

# Nachusa Grasslands Prescribed Fire Crew

## Summary Report Fall 2019 through Spring 2020



**By Bill Kleiman, The Nature Conservancy April 25, 2020**

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2020 has been a tough year for all of us. At Nachusa we also had a pole barn burn down, immolating a lot of good equipment. We kept going, as what else could we do. Nachusa Forward! That was February. By March Covid was running like wildfire across an un-prepared nation. To outsiders, prescribed fire sounds like a dangerous group activity, a team sport by people that like danger. Our attorney was adamant we should not do prescribed fire.

Below I list some Covid procedures to use for safe prescribed fire. For this Fall, I encourage you all to work towards having an active and safe fire season. Covid will still be with us this Fall, and next Spring.

Prescribed fire crews are used to following safety protocols. It is baked into our fire culture. We are the ones who know first aid and CPR and AED and blood-borne pathogens. We operate with a chain of command with a fire manager, a burn boss, a crew boss. We use an extensive burn plan, a wildfire plan, a medical emergency plan, a smoke management plan, a complexity analysis, a consequence analysis. We wear safety glasses, leather gloves, and have leather boots with hard rubber soles. We are covered head to toe. This is us. We are a culture that often are also Emergency Management personnel. We need to articulate our culture to those above us. We need to describe why prescribed fire is our most essential stewardship, and why our culture is inherently oriented towards safety.

## Covid procedures for prescribed fire, by Bill Kleiman IL TNC Fire Manager

1. The updated CDC personal protection guidelines are solid and available here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>
2. Before the fire day carefully articulate your Covid procedures and expectations to your crew. Use a video meeting to make sure your procedures are understood.
3. Practice physical distancing in all the ways you have heard. Prescribed fire requires people to keep safe distances. That is how we normally control fire lines as the lines go for long distances. We only huddle up before and after fires for briefings and photos. We don't have to huddle up. We can skip the photos.
4. Wear fabric face masks. Many of us have been using masks for years for smoke. There are fire resistant mask holders available.
5. Wear smoke goggles as they protect your eyes from scratches, smoke and viruses.
6. Don't crowd into spaces, like pickup trucks. A pickup cab is the worst place to be with another person. One per truck. One per UTV. Extra crew can drive their private vehicles to a nearby parking area and hike into the unit. Pumper unit/engine teams are often two people. One driving and one spraying. Try to not be in the cab together and if you must drive together for a bit have your PPE on tight and open the windows.
7. Hold the safety briefing and After Action Review in a big space, preferably outdoors, with facemasks on.
8. If you need 10 crew to safely do a fire, and you can gather most from your local crew, then the few other crew you need should be carefully chosen. Maybe they are the same people you chose previously. They practice good hygiene and are dependable.
9. If you have a fire that needs 15 crew then you are likely not in Illinois. But if you do, perhaps postpone that unit to next year, or break it up into smaller units for a smaller crew. Or have two crews that do safety briefings separately, and keep their distance from each other.
10. Trainings: Don't host an in person large group training. Be creative. Use a webex, or a video meeting. Meet outside in small groups. Perhaps break a big group into multiple small groups that meet on different days.
11. On line training: For NWCG courses there is a procedure to get permission to hold virtual trainings. This could be a good winter project to host such a training. Look for courses being advertised on state Fire Council websites. The Illinois page has been building lists of courses. <https://www.illinoisprescribedfirecouncil.org/training.html>
12. Annual fire safety refreshers: Your agency likely has given you permission to skip in person safety refreshers. As above, use video and Webex and emails.
13. Physical fitness tests: Do your crew typically require annual pack tests? You may find your agency has given you permission to skip a year. You could do something simple like allow people to take their pack test at home. I suggest lowering the weight, giving a bit more time, and requiring a partner for health care assistance. A lite pack test.
14. Demonstrate good hygiene so others follow. Wash your hands! We carry a lot of water with fire work. Bring the soap and paper towels. Class A foam works as a hand soap in a pinch. Air drying hands is ok, paper towels better. Hand sanitizer is good on dry hands.
15. Carry rags and some disinfectant to wipe down tools, door handles, steering wheels, knobs. Make this part of your equipment care procedures.
16. Remember to communicate to your chain of command the importance of prescribed fire and the ability of your crew to work Covid safe.

Photo below: Burning around the Holland House. Notice that physical distancing is the norm in prescribed fire work. Face coverings and smoke goggles are common. Gloves are worn. Safety protocols are taught and followed.



**The numbers:**

We broke a record for the least acres burned. We burned 440-acres at Nachusa on 5 burn units. We also assisted on 2 units for an additional 125-acres. Covid shut us down mid-March and we spent time in a daze trying to be productive. We eventually hit our stride of pushing very hard on brush.

