



**National Park Service**

**Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site**

**North Dakota & Montana**

**Fire Effects Monitoring Plan**

## INTRODUCTION

Prescribed fire will be used to maintain and restore the fire adapted ecosystems at Fort Union. National Park Service (NPS) Reference Manual 18 states, “Monitoring is a critical component of fire management and the Fire Monitoring Plan is important to identify why monitoring will be done, what will be monitored, how it will be monitored, where it will be done, and how often it will be completed.” Monitoring of these fires is mandated in Director’s Order #18: Wildland Fire Management issued in 1998. Section 5.2, *Fire Management Plans* (no. 10) states, “Include procedure for short and long term monitoring to document that overall program objectives are being met and undesired effects are not occurring”. Section 5.8 directly addresses *Prescribed Fire Monitoring*:

- a) Fire effects monitoring must be done to evaluate the degree to which objectives are accomplished.
- b) Long-term monitoring is required to document that overall programmatic objectives are being met and undesired effects are not occurring.
- c) Evaluation of fire effects data is the joint responsibility of fire management and natural resource management personnel.

## MONITORING DESIGN

### SAMPLING DESIGN

Plots established at Fort Union follow standard Fire Monitoring Handbook (FMH) (2003) protocols. The sampling design for the FMH plots are contained in the individual monitoring unit description sheets found in Appendix 1. Long-term photo monitoring points have also been established.

### FIELD MEASUREMENT

The individual variables to be measured are defined in the monitoring unit descriptions found in Appendix 1. All plots are marked with steel rebar approximately half a meter in height. Each piece of rebar has a brass tag indicating its location within the plot. The rebar at the zero end of each plot has a tag with complete plot data as specified by the handbook. All locations have been georeferenced with a GPS unit. A hard copy of each plot location is retained in the Northern Great Plains Fire Management Office (NGP) at Wind Cave National Park. A digital text file with UTM coordinates and ArcView ‘shape’ file are also on file at the NGP. The Northern Great Plains Fire Monitoring Crew will retain copies and backups and will be responsible for providing updated versions to Fort Union as needed.

### MONITORING LOCATION

Currently there are 3 monitoring plots and two photo points at Fort Union (Fig. 1).

### PRESCRIBED FIRE MONITORING PARAMETERS

Fort Union has adopted the NPS FMH (2003) as a guide for fire effects monitoring. The handbook identifies four monitoring levels:

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Level 1 – Reconnaissance	Fire Cause, location, size, fuel and vegetation types, relative fire activity, potential for spread, current and forecasted weather, resource or safety threats and constraints, and smoke volume and movement
Level 2 – Fire Conditions	Fire monitoring period, ambient conditions – topographic and fire weather, fuel model, fire characteristic, and smoke characteristic
Level 3 – Immediate Post fire Effects	Fuel reduction, vegetative change or other objective dependent variables with in 1 to 5 years after a prescribed fire
Level 4 – Long-term Change	Continued monitoring of Level 3 variables to measure trends and change over time

The FMH plots that have been described in this document thus far are being used to examine levels 3 and 4.

Wildland fires that are suppressed will be monitored at levels 1 and 2 with observations entered into the park's monitoring database. In the event that long-term fire effects plots are burned in a wildland fire, they will be read by the NGP Fire Monitoring Crew, according to the schedule of plot rereads following a prescribed fire treatment. Level 1 and 2 monitoring observations will be filed with the final fire package and a copy placed with the records for the Fire Management Unit that was burned.

Prescribed fires will meet at least the Level 1 and 2 recommended standards. If there are FMH plots in a unit, information on Level 3 and 4 Variables will be collected.

#### *Level 1 variables*

Reconnaissance monitoring provides a basic overview of the fire event. The following variables will be collected on all fires.

- Fire cause (origin), location and size
- Fuels and vegetation type
- Relative fire activity
- Potential for further spread
- Current and forecasted weather
- Resource or safety threats and constraints
- Smoke volume and movement

Specific information on the collection of these variables can be found in the NPS Fire Monitoring Handbook (2003) or the RX-91 – 'Monitoring Prescribed and Wildland Fire' text.

#### *Level 2 variables*

Fire conditions monitoring provides information on fire weather, fire behavior and resource values at risk. The following variables will be collected and summarized in a monitoring report on all prescribed fires.

