

## **Woods Burning in South Carolina**

### **The Nature and Culture of Wildland Fire and its Impact on Our State's Character**

*Presented at the Annual Meeting of the SC Prescribed Fire Council 10 November 2004  
National Wild Turkey Federation Headquarters: Edgefield, SC*

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I'm very happy to be here today to speak to y'all, and I have high hopes that this meeting will serve as the catalyst, the springboard, and the foundation from which to launch our efforts to make Prescribed Fire a better-known, better-understood, and properly-appreciated natural and cultural phenomenon in South Carolina. I hope the fact that we're meeting here at the headquarters of the National Wild Turkey Federation is a harbinger of the success we'll achieve, since the Turkey Federation has been and is one of the most successful conservation organizations ever. The Federation's phenomenal success has largely been a result of the partnerships it has so wisely-formed and skillfully-guided.

Partnerships are popular in these times of tight budgets, and the synergism they produce is always a plus. In many situations, partnerships are efficient, effective, and therefore desirable -- but for our cause -- promoting and ensuring the future of Prescribed Fire in South Carolina -- partnerships are not an option, they're absolutely essential.

Before I talk about fire in the South, and more specifically, about fire in South Carolina, let's consider the unique natural phenomenon we call fire, and how it has shaped both the Earth's surface as well as human culture.

Fire on the landscape is a **natural process** that's been around about **425 million years**, when fires ignited by lightning or volcanic action started sweeping the globe. Lightning-fires especially, have continued since that time to shape the Earth's surface. The Southeastern United States (SE) has one of the highest rates of lightning strikes of any part of North America.

Fire is also a **cultural** phenomenon -- an **ancient ritual** and **tradition**, and a key part of our **heritage**; it's **one of man's earliest tools** -- **the first process of the natural world that we learned to use to our advantage on a landscape level**. **Humans have used fire** for many purposes, to broadly mention a few -- for warmth and cooking, in ceremony, and of course, to alter the landscape to our advantage -- for at least **1.6 million years**.

Fire ecologist and historian Stephen Pyne noted in his classic book *Fire in America*, that the word fire is seldom used in a neutral manner -- it usually has either positive or negative connotations. And if you think about it, that's true.

Like all tools, fire can also be **mis-used**, and when unleashed carelessly or with bad intent, it can be a devastatingly destructive force. So the use of fire, which is inescapable

on Earth, carries with it a huge responsibility of utmost care. I saw a sign in a small airport once, which compared the perils of aviation with those of the sea.

The sign read:

Aviation in itself is not inherently dangerous. But to an even greater degree than the sea, it is terribly unforgiving of any mistakes, carelessness, incapacity or neglect.

*Captain A. G. Lamplugh, British Pilot. Circa early 1930's.*

Now it seems to me that aviation, the ocean, *and* fire are *all* inherently dangerous, but I certainly agree with the second sentence, and I think that it also applies very well to our use of fire.

The effect of fire on the landscape of the SE and its diverse ecosystems, and on the people who have lived here, is well-documented. By about 11,000 years ago, the PaleoIndians and their fires had traversed all of the New World from Alaska to the tip of South America. Henry Lewis compiled 70 different reasons that Indians burned the land, including, for hunting and driving game; for crop, pest and habitat management; for fireproofing for safety; for warfare and signaling; for improving visibility; for clearing areas for travel; and for felling trees for various purposes.

These first Americans, the PaleoIndians, were hunter-gatherers, and so fire was for them likely mostly used to drive game, improve forage for themselves and the game they relied on for food and clothing, and for protection. At that time, the forests here along the 34<sup>th</sup> parallel of latitude were much different than they are today. At that time, glaciers covered much of our continent, and the forests here were much like the Canadian forests of today, with jack pine, spruce and similar boreal trees dominating the land. As the climate warmed and the glaciers receded, so also did Indian culture change. Studies of pollen buried in sediment at White Pond, near Elgin, SC show that about 12,800 years ago, the boreal forest migrated north and was replaced by oak-beech-hickory forest. These White Pond data also reveal that about 9,500 years ago, modern Southern pines joined with oaks to dominate the landscape, and contemporary species such as sweetgum and *Nyssa* showed up. Then, Southern pines dominated the area from about 7,000 years ago to the present. Fire suppression seems to be reversing this trend, by preventing longleaf pine regeneration and allowing hardwoods to take over many sites. Other pollen records, from Alabama, indicate that about 2,500 years ago pine and corn both increased remarkably in the SE, and fires set by Indians to clear land for agriculture seem the obvious primary cause for these changes.

