



Waukesha County Department of Parks and Land Use

Controlled Burns - Frequently Asked Questions

Fast Facts about this Project

The Waukesha County Park System will be conducting a controlled burn covering 25 acres in Ryan Park, W262N4656 Ryan Road, Pewaukee, on Saturday, April 27th from noon to 5 pm.

What is a controlled burn?

A controlled burn is a natural land management tool used by land managers to mimic a natural process that has been part of ecosystems for thousands of years. Controlled fire is applied to land using safe and careful firing techniques that follow a prescriptive plan for habitat improvement. The time to perform a controlled burn varies with the size of the area to be burned and the difficulty or challenge of the area. Some areas can be burned in one hour; some may take a full day.

What are the benefits of a controlled burn?

Controlled burn management is an efficient and economical tool that reduces the amount of pesticides or mechanical equipment that otherwise may be needed to control invasive plants. Reasons to burn a particular parcel of land vary, they range from brush control, increasing the vigor of native plants, to removing invasive species, and improving habitat for grassland dependent species. Fire burns off dead vegetation and stimulates new plant growth by allowing sunlight to warm the dark soil, encouraging germination. Fire also enriches the soil by returning nutrients back to the soil.

Naturalizing areas within the parks reduces the need for mechanical mowing. At Minooka and Fox River Parks we have seen an annual reduction of approximately 1400 gallons of diesel fuel previously used to mow turf. Less mowing also equates to reduced maintenance costs for mowing equipment.

Who is involved in controlled burns?

The Department of Parks and Land Use - Park System staff uses trained personnel at every burn. A controlled burn project uses standard prescribed practices that have been developed by controlled burn professionals over many years. Waukesha County cooperates with local fire departments to obtain their permission to proceed. Fire Departments may participate in the controlled burn. Burn Crews are in constant radio contact with the Fire Department and the Waukesha County Communication Center if an emergency arises.

What safety measures are taken?

The Waukesha County Park System staff uses trained personnel at every burn. Each controlled fire is planned and the site is evaluated in advance. Park staff uses firefighting equipment that is designed for controlled burn techniques. Local fire departments are notified as well as the Waukesha County Communications Center. Trained personnel monitoring weather use many controlled burn techniques to ensure project safety. The controlled burn does create smoke. Staff use specific weather monitoring that help predict smoke dispersal and travel. The intention is to minimize hazards to the public and make every effort to reduce the effect of smoke on our neighbors and nearby roadways.

Are neighbors notified?

Yes, neighbors that have land adjacent to burn areas are notified. Depending on the burn area, other nearby residents and businesses may also be notified.

How does the controlled burn affect wildlife?

Prior to a controlled burn, the burn unit is checked for wildlife. As with naturally caused fires, some wildlife is temporarily displaced while other wildlife that cannot leave use ground nests or tree cavities to protect themselves from the fire. Often, a portion of the burn area is set aside as a refuge for invertebrates. Many species of wildlife are dependent on fire to maintain a suitable habitat.

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Are the Parks closed during a controlled burn?

Parks or specific areas or trails may be temporarily closed during a controlled burn. This is done to ensure the safety of our park users.

How will the area look after the burn?

A site burned in the spring will green up very quickly. Sites burned in the fall may appear black throughout the winter. In the season following a controlled burn, the vegetation is lusher, the native wildflowers are more radiant and the seed production is more plentiful.

Where can I find out more information about this project?

Updates will be posted on the Waukesha County Parks and Land Use website at www.waukeshacountyparks.com. For questions or comments, you can call Waukesha County Park System at **(262) 548-7803**.

