



PRESCRIBED FIRE

What is Prescribed Fire?

- » Prescribed Fire is the planned application of fire under specified weather and fuel conditions to achieve specific and clear management objectives.

Is Fire Part of Indiana's History?

- » Fire has been a part of Indiana's landscape for thousands of years.
- » Native Americans purposefully used fire to shape Indiana's landscape for a variety of reasons such as to improve wildlife habitat, regenerate new vegetation, promote hard-shelled nut-producing species such as oaks and hickories, and to create abundant and predictable resources.¹
- » Fires strategically set by Native Americans helped create diverse ecosystems across Indiana, and as one Indiana Historian put it, "Biodiversity of the landscapes altered by human-ignited fires created abundance and opportunity for the first people."¹
- » Fire continued to influence Indiana's landscape following European settlement until the exclusion of fire within the past century.

Why is Prescribed Fire Used?

- » **Forest management** – promotes regeneration of economically and ecologically valuable oaks and hickories.
- » **Wildlife management** – improves habitat for deer, turkey, bobwhite quail, bats, and songbirds
- » **Ecosystem restoration** – restores grasslands, glades, barrens, forests, savannas, and woodlands
- » **Hazardous fuel reduction** – burning of excess fuels under specified weather and fuel conditions

Is Prescribed Fire Safe?

- » Inherent risk comes with prescribed fire use, but often the perception of the risk is greater than the actual risk.
- » In Missouri, only 1.2% of reported prescribed fires resulted in escapes; none of which were more than 10 acres.²
- » According to a Oklahoma State Extension Publication, across 23,050 prescribed fires on public and private lands, less than 1% of the prescribed fires escaped, which resulted in only one insurance claim of less than \$5,000 and no lawsuits.³
- » Hoosier National Forest has had no escaped prescribed fires in the past 32 years.⁴

Why Is Prescribed Fire Legislation Needed?

- » **Indiana administrative code does not define a standard of liability for the application of prescribed fire.**
- » **Indiana is one of only a few states in the country that does NOT have prescribed fire liability clearly defined through prescribed fire legislation.**
- » The perceived liability and risk of prescribed fire is a barrier to its implementation as a restoration and management tool.
- » Information from other states suggests defining liability through legislation is a way to reduce this barrier and encourage the safe and effective utilization of prescribed fire.⁵
- » The absence of prescribed fire liability in Indiana code diminishes opportunities for contractors, private landowners, and prescribed burn associations to obtain liability coverage, further reducing their ability to use prescribed fire as a tool.

Benefits of Prescribed Fire Legislation

Support private property rights

Enable private landowners to use an essential tool to manage their property. A lack of established liability for private landowners and their representatives has been a barrier for landowners to exercise their rights to manage their property.

Improve the market for prescribed fire liability insurance

Legislation should enable insurance companies to offer more competitive rates and expand coverage while also expanding the number of companies willing to provide this insurance in Indiana.

Increase economic opportunities for small businesses

The cost and availability of insurance for prescribed fire is a limiting factor for businesses to be able to offer this service to private landowners in Indiana. Liability protection reduces this barrier for both new and existing contractors.

Allow landowners to tap into federal funding

USDA already makes funding available to help landowners cover the cost of writing a burn plan and conducting a burn, but without liability legislation their ability to conduct a burn or hire a contractor is extremely difficult.⁶

Enhance the future of Indiana's hardwood industry

Oak species are the cornerstone of Indiana's \$10 Billion hardwood industry. Indiana's oak forests and woodlands were born out of fire. Without widespread application of prescribed fire, our future supply of oak timber is bleak. Prescribed fire is the most effective and efficient way to begin the next crop of oaks needed to fuel this industry.⁷

Restore and maintain wildlife habitat to protect and promote our hunting heritage

Native habitat managers throughout the eastern US are implementing more fire to restore and improve essential habitat for game and non-game species. Indiana has shown that we can be a leader in quality hunting opportunities, but Indiana needs prescribed fire as a viable tool for that trend to continue.

Bolster a Standard of Prescribed Fire Training

Legislation will support a standardized training program for prescribed fire, incentivizing individuals to complete the training through liability protections. This will enhance the safe application of prescribed fire.

We urge the Indiana Legislature to pass prescribed fire legislation in this session to ensure that Indiana's private landowners can reap the multitude of benefits highlighted above. The Prescribed Fire Council is here to answer any questions that may arise.



**SOUTHERN
INDIANA
SENTINEL LANDSCAPE**



About the Indiana Prescribed Fire Council:

We are a collection of prescribed fire practitioners from across Indiana. We have members from various state and federal agencies, universities, conservation organizations, land trusts, private companies and consultants, and private landowners. Our mission is to promote the safe use of prescribed fire in the management of Indiana's diverse ecological systems.

1. Marsh, D. G. 2022. The Coming Out Place. Indiana Magazine of History 118:1–40.

2. Missouri Prescribed Fire Council [MPFC]. 2022. Missouri Prescribed Burning Act: liability Defined by the new legislation.

3. <https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/print-publications/nrem/prescribed-fire-understanding-liability-laws-and-risk-nrem-2905.pdf> <https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/print-publications/nrem/prescribed-fire-understanding-liability-laws-and-risk-nrem-2905.pdf>

4. Information from local active and retired personnel whose knowledge and records date back to 1992.

5. Clark, A. S., D. A. McGranahan, B. A. Geaumont, C. L. Wonka, J. P. Ott, and U. P. Kreuter. 2022. Barriers to Prescribed Fire in the US Great Plains, Part II: Critical Review of Presently Used and Potentially Expandable Solutions. Land 11:1524.

6. <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2024-12/FY25%20EQIP%20Practice%20User%20Guide%20for%20Indiana.docx>

7. <https://www.in.gov/isda/divisions/economic-development/hardwoods/#:~:text=Indiana's%20hardwood%20industry%20has%20an,and%2026%2C000%20in%20ancillary%20sectors>