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Conducting a Prescribed Burn

As you read this, we will likely be on day seven or beyond of this cold snap. Snow isn't melting, and spring forage management might be the last thing on your mind. Nonetheless, spring will soon be upon us, and our focus will transition to grass management for the growing season, and that may mean consideration of a prescribed burn on forage stands.

I like prescribed fire in forage systems. When conducted safely, they can be an effective management tool. The weed and brush control benefits they provide, particularly in our native grass systems, are well documented. Still, before blindly conducting a burn, the question should be asked: why am I burning?

What benefit is prescribed fire going to do for my forage stand or wildlife habitat? Cool season grasses typically don't tend to respond to fire like warm season prairie grasses do. In fact, if burned too frequently or at the wrong time, stands can be harmed.

We don't burn cool season grasses at the same time as warm season grasses. If you are trying to take out brush or taller cedar trees, do you have enough fuel, and will it be flammable during the appropriate time? If ample fuel loads are not available to burn up small cedar trees, or if burns are being conducted prior to the beginning of regrowth on our brush species (as is often the case with our cool season grasses), control will not be as effective as you'd like. At that point, other management options may better help you achieve your desired objective.

There are certainly instances when prescribed fire is a valuable forage management tool. Take a little time now to determine if that value applies to your individual situation. If it does, I'll share more next week about the planning you can do now to make it safe and successful.

Thinking Ahead to Spring

With recent weather limiting much outdoor activity, it's a great time to start looking at trees you might plant this spring...or new vegetable varieties...or even flowers. If that's on your to-do list before spring arrives, but you don't know where to start, the K-State Research & Extension Horticulture Information Center has just the ticket.

Visit <http://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/info-center/recommended-plants/> for links to a wide variety of plants, including iris, daylilies, fruits, vegetables, roses, and even turf grass and trees (trees are broken out by area of the state). Trying to drought proof your landscape? They also have a list of low water use plants.

Some of the resources will come with picture, but many will not. If it's iris, daylilies, roses, or peonies you are exploring, however, a good collection of images of those found in the University Gardens Collection Gardens at <http://www.k-state.edu/gardens/gardens/collections/>.

It might provide just a little bit of a warm feeling even in this cold snap.