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RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

Have You Burned Yet?

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It's mid-April, and you still have not been able to burn your property. You have decided that you are going to have to wait until next year because prescribed fire is supposed to be used in January, February, or March. You don't have any other choices, right?

You may be surprised to find out burn season isn't over. Most landowners familiar with prescribed fire are used to dormant/cool season burns that usually take place between January and March. However, burns conducted during the growing season may be possible depending on site conditions and land-use goals. Arguably, growing season fires better represent the "lightning season" fire pattern to which some native species originally adapted. In fact, your property may benefit most from a growing season burn.

There are several reasons a growing season burn may be right for your property: 1. Your property is suffering from woody encroachment; 2. You've burned your property consistently during the dormant season, but it hasn't been effective; 3. You're interested in diversifying the habitats on your property; and, 4. Another year of vegetative growth will make next year's burn extremely difficult

or much less effective. Each of these reasons for growing season burns will be discussed in more detail.

Growing season burns are best at controlling woody encroachment in fire dependent habitats. As the name implies, trees are dormant during the dormant season. This means that they are not actively growing and have stored most of their energy in their roots. A dormant season fire may "top-kill" the tree by burning the above ground portions, but the tree is likely to begin growing again in the Spring. However, a tree is actively investing its energy into the above ground portions (i.e., trunk, limbs, and leaves) during the growing season. When trees are burned during the growing season, they lose more energy and are more likely to die from the stress.

You have a well-established burn regime in which you are a stickler for making sure that your property is burned at the same time every year it is due. However, you aren't getting the results you expected. Obviously, something needs to change. Burn frequency is generally more important than burn season; so, increasing the frequency is often a valid option. However, increasing burn frequency also increases your investment in time, energy, and



This landowner is burning in mid-April in order to control woody encroachment and improve habitat for bobwhite quail.

The immediate effects of a growing season burn are obvious, but burning with clear objectives under a proper prescription will insure the long-term effects are also seen.

money. Another potential valid option is doing a growing season burn. It is unlikely that all of your future burns need to be during the growing season. Conducting your next burn during the growing season and as needed after that will yield different results than staying with your established dormant season burn regime.

Once again, you may have a well-established burn regime for your property. You are doing everything right and are well pleased with the results to this point. However, you are also interested in diversifying the habitats and plant species on your property. A way to change the species composition in an area is to change the season in which it is burned. Different plants begin growing at different times of the year and respond differently to fire. Fire also stimulates the germination of some seeds, possibly allowing plants that you didn't even know were in the seedbank to grow.

If your property has reached the point where another year of vegetative growth will be very detrimental to your management goals, it is likely woody encroachment is a major problem. Thus, a growing season burn is necessary for multiple reasons. You may also be managing for a specific habitat type (e.g., nesting habitat) that requires regular maintenance to avoid degradation. You had plans and good intentions to burn your property for the last year or two, but weather and life got in the way. You just weren't able to do it. However, the burn window for the year isn't closed. A growing season burn may ensure that you do not permanently lose the habitat or make it very difficult or costly to recover. The habitat value of that particular site is likely very low due to the lack of fire, and it has reached the point where it is desperate for management.

These are just some common reasons why a growing season burn may be beneficial to your property and habitat management. There may be others specific to your property. There are also reasons why a



The formerly green leaves of the actively growing trees are withered and brown post burn causing severe stress and loss of energy.

growing season burn may not be suitable for you and your property. Likewise, not all growing season burns are equal, and you may need to adjust the timing of your growing season burn for best results.

The main thing to keep in mind when planning and conducting a prescribed fire is that it should be done with a specific purpose and objective. The prescription should be made to cure your property of its ailments. Do not get locked into a specific burn regime if it is no longer meeting your habitat management objectives. A growing season burn may be the change your property needs.

If you need help determining whether a growing season burn or any other habitat management is right for your property, contact your Regional AWF Resource Stewardship Biologist. You may also want to join AWF's Landowner Network by downloading our free app at <https://www.alabamawildlife.org/landowner-network/>. 📱