

Controlled Burn Planned At Town Industrial Park

If you see a large amount of smoke rising over eastern North Wilkesboro this Saturday, don't be alarmed. The smoke will be from a controlled burn on 100 acres on the town's industrial park on River Road.

The purpose of the burn is to reduce the amount of brush, undergrowth and other potential fuel at the park in the event of a brush fire at the park.

The burn is scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. In the event of inclement weather or windy conditions, the burn will be postponed until the next clear, calm Saturday.

Over the past 15 years, since the town acquired the property, there have been multiple arson fires within and around the industrial park. Within the past six years, there have been four major fires that have directly threatened the industrial areas and residential areas adjacent to the tract.

\$25,000 grant received

In May 2012, the North Wilkesboro Fire Department received a \$25,000 grant from the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Division of Forest Services for "understory burning in critical areas to reduce fuel loading, improvement of current access roads, development of a pre-attack fire suppression plan, and other mitigation work within the Wilkes Industrial Park," according to Sam Hinnant, the town's business recruitment specialist and a member of the fire department.

Fire Chief Niki Hamby added, "We are pleased to accept this grant from the forest service. This gives us the chance to mitigate the likelihood of having a large wildfire in a high hazard area, which is something that also allows us to maintain department training."

Hinnant noted that the park has 30-foot firebreaks on all sides of the burn area. Brushy or incendiary materials have been removed in order to lessen the chance of the fire spreading beyond the park boundaries. Also, there are multiple fire hydrants at strategic locations within the park.

Assisting the town fire department on the burn will be the Knotville Fire Department, the county FAST team, and personnel and equipment from the N.C. Forest Service.

In a letter sent to the people who live near the park boundaries, Hinnant cautioned residents to ensure that doors and windows (attic, basement, pet doors, vents and windows) are closed, and that HVAC units are turned off to ensure that any smoke will not find its way into the structures.

He added, "Please be aware that controlled burns are a regular occurrence and that every measure has been taken to maintain the safety of all adjoining properties."

The goal of the N.C. Community Firewise and Urban Interface Forestry Grant is to develop, educate, enhance, implement, and support the Firewise and healthy forest management concepts in wildland–urban interface communities in the state.