



Prescribed Fire Training Center: Grooming Future Fire Leaders

FLORIDA - Nearly a decade ago, fire managers recognized that the demand for highly trained prescribed fire professionals was on the rise. Because fire knowledge, fire leadership, and field skills are dynamic things, there needed to be one place where fire professionals could build on what they already knew. That's when the National Interagency Prescribed Fire Training Center was born.

The Center opened in Tallahassee, Florida in 1998. Fittingly, it is located in Southeast, the heart of where most prescribed fire is conducted in the United States. The Center caters to fire professionals from federal agencies, Tribes, private conservation organizations, contractors and communities. So far, 758 fire professionals from 46 states and 10 foreign countries have received training at the Center. They leave having improved their skills in using prescribed fire to reduce hazardous fuels, and meet National Fire Plan and natural resource management objectives, especially in the wildland urban interface.

Other agencies and land managers in the Southeast benefit from the Center's training, as burn teams are assembled and assigned prescribed fire projects on lands managed by federal, state, local and private entities. To date, the teams have conducted 1,135 of these burns, totaling nearly a half-million acres. The large geographic area increases the likelihood of weather and fuel conditions being suitable for a prescribed burn on any given day. Such collaboration benefits students and land managers, with each person learning from the other's perspective.

The Center's director, Phil Weston, is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employee, whose current staff includes fire professionals from the U.S.D.A. Forest Service and National Park Service. The Center is guided by an interagency steering committee with representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, National Association of State Foresters, The Nature Conservancy and Tallahassee Community College. Training teams comprise a variety of individuals from varying agencies, and there are even workshops for high-level administrators to help them understand their agency's fire program.

The Center sends its students home with this concept: more prescribed fire means fewer wildfires. It's a lesson taught over and over on public lands where previously burned

areas help stop wildfires. Students leave the Center with “10 Take Home Messages,” reminders of the successes they’ve had that could apply to their home units. In pursuit of their career paths, students also can earn five hours of college credit through the Center and Tallahassee Community College, which can create opportunities for firefighters to step up to professional-series jobs.

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