



The tour began inside the fence at Fort Custer Training Center. Michele Richards, environmental specialist, (pictured, left) led the group to the transition between prairie fen and upland. Prior to prescribed fire management, the transition zone was dominated by shrubs, including glossy buckthorn.





Photo: Craig Maier



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Neonate eastern box turtles are fitted with tiny, low power radio transmitters (just visible in the photo above). Lightweight, fluorescent fishing line aids in locating individuals turtles that may be burrowed belowground. Why both methods? Hatchlings can move up to 30 meters per day, explained Michigan DNR biologist Alicia Ihnken (pictured above, right, and also holding the hatchling). Fuel from little bluestem was sufficient for prescribed fire to set back the invasive forb spotted knapweed. Female turtles have not been using the area to lay eggs, possibly due to the dense thatch layer and lack of bare ground.



Photo: Craig Maier



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Eastern box turtles use woodland habitat for overwintering. Part of the ongoing research is looking at the effects of fall burns on leaf litter, soil temperature, and spring emergence of turtles.

The site also demonstrated fire effects in oak woodlands—here, multiple spring prescribed fires have created fire scars on some black oaks, but other black oaks and white oaks did not show obvious scars. White oak saplings (right) are responding to increased light availability.





Photo: Craig Maier

Thanks to all hosts, presenters, and partners who helped make the fire management field tour a success: Michigan DNR, Fort Custer Training Center, Michigan Prescribed Fire Council, Michigan State University, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, and Pierce Cedar Creek Institute.