

## Frequently Asked Questions: Prescribed burn at Mitchell Lake Audubon Center

### What is a prescribed burn?

Prescribed fire is a planned fire; it is also sometimes called a “controlled burn” or “prescribed burn,” and is used to meet management objectives. A prescription is a set of conditions that considers the safety of the public and fire staff, weather, and probability of meeting the burn objectives.

Prescribed fire is one of the most important tools used to manage fire today. A scientific prescription for each fire, prepared in advance, describes its objectives, fuels, size, the precise environmental conditions under which it will burn, and conditions under which it may be suppressed. The fire may be designed to create a mosaic of diverse habitats for plants and animals, to help endangered species recover, or to reduce fuels and thereby prevent a destructive fire.<sup>1</sup>

### Why is Audubon prescribing a burn?

Mitchell Lake Audubon Center is currently restoring approximately 20 acres of grassland for birds and other wildlife to use. Northern Bobwhite and Wild Turkey are active on our property but encroaching brush and non-native grass species are not conducive to supporting the populations long term.

Over 4 years ago, in an effort to reverse grassland bird decline, Audubon began to explore an ambitious new conservation approach across the central flyway, seeking to create market-based incentives for bird conservation on rangelands by rewarding producers that adopt bird-friendly management practices on their ranches. The focus of these practices is adaptive multi-paddock (AMP) grazing. Long-term studies have shown that AMP grazing improves not only conditions above ground but in our soil as well. Soil organic matter (OM) and cation exchange capacity has been shown to increase up to 1% annually, and it increased soil water infiltration rates from less than 0.5 inches per hour to more than 8 inches per hour within a 5-year period. Bird and other wildlife populations greatly benefit from AMP by diversifying the plant communities.

Mitchell Lake is an ideal site to serve as demonstration area to show the benefits of grassland restoration and rotational grazing systems. As Audubon helps smaller ranches and landowners fully implement conservation practices, reduced pollutant and bacteria runoff into streams and rivers will enhance ecosystem benefits to all trophic levels for birds and humans alike.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nps.gov/articles/what-is-a-prescribed-fire.htm>

### What happens after the prescribed burn is complete?

This first phase of the project (prescribed burn with follow-up management) will clear approximately 50 acres of succession, allowing us to control some encroachment and eventually establish native grass species to supplement the grazing program. We plan to follow up the woody plant and underbrush management with the implementation of our grazing plan. The overall outcome of this project is to both restore native grasslands on our site and use the site as a teaching tool for home/land owners as they consider restoration work.

### Who is involved in the controlled burn and restoration process?

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### What should we expect before, during, and after the prescribed burn?

**Before** (Texas Parks & Wildlife Guidelines)

1. Prepare disked bare-ground fire guard around all sites before burning. Disked fire guards, which can include roads and right-of-ways, should be 15 to 20 feet wide (These disked areas can be planted to winter supplemental food plots between burn years).
2. Humidity should be between 25 - 40 percent.
3. Wind speed should be between 10 - 15 miles per hour.



4. Always burn into the wind first (backfire) 50 yards into the woods or pasture then set fire with the wind (headfire).
5. Initiate burns in the morning after 9 a.m.

### **During**

Expect smoke to be blown directly over Mitchell Lake, and dissipating before the Pleasanton Road Trailhead, just south of Mitchell Lake.

Air quality will be Moderate. (Defined as acceptable air quality; however some pollutants may be a moderate health concern for those unusually sensitive.)

Neighbors may see flames from afar as the fire progresses.

Multiple agencies will be onsite to monitor, including but not limited to:

San Antonio Water System staff

Audubon Texas Conservation staff

San Antonio Fire Department

Bexar County Fire Marshal

### **After**

Signage will be posted to educate the public on why we used a prescribed burn as a method of land management.

The burn and subsequent management of the fire, will take approximately 8-12 hours.

### **Will you be open the day of the prescribed burn?**

The burn will take place on Wednesday, December 11, weather permitting.

We will NOT be open to the public. Be advised, the smoke conditions may aggravate any allergy or asthma symptoms you may have if in the immediate vicinity.