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May 13, 2011

NATIONAL RANGE AND PASTURE HANDBOOK (NRPH)  
190-VI  
Amendment NM1

**SUBJECT: ECS - NM PRESCRIBED BURN POLICY SUPPLEMENTS TO NATIONAL RANGE AND PASTURE HANDBOOK**

Purpose: To advise all employees of the official NM – NRCS prescribed burning certification policy.

Effective Date: May 13, 2011

In order for NRCS employees to participate in prescribed burning planning and implementation they must be properly trained and certified. As per Appendix A of the National Range and Pasture Handbook (NRPH), states will develop job approval authority criteria and ensure that employees act within their training and certification levels. States will ensure that only qualified NRCS employees are used for reviews and spot checks of prescribed burning activities and job approval criteria is reviewed and concurred in by the appropriate rang-land management specialist. The attached “New Mexico’s Policy for Participation in the Planning and Application of Prescribed Burns” provides this policy and guidance for New Mexico.

Team leaders should immediately begin to work with employees and the state office to assure that employees are in compliance with the attached policy and that certification is documented as per policy.

Filing Instructions: Please file the attached “New Mexico’s Policy for Participation in the Planning and Application of Prescribed Burns” behind Appendix A of the National Range and Pasture Handbook.

/s/

Dennis Alexander  
State Conservationist

DIST: NRPH

## **New Mexico's Policy for Participation in the Planning and Application of Prescribed Burns.**

### **Definitions:**

**Designated Fire Boss:** The individual designated by the landowner/manager as the individual in charge of the prescribed burn. The individual that is the decision-maker during the application of a prescribed burn.

**Maintenance Burn:** A practice designed to facilitate the application of vegetation management by minimizing the damage to desirable vegetation, while suppressing undesirable vegetation.

**Prescribed Burning:** The use of fire as a tool to achieve a management objective on a predetermined area under certain conditions where the intensity and extent of the fire are controlled in accordance with a written prescribed burn plan.

**Prescribed Burn Plan:** A document providing critical information necessary to plan and implement an individual prescribed burn. Minimum criteria includes location of the burn, resource management objectives, pre-burn vegetation, required weather conditions, notification checklist, burning method to be used, pre-burn preparation, fire sequence, job assignments, equipment checklist, and post burn evaluation and management, and necessary signatures of approval.

**Prescribed Burn Planning Authority:** The extent to which an NRCS employee may provide technical assistance on the use of prescribed burning will be restricted by the job approval authority and certification level issued by the state conservationist or the state staff specialist with prescribed burning responsibilities. A person who meets the initial training and experience requirements as outlined in the NRCS General Manual, Section 402.12 Certification and Authority may provide technical assistance regarding prescribed burning and may be issued the appropriate prescribed burn job approval authority.

**Prescribed Burn Certification:** An NRCS employee who maintains their prescribed burning technical adequacy by acquiring continuing education credits, or equivalent, as necessary to comply with state standards, and certified by the appropriate state technical specialist.

**Reclamation Burn:** An accelerating practice designed to change the vegetation composition by inflicting as much damage as possible to undesirable vegetation.

## New Mexico Supplement National Range and Pasture Handbook Appendix A

### **Policy**

Any employee wanting to participate in the planning and application of prescribed burning must be certified as having attained adequate Job Approval Authority. Levels of certification are defined in the attached Job Classification and Job Approval Authority for Prescribed Burning.

Anyone desiring prescribed burning certification should make a request through their supervisor to the Area Conservationist. The Area Conservationist will issue the determination of Job Approval Authority. Each employee is responsible for certifying and requesting the training needed to upgrade their certification.

The original Job Approval Authority for Prescribed Burning shall be kept by the employee, with a copy on file with the employee's supervisor and with the Area Conservationist.

For employees to be considered acting within the scope of their duties, refer to their job classification description.

### **Training, Certification, Authority, and Safety.**

New Mexico NRCS employees involved in any aspect of prescribed burns shall complete a 2-day NRCS training course (16 hours), or equivalent, in prescribed burning.

Employees shall provide written documentation of training and experience to their direct supervisor and the State Rangeland Management Specialist to determine the adequacy of training. The documentation will be completed using Prescribed Burning Experience Form (338-1).

