



## Managing with Fire at Nueces Delta Preserve

### Overgrown brush burned, cut and treated

Burning, cutting and herbicide treatment of brush at Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program's Nueces Delta Preserve has cleared the way for marsh grasses to sprout.

Just three weeks after burning 150 acres, green grass sprigs started to poke through the charred areas.

That's exactly what was intended with the multi-pronged brush management effort that rid the area of invasive brush such as mesquite and huisache.

The brush had overgrown the low-marsh grass that is the natural vegetation for these ranch lands.

In mid-February, a fire crew conducted a prescribed burn to stimulate native grass growth, remove dead vegetation and reduce encroaching brush.

"Our goal is to enhance habitat for grassland birds, control brush and remove the thatch of dead grass," said Jake Herring, a project manager with the estuaries program.



*Richard Joslin, right, sprays brush stumps with a herbicide died blue after Elijah Gillis, left, cuts them down with a chainsaw.*



Photos: Beth Wilson

*One of several small fires starts up during a mid-February burn that cleared 150 acres of overgrown brush at the Nueces Delta Preserve.*

Prescribed burns are commonly-used methods of controlling vegetation. They are planned, approved and conducted under specific weather conditions such as humidity and wind speed and direction. This burn plan was coordinated by Leroy Wolff with the Sinton office of the National Resources Conservation Service, a part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. San Patricio County Commissioners Court approved the burn plan, which was accepted by William Zagorski, the county's emergency management director.

Preparations for the burn included notifying neighbors and creating several fire breaks, areas where vegetation that fuels fire is removed to prevent the fire from spreading into areas not intended to be burned.

When the weather conditions were just right, the burn began, under supervision of a trained fire boss with assistance of a knowledgeable and prepared crew that included several Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program staff members.

The crew set small fires along the edge of the areas already identified for burning. As the fires combined,

the crew watched the area to assure the smoke and fire were controlled. The crew set fires in three areas in one day of burning.

In mid-March, Herring, directing a five-man crew, returned to the burned areas for additional work. Armed with chainsaws and herbicide sprayers, the crew cut down huiscache and mesquite brush on about 60 acres of the burned areas. The crew then sprayed herbicide on brush stumps to attack the roots below the ground.

Weather conditions didn't allow for burning all 530 acres as planned, but Herring said the effort was successful.

This is the first such burn for the delta property, which the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program purchased in pieces beginning in 2003. The estuaries program expects to begin a regular burn cycle to maintain the area, Herring said.

The Nueces Delta Preserve, off Highway 77 near Odem, represents the program's focused effort to acquire and preserve land in its natural state. The preserve, about 5,400 acres in total, is a dynamic ecosystem of highly productive wetlands, uplands, open water, islands, prairie, and river and bay shorelines. Its wetlands provides habitat to shrimp, crabs, juvenile fish and birds.



*Green marsh grass, the natural vegetation for the area, sprouts from the ground weeks after burning cleared out invasive brush.*



*CBBEP project manager Jake Herring, right, and National Resources Conservation Service fire crew members monitor the start of burning to keep flames and smoke controlled.*



Check out more featured projects of the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program online at [www.cbbep.org](http://www.cbbep.org).

The Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and restoring bays and estuaries in the 12-county region of the Texas Coastal Bend. CBBEP is partially funded by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

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This report published April 2009.