

February 1st MO Prescribed Fire Council

Margaritaville Resort Complex and Event Center in conjunction with MNRC 4:00-6:00

Chair Wes Buchheit called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. that started with a round of introductions. Due to extreme weather conditions that prevented some from traveling a virtual attendance option was provided. Members physically present included: Chair Wes Buchheit, Vice Chair Scot Mikols, Secretary/Treasurer John Burk, Members At Large Robin Verble and Jef Hodges, Ben Webster, Bruce Palmer, James Cornelius, Joe Alley, Justin Ferguson, Rachel Settle, and Phil Sneed. Member virtually present included: Mike Gaskins, Bennie Terrell, Members At Large Ryan Gauger and Zach Coy, Lisa McBrayer, Isaac Coy, Chris Woodson, Calvin Maginel, Cheyne Matzenbacher, Julie Norris, and Tori Spanek.

The second order of business was to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. No changes were recommended and a motion was made to accept the minutes by Jef Hodges and seconded by Scot Mikols.

Election Results The bylaws state that all individuals serving as officers on the Executive Committee (with the exception of the Secretary/Treasurer) can only serve 6 consecutive years and then must rotate off for at least a year. Member At Large Neal Humke had reached that threshold at the previous annual meeting so his seat came open. Members At Large Zach Coy and Robin Verble qualified to be reelected and Ryan Gauger expressed interest in filling the spot vacated by Neal Humke. The bylaws also require that requests for nominees for available seats be made 30 days prior to the annual meeting. This did not happen so an e-mail went out to the full council immediately following the September 2021 annual meeting requesting nominees that included Robin, Zach, and Ryan as options to fill the available seats and accept National Deer Association as a new affiliate member. No additional nominees were offered and all that responded voted in favor of Robin, Zach, and Ryan serving as Members At Large for the council and to accept NDA as a new affiliate.

Prescribed Burning Training Ben Webster provided an update that included some participation statistics. Thus far, 153 people have completed the online training and there does not appear to be any issues with it or complaints received. There have also been 2 field trainings completed with 14 more scheduled. Ben also provided the observation that participants taking the field portion tend to take courses available close to where their property is verses where they live if they are absentee landowners. Ben also passed around a hard copy version of what the online training module contained as well as some charts containing pertinent statics pertaining to the online training module generated by the vendor Kalkomey.

Joe Alley asked if there were or would be any issues addressing demand for the field portion of the training. Ben suggested that there was and would be because, currently, only MDC employees that have burn boss qualifications can teach the course. NGO's and other partners can assist with these trainings but they must have an MDC employee with the proper qualifications to sign off on the certificates that authorize the attendee as having achieved the status of certified prescribed burn manager. Ben also pointed out that currently, staff offering these trainings are addressing backlogs and providing them for folks that are already on a waiting list. Right now supply and demand are fairly equal but MDC has not promoted the program yet and suggested that when they do, and that should be soon, demand would likely spike. The eventual goal is to have the Kalkomey system identify where the demand is and that will determine when and where the field trainings are offered.

Wes brought up another issue that has caused bottlenecks. Although burn plans are not legally required to conduct a prescribed fire they are required to receive state or federal cost share to conduct prescribed fires and they also serve as a point of reference in determining negligence. Currently, the burn plan review and sign-off process can present hurdles that can delay burning from efficiently being accomplished.

Ben reiterated points from previous meetings on the topic of certification. It is his intent that anyone that has already received the training as it was previously offered (a classroom portion of the burn workshop followed by the field

portion the same day) they would be grandfathered in and would receive a letter from Ben stating such. The caveat is that the participant would have to have some verifiable proof that they completed that training and then request the letter from Ben.

Liability Fact Sheet Zach, Jef, and Wes provided their draft copy of this fact sheet for comment and approval. The purpose of the fact sheet is primarily for conservation contractors to present to their insurance underwriters to outline the legal definition that now exists in Missouri regarding negligence so that affordable premiums might be able to be provided. Jef pointed out that the wording was carefully chosen to show that the intent of the law and the fact sheet was that you were liable if you were found negligent and not that you could not be held liable which provides legally defensible standards to both the practitioner and the insurance company.

