

NORTH CAROLINA PRESCRIBED FIRE COUNCIL

Dean Simon

Chair, Wildlife Forester, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

MR. MARK MELVIN: Our next update will be given by Dean Simon. He's the incoming chair, and he's with the North Carolina Wildlife Resource Commission.

MR. SIMON: I appreciate the opportunity to come back to my home state and give this presentation. It's kind of interesting, if you look at our logo and see where the fire is, it's up in the mountains, where a lot of people from Florida are coming and building their houses right on the midslope where we're trying to get fire. Also, I say to John Morgan in Kentucky, we're not too far ahead of you as far as the existence of our council. And, brother, I feel your pain with your state forest service. We have a similar situation, but it's something we're working through. We're getting them involved, and hoping to see some changes.

We're dealing with a lot of growth and urbanization in North Carolina. My wife is an environmental coordinator with the DOT [Department of Transportation] in North Carolina. She said, "If you ever notice, the names of the developments that go in are actually naming what they're destroying." Like on the coast, it's Oak Hammocks, because that's what was there. Whispering Pines might have been what was there. Up in our area, it is Falls Creek. They're not there anymore because now it's a development.

Similar to other states, we have quite a lot of variability in our burning programs from the coast to the mountains, as far as why folks are burning, what the needs are, the amount of burning, and the types of ecosystems they're burning. There's huge variability. You know, in the mountains, there's burning for oak savanna development in the hardwoods. We have Table Mountain pine complexes. When you get out on the Coastal Plain, you're in a lot of the longleaf pine issues. So there's quite a lot of variability in how much is burning, who is burning, and why they're burning. And what we're hoping to do with the council is to draw in all interested folks and share from the mountains to the ocean. We have common interests and we can work together to overcome what's keeping us from getting more burning done.

We were established in early 2006, and our steering committee is actually a 17-member committee, because it includes the eight at-large steering committee members, five subcommittee chairs, our secretary/treasurer, and the chair, vice-chair, and past chair. Our chair is a three-year stint, so once you make a commitment, you're not getting out of there for three years. But the interesting thing is once you get to folks that are willing to serve as chair, you kind of make a deal with the devil, so by the time you're past chair, we look at you for wise counsel. But through development of our subcommittees and the steering committee, we've gotten a lot done and have made a lot of headway, especially in making some positive impacts on burning and improving communication between those that support prescribed fire.

The subcommittees themselves include Education and Outreach, which makes a big effort towards networking and providing an opportunity to get that message out. I have

learned a lot from this conference, and I'm really appreciative for the presenters here that are giving me a lot of ideas to carry back to North Carolina to help get that message out. Our Data Collection committee does a lot of work with trying to track who is burning and where they're burning and where the need is from an ecosystem standpoint, as well as trying to determine what the resources are as well. Our Policy committee is in charge of a lot of our legislative issues, trying to work to change some of the rules and regulations that govern what we can and cannot do with regard to fire. They are also dealing with the smoke management issue, which is a pretty big deal everywhere, especially up in North Carolina. Our Implementation committee is making a strong effort towards serving as a clearinghouse to let folks know where the opportunities are, like where there's an S-130, S-190, L-180, some of the basic courses. But also, we have our Certified Prescribed Burner Program in North Carolina, like a lot of the other states do, and we're trying to help those folks that have gotten into that program to complete their requirements and get through that program and get their certification as well. And then we have a Membership committee as well. Currently we have about 222 members active in the council. And we function primarily, like many of the other councils, through grants and donations. We have no membership dues.

In 2006, we held our first annual meeting, which is a one-day meeting, in the Piedmont region, and it was a very successful meeting. We have talked and hope to maybe expand to a two-day meeting which would possibly include a field trip on one of the days. We hope to get there at some point. One of our ideas is to try to rotate among the mountains, the Piedmont in the center of the state, and the coast, to give folks the opportunity to come to the meetings and be involved. But this is really just our third meeting since we haven't been in existence that long. This is probably bordering on too much information, and in some places not enough information, but we moved our meeting to August to try and get out of our major burning season, which is winter and spring in our neck of the woods. Again, we fund most of these meetings through donations, to get our food and our drinks. We get donations for door prize drawings, and that brings in a good crowd. Word gets out there's free food and you have all kinds of people coming in. But anyway, we also involve speakers. We've been very fortunate to have some folks come in and talk on subjects of fire ecology and forest management related to fire. And something we try and make a regular part of our annual meeting is to have landowners who use fire, no matter what region we're in, to come in and talk about their use of fire and their history with fire. Some of them grew up with fire, and they'll talk about how their granddaddy used to burn. It's great testimony and gets folks, pardon the pun, fired up. Usually the second half of the day is committed primarily to committee outbreak sessions, where we have working groups that try and get some stuff