U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

BLM New Mexico

Prescribed Fire

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Why prescribed fires?

Over the past 20 years, a rising number of large and destructive wildfires have threatened lives, property, and infrastructure. Forest or woodland thinning and the safe and effective use of prescribed fire, often in conjunction, are essential tools for reducing wildfire risks and creating resilient fire-adapted landscapes. Fuels management, the strategic treatment of grasses, shrubs, and trees to restore and maintain ecosystems and limit the negative impacts of wildfires, can save lives, property, and natural resources.

A vast body of research over the past 30 years clearly shows that prescribed fire is a very effective treatment for reducing the severity of subsequent wildfires within the treatment areas. Often, mechanical treatments such as thinning and mowing of vegetation are required prior to the use of prescribed fire to meet overall objectives; however, follow-up of treatments with prescribed fire significantly enhance the overall effectiveness of treatments by reducing wildfire intensity. This reduced wildfire intensity allows firefighters to engage wildfires more safely and effectively.

Wildland fire agencies use cutting-edge technology to create prescribed fire plans. They monitor key factors such as weather and fuel moisture leading up to and on the day of a prescribed burn so decision makers are engaged in real-time to determine whether a prescribed burn should be implemented on any given day.

Our managers carefully develop burn plans for implementation of each prescribed fire to ensure they will meet land management objectives and that fire can be safely and effectively managed.

In light of recent escaped prescribed burns during the 2022 fire season in New Mexico, the BLM is taking additional precautions this year, including careful review of all prescribed burn plans to ensure they are specifically tailored to the current conditions of the project location, use of the latest science for modelling potential fire behavior to better inform prescribed fire managers on necessary contingency resources to quickly contain any fire that might occur outside the planned burn area, and additional requirements for Management Officials to provide oversight before, during and after prescribed burns are implemented.

Scientific data has shown that strategically placed prescribed fire and mechanical treatments are essential to reducing forest and rangeland fuels and lowering catastrophic wildfire risks, thus allowing for future fires to safely play a natural role on the landscape.

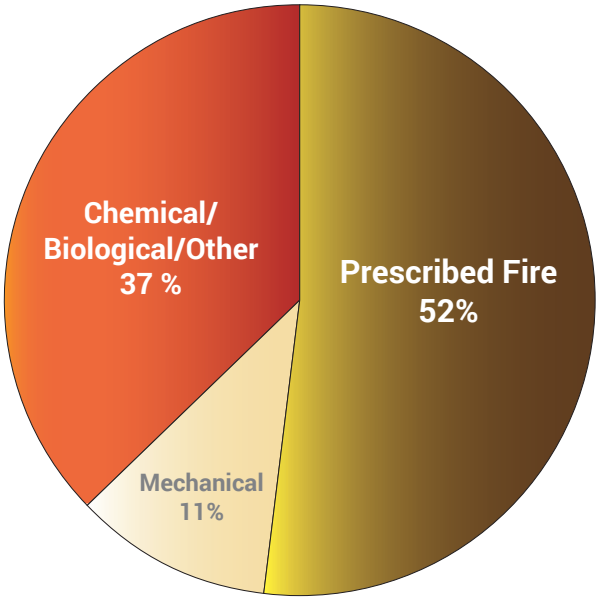
Prescribed fire is one of the most efficient ways of reducing wildfire risk. Regularly conducting prescribed fires reduces the buildup of flammable vegetation and overgrowth.