As Indian culture progressed through the phases we now call the Archaic, Woodland and Mississippian periods, these people became less nomadic -- they became more sedentary and developed agriculture, as well as stratified societies. And their populations swelled; some researchers estimate that there may have been as many as 100 million Indians in North America in pre-Columbian times. As these societies grew and evolved, fire continued to be used as it was in the past, but it also took on new roles such as clearing travel corridors; clearing land and recycling nutrients for agriculture; controlling vermin

such as rodents, ticks and chiggers near villages; and clearing brush around villages to improve visibility and prevent surprise attacks. In other words, the Indians became what we today would call “**land managers**,” and they seem to have been very good at it for thousands of years.

It’s tragic and reprehensible that we destroyed the wealth of nature lore and oral history the Indians accumulated over their millennia-long reign here in the SE, but at that time most settlers foolishly thought that there was not much they could learn from the so-called “primitive” and “un-civilized” Indians. Who knows what ethnobotanical and other secrets we destroyed -- secrets that could immeasurably enrich our lives today?

As we move into historical times, we get a glimpse of pre-Columbian America through the accounts of early explorers, and one fact leaps out -- the oft-repeated notion that before Europeans arrived a squirrel could jump tree-to-tree from the Atlantic to the Mississippi without touching the ground **is simply not true**. Much of the landscape at that time was quite open, and fire was the primary natural process that kept it open.

Forest types can be broadly categorized into four classes based on the amount of tree canopy cover, which is reflected in how much sunlight reaches the ground. Forests tend to have at least 60% canopy cover; woodlands have less, say 30-60%, what we might call park-like conditions; savannas are mostly open, with 5-30% canopy cover, and prairies have very few trees; trees on prairies cover less than 5% of the ground. Many of the early historical accounts of the Carolinas describe prairies or savannas. Many of them also mention the widespread, frequent fires set by Indians.

In SC, we have 4 major physiographic regions: the Mountains, Piedmont, Sandhills, and Coastal Plain. Let’s consider each, with respect to fire, from the mountains to the sea:

Folks tend not to associate fire with Mountain ecosystems, but both history and remnant ecosystems belie that idea. William Bartram, who traveled the SE in the late 1700s, described meadow-like conditions in the valleys of the Blue Ridge in his classic book, *Travels of William Bartram*. He wrote:

“[We] began to descend the hills of a ridge ... and having gained its summit, enjoyed a most enchanting view; a vast expanse of green meadows and strawberry fields; a meandering river gliding through ... flowers ... flocks of turkeys strolling about ... herds of deer prancing [and] bounding over the hills ... companies of young, innocent Cherokee virgins ... [lying] reclined under the shade of floriferous and fragrant bowers ...”

Bartram sure had a way with words. This sounds to me like a fire-maintained, park-like paradise.

The presence of fire-dependent species such as pitch and table mountain pines, coneflowers, and pitcher plants also underscore the role of fire in the Mountains. Many of these ecosystems are today imperiled because of fire suppression. Charles Hudson, in

his classic book, *The Southeastern Indians*, describes how the Indians burned the woods to facilitate collection of chestnuts, which provided an unrivaled bounty each fall in the Southern Appalachians before the Eurasian blight we introduced wiped them out.

