

From Ben Prater, ecologist at [Wild South](#)

I would encourage you not to be too alarmed about this proposal. I have not explored the supporting documents to look at precise location and scale but I do know that the Smokies maintain one of the best burn programs in our region and serves as an excellent model for the Southern Appalachians.

As an ecologist, I believe growing season burns are lacking and are much more suited to mimic natural fire regimes in our region. A growing season burn has much more positive impacts on the ground rather than traditional dormant season burns which are typically targeted for fuels reduction.

Vegetation and wildlife are more likely to benefit from the flush of new growth following a burn in early spring. The timing of these burns will also reduce competing fire-sensitive species and help established a more ecologically appropriate forest structure and composition. In other words these burns will likely serve to restore these ecosystems

It's my understanding that these sites consists of South facing slopes dominated by oaks which are naturally drier and suited for appropriate use of prescribed fire. The frequency and scale of such burns is often debated but the Park Service understands this and will adjust prescriptions accordingly as the ecosystems requires.

As for wildlife impacts this particular habitat is not well suited to support ground nesting birds in the first place. As for smoke impacts to neo-tropical migrants, this would be highly unlikely to have any serious negative impacts. Birds can of course fly away and again this habitat is probably less well suited for many of these migrants in the first place as far as territories and nesting sites are concerned.

In short, I trust the Smokies on their burns. Their burn program is based on ecological restoration and is based on the principles of adaptive management.