The State Range Management Specialist will review experience and training of personnel to determine their level of expertise. Direct supervisors and the State Range Management Specialist will concur in and sign job approval authority forms and submit them to the Area Conservationist for certification. Job approval authority will be documented on New Mexico 338-2.

The Area Conservationist shall certify training and job approval authority for employees involved in the planning and application of prescribed burns following a concurrence from the employee's supervisor and review of level of expertise from the State Rangeland Management Specialist.

Area Conservationist will review, approve and maintain copies of all documentation for employees.

## New Mexico Supplement National Range and Pasture Handbook Appendix A

### **Trainer Certification:**

Criteria that must be met to qualify as a NRCS prescribed burning trainer are as follows:

1. Completion of the Range Burning Training course provided by NM-NRCS or equivalent.
2. Completion of the NRCS National Fire Ecology course.
3. Experience as advisor on a minimum of three prescribed burns of at least Class V.
4. Be an effective trainer.

Certified trainers must remain actively involved in a sufficient number of prescribed burns annually to maintain a high degree of technical proficiency. Certified trainers also are encouraged to receive additional training from sources approved by the State Range Management Specialist in order to maintain their certification. Approved training resources for this purpose could include:

1. Accredited University Prescribed Burn Courses
2. Bureau of Land Management
3. US Forest Service
3. New Mexico State Forestry

NRCS will conduct prescribed burns for the purpose of training field personnel in prescribed burning. A Prescribed Burn Plan will be completed on site prior to ignition of the burn. Fire control equipment as required by burn plan will be on stand-by as well. Approval authority to conduct prescribed burning for training purposes is vested in the Area Conservationist. All plans for burns to be conducted for training purposes will be reviewed and approved by a certified prescribed burning trainer.

## New Mexico Supplement National Range and Pasture Handbook Appendix A

**Safety**

Safety is the first consideration in prescribed burning. Landowners or cooperators must be informed in writing that they may be liable for damages if the fire escapes or smoke damage occurs. If unfavorable atmospheric, fuel, or logistical situations exist, NRCS employees must advise the fire boss or landowner to postpone the burn. NRCS employees are required to inform the landowner and/or fire boss of any unsafe situations or act as soon as it is apparent. If an emergency situation develops, NRCS employees are to follow the direction of the designated fire boss and act responsibly to resolve the situation.

Prescribed burning safety requirements for all NRCS employees or persons supervised by NRCS employees will adhere to the following for prescribed burns:

1. Clothing requirements. Each person present during a prescribed burn will wear: fire resistant shirt of 100% wool, 100% cotton or Nomex; fire resistant trousers (without cuffs) of 100 % wool, 100% cotton or Nomex; all leather boots, at least 8 inch high, with fiber lug or traction soles; and leather gloves. In addition, anyone assisting with prescribed burns in/or adjacent to wooded areas will wear a hard hat and wear or carry a fire shelter. **SYNTHETIC OUTER CLOTHING INCLUDING HEADGEAR, WATCHBANDS, DUSTMASKS, ETC., OTHER THAN NOMEX, WILL NOT BE ALLOWED ON FIRES AT ANY TIME.**
2. All vehicles will be equipped with shovel, flashlight and batteries, canteen or other water bag, fire extinguisher, and first aid kit.
3. Each person present during a prescribed burn will attend a pre-burn meeting outlining the responsibilities of each person, escape routes, planned firing sequence, and emergency action plans.
4. Each person providing instruction or advice to the holding crew will receive training on proper use of holding equipment prior to the actual burn.
5. Each person providing instruction or advice to the ignition crew will receive training on proper use of lighting equipment prior to the actual burn. **NRCS employees or persons supervised by NRCS employees will not drop the match, or other wise light the fire** except in properly scheduled training sessions.
6. No employee, at any time, shall ride on the outside of any vehicle, without proper safety harness or rails.
7. No employee, at any time, shall be left without reasonable access to a vehicle.
8. There shall be adequate communications available on all sides of the burn site.
9. A designated safe fuel storage area will be identified.

## New Mexico Supplement National Range and Pasture Handbook Appendix A

**Safety Continued**

10. The landowner or their designee must be on-site throughout the prescribed burn period. NRCS personnel will not serve as the landowner's designee.
11. In cases where the fire boss or landowner is unwilling to apply the prescribed burn within the burning prescription, NRCS employees will discontinue providing on-the-ground assistance, document the fire boss or landowner decision, and leave the area immediately.

