TFA/Burn Council Statement - Texas Prescribed Burn Manager Insurance Program

Fire is not a new tool for managing the Texas landscape. For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples used fire intentionally to shape vegetation, improve wildlife habitat, aid hunting, and maintain the landscapes on which they depended. Fire, along with naturally occurring ignitions, helped shape many of the forests, prairies, and rangelands we have the privilege of managing and enjoying today.

Centuries later, Aldo Leopold famously recognized the “axe, plow, cow, fire, and gun” among the basic tools available to the land manager. Of those five, there is something uniquely timeless about fire. The axe and plow have given way to modern machinery, livestock have been shaped by generations of selective breeding, and firearms bear little resemblance to those of Leopold’s time. Fire, however, remains fundamentally the same ancient tool. One that humans have learned to harness and carry forward through generations. While our understanding and application of it has continued to evolve, fire remains one of the most effective tools available for managing forests, rangelands, wildlife habitat, and wildfire risk.

Yet despite its long history and proven value, putting good fire on the ground today is not easy. For years, access to affordable and available liability insurance has been one of the significant challenges facing Certified and Insured Prescribed Burn Managers (CIPBMs) and, ultimately, our ability to continue expanding the responsible use of prescribed fire in Texas.

The launch of the Texas Prescribed Burn Manager Insurance Program is an exciting and important step forward for prescribed fire in Texas. This program is the result of years of discussion, collaboration and hard work by many people within the prescribed fire community and at the state level. The amount of time and effort invested by so many to bring this concept to reality should not go unrecognized. On behalf of TFA's Texas Burn Managers Council, I want to congratulate Texas A&M Forest Service and everyone who played a role in making this program possible.

The program was established in response to House Bill 2563, authored by Rep. Trent Ashby and sponsored in the Senate by Sen. Lois Kolkhorst during the 89th Texas Legislature. HB 2563 created a self-insurance pool administered by Texas A&M Forest Service to provide prescribed burn liability coverage for participating Texas CIPBMs. The program is designed not only to provide another option for liability protection, but to promote responsible burning practices and reduce some of the financial risk associated with putting prescribed fire on the ground. More information on eligibility, coverage, costs and program requirements can be found through the Texas A&M Forest Service's Texas Prescribed Burn Manager Insurance Program webpage.

Prescribed fire is critical to managing Texas forests, rangelands and wildlife habitat while also reducing hazardous fuels and the risk of damaging wildfires. We need qualified burn managers willing and able to do this work. Having this access to liability coverage is a key part in expanding the use of prescribed fire across Texas. I encourage current and prospective burn managers to learn more about the new program and determine whether it may be a good fit for their operations. More good fire on the ground is good for Texas and this program represents another tool to help us accomplish that goal.

In the words of Uncle Ben, “With great power comes great responsibility.” Having accessible burn insurance helps too.

Thanks,

Joe Pfluger, ACF

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