

# Controlled Burns



## ***Why Burn?***

Most prairie burns are conducted in March, April, or early May. Annual burns are recommended to improve prairies infested with cool season grasses and other invasive plants. Why? Because fire is one of the things these areas need to regain a healthy diversity of species.

Before this land was settled, wildfires set by lightning and Native Americans were frequent and unchecked. These fires actually shaped local habitats. By reintroducing fire in our open lands, we are reinstating an essential ecosystem process.

## ***What Good Comes from Burning?***

Fire is the most efficient and economical tool available for managing Lake Forest's natural areas. Fire controls woody invasions in two ways. First, fire stimulates prairie plants to form vigorous prairie growth, which prevents establishment of woody seedlings. Fire also kills the above-ground parts of invading shrubs and trees such as Buckthorn and Honeysuckle. Repeated fires are needed to keep re-sprouting brush under control.

After a burn, many native plants are more robust and produce more seeds. Fire lengthens their growing season, recycles nutrients and, for a few species, is critical for their seeds to sprout.

Oaks, hickories and a few other trees grow a thick bark that protects them from fire. Big bluestem and many other plants of the prairie and savanna keep their buds safe just beneath the soil's surface. Non-native weeds aren't so well-adapted and burning keeps them in check.

Animals, too, are adapted to fire, with many simply leaving the area during a burn.

## ***Safety: Our Highest Priority***

Our burn crews are made up of Parks & Forestry staff who have received training. Before starting a controlled burn, we obtain all needed permits and contact local fire departments. We notify neighbors who are adjacent to the property. Wind speed, wind direction and humidity are taken into account when deciding which site to burn each day. A key goal is to keep smoke from blowing toward homes or highways.

## ***Is There a Controlled Burn Near Me?***

If you have any questions or concerns about controlled burning or would like to find out when a burn is occurring near you, please call us at 847-810-3563.