

CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS

Final Report

Grantee Name: <u>Texas A&M Research Foundation</u> (on behalf of: Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources)	
Project Title: Adapting to climate change through increased use in prescribed fire and community-based partnerships	
Agreement Number: 69-3A75-10-146	
Project Director: Roel R. Lopez	
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Period Covered by Report: June 2011-September 2012	
Project End Date: September 2012	

A) Summarize the work performed during the project period covered by this report:

- In May 2011, a state-wide Prescribed Burn Association (PBA) two-day workshop was held at Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center in San Angelo, Texas. Key leaders (i.e., President, Vice-President) from all 11 PBAs attended the meeting. In addition, representatives from key agency partners also were present (e.g., Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas Forest Service, NRCS, Texas Parks and Wildlife, etc.). On the first day, PBA leadership (26 members) discussed the concept of forming a state-wide “Alliance” and necessary steps to develop such a partnership. On the second-day, an educational workshop was held and CEUs were offered with 78 individuals attending.
- In June 2011, an NRCS-CIG Advisory Board comprised of 18 key partners was established to share project purpose/objectives and provide periodic updates towards the progress of the project goals.
- In July 2011, a web-site supporting all the PBAs was developed and launched. The Prescribed Fire Portal (<http://pfire.tamu.edu/>) continues to expand and facilitate communication among the PBAs.
- In August 2011, the *Prescribed Burn Alliance of Texas* (PBAT), a state-wide network of PBAs with a single voice for private landowners interested in use of prescribed fire, was formed and operationalized. In October 2011, a Steering Committee and work groups were established to focus on organization, finance, education and outreach, and insurance needs.
- In November 2011, an article was submitted to Texas Wildlife Association summarizing the work of the state-wide alliance (*Attachment A*).
- In December 2011, officers were elected and an Alliance Charter/Bylaws were approved. In addition, a press release was disseminated via AgriLife Communications which resulted in more than 12 newspaper articles across the state and radio announcements via the Farm Bureau network (*Attachment B*).

B) Describe significant results, accomplishments, and lessons learned. Compare actual accomplishments to the project goals in your proposal:

Significant Results:

- First-ever state-wide meeting of all PBAs resulting in the establishment of PBAT.
- PBAT has annual meeting and remaining active
- Multi-State Alliance formed (Reps from Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and Nebraska)
 - They met 2 times; once at Ft. Worth Technical Center and once in Wichita, Kansas
- Three 3 prescribed fire trainings were conducted with assistance from IRNR.
 - July 21-23 in Mason, TX with 8 attending,
 - August 11-13 in Sonora, TX with 5 attending
 - September 9-11 in Marble Falls, TX with 3 attending.

Accomplishments:

- Establishment of the *Prescribed Burn Alliance of Texas* (PBAT), a state-wide network of PBAs.
- Development of website fire portal (<http://pfire.tamu.edu>) for supporting PBAT and offering online fire training.

Lessons Learned:

- Success in the establishment of the PBAT was largely due to the several in-person workshops/meetings allowing for a shared communication platform. The current organizational structure of the Alliance allows for equal representation from each of the PBAs.
- Communication with key agencies like NRCS, TDA, TPWD, etc. served to ensure the purpose and objectives of the Alliance. Use of monthly teleconferences and a NRCS-CIG Advisory Board also were important communication networks.

C) Describe the work that you completed:

- Complete online prescribed fire training modules and continue to update prescribed fire portal.
- Continue to support the leaders of the *Prescribed Burn Alliance of Texas*.

D) Provide the following in accordance with the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and CIG grant agreement provisions:

1. *A listing of EQIP-eligible producers involved in the project, identified by name and social security number or taxpayer identification number. N/A*
2. *The dollar amount of any direct or indirect payment made to each individual producer or entity for any structural, vegetative, or management practices. Both biannual and cumulative payment amounts must be submitted. N/A*
3. *A self-certification statement indicating that each individual or entity receiving a direct or indirect payment for any structural, vegetative, or management practice through this grant is in compliance with the adjusted gross income (AGI) and highly-erodible lands and wetlands conservation (HEL/WC) compliance provisions of the Farm Bill. N/A*

The Role of Prescribed Fire in Mitigating Catastrophic Wildfires

Article by
MARIA GUTIERREZ and AMY HAYS,
Texas A&M University Institute for Renewable Natural Resources



Photo by Maria R. Gutierrez, IRNR

Texas Alliance of Prescribed Burn Association meeting at the San Angelo, Texas, AgriLife Research Center.

comprehensive fire policy to communicate to the citizens of Texas, landowners and land managers the importance of prescribed burning as part of the solution in mitigating the dangers of catastrophic wildfires.

State and federal agencies cannot solely provide the support and technical assistance needed to implement effective prescribed burning at large, regional scales. The solution in many regions of the state has been an “army” of landowners advocating for the use of prescribed fire via Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs).

overall perception of the general public, in particular those affected by fire, see all fires as bad. However, not all fires are bad but rather often misunderstood and feared.”

