

Prescribed Burns in Marin: Understanding the Landscape of Wildfire

Prescribed fire has been in the news a lot recently with inspiring stories of areas reintroducing fire as a tool to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire while promoting ecological diversity. “Cultural burning” has been practiced by Indigenous people for centuries. Like medicine for the environment, a prescription of fire offers just the right dose to maintain productive use of the land and a healthy forest ecology.



Prescribed fire is a carefully orchestrated process that can include both pile burning and controlled burns. A controlled burn is a fire set to burn across the forest floor of an area prepared by a landmanager. Since much of Marin has a heavy fuel load from decades of no wildfires, it can be too difficult to use broadcast burning and keep the intensity of the fire low, especially when in close range to people’s homes. Here in Marin, pile burning plays a crucial role in areas where removing cut vegetation proves too challenging by other means. Marin fire departments take all of this into consideration so they can choose the correct application for the landscape that keeps risk low.

Learn more at firesafemarin.org

One of the biggest concerns surrounding prescribed fire is the issue of smoke. Smoke management plans are meticulously crafted to ensure burning occurs under optimal weather conditions, dispersing smoke away from populated areas. After all, when it comes to smoke, it's a "pay me now, or pay me later" situation—smoke during a wildfire poses a far greater hazard than that amount created by prescribed burns.

Did you know that frequent prescribed burns can actually help combat climate change? It's true! Studies have shown that compared to catastrophic wildfires, frequent prescribed burns sequester more carbon and release less into the atmosphere. Healthy forests with large trees help store and capture carbon keeping carbon levels in check. By using prescribed fire to manage the underbrush and lower the intensity of future fires, these forests can keep helping us face climate change- thank you forests!

Prescribed fire is our ally in protecting our communities and our fire officials are making sure they are using the right kind of fire for our landscape. Sign up for [Nixel Alerts](#) so you will be informed if there is a prescribed burn happening near you.