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Bringing Fire Back to the Land

Fire once occurred regularly across the Sandhills and southeastern North Carolina. These low-intensity fires burned every few years, fueled by grass and pine straw. They kept the forest open, allowing sunlight to penetrate to its floor and reducing buildup of dangerous fuel. A century ago, people’s attitude toward fire changed. All fires were suppressed, altering the landscape, allowing fuels to accumulate and putting people and communities in jeopardy. Today, The Nature Conservancy and other land managers are bringing fire back to the land.



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For more information:

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Controlled Burning for Healthy Ecosystems

Most oak and pine forests are fire-dependent habitats. Without fire, many native plants and animals will disappear. If you look at a list of endangered or threatened plants in the Sandhills and southeastern North Carolina, at least half of them have had their habitats destroyed or reduced by fire suppression.

Longleaf pines thrive in the open. As fires were suppressed and hardwoods encroached on their habitat, longleaf pine disappeared. Healthy longleaf pine forest is essential for the survival of many species, including the red-cockaded woodpecker, which makes

its home in living longleaf pines.

Eastern North Carolina is home to a number of other amazing species that need fire to thrive. Carnivorous plants such as Venus flytraps and pitcher plants need sunlight to grow; overgrowth filters out sunlight, choking off these plants as well as a host of other incredible wildflowers and vegetation that produce food for birds and insects.

Controlled Burning is a Science

The Nature Conservancy has an extensive fire program, staffed with experts who know and understand fire. Controlled burn participants receive extensive training to ensure that they are careful to protect surrounding communities, themselves and the land they are working to restore. All controlled



burns are conducted under the guidance of a fire boss, who has years of experience and training.

Burns are carefully planned. Fire experts do a great deal of work before the first match is lit. First they create a burn plan, which includes smoke and fire control, allowable weather, equipment and personnel needs. The plan also details how the ecosystem will benefit from fire.

Preparation for a controlled burn also includes creating firebreaks, which are wide corridors of cleared vegetation around the burn area. Firebreaks ensure that fire doesn't leave the burn area.

No fire is lit until our experts are convinced that the conditions are right to ensure that our goals of community safety and environmental restoration are met. After the fire, crews stay on the scene to ensure that the fire is out.

It is The Nature Conservancy's goal to restore the landscape, but the safety of our neighbors and fire crew is always our number one priority.

Controlled Burning for Safe Communities

Overgrowth and shrubs fuel damaging wildfires that threaten communities and endanger firefighters. Smoke from wildfires is also hard to control and likely to affect people in nearby communities. Controlled burns reduce the chance of large out-of-control fires and their damaging effects on people and places.