

History of the Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council

July, 2010

The Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council was organized exclusively for charitable, educational, and scientific purposes. The specific purposes of the Council are to:

- a) make the use of prescribed fire in Wisconsin safer and more accepted for all practitioners
- b) provide a unified voice representing the prescribed fire community in Wisconsin
- c) promote the use of prescribed fire as a land management tool in Wisconsin
- d) educate practitioners and the general public
- e) enhance the public perception of prescribed fire
- f) promote professionalism in the prescribed fire community
- g) encourage cooperation among non-profit conservation organizations, government agencies, for-profit businesses, and private individuals.

Prescribed fire is an important land management tool for achieving ecological, agricultural, wildfire protection, and other objectives. In Wisconsin, prescribed fire is used by government agencies, non-profit organizations, for-profit businesses, and private landowners to achieve these objectives. There is no regulatory framework specifically designed to regulate prescribed fire. Prescribed burning falls under regulations designed to control wildfire, which do not always adequately address prescribed burning issues.

In the past, there has been no means for all of the different entities and individuals involved in prescribed fire to formally work together to promote safe and effective use of prescribed fire in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council was formed to meet this need.

The Council's origins date to 2003, with informal meetings of prescribed fire practitioners from The Nature Conservancy, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Aldo Leopold Foundation, the Prairie Enthusiasts, and other organizations. Originally known as the "Private Lands Prescribed Burn Group", the group established committees to address prescribed fire issues including agency policy, outreach and education, insurance, cooperation and partnership, and training. Following the example of a similar group in Michigan, the name "Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council" was adopted. Over the next several years, the Fire Council carried out the following activities:

- Compiled a list of prescribed burn practitioners.
- Surveyed practitioners regarding their education and training needs.
- Created a doorhanger to be used to notify neighbors when a prescribed burn is to occur. Created five habitat-specific educational inserts for the doorhanger, describing the habitats and why they are burned.
- Cooperated with an Iowa DNR-funded project to survey prescribed burn practitioners regarding escapes and insurance claims, and to develop an insurance product to cover prescribed burns.
- Developed a set of training standards for burn crew members that would provide a minimum training requirement for burn crews that cannot practically meet the National Wildfire Coordinating Group requirements.
- Developed a burn plan standard defining the minimum information to be included in a prescribed burn plan.
- Created bylaws, which were adopted in July of 2005.
- Developed a Statement of Membership Principles, approved in July 2005.
- Developed a website - www.prescribedfire.org
- Created an e-mail distribution list to communicate Council business and other information of interest to prescribed fire practitioners. As of July 2010 there are 156 people signed up to receive the e-mails.
- Sponsored a Prescribed Fire roundtable discussion at the North American Prairie Conference in September 2004.
- Organized a three-day conference, "Prescribed Fire: Igniting Possibilities for Land Management", in January 2006. The conference featured 35 presentations, 5 plenary sessions, and had over 350 attendees.
- Formed a committee to advocate for legislation that would formalize regulations for prescribed burns and provide liability protection for prescribed burners who follow best practice standards.
- Published an informational brochure describing the Fire Council.

- Provided input to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in the development of a state Smoke Management Plan.
- Provided input to US EPA on proposed changes to smoke management regulations
- Provided information to the national Coalition of Fire Councils regarding prescribed fire in Wisconsin.
- Formally incorporated in September 2008.
- Adopted new bylaws in January 2009.
- Organized a three-day conference, "Prescribed Fire: Learning from the Past, Planning for the Future", in January 2009. The conference featured 37 presentations, 7 plenary sessions, and had over 320 attendees.

The Council organized and hosted the following training courses:

Advanced Firefighter, Nov 2004
Burn Planning workshop, Jan 2006
Basic Firefighter, Nov 2006
Advanced Firefighter, Nov 2006
Burn Planning workshop, Jan 2007
Ignitions workshop, Jan 2007

In addition, the Council sponsored and helped present the following workshops that were hosted by the Aldo Leopold Foundation:

Ignitions workshop, Jan 2008
Fire Behavior workshop, Jan 2008
Two Introduction to Prescribed Burning workshops, Mar and Apr 2008

In June 2010, the Council cosponsored, with the Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Midwest Interagency Engine Academy, an intensive 7-day training course that provided classroom and hands-on learning experience on the use of wildland fire engines for 37 participants.