Much of the Carolina Piedmont -- which we often define today by its characteristic red clay -- was once dominated by grasslands punctuated by groves of mast-bearing oaks, all maintained by fire. Before King Cotton and the concomitant creekbank-to-creekbank plowing sent most of the Piedmont's topsoil into the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico, the red clay was in places covered by a thick layer of dark, loamy soil in which grew a diverse variety of grasses and wildflowers. After Old World diseases wiped out about 90% of the Indians in the late 1500s, buffalo and elk moved eastward, and both species were common in the Carolina Piedmont just prior to and at the beginning of settlement. Neither seems to have been common in the SE before European contact. Spanish conquistador Hernando De Soto recorded no sightings of buffalo when he traversed the SE in 1539-1542, but he did mention seeing "cow" hide shields, and "horns of cattle." Since cattle had not yet been introduced to the area, these "cow" hides and horns were likely from buffalo -- perhaps obtained from trading with Plains Indians. But in the 1720s, the English naturalist Mark Catesby described the piedmont of the Carolinas as open savannah grazed morning and night by "droves" of buffalo, which sought refuge in creekside canebrakes during the hot part of the day. John Lawson mentioned that while traveling in the North Carolina piedmont around 1700, he went days without seeing a pine tree! Some of the species of bunch grasses grazed by buffalo on the Great Plains also grow here in the Carolinas. Anthropogenic fire was likely the primary factor in the establishment and maintenance of these grasses, and for the scarcity of trees. David Ramsey, a SC historian, wrote in 1858 that "in the year 1750, when the settlement of the upper country began, there were so many buffaloes, which have long since disappeared, that three or four men with dogs could kill from 10 to 20 in a day." And kill them we did. By 1775, buffalo were extirpated from the Carolinas.

The aptly named Sandhills -- often synonymous with the Fall Line -- run from the Carolinas to Alabama, separating the Piedmont from the Coastal Plain. We meet today here in Edgefield on the inland edge of the Sandhills. In the 1540s, De Soto's army of 600 men, 300 hogs, and a passel of horses, traveling from present-day North Augusta to Columbia, made more than 20 miles per day through these Sandhills. That would have been difficult or perhaps impossible unless the land was open, and the agent that kept it open was fire. Further evidence of the role of fire in the Sandhills is the fire-dependent, longleaf pine-bunch grass-scrub oak ecosystem that even today dominates the region. But whereas longleaf once dominated the canopy, and there was a diverse ground cover and sparse midstory -- today, because of fire suppression, the forest structure is quite different. With notable exceptions such as the Sandhills State Forest & Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge, Fort Jackson, and other sites -- vestigial mature longleaf now tower over thick midstories of scrub oaks (mostly turkey oak, with a scattering of bluejack oak and sand post oak), and the oaks shade out the groundcover. And longleaf regeneration is sparse, spindly or absent.

The diverse ecosystems of the Coastal Plain -- which in SC is about equal in area to the Mountains, Piedmont, and Sandhills combined -- are very much a product of frequent fire.

Longleaf pine forests, woodlands and savannahs -- some dry and sandy, like on the rims of Carolina Bays and some riverbanks; some wet and fertile, like the seasonally-flooded flatwoods of Lee County -- were the dominant forest type of the Coastal Plain. As I mentioned before, longleaf is fire-dependent; its entire life cycle -- from the seed and seedlings which require mineral soil and low competition from other species, to its “grass” stage when the bud is protected by a thick sheath of needles and the taproot is burrowing deep into the soil, to the “bolting” or “rocket” stage when it shoots up quickly to get its bud aloft, to the mature tree with its thick, insulating bark -- its entire life cycle, its strategy -- is centered on fire -- **frequent** fire.

Conservation biologists define **ecosystem integrity as a function of “natural” processes, species composition, and structure**, and this model is especially clear and cogent for longleaf ecosystems. With fire as *a*, or *the*, primary process -- as long as the land burns frequently, the structure is intact (sparse midstory) and the species composition of the understory is diverse. Remove fire from the equation, and the midstory encroaches, dominating and shading out the herbaceous groundcover. And these effects interplay with one another. As the herbaceous layer disappears and hardwood litter takes its place, fires don't carry as well, and so fire is even less likely to exert its “natural” stabilizing effect. Instead of these different components complementing one another in a positive loop, their “un-natural” counterparts begin to complement one another in an increasingly negative loop.