The model of PBAs has been extremely successful. In fact, during the last 10 years, the concept has expanded to include cooperatives and fire initiatives with more than 1,000 statewide landowner members. (See map.) Dr. Taylor and others also believe PBAs are a viable alternative to the current statewide “non-policy” dilemma, since burn associations can significantly reduce landowners’ risks through increased and shared experience and can ultimately serve to increase capacity for use of prescribed fire at regional, landscape scales.

Fight Fire, With Fire

The value of prescribed burning in maintaining the functionality of rangelands has long been recognized. Prescribed burning can improve rangeland conditions, forage productivity and wildlife habitats. Many private landowners understand the benefits of prescribed fire but lack the experience or confidence to frequently apply prescribed burns. In a year when Texans are facing one of the driest years on record, this level of confidence from landowners is definitely being “tested.”

The drought and associated catastrophic fires have had a heavy toll on landowners and Texans. Interestingly, concerned landowners like Stan Graff have been campaigning for the development of a statewide

Landowner Burn Cooperatives

In 1997, the concept of Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs) began as organized landowner cooperatives. PBAs are non-profit organizations, owned and operated by private landowners to promote and expand the use of prescribed burning across the landscape. PBAs share resources, knowledge and expertise within the cooperative and serve to increase the application of planned prescribed fires, enhancing agricultural production and wildlife habitat.

A leading proponent on the use of prescribed fire, Dr. Butch Taylor with Texas AgriLife Research in Sonora, states that “since Texas does not have a fire culture, the

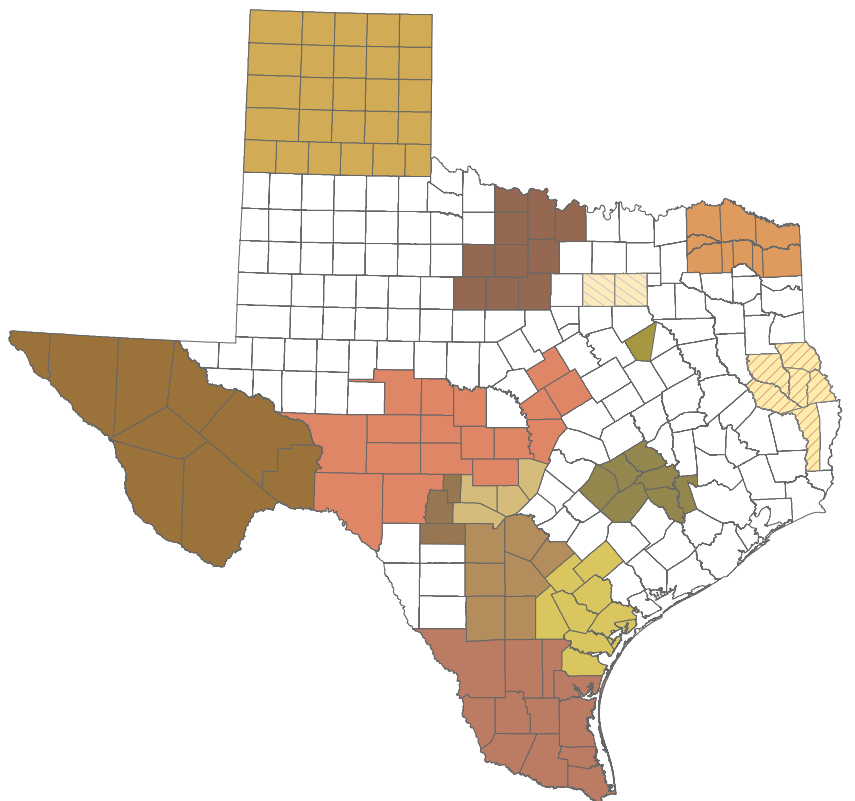
Statewide Alliance

The last decade and a half has allowed the concept of PBAs to flourish. As the number of PBAs increased, some of the challenges of greater communication and need for a single “voice” emerged.

In recognition of these issues, leaders from Texas’ PBAs and state and federal agencies came together to begin the process of forming a statewide Texas Alliance of Prescribed Burn Associations (TAPBA) under a NRCS-Conservation Innovation Grant (NRCS-CIG) managed by the Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources.



Counties in each Prescribed Burn Association



- | | |
|---|--|
| Bush Country Prescribed Burn Association, Inc. | Pineywoods Prescribed Fire Cooperative (planning stages) |
| Coastal Bend Prescribed Burn Association | South Central Texas Prescribed Burn Co-Op |
| Dallas-Fort Worth Area Prescribed Burn Initiative (planning stages) | South Texas Prescribed Burn Association |
| Edwards Plateau Prescribed Burning Association, Inc. | Texas Panhandle Prescribed Burn Association |
| Hill Country Prescribed Burning Association | Trans-Pecos Prescribed Burn Association |
| North Central Texas Prescribed Burn Association | Tri-Canyon Prescribed Burn Association |
| Northeastern Texas Prescribed Fire Initiative | Western Navarro Bobwhite Recovery Initiative |

Map created by Ross Anderson, IRNR

The most common issues facing PBAs today are (1) maintaining communication among cooperatives, (2) dissemination of timely information, (3) support for training/certification, and (4) liability insurance. A solution to these issues can be addressed through the concept of a statewide "Alliance" of PBAs and build further capacity in use of prescribed burning on private lands.