- Fire monitoring period
  - fire number and name
  - observations data and time
  - monitor's name
- Ambient conditions
  - topographic variables
  - slope (%)
  - aspect
- Fire weather variables
  - dry bulb temperature
  - relative humidity
  - wind speed
  - wind direction
  - fuel shading and/or cloud cover
  - time-lag fuel moisture
  - live fuel moisture
- Soil moisture
- Fuel model
- Fire characteristics
  - linear rate of spread
  - perimeter or area growth
  - flame length
  - fire spread directions
- Smoke characteristics (based on state and local requirements)

#### **INTENDED DATA ANALYSIS**

Plot installations will be based on prescribed fire priorities and with the intention of achieving a statistically valid sample size within five years for priority monitoring units. The Northern Great Plains Fire Ecologist will be responsible for checking the minimum plot numbers in all units that have more than five plots installed. Each monitoring unit description delineates the variables that will be analyzed. When minimum plot numbers have been reached, objectives will be evaluated after the data have been checked to meet the assumptions of the statistical test. If the data meet the assumptions, including normality, then confidence intervals will be used for change over time comparisons. If data do not meet the assumptions, a statistician will be consulted. Correlation of Level 2 data with vegetation data can be done with either regression or multivariate analysis.

The Northern Great Plains Fire Ecologist will compare data with fire effects research that has been completed in the park and area. Inconsistencies should lead the ecologist to examine different methodologies, data interpretation, and potential research questions.

#### **MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE**

##### *Timing of monitoring*

All plots are currently monitored at peak diversity for the native vegetation approximately halfway between the peak in cool and warm season grasses. This will need to be examined after

pilot sampling. All plots are currently being read pre-burn, immediately post-burn, and 1, 2, 5, 10, and 20 years post-burn.

#### *Pre-burn Sampling*

Pre-burn sampling will be done during peak phenology. Plots should be installed the growing season before prescribed fires. All plots that have not burned within 2 years of installation will not be reread until that unit is again scheduled to burn. These plots can also be considered for control plots depending on long-term prescribed fire planning.

#### *Post-burn sampling*

Post-burn sampling will be done immediately post-burn and 1, 2, 5, 10, and 20 years after the prescribed fire. Plots that burn in the spring will be read at peak phenology that summer, and then at the regular schedule (1, 2, 5, 10, and 20 year). The 1-Year reads for grassland plots burned in the spring are during the growing season the same year as the prescribed fire, and the 2-year read occurs in the following year. The 1-year reads for forest plots burned in the spring are during the growing season one year after the prescribed fire. Fall prescribed fires will be read the following summer as 1 year post-burn reads. If a unit is scheduled to be burned for a second or third time between reads, an additional pre-burn read will be added. For example, a unit burned in the spring of 2000 would be sampled within a week following the fire, 1 year read summer 2000, 2 year read summer 2001, and 5 year read summer 2004. The unit is then scheduled to burn again in 2008. A second pre-burn read should be added summer 2007.

## **DATA MANAGEMENT**

Other monitoring programs have shown that between 25-40% of the time associated with monitoring should be on data management. The data for Fort Union is collected and managed by the Northern Great Plains Fire Monitoring Crew located at Wind Cave National Park, Hot Springs, South Dakota. All data collected at Fort Union will be entered and checked by this crew at their office. Generally the seasonal field staff enters and checks data. This process is supervised the NGP Lead Monitor and Fire Ecologist. Original copies of all data will be kept at the crew's office. Hard copies of the Plot Location Data Sheets will be archived at Fort Union in the Resource Management files. The Lead Monitor will provide monitoring data to the Fort Union Resource Management staff when requested. Data are currently entered and analyzed in the FEAT software. It is backed up to the server at Wind Cave. It will be sent annually to the Midwest Regional Ecologist in conjunction with the annual report. Global positioning data of plot locations are stored on CD at the Fire Monitoring Office at Wind Cave.

## **QUALITY CONTROL**

Data quality will be ensured through proper training of the crew in data collection and a system of checks in the data entry process. All data sheets will be checked by the lead crewmember before leaving a plot for data accuracy and completeness. Data will be summarized annually and results reported to the park and regional fire ecologist. A program review should happen every 3-5 years to maintain consistency of data collection and analysis and re-assessment of program requirements. More frequent review may be necessary if there are significant staffing changes, additional ecological concerns, or by request of the park or monitoring crew.

