

Controlled Burns: Prescription for Habitat Health

Fire and Habitat Health

In the Chicago region, fire is a natural and essential ingredient of healthy native ecosystems. Throughout history, lightning sparked natural fires, performing a "house cleaning" function for nature. Oak woodlands and prairies are adapted to fire and depend on it to maintain their unique character.

Fire helps local habitats thrive by:

- Releasing nutrients from burned plant materials.
- Helping seeds to grow.
- Opening the woodland floor to sunlight so that native wildflowers and plants can flourish.



Restoring a Natural Cycle

In an effort to restore the natural fire cycle, forest preserve districts, local park departments and other agencies use controlled burns that are carefully watched and tended. Trained ecologists burn parts of the woods, wetlands and prairies every few years to clear out weedy plants that choke out burr oaks and other native trees and wildflowers. The work is helping to bring back diverse communities of plants and animals, and creating dynamic, attractive and safe natural areas for people to enjoy.

Planning and Conducting Controlled Burns

Each spring and fall, land managers conduct controlled burns, also known as prescribed burns, at several sites in the Chicago region. Before a burn, trained personnel survey the burn site and create a detailed plan of action. Then they carefully monitor the weather and wait until conditions are right, minimizing the chance that smoke will blow towards houses and roads.

Benefits

Following a controlled burn, the reinvigorated natural areas provide habitat for wildlife and increase air and water quality in the region.

For More Information

To learn more about controlled burns in your area, please contact Valparaiso Parks Horticulture staff at 531-4678



A Cooperative Effort

The Valparaiso Department of Parks and Recreation is a member of the Northwest Indiana Invasive Plant Network, an alliance of public and private organizations working together to protect, restore, study and manage the precious natural ecosystems of the Chicago region for the benefit of the public.

To learn more about nature in the Chicago area, visit the Chicago Wilderness Web site at www.ChicagoWilderness.org