In the summer of 2011, PBA leaders met at the San Angelo AgriLife Research Center to further explore the concept of a statewide alliance. The concept was unanimously supported by PBAs attending the conference, and as a result, the group drafted a charter and mission statement.

Initially, four workgroups were established to explore and propose recommendations for the Alliance Steering Committee to consider. Those recommendations focused

on organization, group liability insurance, finances, and education and training. If you want to learn more about TAPBA and/or if you would like to join a PBA, visit the alliance's Prescribed Fire Portal at <http://pfire.tamu.edu>.

In the end, the purpose of the TAPBA is to promote the safe and continued use of prescribed fire. Given the drought and catastrophic wildfires Texas has experienced in 2011, the only "smoke on the horizon" the group would like to see is from the safe and properly applied use of prescribed fire. Fighting wildfires with prescribed fires is a solution that makes sense in mitigating for increased fuel loads from a lack of a frequent burning regime. 🌱



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Prescribed burn alliance formed after record-breaking wildfire season

December 23, 2011 By: [AgriLife Today](#)

SAN ANTONIO—Following a record-breaking wildfire season, the Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources, Texas AgriLife Research and the Texas AgriLife Extension Service have assisted prescribed burn associations throughout the state in forming the new Texas Alliance of Prescribed Burn Association.

AgriLife TODAY
Sharing Stories of Everyday Solutions

The purpose of the alliance will be to safely increase the use of prescribed burning, according to Roel Lopez, the institute's associate director.

Lopez said prescribed burning, or the controlled application of fire to the naturally occurring buildup of fuels in a predetermined area, has been used for years to improve and manage forests and rangelands, improve wildlife habitat and reduce the risk of devastating wildfires.

"This statewide alliance, comprised of 11 prescribed burn associations, is particularly important after the wildfire season Texas just had," he said. "Texas reported over 30,000 wildfires with nearly 4 million acres burned. More than 2,000 homes and an additional 2,000 other types of structures were lost."

"The alliance will promote education and training, and increase the practice of safe prescribed burn techniques," said Larry Joe Doherty, the alliance's new president. "Prescribed burning techniques safely applied can reduce the dangers of fuel buildups that lead to the terror of wildfires and its destructive forces. At the same time, we are honoring our duties as good land stewards by improving wildlife habitat and agricultural production."

Jim Kenton, alliance vice president, said the alliance will work collaboratively with private landowners, county governments, federal and state agencies, and natural resource organizations to foster the acceptance and use of prescribed burning in Texas.

"Many of the devastating fires were especially dangerous because volatile fuels had been allowed to accumulate in forests and rangelands," Kenton said.

Individual ranchers and range managers, federal and state agencies, The Nature Conservancy and wildlife associations have all used prescribed burns sporadically since the 1970s, according to alliance officials. In 1997, Texas' first prescribed burn association, the Edwards Plateau Prescribed Burn Association, was established.

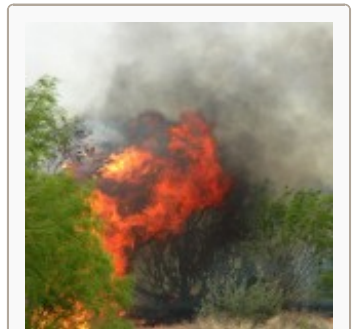
Before the newly formed alliance, the 11 prescribed burn associations, which are typically nonprofits owned and operated by more than 1,000 private landowners, worked mostly on their own, Doherty said.

"Without uniformity in training and using privately purchased fire equipment, they assisted their neighbors in safely conducting prescribed burns," he said.

Lopez said the institute, AgriLife Research and AgriLife Extension received a funds through a Natural Resources Conservation Service Conservation Innovation Grant to help form the alliance. Funds also were used to design and develop a prescribed fire website to serve the burn associations and develop web-based training for individuals wanting to attain prescribed-burning certification.

"Many private landowners understand the benefits of prescribed fire, but lack the experience or confidence to frequently apply prescribed burns," Lopez said in reference to the need for training.

Alliance officers are Doherty, president; Kenton, vice president; Dave Redden; secretary; and Stan Graff, treasurer.



This past wildfire season, Texas had over 30,000 wildfires with nearly 4 million acres burned. In addition, more than 4,000 homes and other structures were lost. (Texas AgriLife Extension Service photo by Kay Ledbetter)

Susan Durham, the South Texas Prescribed Burn Association president, encouraged landowners to organize a prescribed burn association and join the alliance.

“The South Texas Prescribed Burn Association recently reorganized along with neighboring prescribed burn associations and reached out to the experts organizing the Texas Alliance of Prescribed Burn Association for assistance,” Durham said. “We found an overwhelming response from them all, offering whatever resources we needed. The alliance is about making Texas safer, not about making a profit.”

For more information on the alliance and to learn more about the benefits of prescribed fire, go to <http://pfire.tamu.edu>.

Contacts

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