## **SOURCES OF DATA ERRORS**

Errors in recording can be reduced by checking all data sheets for completeness and accuracy before leaving the plot. Standardized crew training at the beginning of the season will insure all data are being collected in the same manner by all crewmembers. Transcription errors will be corrected by checking all data once entered in the computer. Collecting voucher specimens and using the study collection to verify plant identifications can minimize incorrect identification of plant species. All unknown plant species will be photographed and added to the unknown plant database. These photos can be used as a field reference to insure that all unknowns are consistently observed. Fort Union Resource Management personnel will be notified of unknowns of particular concern so special attention can be given to identify it. Undersampling of less-frequently occurring species is a large problem in the grass types. An additional sampling technique, nested frequency, will be added after consulting with the regional fire ecologist to better sample the species richness found in these types.

The impacts of monitoring include compacting of fuels and vegetation and the collection of voucher plant specimens. Compaction can be minimized by crew awareness as to where data are collected. Voucher specimens are not collected in the plot – if no other specimen is found, the unknown plant will be photographed and added to the unknown plant photo database. Accurate plot locations including GPS data will aid in plot location and minimize vegetative compaction. Test all directions by having new crewmembers use previously written directions to ensure accuracy. Incomplete or missing data will be corrected as soon as possible. Plot protocols need to be reviewed annually with the seasonal crew prior to beginning work to insure that data are accurately collected. Problems encountered by the field crew must be brought to the attention of the lead monitor and fire ecologist.

## **RESPONSIBLE PARTIES**

Administrative duties will be assigned as follows:

- *Northern Great Plains Fire Ecologist*: Plan revision, crew supervision, data management and data analysis
- *Superintendent, Fort Union Trading Post NHS*: Park liaison
- *Northern Great Plains Lead Monitor*: Data collection, data entry, data management and field crew supervision
- *Midwest Regional Fire Ecologist*: Coordinate program reviews

## **MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS OF MONITORING RESULTS**

Monitoring results will be summarized and presented to the park in the fall meeting of the Fire Committee with the NGP Fire management Officer, Prescribed Fire Specialist and Fire Ecologist. This meeting helps coordinate fire activities including prescribed fire for the park in the coming year. The annual report information can be conveyed to Fort Union Resource Management in an additional meeting as requested.

Review of the data summary and analysis by the NGP Fire Ecologist, Prescribed Fire Specialist, and Fort Union Resource Management staff should determine if the current program is moving

the vegetation towards the desired conditions and/or having unwanted results. Targets should be reviewed and refined, and prescribed fire prescriptions and other vegetation management techniques could be adjusted to compensate. This review could also generate questions that may lead to fire effects research being conducted in the park. Information from the Fort Union program could be analyzed with other parks from the NGP group as appropriate and should be presented to other parks and at scientific meetings and publications.

## **CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

The Northern Great Plains Fire Monitoring Crew is responsible for coordination and consultation with other parks in the group, fire management personnel, and the Midwest Regional Fire Ecologist. Fort Union Resource Management staff will be responsible for coordination and consultation with the park and all other cooperators.

## **LITERATURE CITED**

USDI National Park Service. 1998. Directors order #18: wildland fire management.

