

## **Determining Need and Method for Prescribed Fire Education in Florida**

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Fire has been a natural process maintaining Florida's ecosystems for thousands of years. As our state population continues to grow and developed areas encroach upon natural lands, more people are affected by fire. The use of prescribed fire for habitat management and wildfire risk reduction is viewed from various perspectives. This practicum project focuses on determining if there is continued need to provide education regarding the benefits of prescribed fire. And if so, to identify a target population for outreach efforts and delivery methods that would be successful.

Two focus groups were held, one each in Sarasota and Collier County. Participants represented stakeholder groups impacted by fire or who have a role in implementing prescribed burning, including the general public, private and public landowners, government agencies and non-governmental organizations. These stakeholders may also have a responsibility for educating the public about prescribed fire activities. Participants discussed past outreach efforts, which components have been successful or not, and why. Target populations for educational outreach were identified and each participant offered at least one suggestion to improve communication and outreach efforts regarding the benefits of prescribed fire.

There was consensus across the focus groups that decades of historic messaging to the public about fire being bad needs to be overcome, and that there is a definite need for more successful messaging regarding the benefits of prescribed fire for ecosystem health and wildfire risk reduction.