

Wildfire Risk Can Be Reduced If Action Taken Now

Dangerous. That's the one word fire officials and rangeland management specialists use to describe the combination of heavy grass growth and dry conditions that exist over much of Texas.



“This year most of Texas has been blessed with abundant rainfall. However, with abundant rainfall has come large amounts of grass growth,” said Bob McCan of Victoria, president of the Texas Coalition of the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative.

“And because of the high fuel loads and the weather fluctuations, the serious situation is expected to remain through March, in spite of the occasional bouts of moisture” said Dr. Wayne Hanselka, Texas Cooperative Extension range specialist in Corpus Christi. “An inch of rain will not last long with high winds and low humidity’s.”

According to Kent Ferguson, state range management specialists for the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) in Temple, “Managing grass fuels is very important right now. Some things to be done include mowing road ditches, being careful with outdoor burning, being watchful of catalytic converters, plowing or blading fireguards, and using prescribed burning.”

If someone wants to do a prescribed burn, it is important to follow proper procedures Hanselka said. Laws and other prescribed burn information can be found at <http://www.tamu.edu/ticc/prevention.htm>.

“A group of interested persons met recently to begin addressing the issue of fire safety and the proper use of prescribed burning,” McCan said. “This alliance included private individuals, Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, Texas Cooperative Extension, Texas Forest Service, NRCS, Texas Ag Experiment Station, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Texas

Department of Agriculture, Texas Nature Conservancy and the Welder Wildlife Foundation. Our purpose is to make people aware of the good information that is available.”

There are many ways and techniques to provide fire protection as well as conduct a safe prescribed burn.

Dr. Butch Taylor, at a recent tour for the Edwards Plateau Prescribed Burn Association, offered this technique. “Ranchers and others wanting fire protection can install two parallel dozer lines, then burn between them under carefully chosen conditions. This creates a blackline. The distance between the lines can be about 100 feet for grass fuel, but should be at least 500 feet for volatile fuels or more sensitive areas. This not only provides a margin of safety from wildfire but allows a rancher to conduct a prescribed burn at the time and condition of their own choosing.”

Additional information about protecting against wildfires can be found through the Texas Forest Service at <http://txforestsERVICE.tamu.edu/>.