Fox squirrels, pine barrens tree frogs, red-cockaded woodpeckers, and bobwhite quail and other grassland birds are species associated with longleaf pine. Plant species diversity of intact longleaf forests rivals that of any ecosystem in the temperate world. And the aesthetic appeal of intact longleaf ecosystems is phenomenal. Bartram lyrically described this beauty, as follows:

“We find ourselves on the entrance of a vast plain, generally level, which extends west 60 or 70 miles, rising gently. This plain is mostly a forest of the great longleaf pine, the earth covered with an infinite variety of herbaceous plants, embellished with extensive savannas, always green, sparkling with ponds of water.”

Longleaf pine once was dominant or codominant on 60-90 million acres in the SE, but only about 3 million acres remain. Most of South Carolina's Coastal Plain and practically all of its Sandhills -- perhaps 5-6 million acres -- were dominated by longleaf just a few hundred years ago, but today, according to the US Forest Service, only 369,000 acres of longleaf remain.

Rhett Johnson of the Longleaf Alliance laments the sad irony that many of our children learn and are concerned about the tropical rainforest while the **Longleaf Pine Fireforest**, their heritage, disappears in their backyards. The Alliance is working to change that.

Many wetlands in SC are also a product of fire. Our native switchcane grows statewide. And the expansive streamside canebrakes described by early explorers -- Bartram mentions extensive canebrakes 24 times in his *Travels* -- once provided key habitat for birds such as passenger pigeons, black bear, Bachman's warbler, Swainson's warbler, and canecutter rabbits. In the Sandhills and Coastal Plain, seasonally-inundated, isolated wetlands -- including Carolina Bays of all types, whether peat-based with pocosin vegetation, clay-based with cypress/sedge forest, or treeless depression meadows -- are all shaped to some extent by fire, which along with hydroperiod (flood-drought cycles), determines their vegetation.

The term **pocosin** emanates from the Algonquian word for "Swamp on a Hill," which reflects the fact that much, but not all pocosin is found in isolated wetlands (no inlet or outlet). Pocosin (often colloquially known as titi) is evergreen and semi-evergreen shrub vegetation (such as swamp cyrilla [again, titi], gallberry, fetterbush, smilax, and the 3 "bays," sweetbay, red bay, and loblolly bay), which often grow atop peat. Pocosins don't burn as frequently as the uplands that surround them, but when they do burn, say every 5-25 years, they tend to burn intensively in stand-clearing fires.

The largest wildfire on record in South Carolina was the Buist Tract fire in Horry County near Myrtle Beach in 1976, which burned about 30,000 acres in 5 days. The magnitude of this fire -- much of which was in pocosin growing atop deep peat deposits -- is underscored by the fact that on average about 30,000 acres burn statewide **each year**. The Buist Tract fire burned that much in less than a week, with flaming material being thrown as much as a mile ahead of the flaming front. Today, 10,000 acres of the former Buist Tract is the SC DNR's Lewis Ocean Bay Heritage Preserve and Wildlife Management Area, which is now adjacent to the Carolina Bays Parkway and Conway Bypass -- both major thoroughfares. But despite the difficulties inherent in burning in such a "developed" area, with the help of the SC Forestry Commission and The Nature Conservancy, we regularly burn a couple of thousand acres a year there.

The rare and valuable Atlantic white-cedar bogs, also known as "juniper" swamps (as in the juniper whaleboats described in Melville's *Moby Dick*), are both fire- and wetland-dependent. We have an Atlantic white-cedar restoration site we are really proud of on our Aiken Gopher Tortoise Heritage Preserve and Wildlife Management Area not far from here, if anyone wishes to see it sometime.

Now that we've looked at aboriginal fire, and the primary fire-shaped ecosystems in SC, let's move forward to European settlement.