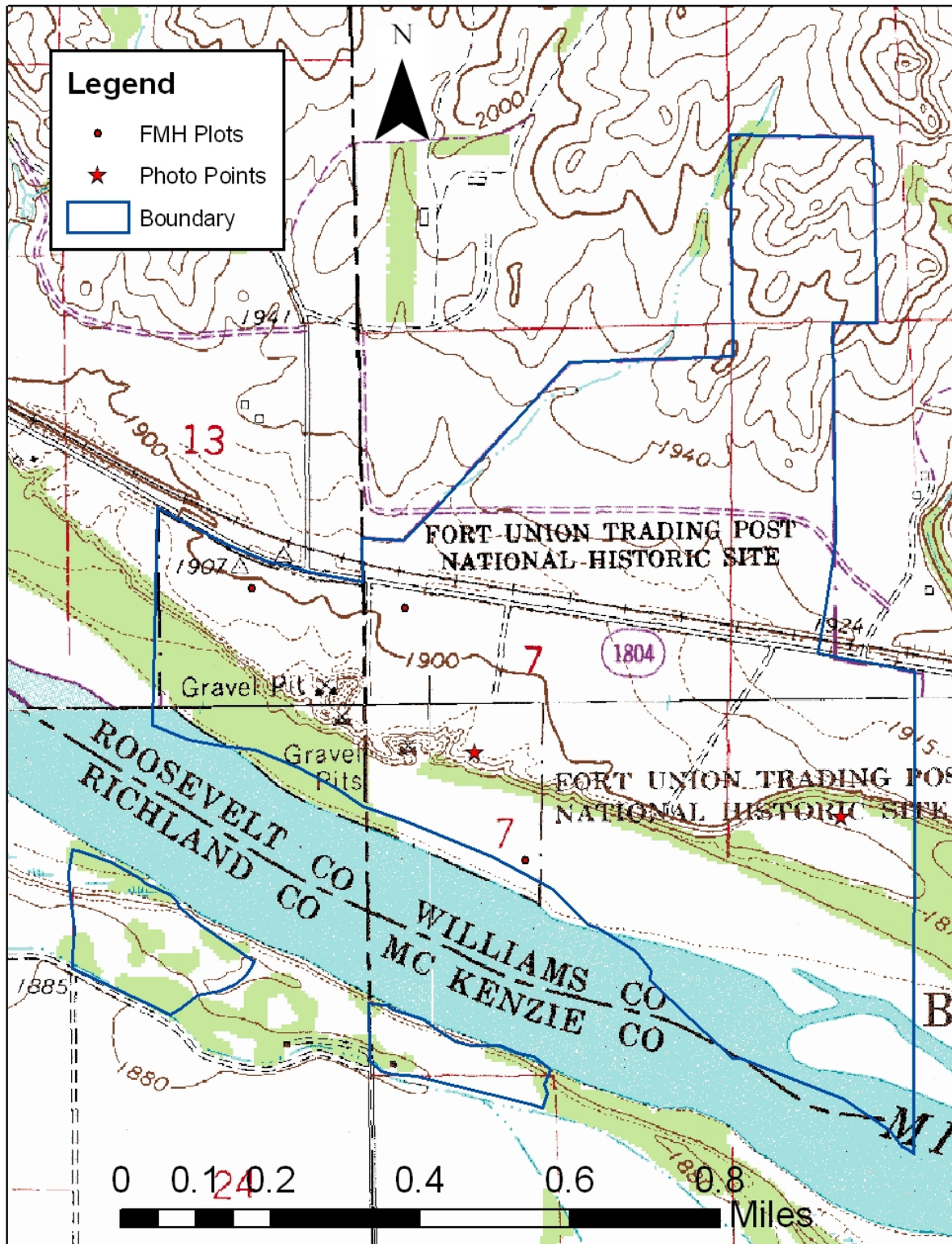
USDI National Park Service. 1999. Reference manual 18.

USDI National Park Service. 2003. Fire monitoring handbook. National Interagency Fire Center, Boise, ID. 274 pp.

## **FIGURES**



FIGURE 1. LOCATION OF FIRE EFFECTS MONITORING PLOTS.



## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX 1 – MONITORING UNIT DESCRIPTION SHEETS

**Monitoring Type Code:** GAGCR1D01

**Date Described:** 7/29/97

**Monitoring Type Name:** Crested Wheatgrass – Non-native Mixed-grass Prairie

**Prepared by:** A. Powers, G. Bradshaw, B. Braudis, R Runge, B. Adams, G. Kemp, A. Banta.

### Physical Description:

Level to gently sloping lowland mixed-grass prairie. Elevation 1800 to 1900 feet. Soils are silty, clay loams, and silty loams, soil types are: Farland, Lohler, Shambo, and Lawther. The area has been almost entirely flattened by agricultural activities and the native plant community replaced by exotic species. The land has been mowed, disced and some has been burned in the last ten years. It has been reseeded with native seed mixes, to varying degrees of success.

### Biological Description:

Because of the disturbed nature of the site, the native plant community is potential. Crested wheatgrass (*Agropyron cristatum*) and smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*) dominate the largely exotic community. Native species which should be present, according to “Current and Historic Natural Resources of the Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site” include: green needlegrass (*Nassella viridula*), western wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*), blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), sideoats grama (*B. curtipendula*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), prairie Junegrass (*Koeleria macrantha*), prairie sandreed (*Calamovilfa longifolia*), plains reedgrass (*Calamagrostis montanensis*), porcupine grass (*Hesperostipa spartea*), plains muhly (*Muhlenbergia cuspidata*), blackroot sedge (*Carex filifolia*), Sandberg’s bluegrass (*Poa sandbergii*), and sand dropseed (*Sporobolus cryptandrus*). Native forbs on site include rough false pennyroyal (*Hedeoma hispida*) and blue flax (*Linum lewisii*), blue lettuce (*Lactuca oblongifolia*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), and scarlet globemallow (*Sphaeralcea coccinea*). Potential forbs include: white locoweed (*Oxytropis sericea*), purple prairie clover (*Dalea purpurea*), white prairie clover (*Dalea candida*), lupine (*Lupinus argenteus*), fringed sagewort (*Artemisia frigida*), broom snakeweed (*Gutierrezia sarothrae*), and purple coneflower (*Echinacea angustifolia*). Shrubs include: skunkbush sumac (*Rhus aromatica*), western snowberry (*Symphoricarpos occidentalis*), woods rose (*Rosa woodsii*), and silver sage (*Artemisia cana*). Prominent exotics on site include: crested wheatgrass (*Agropyron cristatum*), Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), sweet clover (*Melilotus officinalis*), smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*) and leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*). Exotic forbs on site include: wild buckwheat (*Polygonum convolvulus*), field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*), and alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*).

