

Texas A&M Forest Service promotes prescribed fire benefits through grants for landowners

Texas A&M Forest Service awarded 81 recipients grants to conduct prescribed burns this year. For the 2022 fiscal year, the agency has approved \$522,950 in grant funds to private landowners in Texas with a goal to treat 18,250 acres.

Texas is a local government state and 95% private property-owned. This means the management of our state's lands, trees and forests - as well as the benefits they provide - rests in the hands of thousands of Texans. Texas A&M Forest Service builds the capacity of landowners by providing grants, including prescribed fire grants, to help them manage their lands.

Prescribed fire is a strategic land management tool that uses low-intensity fire on a specific area of land to achieve set goals. More than any other type of land management tool, prescribed fire is the most efficient and effective for decreasing the risk of catastrophic wildfire by reducing hazardous fuels.

"Over time, leaves, twigs and understory brush build up in our landscape and increases wildfire risk," said Andy McCrady, Texas A&M Forest Service Fuels Program Coordinator. "By conducting prescribed fire, you're removing these hazardous fuels from the landscape in a safe and controlled manner."

Beyond protecting communities from destructive wildfires, prescribed fire creates resilient landscapes; encourages the growth of native species; improves soil health; creates open forest conditions that allow wildlife to travel and forage more easily; minimizes the spread of pests, insects and diseases; and gives firefighters a safe place to work when wildfires do occur.

"Before Texas was fully settled, wildfires occurred in the natural landscape frequently, and our ecosystem actually relied on wildfires to remove the understory of forests and other areas," said McCrady. "That's why it is so important to treat our land with prescribed burns, to help restore this normal, natural and essential process for the land."

According to Texas A&M Forest Service surveys, an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 acres are treated with prescribed fire in the state each year. Of those, Texas A&M Forest Service provides grant funding to an average of 11,650 acres annually.

With cost being a limiting factor for many landowners when it comes to managing their land, these grants allow reimbursement to landowners up to \$30 per treated acre. This can be significant support to landowners as many prescribed burning contractors cost between \$25 and \$35 per acre. Texas A&M Forest Service offers four grants to landowners

to complete prescribed fires on private lands across the state, each with their own unique goals. For residents in the Panhandle and West Texas, the State Fire Assistance for Mitigation - Plains Prescribed Fire grant is available. The remaining available grants focus on East and Central Texas and include the Community Protection Program grant, State Fire Assistance for Mitigation - Central and East Texas grant and Neches River and Cypress Basin Watershed Restoration Program - Prescribed Fire grant.

Depending on the grant, applicants must submit their application in July or September and are notified of award money by late December. Once contracts are signed and burn letters are given, the burns are typically conducted from January through March.

Prescribed fire is not without its risks, so the grants are awarded with many requirements and restrictions.

"While Texas A&M Forest Service has a robust public land prescribed burn program, we do not conduct any of these prescribed burns on private lands," said McCrady. "Landowners typically do not personally conduct the burns either, instead they hire licensed and insured burn managers. We manage the funding, make sure each burn manager has proper licensing, review burn plans and monitor the ecosystem that will be burned."

(Continued on next page)

TEXAS NEIGHBORS | SPRING 2021

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Agriculture employs **1 out of every 7** working Texans

The economic impact of the Texas food and fiber sector totals about **\$100 BILLION**

Texas has more farms than any state: **248,416**

The average size of a Texas farm is **511 acres**

Texans ranks first in the nation for:

- number of cattle and calves
- cotton
- sheep
- goats
- hay
- horses
- mohair

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156,233 female farmers

*Texas has more female farmers than any other state

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