

# OKLAHOMA PRESCRIBED FIRE COUNCIL

John Weir

Steering Committee Member, Research Associate, Oklahoma State University

MR. MARK MELVIN: The last council update before we break will be John Weir from Oklahoma State University. We've heard several presentations from John already. The first time I talked to John is when I called him and he answered the phone while he was in a duck blind and we talked about fire, so I knew right then that he was a neat guy.

MR. WEIR: Thank you. I'm going to talk to you representing the prescribed fire council that we have in Oklahoma. We started it back in about April of 2007. What we've decided to do with our prescribed fire council is to have what we call charter members. It's a group of people, mainly state, federal agencies, and nongovernment agencies within the state that use fire, who we wanted to get together so that we can promote fire. But our main goal and our main reason for all of these groups coming together was to promote and support our private landowners and our prescribed fire associations in Oklahoma because, as Russ [Walsh] alluded to, keeping the ability of landowners to burn is the most important goal, and we're going to get more land burned that way than doing anything else. We got together what was probably one of the best meetings that any of us had attended, because we actually got something done and got to eat Mexican food and work at the same time. We can usually get more stuff done that way.

We have our mission statement, and it's "To promote the implementation of prescribed fire in Oklahoma as a natural resource management tool." That's what our mission statement is, and that's what we're out to do throughout the state. Our members are Oklahoma State University, The Nature Conservancy, our Fish and Wildlife Service Ecological Services Section, the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, the Oklahoma Conservation Districts Employees' Association, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, the Noble Foundation, USDA-NRCS in the state, and also our Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry. Those are the main people who use fire and promote fire within the state. We do not really have any type of structured setup. We do not have officers or anything like that. We have a kind of ad hoc chairman. So, we're very loosely put together in those terms, but, again, we get together and work and promote what we can.

In our meetings, we have come together with four main strategies that we want our council to work on and to do. Those are education, training, legislative advocacy, and facilitation of fundraising. Our goals for the education portion are not only educating our landowners in the proper use of prescribed fire and providing training, but also educating the general public in the state of Oklahoma on why we use fire and what the benefit is to them. Our training portion focuses on training our landowners and others. And then we have our legislative advocacy, which goes into policy, laws, also working with our legislature. A few of the

members of our council, especially the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, have an executive director who is really nothing more than a lobbyist. So they help us work with that portion. We're able to get into the legislature and talk to different people.

The next thing is our facilitation of fundraising. What we want to do is to be able to make grant templates and to find out where the money is so we can get that money, possibly through some of the members or through the council itself. Then we can spread that money back out to the landowners through the prescribed burn associations for equipment and different things like that.

We have a Web site: [oklahomaprescribedfirecouncil.okstate.edu](http://oklahomaprescribedfirecouncil.okstate.edu). We maintain it there at Oklahoma State University [OSU]. The Web site maintains details about the council, like our mission statement, why we're there, a whole section with burn association information within the state, fire weather sources, and fire law information. Also, it's a place that we can put all of our prescribed fire publications and other information. At OSU we've been working with prescribed fire for decades. We have a lot of fact sheets, circulars, and extension publications that we have produced and maintain and update. It's a good source so that people can go to and find readily and be able to use it.

One of the activities that we've participated in, even though we're only a couple of years old, is the Conservation Day that the Conservation Commission sets up each year at the state capitol. We've attended two of those during these last two years. We set up booths for the council, and we went and visited with legislators there at the state capitol. We've also been able to receive some grants for our prescribed burn associations through our members. The latest one was through our Conservation Commission, who was able to secure about \$50,000 from the Fish and Wildlife Service of the state. That money was divided up three ways to three of the burn associations in the state to buy equipment and to pay for some training and other things for them. So that's a very good benefit that we can use and promote throughout our state.

We have also been involved in the Wildlife Expo that our Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has put on for the last four years. This has grown into a three-day event in the fall of each year and is held just north of Oklahoma City in Guthrie, Oklahoma, at the Lazy E Arena. It's a free-to-the-public activity where people, at no cost, can set up booths for education and outreach to the general public about wildlife in the state of Oklahoma, and we've been part of that. In the last two years there have been about 70,000 people that attend that Wildlife Expo, so it's a good outreach point that everybody can go to.

Our executive director for the Conservation Districts helped us write some legislation in 2007. It was called The Prescribed Fire Indemnity Fund, and he patterned it after a grain elevator indemnity fund that we have in Oklahoma. It's