Prescribed fire on CA’s private lands: Myths, realities, and opportunities

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Today’s presentation

• Options for private lands burning
• Debunking prescribed fire myths
• Humboldt County Prescribed Burn Association
Who’s using Rx fire in northern CA?

- Total of ~50,000 acres/year in northern CA
- Federal agencies = 91% of burning*
- Very little private lands burning!

*From Quinn-Davidson and Varner 2012
CAL FIRE VMP acres per year
Options for private lands burning

Pros
- Liability covered by CAL FIRE
- Low cost for landowner
- Experienced crews/resources
- Permits/air quality covered

Cons
- Limited agency capacity
- Planning time/environmental compliance
- Not guaranteed
Options for private lands burning

**Pros**
- Contractor provides insurance
- Landowner can set expectations and timeframes
- Experienced crews/resources
- Permits/air quality covered
- Environmental compliance

**Cons**
- Cost!!
Options for private lands burning

**Do it yourself**

**Pros**
- You’re in charge—do it when and how you want
- Low cost
- Environmental compliance

**Cons**
- Liability
- Manpower/resources
- Permits/air quality
Options for private lands burning

**Pros**
- You’re in charge—do it when and how you want
- Low cost—volunteer based
- Environmental compliance
- Equipment/labor pooled through PBA
- PBA can apply for grants/funding
- Every burn is a training opportunity

**Cons**
- Liability (though you can hire a burn boss with insurance)
- Permits/air quality
- Someone has to coordinate
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Cost to landowner</th>
<th>Success rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VMP</td>
<td>Very little...cost of lunch for crews, equipment time for prep</td>
<td>Limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private contractor</td>
<td>$10-20k per day?</td>
<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do it yourself</td>
<td>Equipment time/labor</td>
<td>High? (small scale only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBA</td>
<td>Equipment time/labor Optional: Burn plan + burn boss ($1.5-2k)</td>
<td>High</td>
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“Reasons” why Rx fire isn’t a viable option in California

- Liability
- Permits
- Population issues/public acceptance
- Topography/fuels
- Etc., etc.
Liability: “It’s just too risky”

- Simple negligence law
- Fire often covered in farm insurance policies
- There are good ways to mitigate liability:
  - hire burn boss
  - include neighbors in project planning
  - start with small, simple units
Permits: “Too much red tape”

• Only **two permits** needed for Rx fire:
  • Year round: air quality permit and smoke management plan (exemptions available for no-burn days)
  • During fire season (typically ~May 1-Oct. 31): CAL FIRE permit required
Population: “Too many people”

• California has more open space and wildlands than many areas where more burning happens (SE)
• Public opinion more limiting for managers in other regions of the US (Cleaves et al. 2001 vs. Quinn-Davidson & Varner 2012)
• Public support for Rx fire is high. Studies consistently show >80-90% approval rates across the country (McCaffrey et al. 2015)
Topography/fuels: “California is too complex—it’s not like Nebraska or Texas”

- Many of the areas that need fire on private lands in California are low complexity—grasslands, woodlands
- Management objectives in CA are similar to other states where they do more burning
Woody encroachment is everywhere
Interested landowners, fire departments, and volunteers are everywhere.
Everyone has a role!
We need to be open to learning from other regions that have it figured out.
Bringing the PBA model to CA
Hunt Burn: 6/29/17

- Goals: provide training and reduce invasive grass cover (medusahead)
- 18 acres, 25 volunteers, 2 VFD engines
Mazeppa Burn: 10/31/17

- Goals: provide training and restore coastal rangelands (reduce *Baccharis* cover)
- 140 acres, 23 volunteers, 6 fire departments
VFD support was amazing!
Provided a great training opportunity
Chalk Mt. Burn: 12/14/17

- Goals: provide training and maintain oak woodland restoration area
- 20 acres, 12 volunteers, 1 VFD engine
Burn trailer is here!!

- California Deer Association donated $24k to kick off Rx burning in Humboldt County with the purchase of a burn trailer and 3 slip-in units.
- Redwood National Park also donated used hand-tools, hose, and other items.
Humboldt County Prescribed Burn Association

- Hosted first official Humboldt County Prescribed Burn Association meeting on March 9
- Board of Directors & by-laws established
Humboldt County Prescribed Burn Association

- Building list of projects and ranking strategy
  - 2200 acres of projects identified
  - Must participate in other burns to get your project on the list
- Burns planned for this spring and fall—join us!
Questions?

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