Fort Hood

Texas

Great Plains Fire Learning Network

219,000 acres

A January prescribed fire reduces fuel loads © *Jackelyn Ferrer-Aviles*

Landscape Partners

The Nature Conservancy – Texas

U.S. Army

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Landscape Goal

Together, partners work to manage fire on this landscape to promote recovery of endangered bird species, allow effective use of the land for military exercises and protect nearby developed areas from wildfire.

The Fort Hood landscape is a mosaic of grassy valleys and wooded mesas on the northeastern edge of the central Texas Hill Country, where fire has historically been a natural occurrence. Unlike other lands in the Hill Country, the variety of military training activities that occur on the installation—tracked- and wheeled-vehicle maneuvers, live fire, dismounted exercises—make Fort Hood prone to incidental ignition, so fire has not been excluded from this part of the landscape.

Fort Hood has the largest populations of two federally endangered birds—the black-capped vireo (*Vireo atricapilla*) and golden-cheeked warbler (*Dendroica chrysoparia*)—under single management authority. Because of these birds, the Conservancy began working at Fort Hood in 1992. In 1993, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued the first of two Biological Opinions listing the measures that the Army must take to promote recovery of these birds. Provisions of this Opinion included habitat management (including prescribed burning), as well as monitoring and research. In 1997, the Conservancy assumed primary responsibility for these activities when the first Cooperative Agreement was signed.

Prescribed fire is used at Fort Hood to reduce hazardous fuel loads and is applied around areas where live ammunition is used, which helps keep ordnance-sparked fires contained and reduces shrub encroachment into training areas where clear lines of sight are necessary. Fire is also used to reduce fuel loads in the wildland-urban interface and at the installation's boundaries. Prescribed fire applied to grasslands below the Ashe juniper-oak woodlands on the mesa slopes is used to manage fuel loads and to prevent fire from escaping up-slope into this golden-cheeked warbler nesting habitat. The black-capped vireo also benefits from fire, nesting in shrublands that are maintained by occasional disturbances such as fire. Finally, prescribed fire is used to maintain or improve the health of the fire-adapted grasslands that make up such a significant part of the landscape at Fort Hood.

Numerous research projects have been conducted in this landscape. Recent projects at Fort Hood have assessed the recovery of Ashe juniper woodlands following catastrophic wildfire, fire effects on native and exotic vegetation, bird response to fire and the use of mastication in combination with prescribed fire for habitat management.

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