

SOUTHEAST PRESCRIBED FIRE TRAINING NEEDS SURVEY

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Survey Report

2021

Summary

The Southeast Prescribed Fire Training Needs Survey was conducted online in January 2021 to assess the state of both National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) and non-NWCG prescribed fire training in the Southeast region. A work group formed by the Southeast Regional Strategy Committee (SRSC) of the Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy and the Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS) assisted in developing, distributing, and analyzing the survey. Based on survey results, the work group developed a set of recommendations to meet prescribed fire training needs in the Southeast region.

Respondent Demographics

The survey was completed by 955 practitioners, private landowners, and roles within all 13 Southern states (Figure 1) and others from a diversity of affiliations (Figure 2).

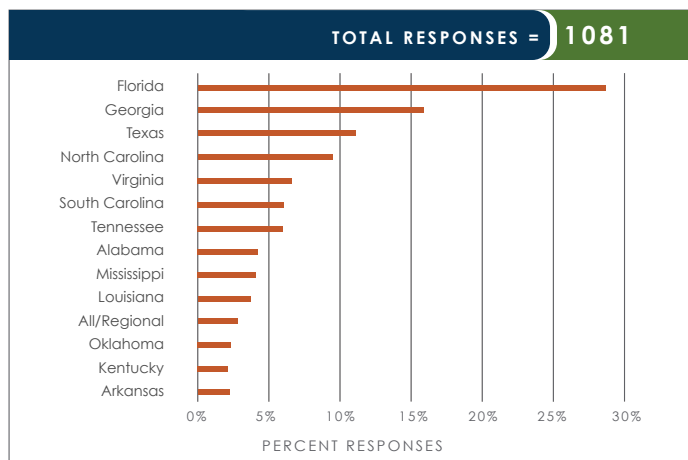


Figure 1: Percent survey responses by state in which participants worked.

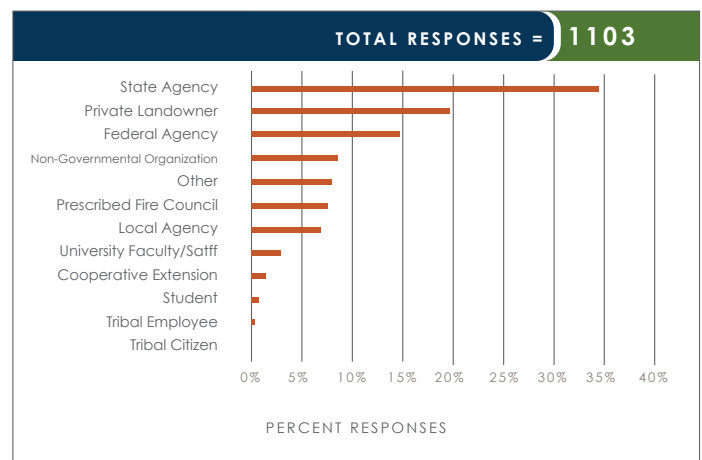


Figure 2: Respondent affiliations

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Common issues and barriers to prescribed fire training across both NWCG and non-NWCG responses included:

- 1 **Difficulty accessing training:** There are not enough training opportunities, and those that exist are not sufficiently advertised. Certain NWCG courses and state Certified Burn Manager courses in particular represent training bottlenecks.
- 2 **Insufficient capacity:** There are not enough qualified personnel to offer training, particularly hands-on opportunities and mentoring of novice burners. There are more personnel in need of training than qualified personnel available to conduct training.
- 3 **Qualifications difficult to navigate:** The process for achieving, maintaining, and progressing qualifications, particularly NWCG, can be confusing and challenging. This is especially true for those agencies that do not have fire suppression responsibilities.
- 4 **Differing agency guidelines and policies:** Differing training and qualification requirements across agencies and organizations inhibit collaborative training, including hands-on training.
- 5 **Interest in diversifying training formats:** There is significant interest in virtual and hybrid training opportunities for both NWCG and non-NWCG trainings.

Recommendations to address issues identified in this survey that should be implemented in order to have the greatest impact include the following:

- 1 Increase notification of, access to, and number of training opportunities.
- 2 Increase opportunities for hands-on prescribed fire training and mentoring, including opportunities to conduct burns in a variety of landscapes, ecosystems, fuel models and terrain.
- 3 Improve and streamline the process for achieving NWCG qualifications, particularly for those individuals working in agencies or organizations that do not have wildfire suppression responsibilities but conduct prescribed burns.
- 4 Develop and support more hybrid and virtual training options.
- 5 Identify and address policies and other factors that present barriers for accessing prescribed fire training and implementing prescribed fire on the ground.
- 6 Foster cross-agency working relationships, including increasing opportunities for non-NWCG entities to partner with NWCG agencies training and implementing prescribed fire.
- 7 Improve coordination, communication, and partnership with underrepresented groups including Tribes and landowners.
- 8 Secure and provide consistent, dedicated funding at levels sufficient to address prescribed fire training needs.

The overwhelming number of survey participants is a testament to the importance of prescribed fire in the Southeast and the desire by the many practitioners who conduct prescribed burns to be as well-trained and skilled as possible to apply fire to the landscape. This comprehensive report of findings and recommendations, if implemented, will play a pivotal role in increasing the knowledge and skill needed to substantially increase the pace and scale of prescribed fire use. Successfully developing solutions to the issues identified and implementing the recommendations will best be achieved when approached from a collaborative process. Implementing the recommendations provided from this survey will also help meet the goals and objectives of the Southeast Regional Action Plan of the Cohesive Strategy, the SERPPAS Prescribed Fire Strategy and other initiatives underway to increase the pace and scale of prescribed fire application across the landscape of the Southeast.

