

# MICHIGAN PRESCRIBED FIRE COUNCIL

Michele Richards

Outreach and Education Committee Chair, Natural Resources Specialist, Michigan Army National Guard

MR. MARK MELVIN: Our next presenter is Michele Richards from Michigan. She's the Outreach and Education Committee Chair, and she is with the Michigan Army National Guard. I'm really pleased that she could be here, because she's going to have to represent not only Michigan but the Great Lakes states.

MS. RICHARDS: Hi. We are probably one of the older prescribed fire councils. I'm going to make this short. Basically, we came into being 10 years ago because everybody was afraid of losing the right to do prescribed burning on lands in Michigan. We are not nearly as well established or doing as many acres as the rest of y'all seem to be, but we do have prescribed fire. We have lots of habitats that require it, and so we wanted to make sure that it was still an option for land managers and citizens to be able to use it. We started in 1999. In 2003 we had a giant meeting of almost a hundred participants to declare the council to be a statewide group.

We also, at that time, chose not to pursue 501(c)(3) status, because a lot of the participants are state and federal agencies. And for our people, if you change it to a 501(c)(3), it makes participation a little bit sticky, so we decided to stay in the ephemeral realm with that. And we work with The Nature Conservancy. They're sort of our fiduciary and our secretary, and they provide a really great partnership for the money thing. We can run money through them without having to jump through all the other hurdles that you would have to otherwise.

Part of the issue with going statewide was that Michigan has so many different habitat types and natural communities. We go everywhere from the Prairie Peninsula grassland ecosystems, all the way to boreal forest at the northern edge of the UP [Upper Peninsula], so it's really weird. We have our own map projections, which consternates those of us who work with GIS, but it's a big state.

We have a lot of nongovernment organizations, 501(c)(3)s. Many of our state agencies participate, including us. We're the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. Our DNR [Department of Natural Resources] has a division for forests, minerals, and fire management, so those guys all work together, and there's not really a division between the foresters and the fire people. In fact, the foresters tend to be one of our big defenders of fire in Michigan, so we're lucky that way. We also have the Department of Transportation on our steering committee, and the DOT rep was our chair last year. She's very enthusiastic about fire and is starting to make right-of-way burns on freeways and on state highways possible for those folks who want to do that. So we have all kinds of folks who participate, and we drag them in as much as we can. We're always open to more.

The committees that make up our steering committee sort of reflect our objectives. They kind of say, this is what we're doing, this is where we're going, these are the things that we are planning. The education and outreach committee,

which is mine, is more of a public and not so much an agency kind of group. We're also providing training for certification, which is a lot more in the hands of DNR, and like I heard somebody else say, agencies don't necessarily let other folks come in to get their training. So the prescribed fire council acts as a means and a place to provide training for those people who wouldn't ordinarily be able to get it because they're not in an agency. One of our activities and accomplishments is that every year we do an S-130/S-190 fire training course. We have 30 slots for that, and it's always filled. Sometimes it's agency people, but most of the time it's not. Recently we've gotten quite a few college students involved, and they're very interested in prescribed fire. It's exciting that there are some young folks doing it. We have a consultants committee. This is one of the smaller ones, but we do have a few consultants in Michigan who specialize in prescribed fire. Then there's the legal and legislative committee.

We have an annual meeting that's two days. In past years we've done it in partnership with the American Association of Conservation Districts or the Society of American Foresters. We're trying to move back towards doing it independently. It works a little bit better for us that way. So we have one day of mostly talks from professionals. And if we have people who are lay folks out there doing it, then we have them talk about what they're doing, and the next day we have either a field trip or a demo burn.

We've developed best management practices for fire, and we participate in the Statewide Smoke Management Plan building in cooperation with the EPA. So we're trying to stay ahead of that curve so that we don't get squelched when the EPA starts pushing out their regulations. More recently, we've started to offer S-131 and S-290, and, as I said, that filled up. It is my assertion that we definitely need to get more training out there on the ground for non-agency people, and that will be coming up in a second. And then we also worked with the Michigan DNR and state legislature to write Senate Bill 925, which is a right-to-burn and burn manager law all rolled up into one. That passed. It doesn't have any funding for the certified burn manager certification process, but we expect eventually, once Michigan gets out of its economic troubles, that we'll be doing that. They have training courses written. They just have to get the funding for it.

And then we are working with The Nature Conservancy as a prescribed fire council to offer a crew boss academy at Fort Custer Training Center. We are a small installation. We just have 7,500 acres, but we burn a third to a half of it every year, and that will slow down as soon as we get our fire regimes in place. But this is like an academy, if any of you are familiar with it, where they bring in a cadre of instructors and we do all of these courses within a 10- to 14-day time span. And it includes Incident Command System. It includes having folks going out on the ground and doing the fires, if