



## PASTURE BURNING 101

Burning pastures is a great way to reduce weeds and unwanted vegetation. It also serves as a fire prevention tool by removing fuel loads that can turn small fires into large ones. The Douglas Forest Protective Association oversees most burning during fire season on private land in Douglas County. DFPA officials say that the key to a good burn program is to be organized.

Ranchers wishing to burn their pastures should first have a plan. What is it that you want to accomplish? In Douglas County, poison oak and brush infested hillsides are burned periodically to restore rich and productive grazing pastures for livestock and wildlife. Burning is also an effective tool to control invasive weeds and brush species. Things to consider in your plan are fuel types, topography and surrounding vegetation. If you haven't burned before or the pasture in question is being burned for the first time, it's a good idea to have a DFPA forest officer visit the site first. The forest officer can help identify the placement of trails and whether or not the area should be subdivided into parcels for a safer burn.

After devising a plan it's time to trail the property to be burned. A bulldozer is the best tool for constructing fire trails for pastures. A dozer trail is typically eight feet wide and removes all vegetation down to mineral soil, where nothing remains to burn. Because disc trails can leave remnants of vegetation behind, these types of trails are not recommended. Once your trails are in place, it's time to contact DFPA for an on-site inspection.

Call DFPA at 672-6507 a few days ahead of when you want to burn. Close to 10,000 acres are burned annually, most of which during a short time frame. So it's a good idea to plan ahead.

When you call DFPA, a dispatcher will ask you the following questions: 1) What are you burning? 2) How many acres are planned for the burn? 3) Are your fire trails in place? 4) When would you like to burn?

The dispatcher will then make contact with a forest officer in your area to schedule an appointment. The forest officer will visit the site and make sure that all of the elements are in place for a safe burn. The FO will look at the fire trails, surrounding vegetation and the depth of the vegetation that is going to be burned (different depths produce different flame lengths). A containment plan will then be implemented stating the best time to burn and the number of people, water, hand tools and other equipment that will be required to conduct the burn. DFPA dispatch will be notified of



*This is a good example of a dozer constructed fire trail that accounts for overhanging vegetation.*

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ignition time and therefore letting all DFPA lookouts know of the controlled burn and location.

The participation of DFPA equipment and personnel will vary based on weather and environmental factors as well as fire activity in the district. The presence of the crew and engine is not part of the conditions of the permit, nor does it replace any of the equipment or personnel that the permittee must provide.

On some occasions, burning may be suspended due to high fire danger or high fire activity. However, DFPA will continue to inspect fire trails and burn sites during these periods so that the permittee is ready to go when burn bans are lifted.



A permit does not relieve the landowner of any liability if the pasture burn escapes and causes

damage to an adjacent landowner or third party. It is recommended that anyone planning to burn should contact surrounding neighbors ahead of time. Likewise, the landowner could be held liable for any and all fire suppression costs if he/she is negligent in the escape of the fire. One example of negligence is not following the instructions on the permit. Even if a permittee is not negligent, the permittee is liable for any extra fire costs up to \$300,000. This is why it is a good idea to have liability insurance that will cover your burning activity.

If done effectively and safely, burning pastures can benefit everyone. Livestock will flourish in fields of rich grazing land the following spring and by eliminating overgrown fuel loads, the risk of large wildfires will be reduced.



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