

Prescribed Burn

The Aldo Leopold Nature Center works to conserve and restore our grounds in the spirit of Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic for healthy ecosystems, habitat for native flora and fauna, educational programs, and the enjoyment of our community. Our staff and land stewards employ the teachings of Aldo Leopold and other best practices for land management, including seasonal prescribed burns. Many of these practices have also been used by Indigenous People for millennia to manage the land.

Why We Burn:

A native ecosystem needs periodic fire to remain healthy. In fact, many Wisconsin plants and animals have adapted to depend on fire for their existence. Fire will:

- reduce hazardous fuels, protecting human communities from extreme fires
- minimize the spread of pest insects and disease
- remove unwanted invasives that threaten species native to the ecosystem
- improve habitat for threatened and endangered species
- recycle nutrients back to the soil
- promote the growth of trees, wildflowers and other plants
- provide forage for game

When We Burn:

Typical "burn season" is early spring or late fall, capping off the growing season of our native plants. In addition to the season, there are a number of factors that go into formulating our burn plan and setting a burn date.

- **The urban setting.** We are surrounded by risks that have to be taken into consideration. In addition to our own facility, students, visitors and staff, there are residences, businesses and busy streets surrounding our location. The impact of smoke on these people and spaces is an important consideration.
- **The short burn season.** There are only a few days from late March to mid-April that have the right conditions to burn – including precipitation, air temperature, soil conditions, humidity, snow cover, and growing season. We must burn in the small window when the right conditions are present.



- **The weather.** Each habitat needs slightly different conditions to burn. For example, in the woods, low humidity is needed to limit smoke and move the fire. In the prairie, higher humidity is needed to keep the fire from becoming too intense. Wind direction is critical and different for each section to keep the fire moving in the right direction while keeping smoke away from neighboring businesses and residents. In addition, the topography of the land and the surrounding buildings make wind direction and speed difficult to predict or cause winds to swirl differently than predicted.

How We Burn:

Our burn crew is led by seasoned land stewards who have been conducting prescribed burns for decades, in addition to staff and other volunteers with experience and certification in Wildland Firefighter Training. Safety is our number one priority. We use wildland firefighting equipment, including water tanks and other fire extinguishing tools. We develop a burn plan each year, taking into account the needs of the land, site preparation, and the factors described above. We coordinate with our program staff and neighbors, obtain permits from the city and do our best to communicate to the general public. We manage the grounds to remove hazards and maintain firebreaks and boundaries.

When conditions are looking favorable a few days out, we designate potential burn dates. On the morning of a burn, we access the National Weather Service Fire Weather Forecast which gives a detailed prediction of relevant conditions for the Monona area. After reviewing these and discussing any concerns, we confirm where and when to burn. The burn crew reviews the plan extensively and monitors weather and conditions closely. We burn in sections to maintain control and leave room for adjustment if needed. If we begin to burn and find that conditions have shifted or are no longer favorable, we will call it off. After we've burned the designated areas, our crew "mops up" to ensure that all fire is extinguished. We communicate closely with Monona Fire Department before, during and after our burn.