



Woodland Damage from Wildfire

It's early May. The grass is green, trees are in leaf and the spring wildfires are behind us. Or are they?

Did your timber or woodlot have a wildfire this spring? Unfortunately, even if the trees look alright now, they may carry the scars from the wildfire for the rest of their lives. Trees form scars where the inner bark is killed from the heat of the wildfire. Scars may hurt the wood quality if you plan to sell the tree, or it may make an opening for rot and decay which can eventually kill the tree. If the damage is not too severe, the trees may survive and continue to provide shade, hold the soil, and benefit wildlife with food and shelter.

If the wildfire was hot enough, small woody stems may have been killed at ground level. Several species such as the oaks can sprout back and start growing another tree. New sprouts can grow from the old root base and will make a tree without any scar from the fire.

Fall wildfires following a late summer drought can cause even more problems. If the ground cover is burned away in the fall, the land will be bare throughout the winter and the soil may erode. Leaf fall will help to cover the soil, but in areas with few trees or fires that burn after leaf fall, your soil will be open to wind and water erosion clear until this time next spring.

The Conservation Department uses fire to accomplish land management goals. We set them so that we control the intensity of the fire. We select the weather and how we ignite the fires. We select the time of year when the fire will do what we want. Setting fires under specific conditions to accomplish

specific management goals is called **Prescribed Burning**.

Man-caused (arson) wildfires are generally set near roads. Wildfires may also result from escaped debris burning. Both tend to occur on the drier, windier days. These fires burn exceptionally hot and do a lot of damage to the trees (and fence posts, and hay, and buildings, and.....).

MDC is an agency experienced in both lighting prescribed burns and suppressing wildfires. We know that under the right conditions we can enhance oak and pine regeneration with fire and we can open up closed woodlands to benefit large numbers of wildlife. We also know the damage uncontrolled wildfire can cause. We work closely with rural fire departments to fight wildfires aggressively.

The US Forest Service also uses prescribed burning on thousands of acres in Missouri each year. The next time you hear a Smokey Bear ad, listen closely. Smokey will be telling you "Only YOU Can Prevent Wildfire".

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