

Prescribed Fire on the White Mountain National Forest

The White Mountain National Forest was established in 1918 after public outcry over uncontrolled logging and fires forced passage of the Weeks Act in 1911, allowing the federal government to purchase private land east of the Mississippi River. Today, the Forest has grown to almost 800,000 acres in New Hampshire and western Maine, and is one of the most popular in the country — with upwards of 6 million visitors annually.

The White Mountain National Forest's Fire Management Program uses the full spectrum of fire management actions including prompt suppression of unwanted fires, management of naturally ignited fires, and the use of prescribed fire to achieve specific objectives. The WMNF uses prescribed fire to achieve four broad goals- creating or maintaining wildlife habitat, achieving silvicultural objectives, ecosystem restoration, and reducing hazardous fuels.

Goal 1 Maintaining Wildlife Habitat

The WMNF has used prescribed fire to maintain former pastures, fields and landings as open habitat since the 1970's. Currently the WMNF uses prescribed fire and mechanical treatments to maintain 934 acres on 189 different sites across the forest. Prescribed fire in these sites promotes blueberries, grasslands, and shrub habitat and the plants and animals that use them. Open habitat, while once common in the state has dwindled and the populations of plants and animals that require this habitat have also been greatly reduced. By maintaining this type of habitat with fire, the WMNF provides key habitat for uncommon plant and animal species.



A prescribed fire in a grassland on the WMNF

Goal 2 Silvicultural Objectives

The WMNF also uses fire to achieve specific silvicultural objectives, these burns are tied to harvest units and usually center around creating conditions that promote regeneration of particular species over others. Fire is used to create conditions that less common species like oaks, pines, paper birch, and aspen prefer. These burns are usually post harvest and timed to seed releases.



A prescribed burn to promote white pine and red oak regeneration.

Goal 3 Ecosystem Restoration

The WMNF is at the northern range of most fire adapted ecosystems, however, small but important components of fire adapted habitats do exist. Pitch pine, scrub oak, red oak and red pine, and jack pine are all species found on the forest that require periodic disturbance to maintain their position in the larger spruce/fir and northern hardwood matrix. Blueberry, huckleberry, and uncommon species of grasses and sedges are also components of these systems. These areas respond well to natural and

human caused fires. Some of these habitats are undoubtedly influenced by years of human caused fires- both intentional and unintentional. In the past 100 years all fires have been aggressively suppressed on the WMNF and fire adapted habitats have begun to shrink. By using fire in these areas the WMNF promotes a diversity of species across the forest.



A backing fire in a dry oak woodland -New Boston Airforce Station

Goal 4 Hazardous Fuel Reduction

Although wildfires are less common in the northeast, during the Spring and Fall fire danger can be extreme. As the number of homes and subdivisions increases along the borders of the WMNF the need for fuels management also increases. The WMNF uses fire and mechanical treatments in and around houses and communities where the fuel types indicate a potential for rapid fire spread. By proactively managing these fuels the potential impacts of a wildfire are reduced.



Prescribed burn for hazardous fuel reduction and ecosystem restoration next to the Birchview and Dandiview neighborhoods, Conway, NH.