

DRAFT CHARTER

for

Texas Alliance of Prescribed Burn Associations (TAPBA)

August 2011

BACKGROUND

The value of prescribed burning in maintaining the functionality of grasslands has long been recognized. Prescribed burning can improve forest systems, rangeland conditions, forage productivity, and wildlife habitats. Many private landowners understand the benefits of prescribed fire but lack the experience or confidence to carry out prescribed burning without technical assistance. Furthermore, state and federal agencies often cannot meet the demand for onsite technical assistance required to implement effective prescribed burning at large, regional scales. A viable alternative to state or federal agency assistance programs has been the development of Prescribed Burning Associations (PBAs), organized landowner cooperatives that are user owned, led, controlled and operated. Burn associations can significantly reduce landowner risks through increased and shared experience, knowledge and available resources, and can ultimately serve to increase capacity for use of prescribed fire at regional, landscape scales. In the last 10 years, the concept of PBAs in Texas has expanded to include 11 cooperatives with over 1,000 landowner members (see figure). Some unforeseen challenges to PBAs include maintaining communication among cooperatives, dissemination of timely information, and support for state-wide training/certification. A state-wide “Alliance” of PBAs as has long been suggested can serve to address many of these challenges and build further capacity in use of prescribed burning on private lands.



In May 2011, a workshop was held at the Texas AgriLife Research and Extension Center in San Angelo to discuss the concept of a “Texas Alliance of Prescribed Burn Associations” (hereafter TAPBA or Alliance). Nine of 11 PBAs were represented at this facilitated event to (1) discuss the concept of a state-wide Alliance in support of local PBA initiatives, (2) gain input and perspectives on the potential organizational function and structure, and (3) identify methods of communication among all PBAs and their members. This document serves to capture discussions stemming from that workshop and to serve as a Charter for the TAPBA. The Charter’s purpose is to outline the *Principles, Functions, and Organization* of the TAPBA.

PRINCIPLES

Purpose and Benefit

The *purpose* of the TAPBA is to encourage the safe use and application of prescribed burning to reduce the fuel load of Texas’ forests, agricultural and rangelands. The *benefits* of the TAPBA are:

- Provides a forum for PBAs to address issues of mutual interest.
- Increased communication and sharing of common resources.
- Integrated approach to working with county level governments.
- Increased use of prescribed fire across the landscape.
- Potential to obtain liability insurance policies, primary and/or umbrella for volunteer members of PBAs.

Mission

The TAPBA serves to promote and protect the right of Texas landowners to use prescribed burning as a safe, economical, and effective forests, rangeland and habitat management practice. TAPBA will facilitate communication among member PBAs on issues of local, state, and national interest.

Goals

The goals of TAPBA are:

- Teach and encourage the use of safe prescribed fire practices.
- Provide training opportunities in conducting prescribed burning.
- Reduce fuel loads in support of wildfire prevention and mitigation.
- Establish long-term use of sustainable prescribed burn fire practices across the landscape.

Objectives

The objectives of TAPBA are:

- Increase communication and coordination among PBA members and external stakeholders at the state, regional, and local levels.
- Identify viable insurance options for PBAs to obtain affordable and sufficient insurance for PBA members working as volunteers on prescribed burns approved by a PBA and conducted under the approved Burn Plan.
- Increase the number of PBAs and provide local assistance and support as an alliance.
- Facilitate the sharing of resources among PBAs to include funding sources, sample burn plans, and outreach/education materials.
- Diversify the educational experiences and mentoring of the next generation of landowners.
- Promote safe prescribed fire implementation practices.
- Explore potential partnerships with local fire departments to assist in prescribed burning and potentially in wildfire control.
- Secure a funding “Foundation” for existing PBAs and develop more PBAs.

FUNCTIONS

Target Audiences

The TAPBA will work collaboratively with both internal and external stakeholders to include the following target audiences:

- Private Landowners
- County Commissioner Courts’ and other county offices
- Texas Prescribed Burn Board
- Natural Resource Agencies (e.g., Texas AgriLife Extension and Research, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Texas Forest Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Texas Department of Agriculture, Coalition of Prescribed Fire Council, etc.).
- Natural Resource Organizations (e.g., Texas Wildlife Association, Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers’ Association, The Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, Texas Sheep and

Goat Raisers Association, Texas Exotic Wildlife Association, Texas Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, The Nature Conservancy, National Fire Protection Associations, Texas Farm Bureau, Quail Forever, Texas Quail Coalition, Texas Organization of Wildlife Management Associations, Audubon Texas, etc.).

- General Public
- Volunteer or other organized Fire Departments

Key Issues and Priorities

The TAPBA identified several key issues and priorities to further consider and if appropriate pursue. Issues and priorities are categorized into short- and long-term and in no order of preference.

Short-term

- Increase communication and sharing of concerns and opportunities among PBAs for issues of mutual interest.
- Develop resources to assist the PBAs in communicating with local county governments.
- Develop checklist for County Commissioners' Courts to use as guide when determining if exception to burn during burn ban should be granted.
- Improve access and affordability of liability insurance for PBAs members.
- Increase education and training for association members and targeted stakeholders (e.g., County Commissioners' Courts).
- Advocate for legislation that supports the continued use of prescribed fire.
- Create PBA fire "tool kit" that includes general training/educational material, a media "tool kit" (i.e., commercials, videos, advocacy template letters, etc.), and insurance and planning materials both state-wide and regionally.

