



EVAN-THOMAS 10-YEAR VEGETATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY: 2016-2025

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is the *Evan-Thomas 10-year Vegetation Management Strategy (ETVMS)*?

The *ETVMS* is a 10-year vegetation management strategy for the Evan-Thomas area of Kananaskis Country. The Evan-Thomas area covers portions of five parks and a parcel of Public Land. These five parks include the Evan-Thomas Provincial Recreation Area, Bow Valley Provincial Park, Bow Valley Wildland Provincial Park, Spray Valley Provincial Park, and Elbow-Sheep Wildland Provincial Park. The *ETVMS* proposes measures including the use of prescribed fire and mechanical fuel reduction as the most cost effective and ecologically beneficial tools to protect people and facilities from wildfire and restore the health of the ecosystem.

2. Why use prescribed fire?

Fire is an essential part of nature and fire suppression over the past 100 years has altered many natural areas that depend on fire. Carefully planned prescribed fires safely restore and maintain grassland and forest and reduce the chances of more severe, larger wildfires.

3. Why do we need prescribed fire in the Evan-Thomas area?

Prescribed fires are needed in the Evan-Thomas area to help maintain, restore, and protect the area's recreation, tourism, and ecological values. Prescribed fires will restore habitat quality for grizzly bears and other large mammals, and reduce the threat of wildfire to people and communities by decreasing the chances of more severe and larger wildfires.

4. How are prescribed fires conducted?

Teams of trained specialists plan prescribed fires well before ignition. Fire specialists write prescriptions (see question 2) which take into account weather, type of vegetation, terrain and fire behaviour. They define the boundary of the fire using natural barriers, such as cliffs and wetlands, combined with manmade features, such as roads and constructed fuel breaks. The team outlines the conditions under which the prescription can be used.

5. How are prescribed fires controlled?

Fire specialists use roads, trails and natural barriers such as rivers, cliffs, avalanche slopes, and recently burned forest to help contain fire spread. To ensure that fire does not spread outside desired areas, trees and shrubs may be cleared to make better barriers. During a fire, firefighters have firefighting equipment in place to contain the fire within the boundaries and conditions outlined in the prescription. Helicopters are used to monitor the fire's progress. Additional aircraft, crews and equipment are on standby to assist with control if required.

6. What about smoke?

A paramount consideration of the *ETVMS* is to minimize the impact of prescribed fire activities including smoke on recreation, tourism, and residents. The prescribed fires will mainly be low-intensity surface fires that are relatively small (40-80 ha), of short duration (2-3 afternoons/days), and smoke impacts will be minimal. Most fires will be undertaken in the spring and autumn outside of the busy tourist season.

We can't eliminate smoke but great efforts are taken to reduce smoke impacts. Fire specialists light prescribed fires only on days when prevailing winds will carry smoke away effectively. Depending on wind speed and direction and how well the smoke vents upward, some smoke may linger on subsequent days during the smouldering period of the fire. While prescribed fire permits some control over smoke, unpredicted changes in weather can affect how well smoke disperses. However, prescribed fires provide insurance against future larger wildfires and the smoke they produce.

7. Are there any health risks from smoke?

According to health authorities, our health risk from short periods of exposure to smoke is low for the general public. Children and the elderly are more susceptible to smoke effects. People with heart or lung disease are at a higher risk and should consult their physicians as required.

8. How does a prescribed fire affect wildlife?

Fire will benefit most animals because it creates better habitat for large mammals, particularly elk, moose, sheep, deer, wolves and bears. During fires, large animals usually move out of a fire's path while smaller animals may take refuge in underground burrows or thick cover on the forest floor. Burning in sensitive periods for wildlife, such as when birds are nesting and larger animals are giving birth, will be avoided. Prescribed fires kill a relatively small amount of wildlife.

9. How many prescribed fires will there be and when will they be done?

The *ETVMS* proposes a total of 20 prescribed fires to be done on an annual basis. Approximately two fires will be conducted per year, ideally one in the spring and one in the fall. Pending approval of the *ETVMS*, the first prescribed burn may occur in the spring 2016.

10. Will there be impacts to park users?

During burning operations there may be speed reductions along nearby roads because of smoke. Local trails and facilities could have short-term closures in place for safety reasons, however, there are many other recreation opportunities nearby. The duration of any required closures will be kept to a minimum. Prescribed fires are conducted in weather conditions that disperse smoke away from developed areas as much as possible. Although smoke may be seen and smelled from various areas, our staff plan and control these fires to ensure minimal impact to visitors.

11. Can I visit a park while a prescribed fire is happening?

Yes, absolutely! Prescribed fires are planned so they have minimal impact to visitors and information is provided before and during a prescribed fire to help you plan your visit. You can check the [Advisories and Public Safety](#) link on the Alberta Parks website or contact one of our [visitor information centres](#).

12. How can I find out more about prescribed fires in Kananaskis Country?

Information on prescribed fires and other fire management projects in Kananaskis Country is available on the Alberta Parks website: <http://www.albertaparks.ca/kananaskis-country/park-research-management/kc-management/prescribed-fires.aspx>. You can also visit any of our [visitor information centres](#).

To be included on our contact list for upcoming prescribed fires, contact Scott Jevons at scott.jevons@gov.ab.ca.

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