risk to communities.
- Prescribed fires offer the opportunity to adjust the timing of fire and some ability to manage the amount of smoke and its path, thereby potentially reducing the overall impacts of wildland fire emissions on public health and welfare.
- Wildfire smoke can result in significant air quality impacts to public health, particularly for at-risk groups, as well as impacts to safety and transportation through diminished visibility on roads and aviation corridors.



A Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) member ignites a prescribed burn conducted by Department of the Interior. (DOI photo by Nate Herbert)



A prescribed burn in Ochoco National Forest burns underbrush and saplings, but leaves mature trees unharmed. (USDA Forest Service photos)

- WFLC members, EPA, and CDC are committed to working with stakeholders (such as State, Tribal, and local health departments and air quality agencies, and land managers) to effectively use prescribed fire to reduce adverse impacts of wildfire-related emissions on communities.
- Air quality is an important value and must be considered during every phase of the prescribed fire process from planning to burn implementation.
- All prescribed burners are required to comply with applicable regulations, which vary by location and project.
- Most healthy adults and children will recover quickly from short-term smoke exposure although certain people including those with underlying health conditions, the very young, and very old are at greater risk.
- Government agencies are working together to provide the public information on the effects of smoke—including information on steps people can take to reduce their exposure and protect their health from smoke.

- Information on current wildfires and resources that the public can use to learn about the specific air quality impacts in their area are available through [EPA's AirNow site](#), State and local environmental agencies, state and local health departments, the local National Weather Service, the [CDC](#), and from the [Air Resource Advisor](#), if one is assigned to a wildfire.

In conclusion, leaders from WFLC, CDC, and EPA are committed to working together, with land managers, public health experts, and regulatory officials to effectively use prescribed fire to reduce the impact of wildfire-related emissions. This includes working together to create stronger partnerships and providing the public with clear and consistent information about prescribed fire.

Web addresses for above resources:

- <http://www.airnow.gov/fires>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires>
- <http://www.wildlandfiresmoke.net>

For more information, please contact Mike Zupko, WFLC Executive Director, 770-267-9630.