

COURSE: Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation

TOPIC: Prescribed Fire Funding (Unit 6)

I. Objectives

1. Discuss the importance of detailed cost estimation in project description portion of FireBase.
- B. Discuss the importance of keeping accurate prescribed fire cost records.
- C. List items of consideration in tracking prescribed fire costs.

II Project Description Cost Estimation

- A. This unit deals with the accounting portion of prescribed fire funding. Specifically, you, the prescribed fire planner, have to be able to account for time and equipment used in the planning and implementation of a specific prescribed fire project. This information is essential in order to justify future requests for project funding.
2. The Fish and Wildlife Service has developed a fire budgeting program called FireBase. FireBase will provide a basis for justification and allocation of fire management dollars to each Region. Questions regarding FireBase should be directed to your Regional Fire Management Coordinator.
3. Accurate cost estimation within the Project Description portion of FireBase is the basis for receiving prescribed fire funding. Each prescribed fire proposal should be carefully calculated out to provide accurate information for budget justifications and allocation of funds. Funds for prescribed fire come under the 9263 Hazardous Fuel Reduction Operations subactivity account or the 9264 Hazardous Fuels Reduction Operations subactivity account. These subactivities are a portion of the Wildland Fire Operations account, formerly known as the Emergency Fire Suppression account. This is the same account that pays for wildland fire suppression actions. Contrary to what many think, it is not an unlimited, blank check account. Congress appropriates an annual amount based on the average of the last ten years actual costs for fire suppression, and a target figure for Hazardous Fuel Reductions based on the Interior agencies' identified project requests. The Hazardous Fuel Reduction authority also includes the use of prescribed fire for resource management purposes. This is an unprecedented extension of fiscal authority. Essentially, any prescribed fire project that we propose and which meets all NEPA and refuge planning requirements can be funded fully from this account.

III. Importance of Accurate Fire Finance Record Keeping

- A. Accurate accounting of prescribed fire costs is very important. Because of the unusual nature of the 9263 and 9264 funds, the prescribed fire planner has to be able to account for time and equipment used in the planning and implementation of all specific prescribed fire projects. This information is needed to justify future requests for project funding, and provide tracking information to the Office of Management and Budget (the Administration) and the General Accounting Office (Congress).

- B. One of the sections of the Prescribed Fire Plan found in the Service Fire Management Handbook is a chart where the prescribed fire planner is asked to detail planned costs for a prescribed fire. The structure of project cost descriptions found in FireBase prescribed fire project definition is very similar. In addition, on the FMIS Report , which is required each time a prescribed fire is conducted, a total cost and cost per acre is one of the required fields to be completed. A project completion report in FireBase should also be completed with actual costs for all aspects of the project.

	Equipment & Supplies	Labor	Overtime	Staff Days	Total Cost
Administration (planning, permits, etc.)					
Site Preparation					
Ignition & Control					
Travel/Per Diem					
Total					

- C. In many cases, the cost per acre shown on the FMIS report has been much less than \$10. The Fish and Wildlife Service average for prescribed fire costs for implementation (as reported) is less than \$4 per acre. If you were in charge of the planning and implementation of a moderately simple prescribed fire of say, 100 acres, and you were handed four \$100 bills, would you be able to safely plan, prepare, ignite, patrol, mop up, and monitor your 100-acre unit? In most cases, \$400 will not provide enough

money to plan and prepare a 100 acre unit, much less ignite, patrol, mop up and monitor the unit. Try to be as realistic as possible in planning costs. Prescribed fire project requests translate into funding, but not if they are not demonstrated.

IV. Factors Influencing the Cost of Prescribed Fire Operations

A. Administration (Planning)

1. Unit Recon - In many cases, a look at the unit is extremely critical to the success of the prescribed fire. This occurs even if you happen to be one of those people who have been at a certain location for many years and are familiar with the refuge. Firelines have to be (re)located and checked or flagged for (re)construction. Monitoring plots may have to be checked or established. And, how do you get to the unit? The use of a vehicle needs to be accounted for in each and every aspect of the entire prescribed fire operation.
2. Burn Plan Preparation - Time spent preparing or updating the Prescribed Fire Plan must be accounted for in the cost of the unit burn.

B. Site Preparation

Most units require a certain amount of site preparation prior to ignition of the unit. Is a dozer or a tractor/plow used to construct fireline? Handline or fuelbreaks require much labor intensive work. All equipment costs need to be accounted for in the planning stage.

C. Ignition and Control

Usually ignition and control are easily planned and accomplished, depending upon problems associated with holding and mop-up. The prescribed fire planner must remember that all equipment used on the burn has to be cost accounted.

D. Travel/Per Diem

Usually not a large part of the burn cost unless extraordinary forces are required and must be ordered in from other stations or regions.

V. Cost Per Unit for Personnel, Equipment, and Supplies

- A. Personnel cost for prescribed fire purposes can be estimated from the cost-to-Government figures available from most personnel offices. If you calculate your own, remember to include the cost of benefits as well as

direct wages. If you use non-refuge personnel, use their cost-to-agency so that all costs are accounted for. Other Department of Interior fire management personnel and U.S. Forest Service fire personnel will not cost you anything directly. Just as when you assist a neighbor agency and absorb your costs using the IARX project code, they have a similar cost account mechanism and are not supposed to cross bill for prescribed fires, but you do want to account for these costs.

- B. Equipment may be very hard to calculate costs for, since the Service does not utilize a use rate or a replacement rate for the equipment. One source of cost data may be to locate equipment rental rates and cost your equipment according to those rates. Although this will not be exact, you will have at least a relatively accurate figure. Don't forget to calculate costs for pickups, trucks, etc.
- C. Replacement cost for supplies may be very difficult to calculate as replacement may vary from year to year, and from fire to fire. It may be necessary to estimate an average rate and apply it to every acre burned. Specific costs such as helitorch fuel, or bag lunches can be precisely tracked to each fire.