

The Role of Prescribed Fire in Mitigating Catastrophic Wildfires

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Photo by Maria R. Gutierrez, IRNR

Texas Alliance of Prescribed Burn Association meeting at the San Angelo, Texas, AgriLife Research Center.

comprehensive fire policy to communicate to the citizens of Texas, landowners and land managers the importance of prescribed burning as part of the solution in mitigating the dangers of catastrophic wildfires.

State and federal agencies cannot solely provide the support and technical assistance needed to implement effective prescribed burning at large, regional scales. The solution in many regions of the state has been an “army” of landowners advocating for the use of prescribed fire via Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs).

overall perception of the general public, in particular those affected by fire, see all fires as bad. However, not all fires are bad but rather often misunderstood and feared.”

The model of PBAs has been extremely successful. In fact, during the last 10 years, the concept has expanded to include cooperatives and fire initiatives with more than 1,000 statewide landowner members. (See map.) Dr. Taylor and others also believe PBAs are a viable alternative to the current statewide “non-policy” dilemma, since burn associations can significantly reduce landowners’ risks through increased and shared experience and can ultimately serve to increase capacity for use of prescribed fire at regional, landscape scales.

Fight Fire, With Fire

The value of prescribed burning in maintaining the functionality of rangelands has long been recognized. Prescribed burning can improve rangeland conditions, forage productivity and wildlife habitats. Many private landowners understand the benefits of prescribed fire but lack the experience or confidence to frequently apply prescribed burns. In a year when Texans are facing one of the driest years on record, this level of confidence from landowners is definitely being “tested.”

The drought and associated catastrophic fires have had a heavy toll on landowners and Texans. Interestingly, concerned landowners like Stan Graff have been campaigning for the development of a statewide

Landowner Burn Cooperatives

In 1997, the concept of Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs) began as organized landowner cooperatives. PBAs are non-profit organizations, owned and operated by private landowners to promote and expand the use of prescribed burning across the landscape. PBAs share resources, knowledge and expertise within the cooperative and serve to increase the application of planned prescribed fires, enhancing agricultural production and wildlife habitat.

A leading proponent on the use of prescribed fire, Dr. Butch Taylor with Texas AgriLife Research in Sonora, states that “since Texas does not have a fire culture, the

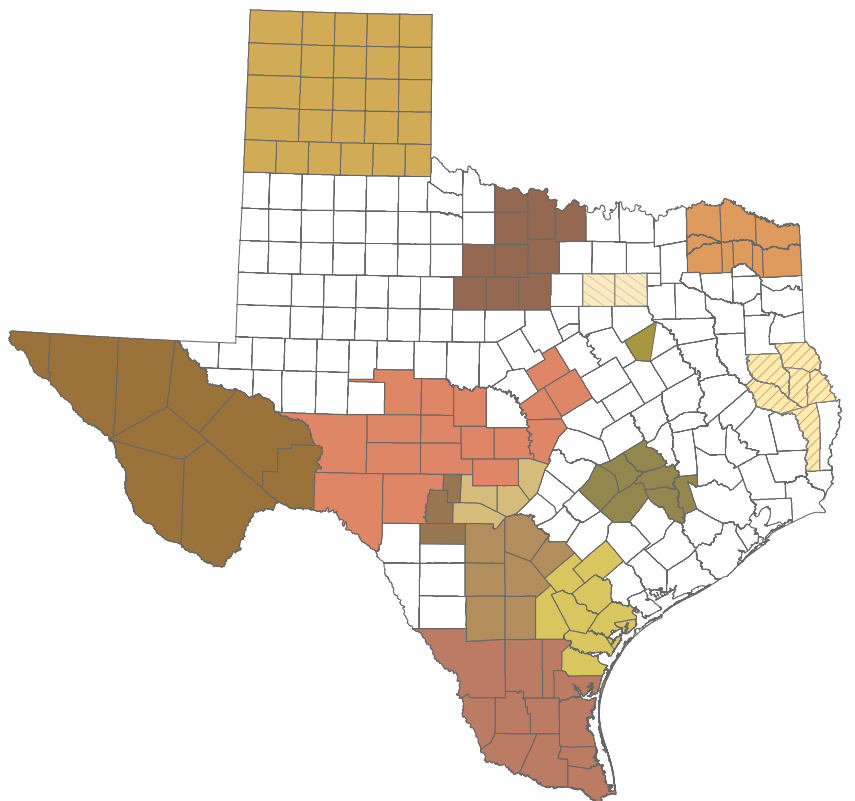
Statewide Alliance

The last decade and a half has allowed the concept of PBAs to flourish. As the number of PBAs increased, some of the challenges of greater communication and need for a single “voice” emerged.

In recognition of these issues, leaders from Texas’ PBAs and state and federal agencies came together to begin the process of forming a statewide Texas Alliance of Prescribed Burn Associations (TAPBA) under a NRCS-Conservation Innovation Grant (NRCS-CIG) managed by the Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources.



Counties in each Prescribed Burn Association



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|---|--|
| Bush Country Prescribed Burn Association, Inc. | Pineywoods Prescribed Fire Cooperative (planning stages) |
| Coastal Bend Prescribed Burn Association | South Central Texas Prescribed Burn Co-Op |
| Dallas-Fort Worth Area Prescribed Burn Initiative (planning stages) | South Texas Prescribed Burn Association |
| Edwards Plateau Prescribed Burning Association, Inc. | Texas Panhandle Prescribed Burn Association |
| Hill Country Prescribed Burning Association | Trans-Pecos Prescribed Burn Association |
| North Central Texas Prescribed Burn Association | Tri-Canyon Prescribed Burn Association |
| Northeastern Texas Prescribed Fire Initiative | Western Navarro Bobwhite Recovery Initiative |

Map created by Ross Anderson, IRNR

The most common issues facing PBAs today are (1) maintaining communication among cooperatives, (2) dissemination of timely information, (3) support for training/certification, and (4) liability insurance. A solution to these issues can be addressed through the concept of a statewide "Alliance" of PBAs and build further capacity in use of prescribed burning on private lands.

In the summer of 2011, PBA leaders met at the San Angelo AgriLife Research Center to further explore the concept of a statewide alliance. The concept was unanimously supported by PBAs attending the conference, and as a result, the group drafted a charter and mission statement.

Initially, four workgroups were established to explore and propose recommendations for the Alliance Steering Committee to consider. Those recommendations focused

on organization, group liability insurance, finances, and education and training. If you want to learn more about TAPBA and/or if you would like to join a PBA, visit the alliance's Prescribed Fire Portal at <http://pfire.tamu.edu>.

In the end, the purpose of the TAPBA is to promote the safe and continued use of prescribed fire. Given the drought and catastrophic wildfires Texas has experienced in 2011, the only "smoke on the horizon" the group would like to see is from the safe and properly applied use of prescribed fire. Fighting wildfires with prescribed fires is a solution that makes sense in mitigating for increased fuel loads from a lack of a frequent burning regime. 🌱



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