Phil Sneed suggested that the MPFC provide a recommendation that private landowners use contractors that are insured. Jef responded that this could be added to the checklist already provided by MPFC on our website on things landowners should consider when selecting a contractor.

Discussion also ensued over the picture chosen for the fact sheet that depicted a prescribed burn practitioner decked out in expensive Nomex PPE. Wes pointed out that the trainings and recommendations don't suggest that this specific type of PPE is recommended. However, there was concern over possibly unintentionally creating this needless standard especially with something that is going to be presented to an insurance company as a sales tool.

Zach Coy suggested that we send the draft to lawyer Steve Mowry to get his legal opinion on the document.

Wes suggested that we provide another week to let folks comment and then send the draft to Steve, Holly, and Kyna to get their input.

Prescribed Fire Coordinator Position Update Wes informed the group that, thanks to private donors and a NFWF grant that PF/QF was awarded the Coordinator position was finally posted with a closing date of 2/11/22. They hope to have this position filled sometime in March. The position will interface with the council and assist in coordinating and facilitating additional MPFC activity. The position will also help identify and address existing bottlenecks to increasing the use of prescribed fire especially on private land.

Fire Needs Assessment Ryan reiterated that the importance of developing a needs assessment is not only to establish a baseline and in identifying priorities but it also allows you to more effectively utilize your existing resources and it can also be very effective in attracting federal dollars that can expand capacity. Ryan also shared that he thinks he has identified someone that is interested in smaller scale model of what the assessment could do as a larger scale to help sell the need for the assessment.

Cohesive Strategy Grant Proposal Ryan shared that there were 3 major points 1) fund contractual assessment with spatial tool development, 2) fund 2 TNC habitat strike teams with TNC match and focus their efforts on priority landscapes, and 3) bring an annual fire training exchange to Missouri. This would maximize the use of burn days in the heart of burn season by significantly increasing capacity. If awarded, these grant funds would enable 3 years of delivery.

MCHF & MPF money John originally shared that MCHF and MPF had received as large gift and wanted to dedicate this funding to assist in the expanded use of prescribed fire. This was a miscommunication. MPF had received a large gift but the donors intent was for acquisition. MCHF will be working with NWTF and others in a fundraising campaign to generate funding for the purpose of expanding the use of prescribed fire on private land. One focus was to assist in the development and support of PBA's and another would be to address general equipment needs through the SWCD's. This campaign is still in development so other aspects like addressing training needs and to help fund the needs assessment are also possible options.

New Business Wes mentioned the “log your burn” tool and encouraged everyone to spread the word and get folks used to using it. This platform allows us to better track when, where, and how much fire is being implemented of private land. It is, and will become more useful in providing supporting data demonstrating the responsible, safe, and effective use of this tool such as the fact sheet being created for contractors to share with their underwriters.

Jef mentioned the upcoming 8th Quail Symposium that will occur 8/3-5/22 in Springfield.

John mentioned that it was probably time to start talking about planning for the annual meeting.

Wes mentioned that previous annual meetings usually were based around a theme and asked the group for ideas.

Robin offered post burn evaluations as an option.

Ryan mentioned the Upper Osage PBA as a possible host but also offered Wah Kon-Tah Prairie as a potential location to meet.

An annual meeting planning committee was selected that included Ryan, Robin, and Wes. Wes said he could coordinate with Len Gilmore and Amy Coy.

John addressed the issue of incoming Chair Scot Mikols to consider for the annual meeting. Historically, the current Chair rolled to a Member At Large position once their 2 year term expired and the current Vice Chair rolled into the Chair position. Scot mentioned that he was concerned about taking over as Chair because he was going to be spending a lot of his time out-of-state in the coming year and did not think he would be able to be very active. John also shared that Ryan Gauger expressed interest in filling this seat. A month prior to whenever the annual meeting planning committee established the meeting date the secretary will send out an e-mail to the council asking for nominations and the elections will be held as part of the meeting.

Motion to adjourn was made at 5:50 by Robin Verble and seconded by Scot Mikols.