

Release

from the South Carolina Forestry Commission



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Tuesday, Feb. 29, 2017

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Governor proclaims March Prescribed Fire Awareness Month

Official designation brings attention to the many benefits of controlled burning

COLUMBIA—Gov. Henry McMaster has proclaimed March 2017 Prescribed Fire Awareness Month in South Carolina.

A coalition of state, federal and non-governmental land management organizations under the umbrella of the South Carolina Prescribed Fire Council requested the proclamation to raise awareness of the essential role that fire plays in both the stewardship of our natural resources and the protection of lives and property.

Prescribed, or controlled, burning is the skilled application of fire under planned weather and fuel conditions to achieve specific forest and land management objectives. Controlled burning is an ancient practice, notably used by Native Americans for crop management, insect and pest control, and hunting habitat improvement, among other purposes.

The practice continues today under the direction of land managers who understand the appropriate weather conditions, fuel loads and atmospheric conditions for conducting such burns. These carefully applied fires are an important tool to reduce wildfires, enhance wildlife habitat, and keep the nearly 13 million acres of forested land in South Carolina healthy and productive.

While prescribed burning cannot stop all wildfires, it is the best management tool available for preventing larger and more frequent outbreaks. "Prescribed burning is not only the most effective, economical protection against wildfires because it reduces accumulated fuels," said McMaster in his proclamation, "but it is also a key tool in managing and maintaining the ecological integrity of South Carolina's woodlands, grasslands, agricultural areas and wildlife habitats."

Darryl Jones, SCFC Forest Protection Chief, said about 500,000 acres are prescribed-burned every year in South Carolina – most of them on private land – but at least one million acres should be burned annually. "There are so many benefits of prescribed burning," said Jones. "Not only does it reduce the severity of wildfires, but it also recycles nutrients, stimulates germination of desirable plants, improves wildlife habitat and protects the aesthetic value of our forestlands."

"Prescribed fire is an essential management tool for land owners and land managers. No other management tool comes close to matching the effect of prescribed fire. Just one prescribed fire will enhance forest health, improve habitat for wildlife and reduce the risk of wildfires," said Tom Dooley, chair of the South Carolina Prescribed Fire Council. "With the support of local and state elected officials, such as Governor McMaster, The South Carolina Prescribed Fire Council will continue to encourage and grow the safe and effective use of prescribed fire across the state."



A Forestry Commission land manager conducts a prescribed burn on Harbison State Forest in Columbia in February 2017. The burn, one of several this winter, was performed to reduce the fuel load in the popular recreational spot.