We had 7 burn days, a record low. We had 4 west wind days, 2 northwest days and one south wind day.

Fires done by Nachusa Grasslands crew from Fall 2019 to Spring 2020

Date	Day of week	Ownership	Unit Name	Burn boss	Acres TNC	Acres other	Temp high	Humidity low	Wind direction	Wind speed	Crew size	Crew
3/2/2020	M	TNC	Holland east to central	Bill Kleiman	156		40	71	W	12	11	Bill K, Susan K, Phil N, Tim S, Bryon W, Mike Hange, Elizabeth B, Dillon Chappell, Eriko K, Paul Swanson, Russell B.
3/4/2020	W	Wahl	Hanaman east	Bryon Walters		120		44	NNW	14	8	MRCP fire: Bryon W, Bill K, Phil N, Elizabeth B, Austin W, Tim S, Greg W, Randy S
3/5/2020	TH	Wahl	Hanaman east	Bryon Walters		na			W	20	4	Bryon W, Bill K, Phil N, Greg W. Managed burning slash.
3/6/2020	F	TNC	Bishop	Bill Kleiman	26		40	49	NW	14	8	Bill K, Susan K, Phil N, Elizabeth B, Joe R, Keith A, Greg H, Travis K.
3/6/2020	F	TNC	Holland west	Bill Kleiman	44		40	49	NW	14	9	Bill K, Susan K, Phil N, Elizabeth B, Joe R, Kieth A, Greg H, Kayla Koenig, Travis K.
3/7/2020	ST	TNC	HLP	Bill Kleiman	114		52	45	S	21	10	Bill K, Susan K, Phil N, Jeff C, Ron D, Molly S, Travis K, Leah K, Gwen D, Bryon W.
3/12/2020	TH	PPSOC	Sand Ridge	Russell Brunner		5	40	60	W	10	7	Russell B, Bill K, Phil N, Leah K, Amanda C, Austin W, Bob V
3/13/2020	F	TNC	CCK East 100 planting	Bill Kleiman	100		46	41	W	20	11	Bill K, Amanda C, Cody C, Phil N, Al M, Greg H, Leah K, Nathaniel W, Kein S, Joe R, Dee H

				<b>Total acres</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>125</b>				<b>Average crew size:</b>	<b>9</b>	
<b>Total burn units</b>	<b>7</b>		<b># fire we assisted on partner lands</b>	<b>3</b>								
<b>Burn units at Nachusa</b>	<b>5</b>		<b>Total TNC Nachusa land burned</b>	<b>440</b>								
<b>Number of burn days</b>	<b>7</b>		<b>Total acre TNC and partners</b>	<b>565</b>								

Below: Nachusa scientist Elizabeth Bach.



Below: March 4. MRCP burning at Greg Wahl's prairie. Nobody was shaking hands but we assembled for a photo.



