

Native Pasture Burning



If there's one value I find in social media, specifically Facebook memories, is the reminders of when disasters strike. Time seems to pass us by, and when my memories showed up of the Starbucks fire a reality check occurred when I realized it had been 2 years since that devastating event. Then just a year ago, we had a large fire in Northern Butler County that jumped the West Branch of the Walnut River, Hwy 77 and even the Kansas Turnpike with cars lined up and stopped. Then, in just the past few days, tragedy has struck Colorado, the Dakotas, and Nebraska, just to name a few. Sometimes, no matter how much we prepare, we cannot prevent or avoid Mother Nature's wrath.

Although we can't stop some disasters, there are things we can do to help mitigate man-made disasters. This time of year is Spring burning in the Flint Hills. Here are a few things you can do to help prepare and reduce the risk of unintended outcomes.

- 1) Know the Butler County Burn Regulations! You can find those at: <http://www.bucoks.com/index.aspx?nid=203>. You are required to make notifications and that contact information is found in this link. I also recommend notifying your neighbors.
- 2) The Kansas Smoke Management Plan goes into effect on April 1 – know the plan! www.ksfire.org
- 3) Develop a burn plan; identify your goals, know the weather and wind forecast (www.weather.gov/ict/fire), review safety requirements, determine equipment and manpower needs and know your emergency contacts. Also be aware of roads and major highways and use caution not to lay smoke across them. Evaluate the ground to make sure it's solid enough to hold a pickup and sprayer. Due to recent rains, the ground is a bit soft. If the ground is not solid, think of what will happen when you put fire trucks on there if the fire should escape. Good planning is critical when planning and executing a controlled burn.
- 4) Establish a burn crew and know what equipment is needed. A good rule of thumb is to have one to light the fire, one to drive the sprayer, one to run a nozzle and one to follow with small hand tools to make sure all the hot spots are out. Equipment such as a drip torch, swatters, rakes and a water supply.
- 5) Know why you are burning! Burning occurs due brush and weed control, conserving/maintaining the prairie, wildlife habitat manipulation, improvement of grazing distribution and increased livestock production are some of the more common reasons.
- 6) Know when to burn. This has been a hot topic of discussion, especially in the hunt for control of noxious weeds. If your goal is for weed and brush control, burns should be conducted late spring when the plants have started growing. Another rule of thumb is when there is 2 to 3 inches of new growth in the native grass. In most years, this will occur in this area from mid to late April. You will see some ranches starting the burn now to get new growth established for incoming stocker cattle.
- 7) Know what to do if the fire gets away. Even though a burn is carefully planned and conducted, prescribed burns can still escape. Reassess the situation to see if you have the necessary equipment and manpower to mitigate the problem. Know at what point you have reached your capabilities and when to call 9-1-1. Know what's downwind from you and if there are structures or people in danger.



As we round the corner into rangeland burning season, take time to develop and review your plan. Know what and how you're going to burn, know the current conditions, make sure you have the appropriate crew and equipment, and know when to call 9-1-1 should you need them.