

Prescribed Burns – Fall 2016

The Landscape Plan for the Rt. Hon. Herb Gray Parkway features an overall Carolinian theme, focusing on preservation, protection and expansion of Tallgrass Prairie ecosystems and Oak Savannah habitats. Prescribed burns – deliberately set, carefully controlled and closely monitored fires – are the most effective management tool for Tallgrass Prairie maintenance, conservation and restoration.

The fall 2016 Parkway prescribed burns are anticipated to be completed between November 15th and December 15th within the Chappus restoration area. This restoration areas is bounded Malden and Matchette Roads, to the east and west, and Armanda Road and E.C. Row Express, to the south and north.

Since spring 2012, over 20 hectares of Tallgrass Prairie associated with the Parkway have been burned. In these sites, we have found an increase in high quality prairie species, not previously found in these locations. Photos and videos of the historic burns, as well as before and after photos are posted on our Flickr (www.flickr.com/hgparkway) and YouTube (www.youtube.com/hgparkway) pages.

The Importance of Tallgrass Prairie and Oak Savannah

Tallgrass Prairie and Oak Savannah ecosystems in Windsor are grasslands with a high diversity of plants, birds, mammals and insects, including a number of species that are considered to be rare, threatened or endangered in Ontario. Tallgrass Prairie and Oak Savannah are among the most endangered ecosystems in Canada with less than one per cent of their original extent remaining. Windsor's Ojibway Prairie Complex is one of the largest protected prairie complexes in Ontario. The remaining prairie sites in Windsor and Essex County contain more Species at Risk than anywhere else in Ontario, outside of Walpole Island.

Why Fire is Essential for Tallgrass Prairie Habitats

Prescribed burns are carried out on a regular basis throughout Windsor and Essex County for the purpose of restoration and management of Tallgrass Prairie habitats.

Without a regular fire regime, over time, woody vegetation will displace prairie plants. Fire leaves the ground covered with black ash. This warms the soil and stimulates the germination and growth of deeply rooted native prairie plants. It also removes less fire-tolerant invasive species which are not part of a prairie community.

Controlling the Burns

A detailed burn plan has been prepared for each block of Tallgrass Prairie to be burned. This work, like all Species at Risk related activities, will be conducted in agreement with permits issued under the *Endangered Species Act, 2007*.

Like all previous burns associated with the Parkway, Wildfire Specialists Inc. will be conducting these burns on behalf of the Windsor Essex Mobility Group (WEMG) and DBi Services (DBi). DBi has obtained all necessary approvals to proceed with the burns from the City of Windsor Fire Prevention Officer.

The spread of fire and smoke will be controlled by conducting burns only when the weather conditions specified in the detailed burn plans are present. This means that although several Tallgrass Prairie patches have been identified for the burning period, it may not be possible to complete all of the prescribed burns this season.

Each burn is expected to last for a maximum of 20 minutes. The burn patch will then be monitored until the burn is declared out by the lead burn expert, known as the burn boss.

Safety is the central focus for prescribed burns. The Parkway burns are considered to be low complexity because the individual patches being burned are small, the fuel load is low, and the expected burn time for each patch is short. As with any burn, the highest safety measures are being employed.

A number of steps are taken on the day that it has been determined that a burn can take place.

- A briefing is held for all on-site trained staff, local Emergency Service Providers and other key personnel. An overview of the operation, equipment, escape routes, safety zones, communications procedures, ignition and suppression plans and anticipated fire behaviour is provided.
- This site is reviewed to ensure all combustible material has been cleared from the boundaries of the burn patch, exclusion fencing is erected and other measures to mitigate the spread of fire are in place.
- Prior to ignition, burn breaks are inspected to ensure there is fire control at the edges of each burn block and the crew does not move to the next block until all fires are out.
- Species at Risk specialists inspect the site immediately prior to the burn and are on-site during the burn.
- The equipment on hand will include drip torches (a handheld incendiary device that releases slow-burning flaming fuel at a predetermined rate), fuses, walkie-talkies, backpack pumps (a portable water container equipped with a hand pump and backpack straps carried on the back of firefighters, used for applying water during fire suppression), shovels, and first aid kits.

Frequency and Timing of Burns

Prescribed burns are an ongoing management technique to maintain healthy, functioning prairie ecosystems. Rather than prescribing a burning frequency (for example, every two years), the timing for burns will be determined and adapted based on management objectives and site-specific conditions. Generally, as the prairie community matures, the fire frequency can be reduced. Using a combination of spring and fall burns is expected to promote the highest possible diversity of prairie species.

More information

The Ojibway Nature Centre (5200 Matchette Road, Windsor) has valuable information on display about the Carolinian and Tallgrass Prairie ecosystems and the need for prescribed burns.

If the public has any concerns regarding prescribed burns or other aspects of the Parkway, please contact DBI's Call In number at 1-844-570-9999

Please visit www.hgparkway.ca to learn more about the Rt. Hon. Herb Gray Parkway.

Reference documents:

http://tallgrassontario.org/TS_SAR.htm

"Caring for Nature in Essex" by the Carolinian Canada Coalition

"<http://www.ojibway.ca/index.htm>