

## How Prescribed Fire Helps Keep Marin Safe and Resilient

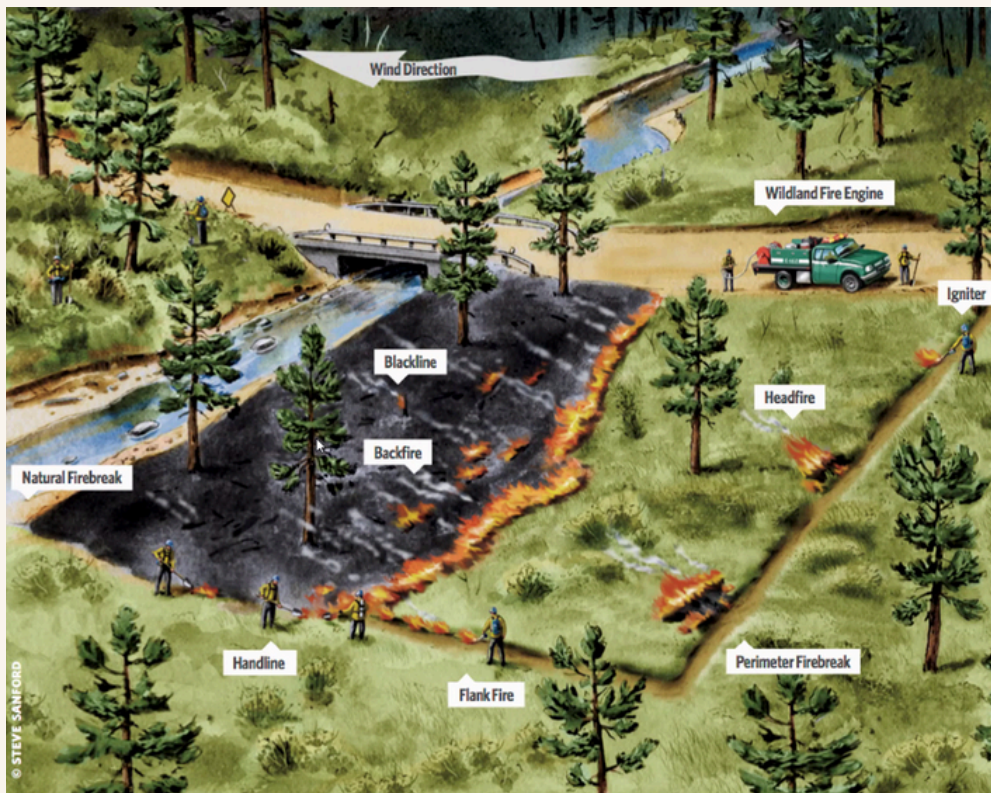
**On the morning** of Tuesday, October 23, a prescribed burn took place on Mt. Tam, near the Mountain Theater, through the joint efforts of Marin Water, California State Parks, and Marin County Fire. Initially planned as an 18-acre burn, the operation was scaled back to one acre when unanticipated changes in weather and relative humidity occurred, pushing conditions outside the allowable parameters for the burn's objectives.

Prescribed fire, or "Rx fire," is a controlled burn designed to improve the health of ecosystems that have historically experienced wildfires. These burns require extensive planning and cooperation among multiple agencies to ensure safety and effectiveness. Weather and fire behavior are closely monitored to meet specific goals, such as reducing ladder fuels and dry fuels on the forest floor, which can contribute to severe wildfires if left unmanaged. Additionally, prescribed fire promotes the regeneration of native grasses and wildflowers, enhancing the ecological health of the landscape.



An often-overlooked benefit of prescribed fire is the valuable training opportunity it offers firefighters. These controlled burns allow them to observe fire behavior in scenarios beyond traditional fire suppression, helping them understand how factors like wind, terrain, and vegetation influence a fire's spread. This hands-on experience is crucial for developing the essential skills needed to respond effectively to future wildfires, both within Marin County and during out-of-county mutual aid assignments.

This particular burn was open to the public, enabling park visitors to observe the fire from a safe distance. Although certain areas were off-limits for safety reasons, the transparency of the operation aims to foster public support for prescribed fire on public lands. Building public trust is essential for encouraging the use of this tool in more areas of Marin, where fire suppression has long been the norm.



*Prescribed burns require consideration of many factors, including the ones shown above. Source: Greenville Water*

The window for prescribed burning is often small, and agencies must be prepared to act quickly - sometimes with just a few day's notice when conditions align. Despite its challenges, prescribed fire plays a critical role in maintaining the health of Marin's forests. By reducing fuel buildup and creating resilient landscapes, it supports ecological health and helps prepare for future wildfires threatening communities in the wildland-urban interface.

During the burn, Marin County Battalion Chief Jordan Reeser, burn boss for the operation, reflected on the day's efforts. "I think it was a valiant effort and worth trying," he said, noting that initial conditions, including fuel moisture and predicted weather, appeared favorable. However, he acknowledged that "as is often the case, variables change," and concerns about fire behavior emerged as the day progressed. While he assured, "We didn't have any safety concerns," he recognized potential challenges for containment, such as spot fires and embers from trees. Reeser concluded that they were "actually getting really good fire effects," but ultimately decided to scale back the operation in response to the changing conditions, with plans to resume the burn on a more favorable day.



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