

**NORTHWEST  
ARKANSAS TIMES**

## **Fayetteville residents may see flames, smoke of controlled burn**

Northwest Arkansas Times

Posted on Monday, February 9, 2009

URL: <http://www.nwanews.com/nwat/News/73855/>

People in west Fayetteville may witness high flames and a column of smoke at some point in the next few days as a contractor for the city of Fayetteville conducts a burn of restored prairie land near a sewage treatment plant.

Bruce Shackleford, president of ECO Inc. of Benton, said last week that he's repeating a burn done in February of last year to continue the process of restoring the prairie grasses and other plant species on the Woolsey Wet Prairie Sanctuary.

The 42-acre property is part of the city's west side sewage treatment plant on Broyles Road. The prairie and wet lands were created as mitigation for nearly 10 acres of wetland that was destroyed with construction of the sewer plant, which began operating last year.

Trained fire crews use a bulldozer to create a 15- to 20-foot path around the prairie area that serves as a fire break. Using a tool on an ATV that drops flames, crews start the fire on the inner edges of the fire break and let it burn toward the center of the property. By the time it nears the middle, flames can reach 20 feet in the air and smoke can be seen for quite a distance, Shackleford said.

It's impossible to predict with certainty which day the burn will take place because it's so dependent on weather conditions. Last week's conditions were too windy, but there is a better chance for this week, Shackleford said.

Shackleford said the effort may have to be repeated annually for the first few years, then become less frequent to maintain the plants native to the prairie.

The burn crews will be on standby for the next several days waiting for good weather conditions for the burn.

"Fire is one of the most important tools in prairie management," Shackleford said. "It's one of the best vegetation management tools for a native plant restoration project."

Last year, the city burned about 28 acres of the property, in part to kill off coolseason fescue before the warmer-season prairie plants became active. With a buffer zone surrounding the smaller acreage also deeded to remain a wetlands mitigation site in perpetuity, Shackleford said the effort was expanded this year to the full 42 acres.

The effect of the fire is to clear out unwanted thatch so that sunlight can reach the seeds of native prairie plants. Continued nurturing will build a stronger and stronger prairie ecosystem on the acreage, he said.

Shackleford's company was hired as part of the city's sewer system expansion and upgrade to handle many of the environmental issues, such as storm water management and wetland mitigation. Included is the management of the prairie area north of the plant.

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