

WILDLAND AND PRESCRIBED FIRE THEME

Fire and grassland: Is fire a tool or a critical ecological process?

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Abstract: Grassland structure and function are a product of climate, weather, and the disturbance processes of fire and grazing. Conservation and management of grassland landscapes has largely focused on management of grazing as a primary objective and fire as a tool to control woody plants and maintain livestock production. Fire is a critical ecological process and conservation of grasslands is dependent on understanding fire and the interaction of fire with grazing and weather patterns. I will make three main points in my presentation; 1) the decoupling of fire from grazing is unfortunate and limits its application and potential conservation value, 2) fire (or the lack of fire) is effecting many ecosystem services that are critical to citizens in grassland regions and beyond, and 3) whether on private or public land prescribed fire, fire suppression, and fuels management are human decisions and without understanding human dimensions the challenges will not be answered. In the face of climate change, understanding fire may be even more critical in the future of grassland conservation.