



## **Prescribed Burns on Prudence Island: Autumn and Winter 2023-24**

Depending on weather and wind conditions, the RI Department of Environmental Management (DEM) along with the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR) plans to conduct prescribed burns on Prudence Island this fall and winter, perhaps as soon as the last week of October.

DEM and NBNERR will advise the public again when there is a more reliable “burn window” (see below). Notifications will be posted at the ferry, on Facebook *Heard Around the Dock*, and on websites for [DEM Forest Fire Program](#) and [NBNERR](#). Flyers will be distributed to abutting landowners, also.

**WHEN:** A **burn window** refers to when the environmental variables such as fuel moisture and weather conditions are balanced so that the fire will accomplish its goals, which include reducing fuels (i.e., combustible materials on forest floors and in grasslands), modifying wildlife habitat, and restoring ecological function while the fire remains under control. One of the biggest factors in determining a burn window is forecasting the weather. Whereas a 10-day forecast is accurate about only half the time, a five-day forecast can accurately predict the weather around 90% of the time, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Wind is an equally critical factor. DEM’s “go/no-go” decision on where and when to conduct a burn will likely come down to wind speed and direction, which allows for the optimal dispersal of smoke.

**WHO:** Experts from DEM’s Forest Fire Program, a subsidiary of the Division of Agriculture and Forest Environment, will lead the prescribed burns. They will employ detailed operational and safety plans. Planning is critical for every burn. A prescribed burn plan developed by a qualified burn boss must be in place before a burn is conducted. Firebreaks and other site preparations are made. Fire behavior, fuels, and weather are monitored throughout the burn, and if the prescription parameters are exceeded, the fire is shut down. The burn is carried out by a skilled crew under the direction of a qualified burn boss. DEM burn managers have obtained the required local permits and an exemption from state air pollution control regulation Part 4: Open Fires (250-RICR-120-05-4). Managers also have communicated with the Prudence Island Volunteer Fire Department and other local fire departments, the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the DEM Division of Fish & Wildlife, and the DEM Office of Air Resources.

**WHERE:** Based on the [Prescribed Fire Plan](#) for Prudence Island, prescribed fires on Prudence Island may occur throughout the south end of the island. This includes areas south of the three gates that enter NBNERR property: (east side) South Reserve Drive at the end of Narragansett Avenue; (central) T-Wharf Road at the junction with Mt. Pleasant; and (west side) Albro Farm Road opposite Steven’s Landing. The exact units to be burned depends on the wind and weather conditions on the day of the burn.

**WHY:** Prescribed burning is a versatile tool primarily implemented to restore and maintain certain ecosystems, including pine barrens and grasslands, and to reduce fuel loads which can lead to hazardous wildfires. Repeated prescribed burns benefit habitat for certain plants and animals by removing invasive species, minimizing accumulated leaf litter, and enhancing the growth of fire-adapted species, among

many other positive impacts. The goals of each burn guide the decisions of how and when a prescribed burn is implemented; for example, a burn during the summer when plants are growing will have a different impact on vegetation than a burn during the winter when plants are predominantly dormant.

### **Can we watch?**

Maybe... and only from a safe distance. **Please** follow any directions on posted signs and listen to directions from fire personnel. Not all areas to be burned can be viewed easily, so there may not be much to see. The best option is to check in at the Reserve Offices on the day of the burn. The details of where and when and how the burn is implemented vary through the day and plans may change.

All trails and roads—including Albro Farm Road—must be clear for the duration of the prescribed burn. Before, during, and after the burn fire crew and fire vehicles need to move around easily; all gates will be open for the safety of the fire crew.

Trained fire personnel will continue monitoring the treated areas after the burning is completed. We anticipate the entire south end will be open to the public the morning after the final burn.

### **What do we, as neighbors & residents, need to do?**

Not much during the actual prescribed burns. The decision to conduct the burn considers wind and weather in order to minimize the impact of smoke on neighbors, however there may be some haze or smell of smoke. That is normal for a prescribed burn.

Beyond the prescribed burn, there is a lot we can all do! [Everyone should take actions to protect themselves and their property](#) from a **wildfire**. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) provides guidance on how we can each prepare our homes for a wildfire. As a member of the Prudence Island community, you can help us become a [Firewise Community](#), one of the key recommendations in the [Prudence Island Community Wildfire Protection Plan](#) (PI-CWPP). The PI-CWPP, published in 2018, is currently being reviewed and updated.

### **What about the plants and animals?**

Like many other land management actions, such as mowing meadows, cutting trees, or harvesting deer, the goal of prescribed burns is to create and maintain healthy and diverse habitats. Within those habitats are populations of plants and animals which are sustained because the *habitat*—such as the meadow, pine-oak forest, or shrubland—is sustained by the cutting or burning. A prescribed burn is implemented after careful consideration of the impact on certain species, a consideration that is balanced with the long-term benefit to populations and habitats. Whenever possible, we protect certain species prior to a burn and we may adjust which units are burned or the season of the burn or the intensity of the fire to reduce harming certain species.

*For more information, contact Jon Mitchell, Stewardship Coordinator at [jonathan.mitchell@dem.ri.gov](mailto:jonathan.mitchell@dem.ri.gov) (or stop by the office at the south end – I may be there).*