

# INTRODUCTION OF THE EIGHTH KOMAREK LECTURER

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Thank you, Ron [Masters].

A lot of people, especially ecologists, have questioned me about the theme of our conference, “The Future of Prescribed Fire: Public Awareness, Health, and Safety,” since it is a departure from our typically more ecological research-oriented themes. My support for the theme stems from my strong feeling that we are in a very unique juncture in the history of using prescribed fire in our country and elsewhere. We are all keenly aware of the increasing challenges facing prescribed fire, such as the changing demographics and culture to a more urban society that is less in touch and involved with management in the wildlands. We have an increasing wildland–urban interface, a very frightening litigious environment, not to mention the onset of global climate change. From my own standpoint as an ecologist, who is first and foremost concerned with research, it is very clear to me that if we lose prescribed fire, we are going to lose everything that we have worked so hard to preserve.

On the positive side, these challenges have inspired a very concerted effort to preserve prescribed burning. Just this past year, Mike Long, Director of the Division of Forestry, had the idea to hold the Florida and Georgia Fire Summit, which was at Tall Timbers, to get people together and chart the future of prescribed fire. As Ron mentioned, Prescribed Fire Councils throughout the U.S. and now in Canada are joining together in a Coalition of Prescribed Fire Councils that will have its first meeting as part of this conference. Prescribed fire practitioners in a series of workshops have been working to refine our message so it has more strength in the public eye. The defense provided by prescribed burned areas against the historic Georgia and Florida wildfires of 2007 has helped bring attention to the need for prescribed fire.

As Lane [Green] said, this past year was the 50th Anniversary of Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy. It has been a time to look back and see how far we have come with prescribed burning and where we should go from here. A clear conclusion from these various forums and discussions is that we need not only a greater effort, but also better information. So, in choosing the theme of this conference, it was my intention that we get the very latest and best scientific information, as well as our collective experience, to bring to bear on the challenges facing

prescribed burning. Making prescribed fire a viable tool for land management in the future will require making it compatible with our changing society. I want to thank everyone for being here and making a contribution to that effort, whether as a presenter or taking part in these discussions, by building networks with others who are interested in preserving the future of prescribed fire.

It is now my great privilege to introduce our Eighth Komarek Lecturer, Dennis Haddow. This series of keynote speeches is named after Edward V. Komarek, Sr., who was the initiator of this prescribed fire conference series back in 1962 and was the Director of Tall Timbers for many years. As Ron [Masters] said, there was virtually nothing positive published about prescribed fire at the time. Ed was a tremendous advocate for prescribed fire, called a “fire evangelist” by some, spreading the word about the need for fire in naturally fire-dependent ecosystems throughout the United States and the world.

The honor of being the Komarek Lecturer is given to those who we feel follow in the spirit of Ed Komarek in promoting science-based conservation that is prudent and practical with a vision for the use of prescribed fire into the future. Dennis Haddow certainly meets this description. Dennis has devoted over 40 years of his career to air quality issues related to wildland fire. He has been the National Smoke Management Program Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service since 2001. He has 21 years of experience working as the Forest Service Air Quality Specialist. He also worked as the Director of Enforcement for the Montana Air Quality Bureau, and did his time on an engine crew for the Bureau of Land Management. So he is certainly not just another air quality bureaucrat in the ivory tower. He knows the issues from the ground up to Washington and has been a leader in maximizing the benefits of prescribed burning while providing for the health and well-being of the public. I am happy to introduce Dennis Haddow.

*Citation:* Robertson, K.M. 2010. Introduction of the Eighth Komarek Lecturer. Page 5 in K.M. Robertson, K.E.M. Galley, and R.E. Masters (eds.). Proceedings of the 24th Tall Timbers Fire Ecology Conference: The Future of Prescribed Fire: Public Awareness, Health, and Safety. Tall Timbers Research Station, Tallahassee, Florida, USA.