

Dept. of Natural Resources: To begin winter prescribed burns Feb. 1

Posted on Monday, Jan 31, 2022

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MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) today announced that starting tomorrow, Feb. 1, fire management crews will conduct prescribed burns on DNR properties throughout the state. The first prescribed burns of the season will be held Feb. 1 at Horicon Marsh Wildlife Area in southeast Wisconsin.

Forecasted weather conditions indicate 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.

The DNR's fire management crews plan to burn cattail marshes, clearing buildup of dead vegetation and opening waterways for waterfowl to feed and nest. By burning in winter, DNR staff take advantage of wet conditions and frozen ground, which reduces the heat and intensity of cattail marsh burns.

Winter cattail marsh burns also mark the beginning of the fire management season for DNR crews. Additional windows of opportunity for prescribed burning will continue through spring, and open again in late summer and fall (mid-July through November).

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, weather forecast evaluations, vegetation moisture measurements and staff trainings, each burn is reassessed on the morning of the burn and at the burn site. The DNR also notifies local law enforcement and fire officials in advance about when and where DNR prescribed burns will take place.

For this year, all burns conducted on DNR land will continue to follow additional Covid-19 operational protocols to further minimize health and safety risks to burn crews and the general public. When conducting prescribed burns near roads or recreational trails, the DNR will post signs on the morning of the burn to notify the public. For public safety, please avoid these areas while the burn is being conducted.

To view the current daily status of where prescribed burns are occurring across the state, visit the [DNR WisBURN page](#), click “View Current Fires,” and show “Today’s Prescribed Burns.” For a more detailed look at historic, current and planned DNR prescribed burns, visit the [DNR Prescribed Fire Dashboard](#).

For more information regarding the benefits of prescribed burning in Wisconsin, [visit this DNR webpage](#). We encourage emailed comments, which can be sent to Michele Witecha, DNR Prescribed Fire Specialist (michele.witecha@wisconsin.gov), or call 608-333-3664.