### Rejection Criteria:

Large outcroppings or barren areas >20% of the plot; areas within 20 meters of roads, man-made trails, or human created clearings are to be rejected. Rejection criteria are somewhat loose at this point due to the lack of areas which *have not* had some form of treatment other than fire.

**Burn Prescription:**

This prairie will be burned between April until green-up, or Labor Day to mid-October.

<i><b>Fire Prescription Elements</b></i>	
RH: <b>25-55 %</b>	Average Rate of Spread: <b>0-3 ch/hr.</b>
Temperature: <b>30-85 F</b>	<b>Live Fuel Moisture:</b>
Average Mid-flame Winds: <b>0-15 mph</b>	1-hour TLFM: <b>6-14 %</b>
Fuel Loading: <b>3-5 tons/acre</b>	10-hour TLFM: <b>8-15 %</b>
Average Flame Lenth: <b>0.4-1.5 ft.</b>	100 hour TLFM: <b>10-30 %</b>

**Monitoring Variables** (in order of importance):

- Cover of native perennial grasses and forbs
- Cover of non-native annual grasses

**Prescribed Fire Objectives**

**Immediate Post-burn**

- Burn at least 80% of the burnable project area.

**Five Year Post-burn**

- Increase native perennial grasses and forbs by at least 25%.
- Reduce non-native cover by at least 25%.

**Fire Monitoring Objectives**

- Measure the cover for native perennial grasses and forbs and non-native annual grasses with a sufficient sample size to be 80% confident that the sample mean will be within 25% of the population mean.

GENERAL PROTOCOLS		YES	NO			YES	NO
<b>Preburn</b>	Control Plots/Opt		•	Herb Height/Rec		•	
	Herbaceous Density/Opt		•	Belt Transect Width:	5 meters		
	OP/Origin Buried		•	Abbreviated Tags		•	
	Voucher Specimens/Rec	•		Stakes Installed:	0P & 30P		
	Stereo Photography/Opt		•	Crown Intercept/Opt			•
	Brush Individuals/Rec	•		Herb. Fuel Load/Opt		•	
	Herbaceous Data Collected at: 0P-30P						
<b>Burn</b>	Duff Moisture/Rec		•	Flame Zone Depth/Rec		•	
<b>Postburn</b>	Herbaceous Data/Opt: Not collected.			Herb. Fuel Load/Opt			•
	100 Pt. Burn Severity/Opt		•				

**Rec = Recommended**

**Opt = Optional**

**Monitoring Type Code:** GSTVI1D01

**Date Described:** 7/29/97

**Monitoring Type Name:** Wheatgrass-Needlegrass Mixed-grass Prairie

**Prepared by:** A. Powers, G. Bradshaw, B. Braudis, , R Runge, B. Adams, G. Kemp, A. Banta.

**Physical Description:**

Level to hilly badlands. All aspects are acceptable, slopes 0 - 45%, elevation 2,400 to 4,000 feet. This plant community found on upper steppes intermittently crossed by grassy drains, also on flat, isolated buttes and lowland terraces of the lower steppe. Soils are clayey, silty, claypan, and badlands overflow. Soil types are: Blackpipe clay loam, Blackpipe-Norrest complex, Blackpipe-Wortman Complex, Cedarpass silty clay loam, Cedarpass-denby complex, Cedarpass-interior-badlands, Interior-cedarpass-denby.

