



Homewood Izaak Walton Preserve, Inc.

Dedicated to Service in Conservation

1100 Ridge Road
Homewood, Illinois 60430
708-798-1850

CONTROLLED PRAIRIE BURNS

BACKGROUND: The Homewood Izaak Walton Preserve in Homewood has been conducting controlled burns of our prairie and wooded areas for many years. All of our efforts are accomplished with the generous help offered by those willing to volunteer their time. We hope to add several volunteers that are interested in assisting our current group of adult and youth volunteers, at the preserve, that for all practical purposes is right in your own backyard.

Why do we conduct these controlled burns: In the Spring we are burning off the thick mat of vegetation that has accumulated during the growing season. This allows the sun and rain to gain ground in quickly promoting natural and native prairie plant growth. The burning also eliminates the non-native vegetation that is not a natural part of the prairie and woodland eco system. In the Fall, we conduct controlled burns, so that moisture from precipitation during the winter months can soak deep into the soil, thus promoting a healthy habitat for all to enjoy, including the prairie dwelling birds and other small animals. The woodland burns are used to burn off the thick layer of fallen leaves. These burns do not harm the trees, as the bark of the tree insulates them from this small amount of fire. Native Americans actually conducted burning of prairie lands, as they understood the benefit to the wildlife and plant life that was a part of the vast prairie lands.

Tools that we use: Flapper - Shovel sized, fire resistant and used to safely knock down small fires keeping them from going past a fence line, onto adjacent property. 5 gallon hand-pump water fire extinguishers, used for the same purpose. We use a drip-can to start the fire. The operator of this device is one of our most experienced prairie burn volunteers and is always under the supervision of the Burn Crew Chief. We have only one drip-can in operation at a time, so we are dealing with only one small fire area.

Vegetation: As our property consists of prairie, small lakes and wooded areas, our burns are small and well controlled. We are burning small prairie grasses. We burn towards our lakes or wooded areas. In this way, the small fire reaches the lake or the dead leaves of the woodlands area floor. We are then extinguishing any small spot fires with our pump cans. Keep in mind our preserve is a prairie, not a pine tree forest in the mountains. We therefore do NOT have vegetation such as that you would see in news footage of a western wildland or California brush fire.

Safety: Safety is always the underlying theme for every one of our controlled burns. None of our volunteers is ever put in a dangerous situation. As an additional safety measure, we also advise the Homewood Fire Department of our location, prior to the start and at the conclusion of all burns.

Background of Controlled Burn Coordinator: Lifelong Homewood resident, attended St. Joseph Grade School, H-F High School and NIU. Member of Homewood Fire Department for 32 years. Served as Homewood Fire Department Cadet Program Training Coordinator for 20 years. Attended Controlled Burn Training conducted by the Cook County Forest Preserve District and Controlled Burn Coordinator for Homewood Izaak Walton, since 2008. The Controlled Burn Coordinator, Steve Wlodarski, is present during the operation.

When do we conduct these burns: Our controlled burn sessions are only 3 hours in length. We generally conduct our burns on either a Saturday or Sunday from 1:00 to 4:00pm. It all depends on the weather, as to which day we select. Saturdays are our first choice. We burn during the months of April, May, October and November. Due to diminishing daylight hours, we have started the late November burns as early as 11:00am. If we start at 11:00am, we would then run the burn until 2:00pm.

Refreshments: The Burn Crew Chief brings bottled water for refreshment, as we take a break at the halfway point in our burning activity. If anyone would like to bring their own refreshments, there is no problem with that, but items need to be small and portable. Fruit and/or granola bars seem to be popular items.

How to Volunteer:

Adult volunteers need only contact me via phone or my e-mail address, if you are interested in assisting us.

Youth Volunteers: If your son or daughter is interested in assisting us with even one of our prairie or woodland area burns, we ask you to do two things.

- 1) Have one of your parents, contact Steve Wlodarski via e-mail at steve.wlodarski@att.net We use e-mail as our method of notifying you of the date and time of future controlled prairie burns.
- 2) Have one of your parents, complete the information on the last page of this handout and bring it with you when you attend a burn. This only needs to be brought to us once.

