



Prescribed Fire Information



“What is prescribed fire and why do we need it?”

Prescribed fire is an essential tool that is used by land managers as a way to maintain and, often, restore the delicate Florida ecosystems that are dependent on fire for their health and survival. Many species of plants and animals simply cannot survive without periodic fire. For example, long leaf pine & wire grass communities can become overwhelmed by hardwoods, such as oaks, in as little as 3-5 years, if fire is excluded from these areas. Prescribed burning maintains and, in many cases, increases species diversity wherever it is applied.

Also, if areas in the wildland/urban interface are left unburned, dangerous levels of fuels accumulate, greatly increasing the likelihood of wildfires damaging or destroying buildings and endangering lives.

“Who conducts prescribed fires on Hillsborough County-owned land?”

Prescribed burns are meticulously planned and conducted by highly-trained, professional personnel.

“Who are these ‘highly-trained personnel’?”

These personnel include, but are not limited to, staff from Hillsborough County Conservation Services & Regional Parks, Florida Division of Forestry, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation, Florida State Parks, professional contractors and, occasionally, volunteers, depending on the location of the prescribed burn and the requirements of the burn plan. Staff from the Hillsborough County Conservation Services section will be on-hand on all prescribed burns conducted on County ELAPP or Regional Parks property.

“Will plants and animals die in the prescribed fire?”

Most plants and animals native to Florida will survive through prescribed fires. They have adapted to fire over the millennia and have evolved specific strategies for dealing with fire. Under the conditions of most prescribed fires, the slow moving, relatively-cool flame fronts allow the vast majority of animals enough time to either move away from the area or seek shelter in safe zones, such as gopher tortoise burrows. This is not the case in the extremely unpredictable, fast-moving and intensely-hot scenario of wildfires in areas that have become overgrown due to fire exclusion.

“How long does a prescribed fire last? How long does the smoke remain?”

Most prescribed burns take only one day. On rare occasions, a burn continues into the night or the next day. The burn managers take precautions to limit the amount of smoke produced by the fire and ensure that all flames are completely extinguished at the end. Some smoke or haze may linger in the area of a prescribed burn for a day or two.

“I live near the area to be burned. Are there any precautions I should take?”

- The day of the burn, keep doors and windows closed to avoid smoke in your home.
- Do not hang laundry out to dry, as it may smell of smoke.
- Cover your swimming pool to keep ash out of the water.
- If you have health concerns (asthma, allergies, respiratory problems, etc.), limit outdoor activity or temporarily leave the area.

“How will I know when a prescribed fire is going to take place?”

Residents in the immediate vicinity of the planned burn will either be notified in person, by flyer or by signage in the neighborhood prior to the burn taking place. **(Note: Due to the extreme variability of weather conditions in the Tampa Bay area, last-minute changes to the prescribed burning schedule can, and do, happen quite often.)**