

This fire season, perhaps landowners should to take a “defensive driving” perspective on fire prevention and control.

Hoss Sasin, AgriLife Extension agricultural and natural resources agent in Callahan County, said in most cases the people traveling down the highways and county roads are not going to be worrying about the landowner's grass. So as landowners with something to protect, you need to take a lesson from the defensive driving course. You need to be watching out for them, and taking evasive actions. With the drought conditions that have set in across much of the state, that means thinking in terms of mitigation, fuel management and prescribed burning. AgriLife Extension range management and beef cattle specialists tell us that land owners need to think about fuel management – shred it, graze it, burn it down – to keep from getting in a situation where fire can do significant damage.

As a tool in fuel management, removing that fuel is important. Whether it's a welding spark, thrown cigarette or hot box on a railroad, if the fuel is not there, the fire won't have a chance to grow and spread. The Texas Forest Service has urged citizens across the state to be aware of heightened wildfire danger due to a low pressure fronts that drop humidity levels and produce high winds. Tom Spencer, Forest Service predictive services department head, said these conditions could lead to wildfires that spread quickly, pose containment problems and endanger public safety. Spencer warned that while some precipitation has fallen, prolonged drought conditions have not improved, and freezing temperatures only cause drought-cured grasses to become even drier. The Forest Service's Predictive Services Department forecasts that through the month of February, fuels, such as grasses and trees, are expected to remain critically dry. The wildfires on the winter-cured grasses in the High Plains can spread up to 2 ½ mph with flames reaching six to 10 feet in length.

Some tools that land owners can use to mitigate and lower the risk are:

- Make sure the roadside ditches are mowed adequately along their property line. Contact the highway department if necessary.
- Prescribed burning can be an option to manage brush and high grasses, where burn bans are not in effect. The Forest Service has an updated list of counties enacting burn bans at: <http://tfsfrp.tamu.edu/wildfires/decban.png> .
- Establish fuel breaks (fire lanes) along fences, roadways and between buildings and fields.
- When welding, be sure the work area is free of grass and debris, have a spotter and a water source handy.

More information about protecting against and preventing wildfires can be found at: <http://texashelp.tamu.edu/> .