

PART 413 – PRESCRIBED BURNING

SUBPART A – GENERAL

413.0 Purpose

This directive sets forth the NRCS policy for prescribed burning.

413.1 Background

NRCS supports and encourages the use of prescribed burning on all lands to meet specific resource management objectives and on plant materials centers for the development, evaluation, and production of conservation plant materials. The national standard for prescribed burning is located in Title 450, National Handbook of Conservation Practices, Chapter 3, “National Practice Standards,” Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) Prescribed Burning (Code 338). The standard does not, and is not, intended to preempt or supersede requirements established by local, State, Tribal, or Federal agencies, but is intended to serve as a baseline for effective planning and implementation of prescribed burns.

413.2 Authorities

The following references provide authority for this policy:

The Soil Conservation Domestic Allotment Act, as amended (Public Law 74-46, 49 Stat.163, 16 U.S.C. Sec. 590(a)), provides the basic authority for NRCS to carry out conservation measures on the land and to assist land users in conducting conservation activities. NRCS has specific responsibilities to assist owners and operators in planning and applying conservation programs.

413.3 Definitions

- A. Class of Burn.—A description of the physical and/or chemical properties of the fuel and the burn area. This includes topography, size, and complexity. Examples of classes of burns might be grass, volatile trees over 10 feet tall, nonvolatile woody species, greater than 12-percent slopes, 640 acres, etc.
- B. The Clean Air Act (42 U.S.C. Sects. 7401–7671q).—A Federal statute that contains requirements addressing air quality concerns as they pertain to the protection of public health and public welfare, including air quality concerns associated with all prescribed burns.
- C. Client.—An individual, group, or unit of government that is the recipient of NRCS technical assistance. Examples of NRCS clients are landowners, managers, or partners who are primarily responsible for the business entity in its dealings with NRCS. Specific client types are person, group, Tribe, corporation, organization, conservation district, and units of government.
- D. Fire Boss.—The individual designated by the client as the person in charge of the prescribed burn and is the decision maker during the application of a prescribed burn. This will not be an NRCS employee.

E. Prescribed Burn Certification.—Documentation of the technical adequacy an NRCS employee has achieved relative to level of prescribed burn job approval authority (JAA) assigned to the employee. Technical adequacy is achieved or maintained through training, continuing education, or equivalent, as necessary to comply with NRCS State standards. The appropriate NRCS State specialist must certify the level of technical adequacy of the NRCS employee before the JAA is approved by the State conservationist and directors of the Caribbean and Pacific Islands Areas.

F. Prescribed Burn Job Approval Authority.—The level of technical assistance that an NRCS employee is qualified to provide based on the complexity of the prescribed burn. The extent of technical assistance will be restricted by the assigned level of prescribed burn JAA issued by the State conservationist and directors of the Caribbean and Pacific Islands Areas. An NRCS employee must meet the initial training and experience requirements as outlined in subpart B, section 413.12, of this part of the general manual to be issued prescribed burn JAA.

G. Prescribed Burn Plan.—A document providing critical information necessary to implement a prescribed burn. At a minimum, the required specific data include location of the burn, resource management objectives, preburn vegetation, required weather conditions, smoke management plan, notification checklist, burning method to be used, preburn preparation, firing sequence, job assignments, equipment checklist, identified escape routes and safety zones, plan for postburn evaluation and management, and necessary signatures of approval.

H. Prescribed Burning.—Any fire ignited by management actions under predetermined conditions to meet specific objectives related to land management goals or identified resource concerns.

I. Smoke Management.—The policies and activities implemented by air and natural resource managers directed at minimizing the amount of smoke entering populated areas or impacting sensitive sites, avoiding significant deterioration of air quality and violations of National Ambient Air Quality Standards, and mitigating human-caused visibility impacts in class-I areas.

J. Operations Director/Manager.—The operations director/manager is responsible for coordinating the overall implementation of the prescribed burn operation at the direction of the fire boss. The operations manager delegates leadership authority to crew chiefs and is responsible for maintaining contact with the fire boss and crew chiefs throughout the progression of the burn.

K. Crew Chief.—The crew chief directs ignition and suppression operations for their area of responsibility as assigned by the operations manager/director. The crew chief is responsible for keeping in contact with each member of their crew and the operations director during the progression of the burn.