



Jesse Wimberley, project lead and fourth generation burner, conducts a prescribed burn on his property. Photo by Paige Burns.

KICKOFF MEETING OF THE NC SANDHILLS PRESCRIBED BURN ASSOCIATION

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The move to get more private landowners engaged in longleaf restoration took a giant leap forward on February 11th in Carthage, North Carolina for the rollout of the NC Sandhills Prescribed Burn Association (PBA)! Over 75 private landowners representing 15,000 acres from six counties packed the room along with natural resource professionals from state agencies, representatives from non-profit conservation organizations, three volunteer fire departments, and several elected officials. John Weir, Oklahoma State University Extension, and Jennifer Evans, North Carolina State Forestry Extension, both contributed their expertise to the kickoff meeting and provided overviews on the success of burn associations and the importance of prescribed fire for wildlife and forestry. For an intensive two hours, attendees discussed

how the NC Sandhills Prescribed Burn Association (PBA) can help move landowners from interest to action by using fire for their longleaf management.

Project Background

The Sandhills Area Land Trust (SALT) is spearheading the NC Sandhills PBA as part of its National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)-funded NC Sandhills Longleaf Pine Project. This project is a unique collaboration between SALT, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), North Carolina State University Extension Forestry, and North Carolina Cooperative Extension (NCCE). The NC Sandhills PBA is a milestone that was achieved through a comprehensive strategy of connecting with landowners and agencies over the

last six months. An initial Forest Summit outreach event was held in August 2015 to connect with over 250 landowners and

ensuring appropriate preparations are in place before each burn, including assisting landowners with preparation of burn plans, creating adequate fire breaks, procuring equipment, and making sure a sufficient team of support personnel is present. PBAs have long been a popular and successful way for Western U.S. landowners to work together to share knowledge, equipment, and labor for prescribed burns, but are a new concept in the Southeast.

The Sandhills PBA welcomes all landowners and citizens who desire to learn more about managing longleaf pine with prescribed fire. At the end of the kickoff meeting, a diverse and energetic steering committee of 12 landowners was formed to steer the NC Sandhills PBA to the next step. SALT will provide long-term support for the organization's activities with contributions from relevant state and federal agencies and local volunteer fire departments. SALT is

facilitating initial meetings and has scheduled a NC Prescribed Burner Certification training. The PBA will provide mentorship and supervision to landowners for certification

collect surveys to identify their needs and interests. In September and October of 2015, SALT and its partners held three short community meetings to provide a "one-stop shop" venue for landowners to speak directly to agencies and learn about the resources available to help them accomplish their longleaf forest management goals. These meetings were attended by approximately 100 landowners at various stages of management, ranging from families who have just inherited property to foresters who have been growing longleaf for decades. This "one-stop shop" format of bringing landowners and agencies together to provide one-on-one time has been highly successful. The project continues to evolve to meet the immediate needs that have surfaced, especially the need for prescribed burning.

SALT has affirmed that NC Sandhills landowners are motivated to use prescribed fire on their lands and have a strong interest in creating a PBA. Most private landowners have excluded use of prescribed fires because of some valid concerns, including potential liability, lack of training or experience, not enough people to help or needed equipment, and smoke management issues. The NC Sandhills PBA will provide these many motivated landowners with peer-to-peer mentorship and field days to gain the skills and confidence to conduct their own burns and accelerate the volume of prescribed burning in the Sandhills of North Carolina.

The NC Sandhills Prescribed Burn Association Overview

PBAs are organizations that provide training, equipment, and educational programs to landowners and the general public to increase the effectiveness and safety of prescribed fires on private lands. PBAs can help individuals manage their risk by

burns and is looking to schedule its first community burn day in the spring.

Restoration of the longleaf pine ecosystem to meet the goals set out by America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative will require more prescribed burning on privately owned lands. The NC Sandhills PBA seeks to be a precedent-setting tool that enables neighbors to help one another to increase their capacity and confidence to conduct prescribed burns, thereby breaking through individual and institutional bottlenecks. This community-based approach will serve as a model for other communities throughout the Southeast to increase the use of prescribed fire on a landscape scale and open new doors to restoration on private lands.



Presenters and PBA members at NC Sandhills PBA Kickoff Meeting. Photo by Ryan Bollinger.



Landowner Outreach Coordinator Jesse Wimberley addressing attendees at NC Sandhills PBA Kickoff Meeting. Photo by Ryan Bollinger.