



Fast Facts

Georgia is blessed with 24.2 million acres of timberland, which consists of 45% pines, 42% hardwoods, 12% oak/pine, and 1% non-stocked, according to the Georgia Forestry Commission.

Timber is the highest valued vegetative crop in Georgia. Georgia's forest resources have a total direct economic impact of \$16.1 billion, according to a 2006 Georgia Tech Economic Development Institute report.

The same report shows that forestry directly creates 67,694 jobs statewide and supports a total of 154,147 jobs.

As of September 2008, 157 counties in Georgia have passed a resolution supporting prescribed fire.

For More Information:
Georgia Prescribed Fire Council

Tall Timbers Research Station &
Land Conservancy,
Lane Green

Georgia Wildlife Federation,
Glenn Dowling

Protect the Practice of Prescribed Fire

What's at Stake?

Forest lands constitute significant economic, biological and aesthetic resources of statewide importance. Frequent fires, set by lightning strikes and Native Americans, have shaped Georgia's ecosystems for thousands of years.

Our forest ecosystems evolved with fire and continue to need the strategic application of fire that mimics this natural cycle. The plants and animals of the pine woods are accustomed to frequent fires and depend on these fires for their survival. Fire is as natural as sunshine, rain and wind in many plant communities including upland pine, pine flatwoods, marshes and wet prairies. Fire also benefits many of the rare animal species in our state that are declining. Some of these declines are caused almost totally by fire exclusion. Frequent fires prevent the build-up of flammable fuels in the forest that set the stage for destructive wildfires when ignition does occur.

Specific benefits of prescribed fire include:

- Maintains healthy forests and scenic views
- Reduces the risk of destructive wildfires
- Perpetuates fire-dependent plants and animals and their habitats
- Controls tree diseases and insects
- Prepares sites for both natural and artificial forest regeneration

Challenges

Smoke from prescribed fires is a sign that certain lands are being cared for properly, but many Georgians, especially those that live in urban areas, may not be familiar with the benefits of prescribed fire. Great care is taken by prescribed fire managers to minimize any temporary inconveniences created by smoke. Smoke management plans for prescribed burns are designed so that smoke-sensitive areas like roads and residences, etc. are not negatively affected by the burn.

Smoke from prescribed fires does not contribute appreciably to air quality issues since the practice typically avoids times of stagnant summer air. However, uncontrolled wildfires usually occur during the summer when there is already a bad urban air quality problem. We can reduce the risk of wildfires and the resulting smoke or air quality problems with well-timed prescribed fires. No other tool can so effectively remove the hazardous buildup of woodland fuels.

Further, some Georgians may not realize that prescribed burning is carried out by experienced, trained, and certified land managers on public and private lands throughout Georgia. These professionals assess forest conditions, determine the type of fire needed, and then write a "prescription" for the application of fire. Prescribed burns are permitted by the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) District Offices depending upon predicted weather conditions and safety measures to be used.

Next Steps

Forest owners, farmers and hunters have used prescribed burning for generations. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has determined that only a certain amount of particle pollution can be emitted within a particular airshed. It is the responsibility of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) to ensure these standards are met in order to protect public health. As new sources of pollution that emit particulates and other air pollution into the air are located in areas where prescribed burning is widely used, the practice of prescribed burning may be threatened.