The first Europeans to settle permanently in the SE US were a diverse lot, but the ones that may've had the greatest impact on the fire-maintained landscape were the Scots-Irish. Lacking wealth, these people -- called "sandhillers," "rednecks," or "crackers" -- were for the most part pushed to marginal lands, which were unsuitable for row cropping, but well-suited for open-range grazing by livestock. The Scots-Irish were fiercely independent people who brought with them their native Celtic tradition of open-range

grazing, and a key part of that tradition was frequently burning the land to encourage new growth of grasses and forbs. The extent of open-range grazing is evident in the fact that in the 1850s nearly 6 million head of cattle, sheep, horses and mules in the Carolinas and four other SE states were mainly supported by grazing on open range.

Africans also brought with them from their native continent the tradition of burning for range management, as well as to facilitate hunting and for other reasons, as the writings of Karamoja Bell, T. V. Bulpin and others attest. **So, the tradition, the ritual, and the heritage of Prescribed Burning in the SE -- begins with an ancient Native American foundation, which later meshed with European and African cultures. Prescribed Burning in South Carolina is truly an ancient, time-tested, and effective land management practice with multi-cultural roots, and it's certainly one worth preserving, for cultural as well as natural reasons.**

Herbert L. Stoddard, often considered the Father of Bobwhite Quail Management, appreciated the benefits of frequently burning the land, especially as it related to benefiting quail. His pioneering, management-based research in the North Florida and South Georgia piney woods, starting in the 1920s, laid the technical and formal foundation for the modern prescribed burning we practice today. Stoddard's advocacy for prescribed fire -- and his research on large plantations, many of which had been kept intact only because of wealthy Northerner's interest in quail hunting -- later evolved into the Tall Timbers Research Station, the nucleus for research into the ecology, philosophy, and techniques of modern prescribed fire. Stoddard and his fellow researchers at Tall Timbers, especially brothers E.V. and Roy Komareck, successfully promoted acceptance of Prescribed Burning outside the Deep South. Tall Timbers could be called the mecca of **Prescribed Burning.**

Besides the large plantations that were acquired and managed for quail hunting and ended up conserving some of the most significant, fire-dependent longleaf and other threatened ecosystems in the nation, another situation developed that fortuitously protected large fire-dependent tracts of land -- that is, the military bases with their firing ranges and resulting unplanned, but highly beneficial and frequent fires. Much of the best fire-dependent land we now have is on military bases such as Fort Jackson, Fort Benning, Eglin Air Force Base, Shaw Air Force Base, and the former Fort McClellan in Alabama's Ridge and Valley, and Appalachian regions, part of which is now the Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge. While these ecosystems were preserved by chance, the Department of Defense now recognizes their value and purposely maintains these areas with prescribed fire and other management techniques.

Powerful forces and many taxpayer dollars have been used to proselytize a culturally-ignorant and condescending message of fire suppression in the South. Felix Salten's novel *Bambi* was translated into English in 1929; then Walt Disney got a-hold of it, and Disney switched the chief threat to Bambi and his companions from poachers to fire. Bambi was for a time used in a fire prevention poster.

In the 1920s, 30s and 40s -- our country's fire suppression movement became entrenched in government and forest policy. Starting in 1924, *federal funds were withheld from state forestry agencies if they even tolerated prescribed burning*. Then the American Forestry Association undertook a massive propaganda campaign, the Southern Forestry Education Project, from 1927-1930. Teams of proselytizers known as the Dixie Crusaders were sent into the rural South with trucks equipped with generators, movie projectors, films, radio broadcasts, posters, and pamphlets. They traveled 300,000 miles and passed out 2 million pieces of literature along the way. They presented more than 5,200 motion picture programs and lectures to 3 million people. One of the main themes of this mis-information campaign was fire's purported destructive effect on wildlife.

The US Forest Service, starting in the 1930s, employed sociologists and psychologists to study what it deemed to be the psychopathology of woods-burners, and continued to fund this work for 40 years. Then in 1945, Smokey the Bear came along. His slogan, **“Remember, Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires”** was the theme of one of the most successful advertising campaigns ever. In ways, the advent of Smokey was a death blow to ecosystem integrity on many wildlands in the SE. Of course, Smokey has done some good, and the part of his message about not being careless with fire will always be on-the-mark, but one might persuasively argue that Smokey has done more harm than good in the SE by disintegrating fire-dependent ecosystems and fostering fuel build-ups that eventually resulted in catastrophic wildfires. Smokey and his cohorts could also be labeled culturally-insensitive -- to use a euphemism -- since in the SE at least -- Smokey, the Dixie Crusaders and others ignored not just the ecological, but also the cultural value of woods burning, which was such an integral part of Southern life.

