

"Bringing Fire Back to the Mountains" is supported by *Promoting Ecosystem Resiliency through Collaboration: Landscapes, Learning and Restoration*, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy, USDA Forest Service and agencies of the Department of the Interior. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Bringing Fire Back to the Mountains



Controlled burn in the North Carolina mountains © DEBBIE CRANE/FNC



Fawn resting in an area after a controlled burn
© MIKE BRÖD/U.S. FOREST SERVICE



Fire once occurred regularly in the Appalachians, but things changed in the last century. The area's people, animals and plants are paying the price for that fire suppression. That's why The Nature Conservancy and our conservation partners are bringing fire back to the mountains.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

The Nature Conservancy

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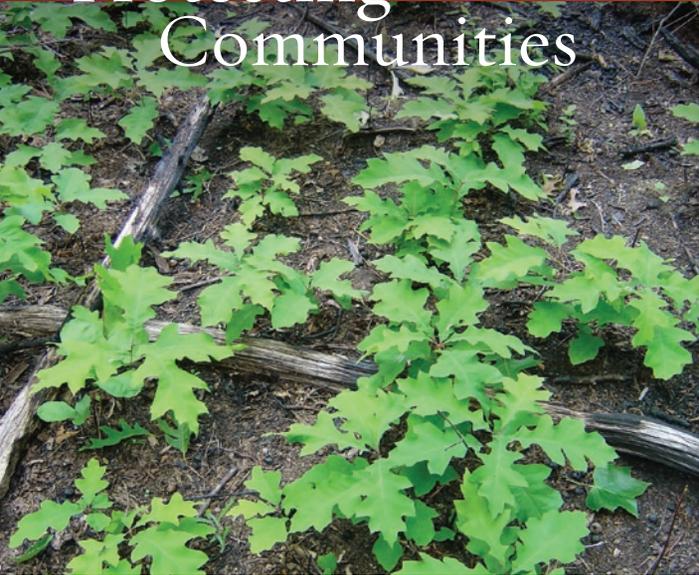
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Heller's Blazing Star,
one of the region's
fire-adapted plants
© DAVID BLEVINS

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Protecting Communities



Without periodic fire, oak and pine forests can become overloaded with highly flammable shrubs and other fuels, resulting in damaging wildfires that threaten communities and endanger firefighters. Smoke from wildfires is also hard to control and likely to affect people in nearby communities. Controlled burns reduce the chance of large out-of-control fires and their damaging effects to people and places.

Healthy Forests, Plants and Wildlife

Acorns are important food for wildlife, birds and insects. As a result of fire suppression, oaks are being replaced by other trees such as maples, which do not provide wildlife food. Oaks have thick bark, which protects them from low-intensity controlled burns. Maples have thin bark and fire kills them, allowing the oaks to survive, thrive and continue to feed wildlife.

Some plants and trees are even more dependent on fire – without fire they will disappear. Table Mountain pines are found in the Appalachian Mountains and nowhere else in the world. Their cones are coated with

resin, which melts with the heat of a fire and allows the cones to open and release their seeds. Fire suppression has dramatically reduced the number of Table Mountain pines in the mountains. It has also resulted in near extinction for a number of plants including Heller's Blazing Star, mountain golden heather, and Peter's Mountain mallow.

Controlled Burning is a Well-Planned Conservation Tool

Controlled burn practitioners receive extensive training to ensure that they know how to protect surrounding communities, themselves and the land they are working to restore. All controlled burns are conducted under the guidance of a burn boss, who has years of experience and training.

Burns are carefully planned. Fire experts do a great deal of work before the first match is lit. They create a burn plan, which describes weather conditions necessary for controlling smoke and fire behavior, as well as equipment and personnel needs. The plan

from left: Young oaks after a controlled burn in the N.C. mountains © DEAN SIMON, N.C. WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMISSION; Controlled burn at Linville Gorge © GARY KAUFMAN/U.S. FOREST SERVICE; Mountain golden heather (*Hudsonia montana*), another of the region's fire-adapted plants © U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

details how to conduct the burn in a way that will benefit forest and plant conditions.

Preparation for a controlled burn also includes designating firebreaks, which are corridors around the burn area cleared of vegetation. Firebreaks ensure that fire doesn't leave the burn area.

No fire is lit until experts are convinced that the conditions are right to ensure that our goals of community safety and ecological restoration are met. After the fire, crews stay on the scene to make certain that the fire will stay within the control lines.

The Nature Conservancy's goal is to work with partners to restore ecosystems, but the safety of our fire crew, our neighbors and their property is always our number one priority.