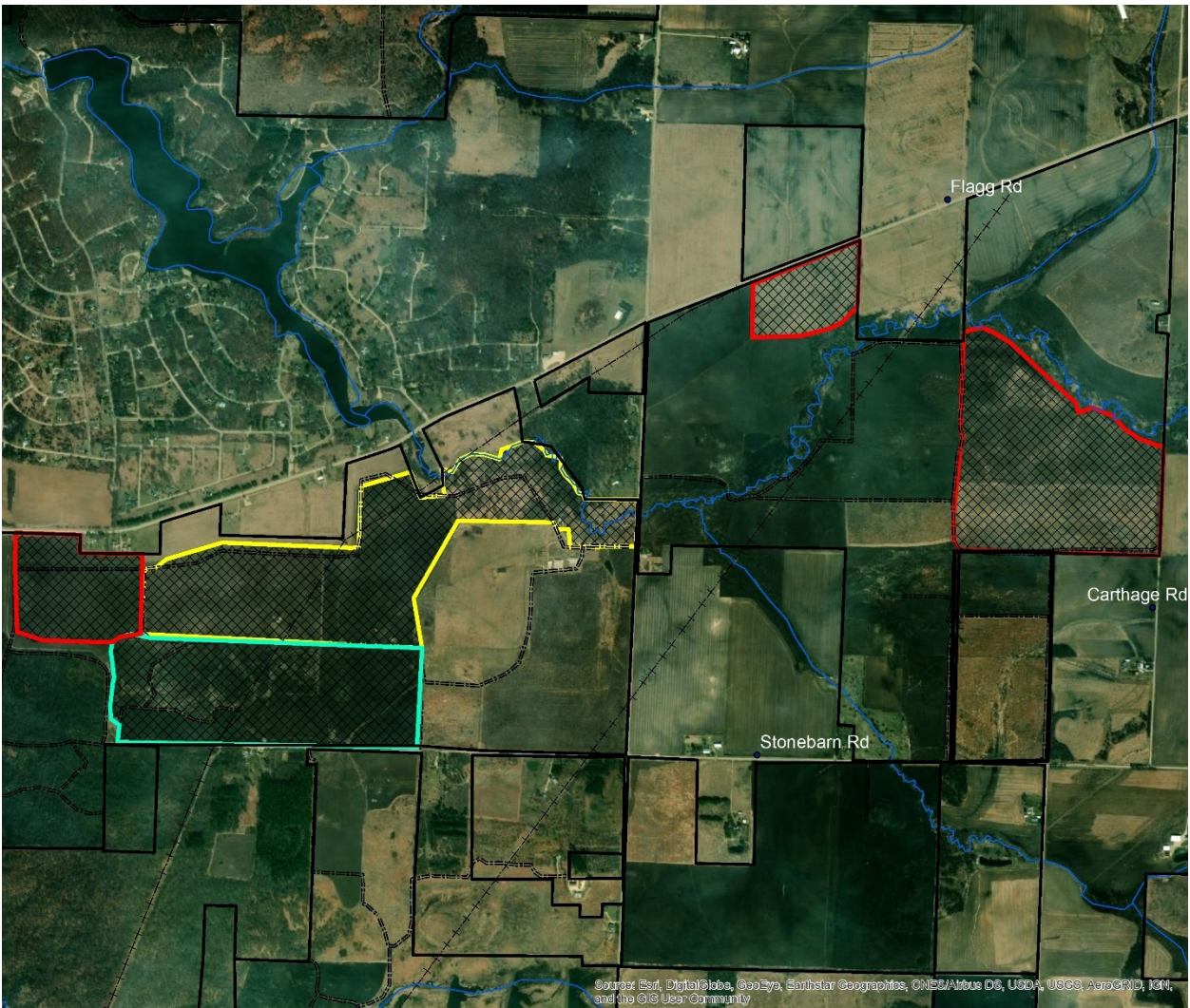
Below: The indomitable Phil Nagorny was back for another winter at Nachusa. He will be on his third wildfire season with the Feds in Washington State. He is using a pressure washer style pump, loud but uses little water.



Below: West Holland fire crew on March 6



Map below are the fires accomplished shown in hash marks.



Below: We helped put out a small wildfire at a neighbor's. Our little UTV put out a similar amount of line as this large unit with its monitor and we of course used much less water. Just saying.



Below: HLP burn unit with Phil out there igniting.



Below: By Dee Hudson, from our annual fire refresher on March 7, before Covid became obvious. A week later this photo made me cringe. Can't do large group trainings with Covid. Do alternative trainings. Skip the group photos.



Below: Retrofitting a dusty old tank from storage into a nice pumper unit.





Below: Amanda Contreras, our resident McCormick Fellow was a line boss this year and travelled to Missouri for a fire training.



Nachusa Crew list for Fall 2019 through Spring 2020. Let me know if I missed you.

First name	Last Name	# of fires	Comments
Bill	Kleiman	9	Burn boss
Leah	Kleiman	3	
Phil	Nagorny	9	Line boss
Amanda	Contreras	2	Line boss
Russell	Brunner	2	
Austin	Webb	2	
Bob	Vogl	1	
Cody	Considine	1	Line boss
Al	Meier	1	
Greg	Hunter	3	
Nathaniel	Weickert	1	
Kevin	Sheiwiller	1	
Joe	Richardson	3	
Dee	Hudson	1	
Elizabeth	Bach	4	
Tim	Smith	2	
Greg	Wahl	2	
Randy	Singelton	1	
Bryon	Walters	5	Burn boss
Susan	Kleiman	4	Line boss
Mike	Hange	1	
Dillon	Chappell	1	
Eriko	Kojima	1	
Paul	Swanson	1	
Keith	Anderson	2	
Travis	Kuntzelman	3	
Kayla	Koenig	1	
Jeff	Cologna	1	
Ron	Deters	1	
Molly	Sedig	1	
Gwen	Deters	1	



<https://www.illinoisprescribedfirecouncil.org/>

Visit your Fire Council website to see what resources are being stored there, such as:

- Fire courses
- Annual Fires Accomplished Map: We need to document this years dearth of fires too.
- Equipment reviews and annual reports.

Below: Leah Kleiman on the line.



Below: Our new tender water tank being filled. See the new equipment reviews section here: <https://www.illinoisprescribedfirecouncil.org/equipment-reviews.html>



Below: With our fire season Covid truncated Bill Kleiman and Damian Considine leaned heavy on this brush mower to get a lot of work done. We ran this mower 7 days a week for about a month.



Below are before and after brush thinning with a bur oak in the center of the photos.



Share with colleagues.

End.