**Planning Prescribed Burns**

All prescribed burns which NRCS are involved in, must be done in accordance with the NRCS Prescribed Burning standard and specifications (338) in Section IV, FOTG. All Prescribed Burn Plans will be reviewed and approved by a NRCS employee who has job approval authority for the burn class planned. Completion of the basic 2-day NRCS Prescribed Burning training program, or it's equivalent, is only the first step necessary for authorization to plan a prescribed burn. Until an employee has demonstrated sufficient knowledge, skills, and abilities (as determined by a certified trainer), that employee must have all burn plans reviewed and approved by someone with the proper authorization. This approval must be made by a NRCS employee who has job approval authority, which is equal or greater than the class of burn under consideration. Job approval authority will be issued by the Area Conservationist, based upon concurrence of the State Rangeland Management Specialist and the employee's direct supervisor.

Copies of Job Approval Authorities and supporting Prescribed Burning experience will be filed in the Area Conservationists office, as well as, in the employee's personnel file. The job approval authorities may not exceed the authority of the trainer. Area Conservationists will review, approve, and maintain copies of documentation for all employees Job Approval Authority. Each employee will be certified by job class. The controlling factors of area size, vegetation, terrain, and type of burn will determine Job class. The most limiting factor will determine which class of job approval authority is issued. Job approval authority will be issued on form 338-2.

Properly planned burns may include plans developed during a prescribed burning training course, as an active participant in a group planning an actual burn, or as an individual planning a burn.

**Any NRCS employee who violates NRCS Prescribed Burning policy will have their job approval authority revoked immediately.**

Job Approval Authority may be granted to employees who have documented evidence of previous training or experience that equal or exceeds NRCS prescribed burning training requirements. NRCS occasionally hires an employee with extensive training experience, and education in prescribed burning while in college, other agency, etc.

Prescribed burn management plans are valid only for the area planned and for the burning season planned. If the landowner decides to change the location of the burn or is unable to burn during the prescribed time frame, a new plan must be prepared prior to conducting the burn.

## New Mexico Supplement National Range and Pasture Handbook Appendix A

### **Technical Application Assistance**

For the purpose of providing training and technical assistance to land owners/managers and other NRCS employees properly trained and certified personnel may participate in the following activities in New Mexico:

- development of the prescribed burning plan;
- assist the fire boss in determining if field and weather conditions are in compliance with the plan at the time of ignition;
- serve as a burn team member for the application and completion of the burn;
- make recommendations to the fire boss or other burn team leaders on necessary adjustments to the plan prior to ignition to ensure the fire will meet planned objectives and that all participants are safe.

NRCS employees in New Mexico **shall not** serve as the fire boss, drop the match or otherwise initiate the fire except in properly scheduled training sessions. NRCS employees may **not carry** the drip torch and/or any other type of ignition equipment for the purpose of ignition of a prescribed burn, except during a properly scheduled training session

NRCS employees or NRCS supervised employees may attend prescribed burns for purposes of training or observation even if they have not had the basic prescribed burning training. Their participation will be restricted to activities such as collecting weather data, note keeping, etc.

### **Employee Liability**

Employees acting within the scope of their work accept a liability no greater or less than that associated with other practices. The scope of the work is clearly established in the National Range and Pasture Handbook and the state standards and specifications for the practice of Prescribed Burning. Any questions concerning employee liability should be directed to the Area Conservationist as soon as the question arises.

Employees operating outside of their scope of work face immediate disciplinary action and possible criminal liability.

## New Mexico Supplement National Range and Pasture Handbook Appendix A

### **Quality Control**

At a minimum all burn plans will be submitted to the local New Mexico State Forestry office for review.

Burns planned with NRCS assistance must adhere to all Federal, State, Local laws and Tribal requirements regarding outdoor burning, fire control, smoke management, and air quality. Adherence to the Clean Air Act (42 U.S.C. 7401 – 7671q) is required for all prescribed burns. Landowners are responsible for obtaining all permits and clearances as required by law.

New Mexico Environment Department/Air Quality Bureau Permit Application and Reporting of Open Burning for Prescribed/Prescribed Natural Fire Areas can be downloaded from the internet. See the practice standard for the address:

The fire boss will thoroughly review the prescribed burning plan with the fire crew immediately prior to the burn.