Long-term

- Improve data collection on prescribed fire applied by PBAs across the state.
- Protect and enhance water resources through the use of prescribed fire.
- Promote county-wide fire management plans (i.e., strategic plans).
- Share resources for funding opportunities to include funding announcements (e.g., RFPs) and sample proposals from other PBAs.
- Explore and provide benefits of membership (e.g., cards that offer discounts with various vendors, etc.) for PBAs and the Alliance.
- Develop methods to assist new PBAs with little or no experience in prescribed burning (i.e., education, equipment) through mentoring by older PBAs.
- Develop a recruitment strategy for PBAs and the Alliance to include targeting new areas for PBAs.
- Develop a state-wide fire policy and determine how PBAs can assist in this process.
- Establish a state-wide fire break grid to be used in preparation for wildfire control.
- Establish a Mobile Emergency Command Center (MECC) to assist in wildfire control by using prescribed burn techniques, and provide expert staff for the MECC.

ORGANIZATION

The mission of the TAPBA will be accomplished through a transparent, collaborative network of PBAs and their representatives. A *preliminary* structure for this network includes elected co-chairs, steering committee, and working groups. A brief description of each component to include their roles and responsibilities is outlined below:

Steering Committee

A Steering Committee will be established to provide guidance and direct TAPBA activities to include oversight of specific work groups. Each PBA will identify two individuals to serve on the Steering Committee (one primary, one alternate, see Appendix A for list of PBAs). Steering Committee members will serve two-year terms and can be re-appointed for an unlimited number of terms, if desired.

- Any Steering Committee member may resign by presenting written notice to the Co-Chairs.
- A quorum of six (6) committee members shall be present to conduct business and at least one Co-Chair must be present.
- At least one (1) Steering Committee meeting shall be held annually. Additional meetings may be called by the Co-Chair as needed or conducted via conference calls or email.
- A petition from a majority of the Committee members may call a special meeting of the Steering Committee.

Co-Chairs

Two TAPBA Co-Chairs will serve as facilitators of the Steering Committee. The responsibilities of the Co-Chairs include facilitating steering committee meetings and providing oversight to other TAPBA activities. To ensure overlapping in TAPBA leadership, the position of Co-Chair will be a two-year commitment each serving a staggered term (i.e., one co-chair will be elected to a two year term each year).

- Co-Chairs must be landowners active in their respective Prescribed Burn Associations, Texas residents, and members of the steering committee.
- Co-Chairs are elected by a two-thirds (2/3) Steering Committee vote.
- Co-Chairs can be re-elected for 2 consecutive terms (4 years); Co-Chairs must step down for one (1) calendar year after serving two (2) consecutive terms before eligible for re-election.

Work Groups

Work Groups will serve to implement specific tasks as charged by the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee will create Work Groups and appoint Work Group leaders as necessary. Work Groups may be made up of Steering Committee members or other PBA members. Specific Work Groups initially identified to address short-term priorities of the Alliance include:

- *Organization.*—The current organizational structure of the TAPBA as outlined in this charter will be further refined through the input and recommendations of this workgroup. An Organization Workgroup will be established to recommend any changes or adjustments, if any, to the TAPBA. Proposed organizational changes will not prohibit the TAPBA in meeting its mission, goals, and objectives.
- *Finances.*—A Finance Workgroup will be established to review and recommend viable options in the long-term support of the TAPBA. The issue of TAPBA membership fees, for example, will be discussed and recommendations made to the Steering Committee for further consideration.
- *Education and Training.*—An Education and Training Workgroup will be established to develop outreach materials, recommendations for improvements to the TAPBA website, and review of training certification materials. All materials will be shared and posted on the TAPBA website for PBA use.
- *Alliance Insurance.*—An Insurance Workgroup will be established to explore viable options

for “group insurance” or other strategies to ensure affordable and sufficient landowner liability insurance. Insurance liability was identified as a priority issue needing further evaluation.

Workgroup leaders will be responsible for reporting progress and recommendations to the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee will establish or disband Work Groups based on the needs of the TAPBA.

Membership

Membership to the TAPBA is open to any PBA interested in joining the Alliance. Initially, there will be no membership fees (subject to change based on input from the Finances Workgroup and with approval of two-thirds of the Steering Committee). Future PBAs interested in joining the TAPBA will do so through a letter of intent to the Co-Chairs subject to the approval of the Steering Committee. Membership does not imply any financial or other resource commitments by the member PBAs.

- PBA members can withdraw membership from TAPBA at any point in time, with immediate effect, through a letter to the Co-Chairs.
- If TAPBA membership becomes fee based and terminates its memberships, the PBA will forfeit any fees paid to TAPBA.

Meetings and Reports

The Steering Committee will meet periodically as determined by the Organization Workgroup. All TAPBA bylaws and policies will require a 2/3 majority vote. The Steering Committee will generate an annual progress report that will be posted on the TAPBA website (<http://pfire.tamu.edu/>).

**Appendix A:
Prescribed Burn Association Partners:**

Coastal Bend Prescribed Burn Association

Brush Country Prescribed Burn Association

Pineywoods Prescribed Fire Cooperative

Edwards Plateau Prescribed Burning
Association, Inc.

Hill Country Prescribed Burn Association

Western Navarro Bobwhite Recovery
Initiative

Northeast Texas Prescribed Fire Initiative

North Central Texas Prescribed Burn
Association

Texas Panhandle Prescribed Burn
Association

Trans-Pecos Prescribed Burn Association

Tri-Canyon Prescribed Burn Association

South Central Texas Prescribed Burn
Association

South Texas Prescribed Burn Association