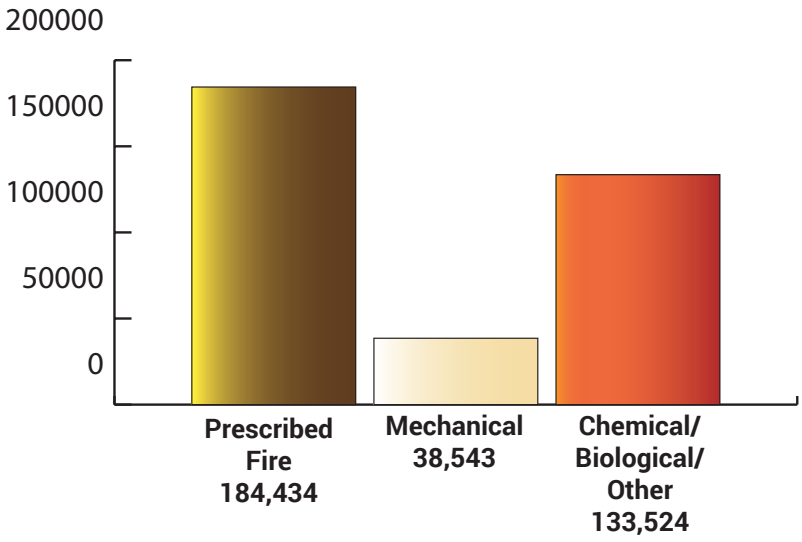
When wildfires burn in areas that have been treated with a prescribed burn, they are easier to control and less destructive.

Firefighters and land managers reduce hazardous fuels through prescribed fire, mechanical thinning, biological treatments, and chemical spraying to reduce vegetation.

Active grazing programs are also used to target areas for fuels. These proactive management tools help protect communities, watersheds, infrastructure, recreational improvements, and threatened/endangered species from future high-intensity wildfires.

BLM New Mexico Fuels Program Acres Treated (2013-2022)





Total: 356,501

10-Year Average: 35,650

Our prescribed fire and fire use treatments compose more than 50% of all treated acres. Nationally, this figure is about 25%. These include:

Managed Wildfire Fires that are ignited naturally, usually by lightning, in remote areas that don't pose a risk to life and property. These fires are actively managed to ensure they provide desired effects in specific areas and are kept away from other areas where their impacts may be less desirable.

Pile Burning A prescribed fire that involves burning vegetation that has been piled during a thinning treatment.

Broadcast Burning A prescribed fire where a specified area is burned; i.e., grasslands, shrublands, and oak woodlands for habitat restoration, fuels reduction and ecological restoration.

Fuel Reduction Removal or reduction of overgrown vegetation using prescribed fire, tree thinning, pruning, chipping, and roadway clearance, among others. The purpose is to reduce and rearrange the vegetation, creating breaks in fuel continuity that changes fire behavior, reduces negative ecosystem impacts and enables fire fighters to better protect communities.

Jackpot Burning A modified form of underburn or broadcast burn where the target fuels to be ignited are the concentrations (or jackpots) of vegetative fuel. The result is a mosaic burn pattern.

For all prescribed burns, we conduct outreach as well as coordinate with the local community, landowners, and permittees. Additionally, we keep the media, communities, and our partners well-informed through a combination of press releases, social media, phone calls, emails, and face-to-face interaction to ensure that key individuals and organizations are aware of these projects and understand where and when they will take place.

In New Mexico, fire has shaped the landscape for thousands of years. Strong partnerships and cooperation with other Federal agencies, Tribes, the New Mexico State Land Office, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, New Mexico Forestry, conservation districts, local cooperators, and landowners have facilitated a strong prescribed fire program.

Specific vegetation types, historical land uses, and current weather/drought conditions dictate the amount and frequency of prescribed fire that can, or should be, used to manage lands.

Under historical fire cycles, including Native American uses of fire, large areas frequently burned every few years.

Each prescribed fire is tailored to a specific area and based on land management objectives. In many of these areas, mechanical treatments must often be completed before prescribed fire can be implemented.

While prescribed fire is a very effective fuels reduction tool, it is not always appropriate for all landscapes. Some landscapes have invasive plant species that respond very favorably to being burned thus greatly increasing the spatial coverage of those invasive species.

The use of prescribed fire on some lands may not be compatible with some land use designations or may result in unacceptable risks to key resources.

Although we primarily conduct prescribed burns throughout Fall and Spring, we may conduct them during other times of the year when weather and fuel conditions are within predetermined parameters and when necessary staff and equipment are available.

These efforts support the goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, which emphasizes an “all-hands, all-lands” approach to managing wildland fire through community engagement and partnerships.

Learn more at forestsandrangelands.gov

For more information, visit NMFireInfo.com or follow them on social media at https://twitter.com/NMFireInfo or at https://www.facebook.com/nmfireinfo