Quality control will be accomplished by reviewing prescribed burning plans before the burns are carried out. Prescribed burning plans and activities will also be reviewed during program and functional appraisals.

Only certified NRCS employees are used for reviews and spot checks of prescribed burning activities.

If an employee believes that the prescribed burn plan is not being followed or required burn permit(s) is not present, the employee is required to remove themselves from the prescribed burn area. Documentation of the conditions must be completed and notification to the fire boss that the NRCS employee(s) is removing themselves and the reason.

## New Mexico Supplement National Range and Pasture Handbook Appendix A

**PRESCRIBED BURNING**  
**Job Classifications**

## CLASS I .Maintenance Burn - Conservation Planning

- Allows for Prescribed Burning (338) practice to be scheduled in a conservation plan (contract etc.). Attendance at the New Mexico NRCS classroom training course (16 hours) or it's equivalent is required.

## CLASS II .Maintenance Burn.

- Size of Area: Less than 100 acres.
- Vegetation: Nonvolatile herbaceous and woody species
- Terrain: 5% slope or less

## CLASS III .Maintenance Burn.

- Size of Area: Less than 100 acres
- Vegetation: Same as Class I plus volatile herbaceous species less than four feet tall.
- Terrain: 10% slopes or less

## Class IV .Maintenance Burn.

- Size of area: Less than 640 acres
- Vegetation: Non-volatile herbaceous
- Terrain: 5% slopes or less

## CLASS V .Maintenance Burn.

- Size of Area: Less than 640 acres
- Vegetation: Same as Class IV plus live volatile woody species greater than four feet tall and dense volatile woody species.
- Terrain: 10% slopes or less

## New Mexico Supplement National Range and Pasture Handbook Appendix A

**PRESCRIBED BURNING**  
**Job Classifications**

Continued:

**CLASS VI .Maintenance Burn.**

- Size of Area: 640 Acres or more
- Vegetation: All types of fuel (fine or volatile)
- Terrain: more than 10 %

**CLASS VII Reclamation Burn**

- Size of Area: No Restrictions
- Vegetation: No Restrictions
- Terrain: No Restrictions

Size of Area Contiguous acres to be burned on a single management unit during the same growing season are considered to be one prescribed burn regardless of the number of individual segments the fire is divided into. Total acres for any prescribed burn can't exceed the Size of Area limits for the appropriate job classification.

## New Mexico Supplement National Range and Pasture Handbook Appendix A

### SEPARATE PRESCRIBED BURNING PLANS MUST BE DEVELOPED FOR EACH IDENTIFIABLE PRESCRIBED BURN.

For Class II and above, in order to have job approval authority, an employee must have completed a formal NRCS prescribed burning training course, or its equivalent, including participation in a field training burn and supervised participation in at least three prescribed burns at which NRCS provided technical assistance. The individual must demonstrate good judgment, knowledge, and skills in prescribed burning.

The following are the requirements for job approval authority:

#### **Job Approval Authority for Prescribed Burning**

CLASS I .Individuals must have attended the New Mexico NRCS classroom training course (16 hours) or it's equivalent.

CLASS II .Individuals must have Class I authority, must have properly planned and assisted in conducting at least three Class II burns which have been approved and must have demonstrated good judgment, knowledge, and skills for Class II burns.

CLASS III .Individuals must have Class II authority, must have properly planned and assisted in conducting at least three Class III burns which have been approved and must have demonstrated good judgment, knowledge, and skills for Class III burns.

CLASS IV .Individual must have Class III approval authority, must have properly planned and assisted in conducting at least three Class IV burns which have been approved and must have demonstrated good judgment, knowledge, and skills for Class IV burns.

CLASS V .Individual must have Class IV approval authority, must have properly planned and assisted in conducting at least three Class V burns which have been approved and must have demonstrated good judgment, knowledge, and skills for Class V burns

CLASS VI .Individual must have Class V approval authority, must have properly planned and assisted in conducting at least three Class VI burns which have been approved and must have demonstrated good judgment, knowledge, and skills for Class VI burns.

CLASS VII .Individual must have Class VI approval authority, must have properly planned and assisted in conducting at least three Class VII burns which have been approved and must have demonstrated good judgment, knowledge, and skills for Class VI burns.

