



DOUG BOYKIN
Chairman,
NM Tree Farm Committee

1118 Hope Farms Road
Socorro, NM 87801
575-838-3027

Diboykin61@gmail.com
www.treefarmssystem.org/new-mexico

November 2019



TREE FARM BULLETIN

ENCOURAGING PRESCRIBED BURNS ON PRIVATE LANDS

By John Tunberg, Retired State Range Conservationist, NM-SCS/NRCS, Consultant
tunbergresources@comcast.net (505)206-9223

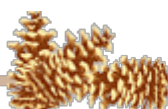
At the New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts (NMACD) annual winter meeting in Raton, NM on October 30, 2019 a group of experienced prescribed fire advocates participated on a panel discussion. The panel was organized by Casey Spradley, a rancher near Cuba, NM and chaired by Jim Williams a Quemado rancher and president of NMACD. A presentation by Doug Boykin, retired NM state forestry, active on the NM prescribed fire council, highlighted lessons learned over a career of prescribed burning and wildfire suppression. Eytan Krasilovsky, serving as Deputy Director of The Forest Stewards Guild spoke about opportunities to learn about conducting prescribed fire and resources available through the Guild for conducting this important restoration activity. I spoke about a conservation organization called Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation, Inc. (QUWF) and the opportunity available through formation of a state QUWF chapter to acquire prescribed burn private landowner insurance.



John Tunberg, Retired

Common threads identified in all presentations were the need to coordinate resources (people and equipment) and achieve economy of scale for burns by crossing ownership boundaries, over 1 million acres of NM landscape per year covering all jurisdictions need to be treated by prescribed fire to reduce fine fuel loads and move landscape scale ecosystems in a more sustainable, resilient and productive direction. Actual acres currently treated are much less.

Those of us making a career of studying and managing the unique ecology of New Mexico are well aware that many of the plants and animals occurring here are fire adapted. By fire adapted I mean that fire created and maintained habitats and conditions are critical for one or more of each species lifecycle requirements.



Several studies sanctioned by the NM prescribed fire council focused on barriers to widespread adoption of prescribed fire as a common management tool. Several consistent themes emerge among these studies as a major limiting factor on private lands. High on the list is the “uncertain” status in state law and the courts of a landowner’s personal liability for escaped fire. Escaped fire in this context is where an individual starts a fire on their own land, and it escapes onto adjoining lands with another jurisdiction or ownership. The uncertain part in our States legal system is legal liability and negligence. Negligence is categorized as “simple negligence” or “gross negligence”. In NM legal records, escaped prescribed burns have been viewed by the courts in both ways regardless of the quality and quantity of planning and execution of any particular burn. Currently, no legislative remedy has been enacted that clarifies the standard of care required and that limits liability where the highest standard of care is used to plan and execute a prescribed burn. In today’s legal climate prescribed burn insurance is a must to reduce legal exposure in the event of escaped fire.

QUWF offers Prescribed Burn Liability Insurance for Private landowners.

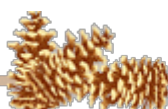
Quail and Upland Wildlife Federation, Inc. (QUWF) is a 501c3 Not for Profit National Conservation Organization. QUWF is the ONLY Disabled American Veteran (DAV) Founded National Conservation organization in the U.S. It is the only Conservation organization recognized as Veteran founded by the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF). QUWF is the ONLY multi-specie organization in the U.S., formed to support the unique passion captured in a chapter’s goals whether it is small game, large game, fisheries or conservation education. QUWF is the ONLY Conservation organization that permits chapters to manage and hold raised revenues and decide how to use them for conservation.

QUWF as a proven track record of accomplishment. In 2018 97% of revenues went to chapters for wildlife and clean stream projects. Less than 3% overall went to overhead. In 2018 nearly \$12 Million dollars in habitat work was completed.

A QUWF chapter is in the formative stages in New Mexico. Although officers have not yet been elected, New Mexico QUWF has enough members to become operational and begin to chart a course in our state’s wildlife special interest group landscape. The founding members are in accord in their desire to do wildlife habitat improvement work and encourage prescribed burning on a landscape scale and coordination across land ownership boundaries.

The mechanism of providing prescribed burn insurance to a private landowner begins with having the planned burn declared a chapter activity. Several other administrative requirements must be met before coverage is granted. Main requirements are as follows:

- Insurance coverage only applies to prescribed burn on a QUWF member’s private operation
- Requires a formal wildlife plan for the landowner prepared by a state agent, NRCS or QUWF employees
- Requires a formal, professionally written Burn Plan prepared by a qualified Burn Boss /Burn Plan writer
- The burn plan must meet requirements as established by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group



- The Burn Plan is submitted to QUWF and their Insurance Company for underwriting and approval as written. Approval under the insurance company is not guaranteed. Insurance can be denied due to size or complexity or other hazards
- Once approved by the insurance company and QUWF, the plan is active and can be implemented
- The exact conditions and requirements of the burn plan must be followed. This includes in part:
 - proposed dates
 - acceptable weather conditions
 - fire management equipment on site
 - numbers of trained volunteers needed for the burn
- On the day of the burn, a trained, qualified Burn Boss must manage the entire burn
- Approved fire safety clothing is mandatory for all participants and available to QUWF members through a “Vendor Direct Program” (VDP) at cost
- Rocky Boot Co. offers fire resistant leather boots at a discount for QUWF members through VDP

Increased use of prescribed fire is needed across New Mexico landscapes in fire adapted forest and grassland ecosystems. Several partnerships exist to promote and facilitate prescribed fire on private and public lands. Each partner has a piece of the puzzle needed to make prescribed fire a more accepted and widely used management tool. QUWF is an organization dedicated to improving wildlife habitat as a main mission goal. They offer volunteers and an insurance program to private landowners for facilitating burning and mitigating liability. QUWF looks forward to partnering with New Mexicans passionate about effective wildlife management and land treatment projects of all sizes to benefit New Mexicans landscapes.

If you are interested in joining QUWF to further these goals please contact the QUWF Executive Director, Craig Alderman calderman@quwf.net . For local information please contact John Tunberg using the information at the beginning of the article.

1) COMMITTEE MEETING

All Tree Farmers are invited and encouraged to attend our 3rd New Mexico Tree Farm Committee Meeting of the year (three held annually). Please join us at 1:30 pm on Wednesday, December 11th, 2019 at the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish office located at 7816 Alamo Road, NW, Albuquerque, NM 87120. Come out and hear what other tree farmers have been up to and share your tree farm accomplishments with the group. We look forward to visiting with you. If you have any questions, please contact Arnie Friedt at arnie.friedt@state.nm.us

2) E-MAIL INSTEAD OF SNAIL MAIL

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