



The NC Sandhills Prescribed Burn Association (SPBA)

The NC Sandhills Prescribed Burn Association (SPBA) promotes and supports Longleaf pine ecosystem restoration in the North Carolina Sandhills through the use of prescribed fire (Rx fire), on private lands. One of the most endangered ecosystems in the United States, the Longleaf pine ecosystem is important for the economic, cultural, and environmental future of the Sandhills region.

Private landowners own more than half of the current Longleaf acreage in the United States¹, and privately held lands represent both the greatest challenge to and the greatest opportunity for restoring this valued ecosystem. Most private landowners have excluded the use of Rx fire on their land because of a number of valid concerns and risks, including: potential liability, lack of training or experience, not enough people to help, or lack of needed equipment. Additionally, private landowners do not feel they have enough burn windows or support of their neighbors and community concerning smoke from burning. Creation of a Prescribed Burn Association can help overcome these barriers.

Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs) Overview

A PBA is an organization that provides training, equipment, and educational programs to landowners and the general public to increase the effectiveness and safety of Rx fire on private lands. The goals of a PBA are to help individuals manage their own risks by ensuring appropriate preparations are in place before each burn. These preparations include assisting landowners with creating a burn plan, adequate fire breaks, equipment and ensuring the minimum number of people are present at each burn. PBAs have long been a popular in the Midwest, but are a new concept in the Southeast.

Landowners Interested in Forming a PBA

The North Carolina Sandhills Prescribed Burn Association (SPBA) conducted substantial community outreach through public meetings and surveys. We determined that NC Sandhills' private landowners are motivated to use Rx fire on their land and have a strong interest to work cooperatively to accomplish their management goals. The NC Sandhills PBA provides these motivated private landowners with peer-to-peer mentorship and training to gain the skills and confidence to move them from being interested in Rx fire to actually using it on their woodlands.



Organization

The NC SPBA is a grass-roots association lead by citizens, structured through a steering committee of committed landowners who use, or are ready to use, Rx fire. Relevant state and federal agencies, such as NC Cooperative Extension, NC State University Extension Forestry, Natural Resources Conservation Service, NC Forest Service, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, and local volunteer fire departments, are involved.

The NC SPBA is highly inclusive and welcomes all landowners and citizens who desire to learn more about managing Longleaf pine with Rx fire. Engaged landowners include people who have been doing their own burns for years, landowners who are new to the Rx fire community, and people who may employ contractors to burn their land, but want to be knowledgeable about the process. The National Wild Turkey Federation donated a burn trailer for the NC SPBA to assist landowners with burning. This reduces start-up costs and gives landowners inexpensive access to necessary tools.

Conclusion

Restoration of the Longleaf Pine ecosystem requires prescribed burns on privately owned lands. Building private landowners' capabilities to conduct their own prescribed burns is critical due to the lack of agency and contractor capacity, and the limited number of days available to burn. The NC SPBA is a precedent-setting tool that neighbors can use to help each other increase their comfort, capacity, and confidence to conduct prescribed burns. An increase in the number of private landowners who use Rx fire multiples local capacity to conduct burns. This ultimately contributes to America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative's (ALRI) overarching goals. Landowners involvement spreads the message that managing Longleaf pine, through prescribed fires, can reduce the risk of wildfires and improve forest habitats. This community-based approach serves as a model for other communities across the Southeast to engage private landowners in the restoration of Longleaf pine.