It is only fair to note that the fire hazard situation in our nation was quite complex when Smokey arrived on the scene, with factors like huge accumulations of tinder-like logging slash, and spark-spewing steam locomotives making matters quite volatile. But even today, when the US Forest Service is one of the main proponents and practitioners of prescribed burning, the mis-information campaign persists. I recently saw a prominent “Smokey” sign on the Talladega National Forest in Alabama that read:

### **Fire Destroys Watersheds**

That doesn't help our cause any. We need to get a drip torch in Smokey's hand.

Conditions in SC today are much different than in the past. Our state is changing at what seems to me an alarming rate. We call this change “progress” and “development,” but I wonder if we need to redefine those terms. Both the land and the people of the state are now less rural, and with these demographic and landscape changes arise new challenges to maintaining prescribed fire as a traditional tool for natural resource management. Much of the increase in population that we're experiencing is from folks migrating Down South from Up North, many from northern cities. And while it may be tempting to blame the increasing hassles associated with land management practices on these immigrants, we should remember that many of these folks come from a region with a fire history much different than that of the South. The attitudes of people from the Lake States and

the Northeast may be rationally and understandably influenced by passed-down accounts of conflagrations and tragedies like the Peshtigo Fire in Wisconsin, which killed 1,500 people and destroyed more than 1 million acres of timber. In just 8 hours, this fire devastated 1,000 square miles of pine forest. It burned on the same day as the Great Chicago Fire, in the fall of 1871, but killed 5 times as many people. Stephen Pyne makes a good point about what may be the chief reason for differing attitudes on fire, that is, “In the South, mass fires appeared as threats only with the advent of fire protection; in the Lake States, fire protection tended to eliminate the mass fire.”

Bruce Matthews coined the term “**rurbanization**” “to define the invasion of affluent urban and suburban-oriented people into rural areas, looking for a self-defined ‘country’ lifestyle, while importing urban attitudes and values, and expecting urban amenities.” Matthews maintains that, “the resulting conflict tears apart the fabric of rural communities, and often destroys the very nature of the ‘country’ experience originally sought, though few **rurbanites** realize it.” Certainly rurbanization is a large part of the problem we face in maintaining prescribed fire in SC. A recent SC DNR study of Charleston & Dorchester counties showed not only that the population is growing (no surprise there), but that associated urban sprawl is growing at 4 times the rate of population growth.

A new term has arisen to describe these places where forestland meets suburbia -- the **Wildland-Urban Interface** -- and the SC Forestry Commission’s excellent *Firewise* and *Living on the Edge* programs are working to educate folks who live there about how to make their homes safer from the threat of wildfire, so that theirs will not be one of the 60 homes damaged or destroyed by wildfire each year in SC. Memories of the Florida wildfires of 1998 are making this program quite relevant in certain parts of SC.

At any rate, I believe we need to constantly remind ourselves of the context and rationale -- sometimes justified and sometimes not -- behind perspectives that differ from our own on the issue of fire. Understanding root causes for these perspectives can help us understand how to change them, if need be.

We have a great challenge before us, but we have great and unique advantages in our favor. I believe we have all we need to ensure the future of Prescribed Fire in SC.

Many of our most important elected state officials understand the need for Prescribed Fire. Our legislature specifically provided for Prescribed Fire in the Heritage Trust Act of 1976. This Act was the first law of its kind in the nation and has since been copied nationwide.

Our legislature also sagaciously passed the **SC Prescribed Fire Act** of 1994, which legally defines Prescribed Fire thus:

**“‘Prescribed fire’ means a controlled fire applied to forest, brush, or grassland vegetative fuels under specified environmental conditions and precautions which cause the fire to be confined to a predetermined area and allow accomplishment of the planned land management objectives. It also is known as a ‘controlled burn’.”**

**The Prescribed Fire Act** also led to the **Certified Prescribed Fire Manager** program run by the SC Forestry Commission, and the law provides legal protection for those implementing Prescribed Fire.

