

Prescribed Fire



Fire is a natural component of the Southeastern landscape. Prior to fire suppression and habitat fragmentation, lightning strikes would start fires that would sweep through the forests. Native Americans and early settlers also burned the woods regularly. Fires would burn large areas of land at a time and stop when they got to bodies of water or low-lying wet areas.

Although we do not know the historical role that fire had in shaping Spring Island's landscape prior to European settlement, we do know the forests and fields have been burned regularly over the last century and benefit from regular prescribed fire. The burning frequency of the island likely peaked during the Walker Era, the period when the island was used primarily as a quail-hunting plantation.

Fire is one of the most important management techniques used by the Spring Island Trust. Our forests thrive on fire. By regularly burning the forests, typically every 2-4 years, we stimulate the growth of desirable native grasses and forbs. Many wildlife species benefit from the increase in diversity following a fire. In addition, prescribed burns make Spring Island safer by reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

The Trust primarily burns in the late winter and early spring. Prior to burning an area, the fire

boss evaluates the weather (wind speed and direction, relative humidity, fuel moisture, etc.) to determine if conditions are adequate to accomplish the burn objectives. Typically, a *backing fire* is ignited first. A backing fire is one that burns against the wind and therefore moves slowly. After an area is secured with a backing fire, a *head fire* (i.e., one that is pushed by the wind) may be used to quickly burn through an area.



A head fire is set to a field planted with longleaf pine.

Spring Island is a challenging place to burn because it is a residential community and is close to other urban areas. Signs, trail markers, and utility boxes have to be avoided. Because it is a residential community, we do our best to put out smoking trees whenever possible. However, sometimes trees and logs will continue to burn for days after a prescribed fire. As long as these trees are within a burned area and are not at risk of falling on a road, we let them burn.

If Spring Island is going to maintain its beauty and biological diversity, we must continue to use regular fire. Spring Island members can do their part by supporting the use of prescribed fire on the island, avoiding trails in areas that are being burned, and slowing down and turning on headlights when driving through smoke.