

Bluestem Breezes
Karaline Mayer
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Konza Prairie

Prescribed burning of the tallgrass prairie is in full swing! It's hard to find a 'calm' day now with no fire moving across pastures.

And, what a terrific job from our local volunteer firemen who are keeping the fires under control on those windy days!

This is the perfect time to sneak in a resource for those of you conducting prescribed burns: www.ksfire.org. It does NOT matter how many years you've been conducting responsible burns. The website is free, so put it to use. The smoke models offer very visual, user-friendly maps showing which days are better or worse to burn. They do take in to effect where our smoke is headed and its potential impact on that city.

The website also works well on your smartphone (now you're running out of excuses!). On my phone, I went to ksfire.org. I clicked on the icon "Click Here to Access Smoke Model". I selected the area of Wabaunsee County I will burn today from the list. The page immediately tells me I have a Medium Contribution today and a Large Contribution tomorrow. This is indicating the amounts of smoke headed to major cities.

Remember, we must take this in to account as we are conducting burns. Sending overloads of smoke into cities with air quality monitors has and will continue to affect those managing grass in the Flint Hills. As a reminder, the monitors are normally turned on April 1st.

Before I veered slightly off tract, I intended to provide some very basic information on the Konza Prairie, located directly south of Manhattan.

Recently, I had the opportunity to tour several parts of the research facility, including a number of their burn plots. I'm going to give you a snippet of several informational items I took away from my tour in hopes that it will catch your interest.

- The oddly mowed areas you view from I-70 are actually dividing lines between watersheds. Each of these plots is on a different burn cycle (early, late, 1 year, 2 year, 4 year, 10 year...). Take note of the differences in plots!
- The maximum numbers of years between burns on the Konza is 20. You'll likely pick those out plots easily! There is a high percentage of brush and trees in those areas.
- Small scale plots at the Konza show similar burn patterns as mentioned earlier. The plots can easily be navigated, showing visitors the impacts on the prairie when grass is managed through various methods.
- Cow/calf grazing studies are starting in 2014. KSU Animal Scientist K.C. Olson will be involved in those trials.

- Educational tours (including school groups) may tour the Konza. To obtain information on the Konza Environmental Education Program (KEEP), visit <http://keep.konza.ksu.edu/>.
- For results from various research trials, visit www.konza.ksu.edu.

Why am I spending time this week telling you about the Konza Prairie? This is a wonderful resource that sits right at our back door. Many, likely most, of us have never toured the site. Lack of knowledge regarding the research and management of this former-ranch have led to many inaccurate assumptions. When you have a chance, spend time on their website. And, if the opportunity arises, I urge you to tour the research station. There is so much knowledge to be gained by every age level.

Good luck to each of you as you continue your prescribed burning of the native grass pastures!

For additional information, visit the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; kamayer@ksu.edu; 765-3821). For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out wabaunsee.ksu.edu.