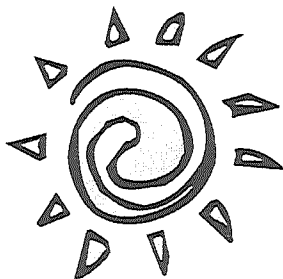


Burn Benefits:



What fire does for our prairies



Exotic trees and shrubs are controlled, reducing competition for water, nutrients, and most importantly, sunlight! Most prairie plants need full sunlight to grow properly.



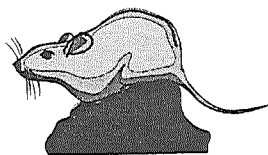
"Litter" plant material is removed, allowing sunlight to penetrate the ground during the critical spring-time growth stages.



Nutrients are cycled back to the soil in the usable form of ash.



Wildlife habitat provided by healthy prairies, including grasses and flowers for use as cover, is improved overall. Insect populations are also more diverse.



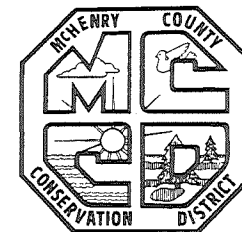
Prairie Fires: Beautifying Our Land



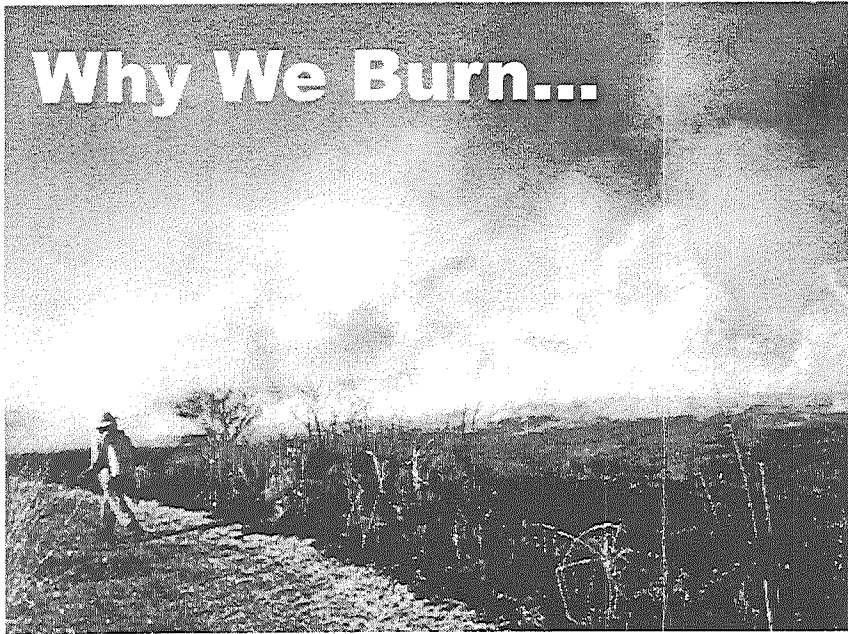
A publication of the
**McHenry County
Conservation District**
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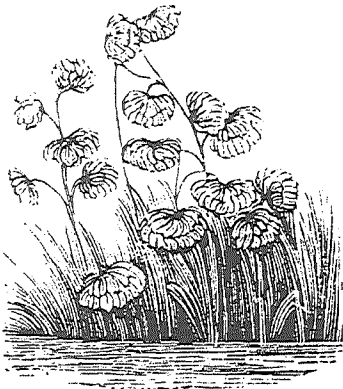


Why We Burn...



Experienced and well-trained McHenry County Conservation District staff members have conducted “prescribed” burns on District sites each spring and fall since 1981 as a means to maintain the ecosystem. Native grasses may seem fragile to the scorching flames of a prairie fire. But ironically, they depend on the destructive energy for survival, as do several native wildlife species.

Prior to pioneer settlement, Native Americans deliberately ignited prairie fires, most commonly for hunting purposes. It was also a way to control flies and mosquitoes. Today, prairie



burns are designed to preserve areas in their presettlement condition.

Staff takes the weather, including wind speed and relative humidity, among other factors into careful consideration to ensure maximum safety and control of a burn on a given day.

The District, which owns and/or manages thousands of acres of open land, also takes care in notifying the police, fire and county health departments as well as neighboring landowners of its plans prior to burning.

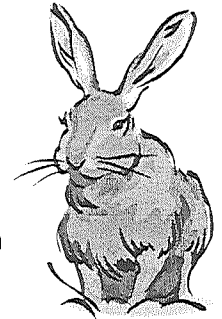
Construction, not Destruction

So just how does fire enhance, not destroy, our beautiful prairies? Burns reduce the amount of dead plant material — or litter — on the ground. Litter can have several negative effects on prairie lands, including hindering plant growth, lowering soil temperature, causing normal bacterial activity to drop, and intercepting and absorbing rainfall.

Burns help mitigate the effects excess litter can cause to native grasslands by removing invading brush, recycling nutrients into the soil and promoting growth of native plant species. Without fire, prairies might convert to forest. Prairie burns should be thought of as a tool for construction, not destruction.

Plants and Animals vs. Prairie Burns?

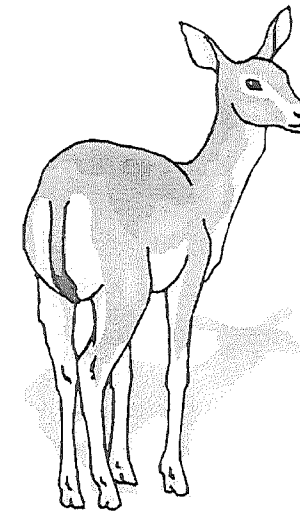
Just as they consider factors such as the size of an area, its isolation from similar habitats, and the natural quality of vegetation when planning a burn, District staffers must keep in mind a land’s inhabitants, especially endangered or threatened species.



Native species have adapted to the presence of fire and periodic burns over the centuries. Burns’ effects on wildlife vary with season, frequency, speed, and more. For example, some wildlife prefer a littered prairie, and therefore benefit from less-frequent burning.

Overall, animals that live in prairies maintained by fire are advantaged with thicker, taller

grasses and flowers that provide cover, structure, and diverse food sources with insects and small mammals.



As for the plant species, because the main growing part of most prairie grasses is underground, they are not permanently damaged. In fact, they grow back more lush and abundant.