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Contact: Elishia Ballentine (334) 315-8019
elishia.ballentine@forestry.alabama.gov

Governor Proclaims March 2023 'Prescribed Fire Awareness' Month

Official designation brings attention to the many benefits of prescribed burning

MONTGOMERY — Gov. Kay Ivey has proclaimed March 2023 'Prescribed Fire Awareness' Month in the state of Alabama. A coalition of state, federal, and private organizations under the umbrella of the Alabama 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 burning is the skilled application of fire under planned weather and fuel conditions to achieve specific forest and land management objectives. A traditional land management tool that is a part of Alabama's heritage and culture, this ancient practice was 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 23 million acres of forested land in Alabama 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, natural, and economical protection against wildfires because it reduces accumulated fuels," said Gov. Ivey in her proclamation, "but it is also a critical tool in managing and maintaining the ecological integrity of Alabama's woodlands, grasslands, and wildlife habitats."

Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) Forest Protection Chief John Goff said prescribed burning is conducted on approximately one million acres in Alabama every year – most of them on private land – but that number represents only one quarter of the acreage that should be burned annually. "Every prescribed burn accomplishes multiple benefits," said Goff. "Most of the woodlands in Alabama are adapted to fire and are burned regularly, historically speaking. When responsible land managers use prescribed fire as a tool under the correct weather and fuel conditions, we can maintain wildlife habitat and forest health while also reducing the severity of wildfires."

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Caption: Watching as Gov. Kay Ivey signs the proclamation are (L to R): Balsie Butler, Asst. Director, AFC Forest Protection Division; Mark Tuggle, Chief of Staff, Alabama House of Representatives; Kyle Lybarger, Native Habitat Project; John Goff, Director, AFC Forest Protection Division; John McGuire, Director, Private Lands Prescribed Fire Initiative, Tall Timbers Research Station & Land Conservancy; Marti Davis, Administrative Assistant, AFC Forest Protection Division; Rick Oates, State Forester; and Dan Chappell, Asst. Director, AFC Forest Management Division. **Photo courtesy of Governor's Office**