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New Mexico 333-1

**Prescribed Burning Experience Documentation**

EMPLOYEE \_\_\_\_\_

LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

Employee should have participated in a burn at least once every three years in the category that certification is sought. Re-certification will consist of documented experience and concurrence of the Approving Officials. Use space below to record employee experience and the type of burn where help was provided. Original copy of this form(s) is to be filed with the Area Conservationist for certification documentation.

DATE	LOCATION	ACTIVITY	ACRES	SLOPE	FUEL KIND, AMOUNT and/or Density (ie. fine fules 800 #/ac, dense juniper)	COMMENTS

Other documentation, remarks and comments:

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Employee Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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**Prescribed Burning Job Approval Authority Documentation**

EMPLOYEE \_\_\_\_\_

LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

CERTIFICATION LEVEL	Check off Classification Levels Attained
<b>Class I:</b> Conservation Planning: Allows for Prescribed Burning (338) practice to be scheduled in a conservation plan (contract etc.). Attendance at the New Mexico NRCS classroom training course (16 hours), or it's equivalent is required.	
<b>Class II:</b> Size of Area: Less than 100 acres. Vegetation: Nonvolatile herbaceous and woody species Terrain: 5% slope or less	
<b>Class III:</b> Size of Area: Less than 100 acres Vegetation: Same as Class I plus volatile herbaceous species less than four feet tall. Terrain: 10% slopes or less	
<b>Class IV:</b> Size of area: Less than 640 acres Vegetation: Non-volatile herbaceous Terrain: 5% slopes or less	
<b>Class V:</b> Size of Area: Less than 640 acres Vegetation: Same as Class IV plus live volatile woody species greater than four feet tall and dense volatile woody species. Terrain: 10% slopes or less	
<b>Class VI:</b> Size of Area: 640 Acres or more Vegetation: All types of fuel (fine or volatile) Terrain: more than 10 %	
<b>Class VII:</b> Size of Area: No Restrictions Vegetation: No Restrictions Terrain: No Restrictions	

CONCURRENCE \_\_\_\_\_  
(Supervisor) \_\_\_\_\_ dateCONCURRENCE \_\_\_\_\_  
(State Rangeland Management Specialist) \_\_\_\_\_ dateISSUED BY \_\_\_\_\_  
(Resource Team Leader) \_\_\_\_\_ date

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New Mexico 333-2

**PRESCRIBED BURNING**  
Job Classifications I - VII

\* Size of Area: Contiguous acres to be burned on a single management unit during the same growing season are considered to be one prescribed burn regardless of the number of individual segments the fire is divided into. Total acres for any prescribed burn can't exceed the Size of Area limits for the appropriate job classification.

For Class II and above, in order to have job approval authority, an employee must have completed a formal NRCS prescribed burning training course including participation in a field training burn and supervised participation in at least three prescribed burns at which NRCS provided technical assistance. The individual must demonstrate good judgment, knowledge, and skills in prescribed burning.

The following are the requirements for job approval authority:

**CLASS I** - Individuals must have attended the New Mexico NRCS classroom training course (16 hours) or it's equivalent.

**CLASS II** - Individuals must have Class I authority, must have properly planned and assisted in conducting at least three Class II burns which have been approved and must have demonstrated good judgment, knowledge, and skills for Class II burns.

**CLASS III** - Individuals must have Class II authority, must have properly planned and assisted in conducting at least three Class III burns which have been approved and must have demonstrated good judgment, knowledge, and skills for Class III burns.

**CLASS IV** - Individual must have Class III approval authority, must have properly planned and assisted in conducting at least three Class IV burns which have been approved and must have demonstrated good judgment, knowledge, and skills for Class IV burns.

**CLASS V** - Individual must have Class IV approval authority, must have properly planned and assisted in conducting at least three Class V burns which have been approved and must have demonstrated good judgment, knowledge, and skills for Class V burns

**CLASS VI** - Individual must have Class V approval authority, must have properly planned and assisted in conducting at least three Class VI burns which have been approved and must have demonstrated good judgment, knowledge, and skills for Class VI burns

**CLASS VII** - Individual must have Class VI approval authority, must have properly planned and assisted in conducting at least three Class VII burns which have been approved and must have demonstrated good judgment, knowledge, and skills for Class VII burns