

# Dept. of Natural Resources: Reminder: Wisconsin fire season is on its way

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Earlier this week, the first prescribed burns of the season began in Wisconsin at Horicon Marsh Wildlife Area. Winter cattail marsh burns mark the beginning of the fire management season for DNR crews. Their work will continue through spring and begin again in late summer and fall (mid-July through November).

By burning in winter, DNR staff take advantage of wet conditions and frozen ground, which reduce the heat and intensity of cattail marsh burns.

When planning prescribed burns, DNR staff look at forecasted weather conditions to find optimal conditions for the burns, which help reduce the chance for wildfires by removing excess dead plant material. Prescribed burns also support healthy ecosystems for an abundance of plants and animals in Wisconsin.

Many plant communities in Wisconsin developed over time to benefit from periodic fire. Many of these communities, such as prairie, wetland, oak/pine barrens and oak savanna, would not exist without occasional fires to restore the balance between open grass and brush. The DNR's prescribed burns are conducted for the health of these ecosystems and mimic the natural benefits that fire historically provided. These benefits include a decrease in dead grass (thatch) buildup, improved spaces for wildlife to feed, nest and raise young, and an increase in native grass and wildflower growth.

Before every prescribed burn season, DNR staff spend months comprehensively planning for the safety and ecological benefit of each burn. DNR staff make the decision to conduct prescribed burns only when weather and vegetation conditions

meet strict standards for safety, smoke management and burn effectiveness. Even after such careful planning, each burn is reassessed on the morning of the burn and at the burn site to make sure the conditions remain appropriate. The DNR also notifies local law enforcement and fire officials in advance about when and where DNR prescribed burns will take place.

## **Get Ahead Of Wisconsin's Fire Season At Home**

Spring in Wisconsin has the highest fire risk with the No. 1 cause of wildfires being debris burning. Most of these debris fires occur in the spring after the snow-cover melts and before vegetation greens up. People cause over 98% of all wildfires in Wisconsin.

When the ground is completely snow-covered, you can burn in DNR protection areas without a DNR burning permit. Be sure to check with your local municipality, which may have additional restrictions.

With the cold temps we've been experiencing, spring may be the last thing on your mind. But with portions of the state already having limited snow coverage, it's important to think ahead now.

Here are some tips for safe winter burning:

- Only burn brush piles that were covered with a tarp in fall and remained covered for several months.
- Notify the local fire department and dispatch offices in advance to avoid unnecessary fire response.
- Gather and pile brush in an open area away from over-hanging branches.
- When you are ready to burn, choose a calm day (winds less than 8 mph) with complete snow-cover on the ground. Snow must be contiguous and adjacent to the fire and remain for the duration of the burn.
- Place small amounts of crumpled clean paper into the brush around the base of the pile.
- Light the paper all around the base of the pile. Do not use the fire to dispose of household garbage, rubber tires, oil or other accelerants.
- Turn the debris using a rake or shovel while in the flames to ensure all the materials are completely burned.
- Never leave the fire unattended.

When the fire is out, consider gathering nutrient-rich cold embers to use in flower beds and gardens in the spring.

[Get up-to-speed on Wisconsin's wildfire season early on the DNR's website.](#)