John H. Kerr Dam & Reservoir

US Army Corps of Engineers
Wilmington District

Controlled Burns

Benefits for the Forest

When properly conducted a controlled burn does not travel to the canopy, or tops, of the trees. The fire creeps along the ground and only burns the leaf litter and forest understory. The larger healthy trees are not harmed by the burn.

A controlled burn is necessary for many reasons:

- Protect trees from disease and insects.
- Limit understory growth that competes for tree nutrients.
- Controlled burns are important for reducing "fuel load", or massive amounts of downed woody debris, helping to prevent catastrophic forest fire.

Only trained professionals should use fire as a tool

Dangers of Fire

If controlled burns are not correctly done they can quickly become out-of-control forest fires. Forest fires can lead to loss of property, injury, or even death. There are many important factors that are used in determining the proper time and area to burn. The area must be surveyed for fuel amount and topography. Weather also plays a large factor in safe burning conditions. The area must not be too dry and there can not be a strong wind, or the fire can become too intense and quickly spread to undesired areas.

A **Fire Line** is used to keep the fire in a designated area

A **Drip Torch** is used to start a burn

Benefits for Wildlife

Fire removes the thick vegetation that grows under the tree canopy. This allows the wildlife to move easier and forage for food.

The removal of the dense brush also allows young trees to sprout up across the forest floor. These saplings provide a good food source for deer and other game species.

Undesirable tree species in the understory, such as sweet gum, are not resistant to fire. The removal of these trees allows more nutrients for the large mast producing trees, like the oaks and hickories. These trees can now generate a larger crop of acorns and nuts for the deer, turkeys and other wildlife to eat throughout the year.

Notice the new oak regeneration following a controlled burn. These oak saplings will provide great food for wildlife, now and in the future.