



Prescribed Fire Breaks and Fuels Reduction

Illinois 2006

Since European settlement, the “natural” fires that created and sustained a rich mosaic of natural communities in Illinois have been virtually eliminated. The surviving remnants are overgrown with woody plants and invasive brush that shade the ground layer flora, degrading the remaining native plants, many of which have become globally rare. The build up of fuels in natural areas near urban, suburban, and rural communities is also an important factor in the state’s designation of 23 counties in the wildland-urban interface as moderate to high risk.

Mechanical control of invasive brush and woody trees will reduce fire risk and help native vegetation to thrive by opening the canopy and allowing sunlight to reach the ground. The removal of encroaching woody plants from woodlands, bottomland forests, savannas, prairies, and wetlands throughout the state will reduce fuels in these areas and support safe, controlled prescribed burns.

Using National Fire Plan funds, The Nature Conservancy has developed a 50/50 cost share program to implement fuels reduction projects and to plan for subsequent prescribed burns. The funding provides for a contract crew to work with landowners-private, state, park districts and The Nature Conservancy-to construct fire breaks and mechanically remove understory vegetation. Written agreements between The Nature Conservancy and the landowners identify the matching requirements and responsibilities of each party. The Nature Conservancy prioritizes and manages the work at the various project areas. Partners in this project have included the Illinois Department of Natural Resources; Girl Scout Camp McCormick; Cook, Kane, Champaign and Will County Forest Preserve Districts; Rockford, Urbana, Rochelle, and Dixon Park Districts; Macon County, McHenry County, and Boone County Conservation Districts; the ParkLands Foundation; and the Natural Lands Institute.

Mechanical treatments have been completed on 60 acres. Fire breaks and fuels reduction treatments have been completed on 49 sites covering 817 acres throughout Illinois. The fuels reduction projects, have benefited 34 Illinois communities within the wildland-urban interface.



Prescribed fire after mechanical treatment in Pine Rock Nature Preserve, photo courtesy The Nature Conservancy

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