**Biological Description:**

A blend of tall-grass and short-grass species, including: western wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*), needle and thread (*Hesperostipa comata*), green needlegrass (*Nassella viridula*), blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), sideoats grama (*B. curtipendula*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), and big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*). Common shrubs are plains pricklypear (*Opuntia polyacantha*), skunkbush sumac (*Rhus aromatica*), fringed sagewort (*Artemisia frigida*), and silver sagebrush (*A. cana*). Forbs include heath aster (*Aster ericoides*), western yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), and Missouri goldenrod (*Solidago missouriensis*).

**Rejection Criteria:**

Large outcroppings or barren areas >20% of the plot; areas with anomalous vegetation; monitoring type boundaries; riparian areas or areas dominated by trees; bio-control areas; areas within 20 meters of roads, man-made trails, or human created clearings are to be rejected.

**Notes:** Brush density will not be collected for *Opuntia polyacantha* because it is rhizomatous. Biomass will be collected at each plot just prior to the burn.

**Burn Prescription:**

This prairie will be burned between April until green-up, or Labor Day-end of September.

Fire Prescription Elements	
RH: <b>25-55 %</b>	Average Rate of Spread: <b>0-3 ch/hr.</b>
Bulb: <b>30-85 F</b>	<b>Live Fuel Moisture:</b>
Average Mid-flame Winds: <b>0-15 mph</b>	1-hour TLFM: <b>6-14 %</b>
Fuel Loading: <b>3-5 tons/acre</b>	10-hour TLFM: <b>8-15 %</b>
Average Flame Lenth: <b>0.4-1.5 ft.</b>	100 hour TLFM: <b>10-30 %</b>

**Fire Monitoring Variables** (in order of importance)

- Cover of native perennial grasses and forbs
- Cover of non-native annual grasses.

### **Prescribed Fire Objectives**

#### **Immediate Post-burn**

- Burn at least 80% of the burnable project area.

#### **Five Year Post-burn**

- Increase native perennial grasses and forbs by at least 25%.
- Reduce non-native cover by at least 25%.

### **Fire Monitoring Objectives**

- Measure the cover for native perennial grasses and forbs and non-native annual grasses with a sufficient sample size to be 80% confident that the sample mean will be within 25% of the population mean.

GENERAL PROTOCOLS		YES	NO			YES	NO
<b>Preburn</b>	Control Plots/Opt		•	Herb Height/Rec		•	
	Herbaceous Density/Opt		•	Belt Transect Width:	5 m		
	OP/Origin Buried		•	Abbreviated Tags		•	
	Voucher Specimens/Rec	•		Stakes Installed:	0P & 30P		
	Stereo Photography/Opt		•	Crown Intercept/Opt			•
	Brush Individuals/Rec		•	Herb. Fuel Load/Opt			•
	Herbaceous Data Collected at: 0P-30P						
<b>Burn</b>	Duff Moisture/Rec		•	Flame Zone Depth/Rec		•	
<b>Postburn</b>	Herbaceous Data/Opt: Not collected.			Herb. Fuel Load/Opt			•
	100 Pt. Burn Severity/Opt		•				

**Rec = Recommended**

**Opt = Optional**

APPENDIX 2 - LONG-TERM PHOTO MONITORING

**LONG TERM PHOTO MONITORING SHEET**

Plot # \_\_\_\_\_

Park: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Burn Unit: \_\_\_\_\_

Recorders: \_\_\_\_\_

UTM Zone: _____	Camera height: _____ ft.	Elevation: _____ ft
UTMN: _____	Lens size: _____ mm	Slope along transect: _____ %
UTME: _____	Distance from pole: _____ ft.	Slope of terrain: _____ %
Datum: _____	Azimuth from camera to pole: _____	No. of Photos Taken: _____
EPE: _____	Height on pole used for shot: _____ ft	Compass Bearing(s): _____

Describe the route to the plot, include or attach a hand drawn map illustrating these directions, including the plot layout, and significant features:

Visit	Initial/ Date	Comments
Install/Pre		
Immediate Post		
1 Year Post		
2 Year Post		
5 Year Post		
10 Year Post		

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**APPENDIX 3 – PLOT HISTORY**

Burn Unit	Monitoring Unit	Plot #	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
West	Needlegrass	STVI-01	V		V	B/V	V	B/V	V			B/V	V
West	Crested Wheatgrass	AGCR-01	V		V	B/V	V					B/V	V
River	Cottonwood Woodland	PODE-01				V						B/V	V
Housing Block 2	Photo Point	FUPPH1							V	B/V			
	Photo Point	FUPPR1							V				

V = Visit; B = Burn