And we are lucky that **South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford** understands land management; he owns land himself and is personally impacted by wildland fire issues.

Quail managers in SC have been carrying out and advocating Prescribed Fire since Stoddard's time. Today, the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative has a goal of applying fire to 29.6 million acres of pinelands in the SE Coastal Plain. And federal initiatives such as the Landowner Incentives Program and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program are providing support to private landowners to practice prescribed burning on their lands.

Now to the council itself: The **South Carolina Prescribed Fire Council** was formed in the summer of 2003, and our **mission is to foster cooperation among all parties in South Carolina with an interest or stake in prescribed fire, to optimize burning opportunities by encouraging the exchange of information, techniques, and experiences among practitioners of prescribed fire in South Carolina, and by promoting public understanding of the importance and benefits of prescribed fire.**

And we have a slogan: **Keep SC Safe: Promote Rx Fire**

We plan to propose that the Governor declare a ***Prescribed Fire Awareness Month*** this winter, which will include regional media academies, in which we'll conduct demonstration prescribed burns (weather permitting), hand out fact sheets about prescribed burning, and answer questions. [note: in 2005, **South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford** proclaimed March as *Prescribed Fire Awareness Month*]

We are also compiling a list of sites where the public can visit land that's regularly burned, to see what it looks like before, during, and immediately after burns -- and the best part -- to see what it looks like after re-growth.

According to the SC Forestry Commission, over the past 10 years prescribed fire has burned an average of about 500,000 acres per year statewide. We think that acreage can and should be doubled.

**The South is the origin of modern prescribed burning in the US. When the rest of the country "caught on" to the utility of prescribed burning, it came to the South to learn the principles and techniques. The art and science of woods-burning in SC is a deeply-rooted, traditional tool in Native American, African, and European culture and heritage -- and it is a unique and essential element of our Southern character, as well as being quintessentially natural.**

We must succeed. The welfare of many species of wildlife and many ecosystems, and the safety of millions of citizens are responsibilities we must embrace. We have the time-

tested knowledge that frequent woods-burning prevents fuel build-up, and that in many ecosystems it is a matter **not** of **if**, but of **when**, fires will burn, and that it's always best to **choose** the "**when**." We have the beauty of fire-maintained ecosystems to inspire us. And we have the expertise. We have the legacy of Herbert L. Stoddard, the backing of several branches of government, including the SC Department of Natural Resources and SC Forestry Commission, as well as the US Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Natural Resources Conservation Service -- and the support of organizations like the Longleaf Alliance, the Nature Conservancy, and Tall Timbers. We have the scholarship of fire researchers like Clemson University's David Van Lear and Tom Waldrop. And we now have this Council, which aims to pull all those with an interest in Prescribed Fire together toward our common goal. It is a worthy goal, and I look forward to us progressing together.

Together we can ensure that Prescribed Fire will continue to keep South Carolina safe and natural, as it has for thousands of years.

Let me leave you with this proverb from the Tuareg people of North Africa:

**The hand that holds the brand will never be burned by the fire.**

Thank you.

I relied heavily on the work of others -- including using several quotations or paraphrased passages that I did not emphasize or cite for readability reasons -- to prepare this speech, especially: Syd Johnson and Philip (Rosebud) Hale's superb paper *The Historical Foundations of Prescribed Burning for Wildlife: a Southeastern Perspective* (USFS GTR-NE-288). I also depended upon the work of Carl Betsill, Dale Wade, Cecil Frost, David Van Lear, R.F. Harlow, Lawrence Barden, Tom Waldrop, Stephen Pyne, Rhett Johnson, Ron Myers, the Longleaf Alliance, the South Carolina Forestry Commission, The Nature Conservancy and others. Any mistakes are mine, not theirs. I will happily provide citations for these works, by request.

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