

Wildland Fire Action Guide

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Fire is, and always has been, a natural occurrence in the wildland. Kansas grasslands developed with fire. Both lightning and human-caused fires have shaped the grassland ecosystem for thousands of years. Fire is an important part of maintaining healthy, diverse rangelands in Kansas. Where precipitation is greater, the amount of biomass (fuel) is also greater, and fires need to occur more often to control fuel loads and remove undesirable vegetation. It is not a question of if, but when, the next major wildland fire will occur. Through advance planning, understanding, and preparation, we can all be partners in the wildland fire solution.

Two types of fires are prevalent in Kansas: prescribed fires and wildfires. Prescribed fires are human-caused, intentional fires to achieve ecosystem management goals such as higher quality forage, excellent grassland bird habitat, and reduced fuel loads. A prescribed fire is carefully planned and occurs only when weather conditions, fuel loads, crew staffing, firebreak preparation, and equipment all fall within pre-determined guidelines (the “prescription”). A wildfire can occur at any time, often in the most adverse weather conditions for controlling the fire.

Grasslands are inherently prone to fire, and wildfires should be expected. Eastern red cedar, a native but formerly localized tree, has spread across the grasslands, producing fires that are more difficult to control.

Fire protection in Kansas is largely provided by volunteer fire departments, with mostly part-time employees who must take time off work to fight fires. During busy fire seasons, the work load can become very heavy for so few people. As the rural population of Kansas ages, there are fewer people to staff the fire departments. When a large fire occurs, fire departments in adjoining districts and counties will be called in, increasing the burden across a larger area and leaving few resources in the home location.

Grass fires move very quickly compared to forest fires. Slight changes in humidity are nearly instantaneously reflected in fire behavior: lower humidity causes more erratic and intense fire behavior.

It is important that communities and individuals be prepared for rapidly moving wildfires. Plans for evacuation of people and livestock need to be thought out and ready to implement. Homes can be constructed and maintained with the possibility of wildfire in mind. Studies show that as many as 80 percent of the homes lost to wildland fires could have been saved if their owners had followed simple fire safe practices. In addition, wildland fire related deaths occur because people wait too long to leave their homes. Prescribed fires can be used to reduce fuel loads, especially around critical buildings and other infrastructure. Red cedar can be controlled to reduce embers that start new fire locations during a wildfire.

Landowners can attend burn workshops which are held around the state each year to improve their burning skills. Groups of landowners can form Burn Associations to help each

other burn their property safely and share equipment and crew. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment conducts outreach to reduce air quality problems caused by smoke.

By accepting that they live in a fire-prone environment, Kansans can take action to protect themselves and their possessions. "Good" fire can be used to reduce wildfires while maintaining the iconic, beautiful prairies all around us. Working together, we can live with fire.

The Ready, Set, Go (RSG)! Program works in collaboration with existing wildland fire public education efforts.

Visit <https://www.wildlandfirersg.org/Portals/18/Resources/States/KS/Kansas%20Guide.pdf> to learn about becoming prepared. The tips in the guide are designed to help create awareness and a safer environment for you, your family, and firefighters. For more information please contact the local K-State Research & Extension Office.