

OTHER PRESCRIBED FIRE COUNCILS

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I'm not sure what your take on all of this is, but mine is that prescribed fire councils are here to stay, and there are a lot of new councils on the ground and a lot of work that's being done. And it was very helpful for me to hear even these brief updates.

There were a number of states that were not able to be here, mostly due to travel restrictions, but they did provide me with some brief updates. I know we're going to be pushing it to make it through the program, but I do feel obligated to pass these updates on to you.

Kansas was one state that submitted an update. Jeff Davidson is the primary contact whom I've been dealing with for a good while. But this update was provided by Tim Christian with the Kansas Grazing Lands Coalition. He is the current secretary. I had an opportunity to talk with him on the phone. They had their first annual meeting on September 15th, and it looks like they have seven people on their steering committee. Ted Alexander, the current chair, is a private rancher. Other steering committee members are the Kansas Forest Service, another private landowner, an NGO, and Kansas State University Extension. Tim said there were about 50 people in attendance at the annual meeting. He said, most notably, they had a staff member representing Congressman Jerry Morgan there, and he expressed the congressman's interest in and support of prescribed fire as a management tool for Kansas landowners. So they're really in the initial development stages, but they're interested in a lot of the same things that all of the other councils are interested in, such as education and fire safety and training. There is a heavy interest in the private side.

Louisiana has Latimore Smith, who many of you probably know. He works with The Nature Conservancy and he's a state representative, and he's a character, and I enjoy working with him. He fought hard to be here, but he was prevented from coming at the last minute. The most interesting thing about Louisiana, which I think is a unique case, is they actually were formed by a resolution from the Louisiana Senate in 2006, which gave them a mandate. That actually went down to the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry to create a prescribed fire council. So the long and short of it is, there was a senator who somehow heard about prescribed fire councils and wanted one in his state. He was a big outdoorsman and was enthusiastic, and so he was able to get that through. So they actually had a mandate to create the council. They had their first annual meeting in October of 2007. Their next meeting is January the 29th, just in a couple of weeks, and you can visit their Web site for more information, but he wanted to make sure that everyone was invited. They are still relatively new, and he states that they're still in the organizational mode. They have subcommittees, including education and outreach, government relations and liability, and capacity development and incentives, and those are the three primary work groups that they have.

Iowa is working on getting their council set up. They have been struggling with the question of whether or not to become a 501(c)(3). It's been brought up a few times. What is of concern to me is that becoming a 501(c)(3) nonprofit can in some cases prevent the state agency and federal agency partners from being able to serve in any leadership capacity. They really haven't gotten that situation resolved. Most of their work has been around training. They have a Prescribed Fire Academy that's coming up in April. It's a week long and pretty extensive, providing a training opportunity for up to 36 attendees and six squads. Each day they focus on a different aspect of burning.

Regarding Iowa, our friends Tom and Stan Buman from Agren in Iowa have done a good bit of work in the area of liability and insurance. I'm sure that most of you have seen the work that they've recently done. They're pretty innovative in creating kind of marketed or incentive-based programs to get land management on the ground. One of the things they've developed is a partnership with rural fire departments to train them to partner with landowners to get fire on the ground. They have a lot of the same or similar circumstances as other states, where you have private lands and those landowners really don't have the expertise to go out on that land and burn. And here are some of the comments that I found interesting. One of the small rural fire departments conducting prescribed burns said that they get to help with the fire from the beginning, as opposed to being called at inopportune times when it gets out of hand. They said it provides a great opportunity for their crew members to receive on-the-job training instead of learning during crisis management on escaped fires. This in and of itself improves safety during wildfires. They said it provides a great fundraiser for the departments since it allows them to purchase newer equipment. They said it beats flipping pancakes to raise funds, and the work has helped them to obtain grants to assist in purchasing new equipment. They said they get to help the landowners in the local communities and actually improve the ecology of their landscape in their own backyards. And lastly they said, and this is great, "We get to light fires. And who doesn't enjoy that?" So that's a successful program, and one that I think that other councils could get involved in, bringing in the rural fire departments.

For Arkansas, Larry Nance sent in a brief update. He really didn't give a whole lot of detail other than they burned about 300,000 acres last year and that their primary focus is training. They have fire academies and it looks like the U.S. Forest Service and TNC [The Nature Conservancy] have partnered together for some fire classes and for their state classes as well.

Washington State has a council. Some days when I talk to Dale Swedberg it sounds like he's the Lone Ranger up there. There's not a lot of support in that area, at least from speaking with him. But they were formed in 2006. They have about 120 members. Their steering committee meets once every quarter, four times a year, so that's a bit unusual,

but they're trying to keep the people motivated there. They have subcommittees in outreach, education, finances, planning and coordination, and also media events. He lists three primary challenges. One is capacity, relating to the inadequate resources to conduct prescribed burning. Public understanding, getting acceptance for fire and smoke. And then liability and liability insurance for prescribed burners. He says that they, too, have discussed the 501(c)(3) status but have abandoned that idea for fear of losing federal and state partners.

For Virginia, I did have a discussion with Fred Turck, the fire manager with Virginia DOF [Department of Forestry], and they are the most recent. They just became formalized in November, I think, or maybe the end of October, 2008, so

they're working on their first meeting. But they're excited about the possibilities of getting more fire in Virginia.

Texas is in somewhat of a unique situation in that they have, instead of a fire council, a legislature-appointed prescribed burn board. Now they're looking to expand that into a prescribed fire council concept, so we hope to see that develop further in 2009.

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