



Prescribed burns can reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, improve rangeland, and help restore habitat for native plants and wildlife. Photo by Devii Rao.

## SBALT NEWS

# When fire can be our friend

By Paul Hain,  
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Most people are afraid of fire, and it is natural to feel

alarmed when you see smoke rising from a nearby landscape. Recent wildfire activity in the State, and around the world, has raised awareness of the need to actively manage our landscapes to lower the risk of catastrophic wildfire. But did you know that fire itself has been used as a tool for thousands of years to improve the environment and promote healthy ecosystems?

Prescribed burns, also known as controlled burns, are planned months or years in advance to achieve a number of specific objectives such as removal of invasive plant species, reduction of thatch fuel load, and encouragement of native plant species. Prescribed burns can help to reach land management goals within a set of safety parameters such as wind speed and direction, temperature range, humidity levels, and resource availability. In contrast, these factors are outside of control in the event of a wildland fire.

In our region, we are fortunate to have the Central Coast Prescribed Burn Association (CCPBA) to assist local landowners and land managers with prescribed burns to improve rangeland, reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, and restore habitat. The CCPBA assists in developing a burn plan with extensive pre-burn preparation. A certified burn boss is hired to oversee the plan-

ning and the firing operation, as well as safety for everyone involved. A hearty meal is often provided for participants following fire treatments, and post-burn seeding with native plants is often included in the burn plan.

For millennia, indigenous Californians have used fire for cultural and ecological purposes. The Amah Mut-sun Land Trust (AMLT) is actively building capacity to carry out cultural burns on the Central Coast land-

scapes that their ancestors tended prior to colonization. We are grateful to the AMLT for partnering with CCPBA, SBALT, and other organizations in the region to share their traditional knowledge of the benefits of “good fire.”

Stay tuned for more information from SBALT about prescribed and cultural burns. Visit [www.sanbenitolandtrust.org](http://www.sanbenitolandtrust.org) to learn more and donate in support of our work.



Prescribed burns are planned by trained professionals and only carried out if all of the safety parameters are met on the day of the scheduled burn. Photo by Devii Rao.