

## **Kansas Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan: Objectives for 2012**

The Kansas Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan is entering its second year in 2012. This comprehensive plan is designed to minimize the movement of concentrated smoke plumes into large metropolitan areas through voluntary participation. All Flint Hills landowners and managers who conduct prescribed burns should know what is in this plan.

To help educate all those affected, a series of radio interviews is being broadcast weekly each Monday on K-State's *Agriculture Today* talk show. These programs will explain the many aspects of the new plan. *Agriculture Today* is part of the K-State Radio Network. The broadcast interviews are podcast online at [www.ksre.ksu.edu/news/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=66](http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/news/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=66).

The following is a slightly edited transcript of the first in the 2012 series of *Agriculture Today* radio broadcasts on the Kansas Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan. This is an interview with Tom Gross, Air Monitoring and Planning Chief, Bureau of Air, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, conducted by Eric Atkinson of the K-State Radio Network.

Q: As a reminder, what was the original purpose of the Flint Hills Smoke Management Plan that was first implemented last year?

A: The plan was developed in response to days in which we had smoke from Flint Hills fires impacting downwind cities such as Wichita and Kansas City, primarily through higher concentrations of ozone. Last year there were some ozone exceedances in both cities because of the burning. In 2010 there was a commitment made to develop a smoke management plan, and it was adopted by the secretary of KDHE in December 2010. It was then implemented for the first time in 2011.

Q: The intent of the plan was to allow grassland managers to better time their burns so as to lessen smoke concentrations?

A: Yes. It is not our intention to eliminate or restrict burning, but rather to give range managers the tools to make more informed decisions on whether the burn they would like to make that day or the next day would have an impact on downwind metropolitan areas. To that end, we worked with K-State Research and Extension and a consultant to develop a web site that contains a lot of good information and a modeling tool that indicates whether that day or the next day would be a good day to burn from a smoke impact aspect. Burn safety conditions also have to be taken into account, but this web site focuses on smoke impact.

Q: The web site is really a key part of the plan.

A: Yes. Producers can use the web site in a couple ways. Part of the web site involves a narrative about what the next few days will be like in terms of conditions for burning. There's also a map that indicates whether conditions in each county will be good for burning in terms of smoke impact. Plus there's a tool that lets you plug in the specifics of your fire in terms of acreage, fuel load, fuel density, and location. It will then generate a map that shows over the next 24 hours where your smoke would move if you lit that fire. Then, using that information regarding air quality impacts along with information on burn safety conditions, managers can make a decision whether to burn that day or perhaps wait a day if today is not so good.

Q: All the recommendations made on the web site are strictly voluntary, right?

A: Yes. We want to get the tools in front of people, and hopefully get people to use those tools. We recognize that there are not always a lot of good days to burn. We are just asking burn managers to take one more factor into consideration – downwind air quality– and to provide a tool for taking that factor into consideration.

Q: How effective was the plan in its first year?

A: I believe it was successful even though there were some ozone exceedances last year. We had a lot of attention on the plan, and a lot of feedback on the web site and the modeling tool. So I'm not discouraged that we had some exceedances. We had a high fuel load in the Flint Hills last year, and a limited number of good days to burn. Hopefully when we have a greater number of good days to burn, the web site and modeling tool will help prevent us from having high-ozone days. There were also a lot acres burned in 2011 – about 2.3 million acres. That was on the high end of what we've seen over the last 10 years.

Q: Safety does trump everything.

A: Yes. Safety is a concern for everyone.

Q: Are there any changes to the plan, or to the web site for 2012?

A: We won't be making any changes to the plan. Based on the feedback we had, we will be making a few changes to the modeling tool to make it easier to use and to improve it technically. The tool did a good job in recommending whether a day was good or bad for burning in terms of downwind air quality. We're just trying to make it a little better. We'll also be continuing with the strong outreach effort from K-State Research and Extension.

A: This is a long-term process, right?

Q: Yes, you can't just look at the exceedances that happened the first year and say the plan didn't work. It's a long-term project. It takes some time to get people to recognize there is another concern that needs to be taken into consideration – that is the downwind air quality impacts from burning. I view this as a multi-year activity.

A: People can go to the web site now and get a glimpse of what it's offering, right?

Q: They can look at the overall web site. We have to pay to run the modeling tool, though, so it's not active at the moment. We'll be starting that up about the start of the burn season, and run it through the burn season. We don't run it year-round. We're also still in the process of making a few last tweaks and improvements. The web site address is [ksfire.org](http://ksfire.org).

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