Under control



REX BROWN | THE JOURNAL

A controlled burn was held Wednesday at the Piedmont Prairie in the Kelly Meadow at the South Carolina Botanical Garden. Pictured is Frank "Red" Reynolds, forestry technician with Clemson University Experimental Forest.

Controlled burn held at botanical garden

BY ERIC SPROTT
THE JOURNAL

CLEMSON — Drivers on Perimeter Road who saw thick, black smoke emanating from the South Carolina Botanical Garden's meadow Wednesday afternoon can rest easy.

Future visitors to the garden on the Clemson University campus, meanwhile, will soon be able to appreciate the byproduct of the controlled burn that was conducted in the Piedmont Prairie of the Kelly Meadow, which covered roughly 2.5 acres.

As the blaze ran its course, garden manager John Bodiford explained the fire was conducted to sustain and maintain the ecosystem of the area, while helping renew the local habitat as well.

"Most folks don't realize South Carolina had prairie ecosystems," he said. "Now when you see the remnants of those ecosystems, you see them along power lines and the edge of the road.

"But if you start reading some of the early naturalists, especially people like Mark Catesby, he's over here in southern Anderson County in the 1730s talking about grass higher than a man's head and herds of bison and elk being chased by packs of wolf.

"That sounds like it was out in the Midwest, but it was right here in South Carolina."

In just a few months, Bodiford said, the area will bounce back strong with spring wildflowers from mid-April through June. Following a summer lull, the native grasses will flower, making for rich scenery.

"The Native Americans understood that if you burned certain areas, the foliage and grasses coming back would attract more herds of deer, elk and buffalo," he said. "It's been kind of passed down.

"In the long run, it's a very good thing," Bodiford added about the fourth burn at the prairie. "This is the best prescribed burn we've done since we've been doing this, and we'll do this in other areas to make it a more sustainable garden."

esprott@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6681
Follow on Twitter @Journal_ESprott