

What is prescribed fire?

Prescribed fire is the controlled application of fire to the land to accomplish specific land management goals. Ignitions may be either human- or naturally caused. Benefits include:

► Reducing fuel build-up

Dead wood, overcrowded, unhealthy trees, and thick layers of pine needles can all contribute to catastrophic wildfires.



► Prepares the land for new growth

When excess vegetation or needle layers are burned off, nitrogen and other nutrients are released into the soil and become available for new plants to grow.



► Helps certain plants/trees germinate

Many native plant and forest communities have adapted to fire for their germination and growth. Seed contact with bare soil (such as that exposed by a fire) is necessary for some species to naturally regenerate. (Lodgepole pine is one such example.)

► Naturally thins overcrowded forests

Historically, natural fire thinned Colorado's forests. Thinned forests can recover faster and are more resistant to insect and disease attacks. Currently, most of Colorado's mature forests are overcrowded, resulting in a lack of vigor and health.

► Creates diversity needed by wildlife

Fire creates a varied land and vegetation pattern that provides diverse habitat for plants and animals. Grazing wildlife benefit from new growth as shrubs produce succulent edible leaves when resprouting after a fire.



What about the smoke?

Controlling where the smoke will go is an important part of every prescribed burn. Before each burn, land managers look carefully at what they plan to burn and the proximity of houses, roads, and other smoke sensitive sites to the planned burn area. The burn prescription is then written to mitigate negative impacts of smoke, especially to



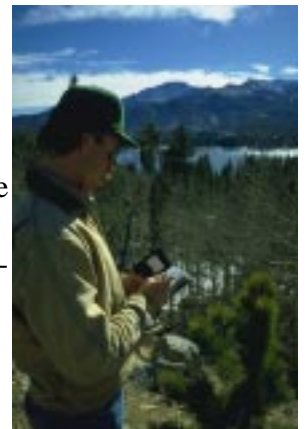
individuals who may be smoke-sensitive. Smoke, however, is a natural byproduct of fire and some amounts are unavoidable.

Periodic prescribed burns prevent heavy fuel accumulation that would send a larger amount of smoke into the air should an uncontrolled wildfire occur.

What is a burn prescription?

A burn prescription helps ensure that the objectives of the burn are met, as well as addressing safety issues.

Land managers determine if the resource would benefit from a slow, consuming fire versus a hotter fire. The burn prescription determines the environmental conditions necessary for meeting resource objectives in a safe, effective manner.



The prescription includes how the fire will be ignited and contained and what resources, such as fire trucks and personnel, must be on site before burning may begin. Burning permits are completed when required.

Who does the burning?

Prescribed burns are conducted by trained fire management professionals who have studied fire behavior and fire control techniques. These prescribed burn professionals help ensure the safety of the burn crew, nearby residents, and property.



What can a homeowner expect?

Prescribed fire provides many important benefits, but some short-term undesirable aspects may also exist.

- **Smoke:** Fire management professionals make great efforts to reduce smoke impacts; however, some smoke will be unavoidable.
- **Smell:** A campfire smell may be present for several days after the burn.

► **Scorching:** Some scorching of lower tree branches (or even the entire tree) is to be expected. After the fire some needles will turn orange and eventually drop from the tree.



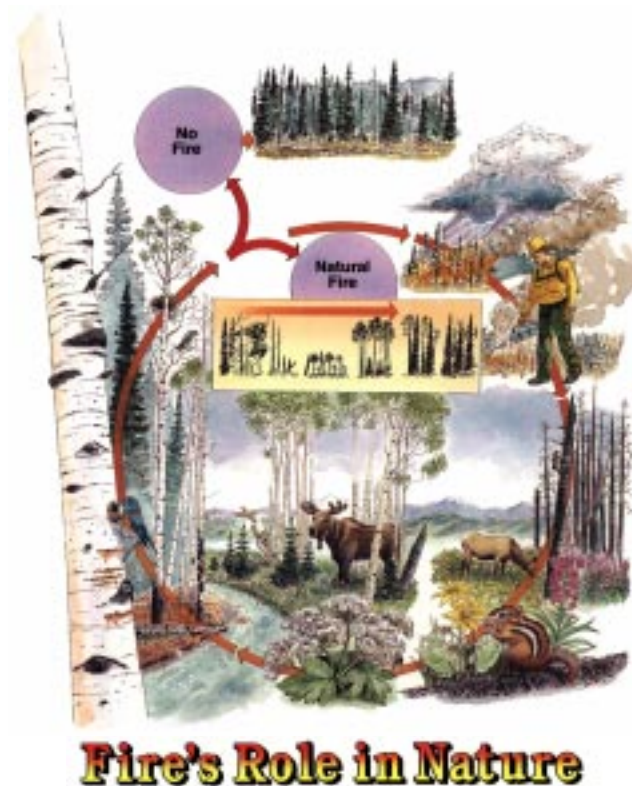
► **Weeds:** Weeds commonly invade disturbed areas and can be expected at burned sites.

Barren look: Immediately after a burn, the treated site may appear charred and lifeless. This temporary condition will be replaced by the resprouting of grasses, forbs, shrubs, and seedling trees.



Prescribed Fire in Colorado

Fire plays an important role in the natural cycle of life in the west. A non-catastrophic fire, whether prescribed or natural, has many benefits.



For more information contact your local Colorado State Forest Service office or local fire department.