How and when do we contact you: Izaak Walton Preserve Member John Newgard or Steve Wlodarski will contact your household by e-mail and advise that we will have a burn and confirm the start and finish time. We do this for each burn, generally John or I will notify those who have expressed an interest in volunteering on the Thursday evening before the burn. We wait until Thursday evening to determine the burn day and start time, as by then we have better certainty as to the weather conditions that are needed in order to conduct the burn. The volunteers to assist that day assemble in front of the garage building behind the main building (Senior Hall). You will see us loading our equipment onto the carts that we use to transport our tools to the burn area. We leave from and return to this area as a group. We work together as a group while out on our grounds.

Additional Information:

Who are our volunteers: We currently have volunteers ranging in age from 13 to 60. Volunteers should be in relatively good physical condition, due to the amount of walking that we need to do on uneven terrain, in and around our grounds. While we have no maximum age restriction, our minimum age requirement is 13.

Youth Volunteers ages 13 to 18: While the parent or guardian need not be present for the activity, we do require the permission of the parent or guardian, in order for the youth to participate. Please note that the youth volunteers work while under adult supervision of our experienced volunteers.

Experience required for new volunteers: (NONE!) There is no experience required. Only a willingness to work with our very easy to handle equipment and our volunteers. Our more experienced volunteers are always willing to assist you in learning our easy to use hand operated tools. We always make sure that our volunteers are working in groups and that they are comfortable with our very simple operations.

What to wear: Dress in layers, as the day can start out cool, warm significantly and then cool down again, before we conclude our activity. Long pants are required, we suggest blue jeans. It is best to wear comfortable sturdy shoes made for outdoor activity that you can either easily clean or you do not mind them becoming soiled. Most of us wear some type of work boots or an old pair of gym shoes.

We welcome and encourage your participation: If you enjoy working together as a team, in an activity that benefits your local community and the natural habitat of the preserve, we look forward to meeting and working with you. As we are an "All Volunteer" organization, we fully understand that our volunteers may be able to attend only one or two of our controlled burns. Please know that there is no maximum or minimum commitment. We are always appreciative of whatever time that our volunteers may have to assist us. Parent(s) either you and/or an older brother or sister are also welcome to join us to participate, if you so choose.

PARENTS - Should you have any questions: Any parents that have questions, please feel free to contact me on my cell phone at 312-420-4939 or by e-mail at steve.wlodarski@att.net , I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

HOW TO NOTIFY US THAT YOU ARE INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING:

Provided that your parents approve of your participation in assisting us with our controlled burns, please have your parent send an e-mail to Steve Wlodarski at steve.wlodarski@att.net or your parent may contact Steve by phone at 312-420-4939.

With our organization being all volunteer there is no e-mail address for me at Izaak Walton Preserve. We do have a facebook page, if you would like to view it. We do not use the facebook page, however, to provide notifications of specific controlled burns. Keep in mind that notification of a controlled prairie burn is made on the Thursday evening before the burn, as we are dependent on being certain of the weather conditions that will allow us to conduct a burn. We have found that it works best to provide this notification via e-mail to the parent.

Please have one of your parents complete the following form and bring this completed form with you when you attend the controlled burn. We only request that this form be completed one time.

Student's Name _____

Student's Age _____

E-mail Address that we can use to reach your household (Parent's e-mail address):

We ask for the child's age, as 13 years old is the minimum age for participation in this activity at Izaak Walton Preserve. Our maximum number of students per burn would be 10. We want to give everyone that is interested a chance to participate and we know we could not utilize the entire class for any single burn. Should we receive a large number of volunteers, we may have to schedule the students for a specific burn session. We do our best to work with the availability of the volunteers and we have been successful at accommodating all of our youth volunteers, over the years.

Parent Name(printed) _____

Parent Signature _____

Home Phone Number (Parent) _____

Cell Phone Number (Parent) _____