



*A smoke column rises from a prescribed burn on private land.  
Next spring, this field will be lush and green*

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## Getting Prescribed Burning on The Ground in Southern Illinois

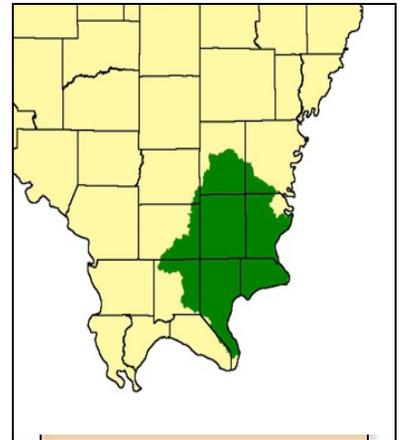
*By Jess Riechman, SIPBA Burn Coordinator*

In the late fall and early spring, particularly nice days are marked by lazy columns of smoke rising from the hills of Southeastern Illinois. Chances are, a prescribed burn is underway. And, if it's on private land, it's probably the Southeastern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association (SIPBA).

Prescribed burning is a key land management tool that is used to maintain native prairie, oak-hickory forest, old fields, barrens and other desirable vegetative communities. Fire is also implicated as a component of the natural disturbance regime that controls invasive exotic plants that degrade wildlife habitat.

However, this is not the first time our landscape has seen fire. Historical ecology tells us that the success of these native plant and animal species depends on regular disturbance – and the suppression of naturally occurring fires has negatively affected the species composition of our forests and prairies.

The solution involves carefully reintroducing fire to the landscape. Prescribed burning is a tool that has been largely unavailable to the private landowner due to significant social and practical barriers. As a result, thousands of acres of non-industrial private habitat in southern Illinois risk being degraded or lost completely.



*The Southern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association covers portions of eight southeastern counties.*

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The SIPBA was incorporated as a not-for-profit organization in 2006 and received initial funding from an Illinois Department of Natural Resources C2000 grant and a State Wildlife Grant in 2008. SIPBA also received funds from the National Wild Turkey Federation and an extension of the original State Wildlife Grant.

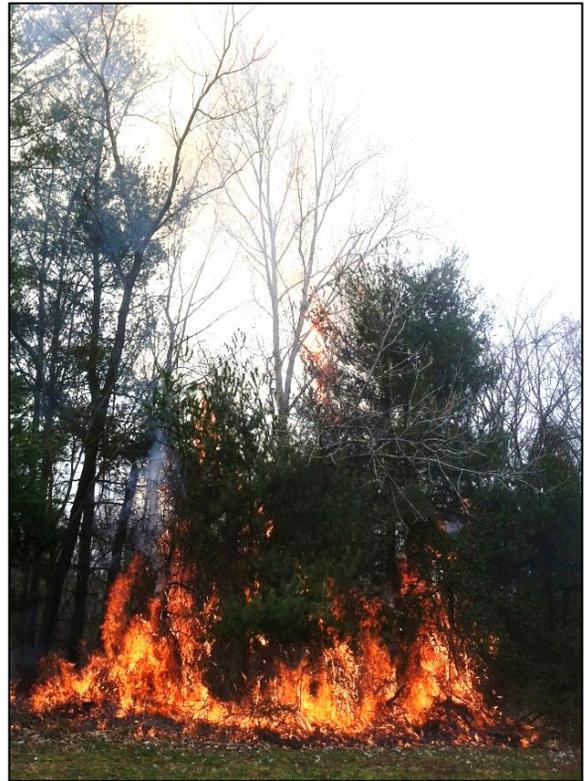
## A Success Story for Landowners

The Southeastern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association (SIPBA) is a partnership between landowners, government agencies, conservation groups and individuals that share the goals of expanding the use of prescribed fire and restoring native plant and wildlife habitat for the aforementioned species.

The SIPBA covers nearly all of Pope, Hardin, Saline, and Gallatin counties as well as portions of the surrounding counties. It was designed to overcome barriers that had prevented landowners from using prescribed fire, including liability concerns, lack of training and equipment, limited resources from natural resource agencies, and the absence of a crew.



*In the last light of the day, flames advance across the final acre of this CRP field.*



*Eastern Red Cedar can become thick and unmanageable near the edge of a forest, but burns readily.*

## Backed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources

The IDNR has been a crucial part of the project from the beginning. Personnel from the Division of Forestry provide professional guidance to the burn coordinators and serve as key personnel for planning, coordinating, and implementing prescribed burns. Because the IDNR provides office space for SIPBA coordinators, the two are able to work closely in a mutually beneficial relationship, sharing equipment and other resources. Technical assistance provided by the Division of Forestry is valued by SIPBA members, who are then fully equipped to properly manage prescribed fire.

## A Model For Success

The quick growth and popularity of the association has not gone unnoticed in the region. SIU Forestry graduate Jesse Riechman performed a case study of the SIPBA focusing on the decision-making process that drives membership of a land management cooperative. Riechman's results illustrated a complex relationship between the management challenges that landowners face and the solutions gained by forming such an association. At the same time, the association's reputation was spreading as quickly as the word of the benefits of prescribed fire, and SIPBA began making plans for an eventual expansion toward the Western side of the state.

The success of the SIPBA greatly depends on the active participation and support of the membership. For safe and effective burns, landowners and stakeholders are required to provide proof of property liability insurance, assist on their own burns, and help with at least one other member's burn each year. Training days and regular meetings are held to ensure that each season goes smoothly. Landowners are also responsible for preparing their fire lines. Annual membership dues are only \$25. The SIPBA supports a prescribed burn coordinator, four crew coordinators, and enough equipment to safely burn an average of 1,000 acres per year.



*Volunteers from Southern Illinois University take a break to refuel their drip torches on a SIPBA burn. SIU involvement is **also** mutually beneficial as forestry students get valuable field experience.*



*Landowners gather for the morning weather report and test fire.*

Over 70 members actively participate in the Association. SIPBA consistently seeks new funding opportunities that may help transition them to self-sustainability – a key accomplishment for a land management partnership. As the first association of its kind in the Midwest, SIPBA recognizes its role in paving the way for landowner-based habitat management

## Seeing Is Believing

SIPBA members know that the best way to explain the benefits of prescribed fire is to see the before and after conditions in person. A culture of communication between neighbors helps spread the word about this form of land management. No other form of advertising was necessary to convince landowners to be part of the solution.

Thanks to the success of SIPBA, landowners in southeastern Illinois now have the specialized equipment, professional expertise, and well-trained extra help needed to conduct prescribed burns in a safe and effective manner. And because of the strong land ethic practiced by these dedicated landowners, the benefit is evident in the forest and prairie habitat of southern Illinois.

### **For more information, contact:**

Jesse Riechman  
Burn Coordinator  
Southeastern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association  
618/967-4213 [jesseriechman@gmail.com](mailto:jesseriechman@gmail.com)