

THE *Current*

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Prescribed Burn on Lagoon Island

In conjunction with the Cheadle Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration (CCBER), the Santa Barbara County Fire Department intends to conduct a one-day prescribed burn prior to Labor Day at the UCSB lagoon, near Campus Point.

The .36-acre burn is part of an ongoing management effort to control non-native grasses and establish native bluff scrub vegetation. Building on successful past burns, this treatment will be conducted on a day with the least amount of fog in order to generate enough heat to reduce the viability of the non-native seed bank, and on a day with the best conditions for dispersion.

The current burn window is Sept. 1 through 4.

“The goal of this burn is to continue to expand the restoration of Lagoon Island to a diversity of annual wildflowers and low coastal bluff and sage scrub native vegetation to replace annual grasses and weeds, which dry out in the summer and pose a fire risk,” said Lisa Stratton, CCBER’s director of ecosystem management. “We hope to increase native plant diversity from 2 non-native species to more than 20 native species.”

This year’s marks the eighth prescribed burn implemented on Lagoon Island since students of Carla D’Antonio, a professor of evolution, ecology and marine biology and of environmental studies, in 2007 demonstrated that adding supplemental fuel effectively eliminated the seed bank of the invasive grass known as “rip gut brome.”

“Working with County Fire and the UCSB fire marshal, these fires are contained within a cleared ring and monitored until the embers are cold,” said Stratton. “By clearing the monoculture of dried annual grass that arrests natural succession, this management process allows a high diversity of wildflowers and native coastal sage scrub to become established. Walk around the lagoon any time of year and you’ll see a wide variety of flowering plants that support birds, butterflies and other insects and restores our heavily impacted coastal habitats for generations of students to appreciate.”

The burn proposed this year will fill in a gap between previous years’ restoration projects that followed the prescribed burns. According to Stratton, the fire will burn for about 25 minutes, with the remaining time — about 3 hours altogether — spent on mop up activities designed to get the larger branches to burn down and ensure the fire is safely out.

Once the exact date is decided and as conditions permit, the burn is scheduled to begin in the late morning or early afternoon and conclude by 4 p.m. It will be conducted when meteorological conditions are highly favorable to direct smoke away from populated centers. County Fire and the Santa Barbara Air Pollution Control District are collaborating to ensure the fire occurs on a day when winds will blow the smoke south or straight up, humidity is lower than 50% and wind speeds are low.

During the event, the site is managed by county fire crews and CCBER staff.

“The collaboration with County Fire and the UCSB Fire Marshall has been wonderful,” noted Stratton, “and is mutually beneficial with a training opportunity for them and a successful conversion of flammable dry annual grass vegetation to more diverse, evergreen native flowering shrubs adapted to the coastal environment.”

Due to changing winds and weather conditions, it is difficult to predict which areas of the county, if any, may be affected by smoke from the burn. Individuals who smell smoke should take precautions and use common sense to reduce any harmful health effects. If you can smell smoke or it is visible in your area, avoid strenuous outdoor activity and remain indoors as much as possible. These precautions are especially important to children, older adults and those with heart and lung conditions.

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