

## USE CARE WHEN BURNING GRASSLANDS

Prescribed burning CRP or pasture can improve stands, prepare them for interseeding, control weeds and trees, enhance wildlife habitat, and improve forage quality. But it must be done safely.

Fire improves many grasslands, but it can be dangerous. Wildfires occur easily when it is hot, dry, and windy. And when is it not windy in Nebraska? So if you decide to burn, do it safely.

Fire is useful on CRP or other fields that are overgrown with much dead mulch from previous years. This mulch can smother plants and new seedlings, causing stands to get thinner. Fire removes this mulch, enabling stands to thicken, and it improves wildlife habitat. Fire also can reduce the invasion of woody plants like cedar trees, weeds, or cool-season grasses invading warm-season grasslands. These less desirable plants are injured or killed by a well-timed burn. This can be especially useful for summer pastures.

Timing is important, though. Right now is a bit too early to burn warm-season grasses. Burning now will open up the ground for weeds to invade, soil to erode, and moisture to evaporate. The best time to burn warm-season grasses is when they just start to grow, usually mid-April to early May. Burning then will result in rapid greenup and thickening of desirable warm-season plants.

Be careful, though. Never burn unless weather conditions, topography, and other factors enable you to control the fire. Plus, make sure your burn is legal. You must obtain a burn permit from your local fire chief. And finally, never burn unless someone experienced in prescribed burning is part of your burning crew.

Fire is a valuable tool. But like any other tool, in the wrong hands it can be dangerous.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, Extension Forage Specialist  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
314 Keim Hall—East Campus  
Lincoln NE 68583-0915  
402-4742-2577  
[banderson1@unl.edu](mailto:banderson1@unl.edu)

