

Request for Proposal

Prescribed Fire Implementation for Forest and Piedmont Prairie Restoration at the Catawba Indian Nation Hunting Property

Issued By:

Catawba Nation Department of Natural Resources
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Contact Person:

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Background:

The Catawba Indian Nation (“CIN”) Hunting Property is located in McConnells, SC and it stands at roughly 308 acres. It is actively managed with the intention to restore native upland forest structure and establish Piedmont prairie habitat through an integrated approach that includes mechanical thinning, herbicide application, cover cropping, native seeding, and prescribed fire.

The property is accessed through three primary gate locations (Gate 1, Gate 2, and Gate 3), each of which has undergone recent habitat restoration treatments.

At **Gate 3**, a 17.8-acre forest stand was mechanically thinned to a residual basal area of approximately 60 square feet per acre to increase light penetration to the forest floor and promote herbaceous understory development. A prescribed burn was conducted two years ago to reduce accumulated fuels and stimulate native ground cover response. In fall 2025, targeted herbicide treatments were applied to reduce woody vegetation and prepare the site for subsequent prescribed burn and planned prairie establishment.

At **Gates 1 and Gates 3**, approximately 58.9 acres were previously thinned to improve stand structure and reduce canopy density. Open field areas were treated with herbicide and planted with winter wheat as a temporary cover crop to stabilize soils and prepare for future native plantings.

At **Gate 2**, an additional 5-acre clearcut was conducted with plans to introduce the montane ecotype of longleaf pine. Longleaf pine holds ecological and cultural significance for the Catawba Indian Nation, as pine needles were historically collected and utilized in traditional basketry. Restoring longleaf pine on the property supports both habitat restoration and the continuation of culturally significant plant resources. This area currently does not have sufficient fuel loading to support a spring burn; however, a fall burn may be considered pending fuel development and evaluation of whether additional herbicide treatment is necessary prior to burning.

The Department of Natural Resources is currently coordinating with its forestry contractor to initiate additional thinning at Gate 2 and continue thinning operations at Gate 3. Approximately 95.2 acres are scheduled for thinning, along with several small clearcut areas (3.2 acres) designed to improve seed dispersal, increase structural diversity, and enhance the effectiveness and safety of future prescribed burns.

Prescribed fire is a critical component of the Nation's long-term management strategy to reduce woody encroachment, maintain open canopy conditions, stimulate native herbaceous communities, support longleaf pine establishment, improve wildlife habitat, and restore fire-based adapted ecosystem across the property.

Project Goals and Scope of Services

The purpose of this project is to implement prescribed fire as a management tool to advance the Catawba Indian Nation's long-term forest restoration and prairie establishment objectives. These treatments are intended to build upon prior thinning, herbicide applications, and site preparation efforts by restoring fire-adapted and ecological processes, enhancing habitat quality, and supporting culturally significant species across the property.

Primary Goals:

1. Reduce woody vegetation and midstory competition in previously thinned stands.
2. Maintain target basal area conditions (60 ft²/ac) at Gate 3 and prevent canopy re-closure.
3. Prepare treated woodland and field transition areas at Gate 1 for native prairie establishment.
4. Support native herbaceous and early successional plant response across treated stands.
5. Reduce accumulated fine and coarse fuels to support sustainable fire return interval.
6. Improve wildlife quality of habitat through increased diversity and open woodland conditions.
7. Integrate prescribed fire into a long-term rotational management framework approximately 95.2 acres of ongoing thinning treatments.

Scope of Work:

1. Conduct prescribed burns at Gate 1, stand 2, and Gate 3, stand 4, totaling 36.4 acres, during the Spring 2026 burn season, including site preparation, burn days, and cleanup.

Project Submission

Contractor should submit a complete proposal package that includes the following:

Cover Letter:

- Brief introduction of the company
- Statement of interest in the project
- Primary point of contact (name, title, phone, email)

Project Proposal:

- Description of proposed approach to implementing prescribed fire at Gate 1 and Gate 3
- Estimated number of operational days (prep, burn, clean-up)
- Proposed timeline for project completion

- Description of equipment and personnel to be utilized
- Outline of smoke management strategy
- Safety plan and emergency response procedures
- Confirmation of ability to meet required permits and compliance

Qualifications & Experience:

- Summary of relevant prescribed fire experience
- Key personnel qualifications and certifications (e.g. burn boss, fire crew qualifications)
- References for past projects

Itemized Budget:

- Daily operational rate
- Additional rate (if burn operations extend beyond estimate)
- Equipment costs
- Personnel costs
- Any optional or contingency costs
- Proposed payment schedule

Insurance & Compliance Documentation:

- Proof of general liability insurance
- Workers' compensation coverage
- Any applicable state certifications or burn credentials
- Confirmation of compliance with state, federal, and Tribal regulations

Availability:

- Confirmation of availability within the anticipated burn window
- Identification of any scheduling conflicts

Project Management

This project will be managed by the Catawba Nation's Wildlife & Habitat Stewardship manager. Staff will coordinate pre-burn planning meetings, monitor implementation, and conduct post-burn evaluation.

Pre- and post-burn projects will be required. Progress check-ins will be needed throughout the duration of the project. A crew leader and/or contractor representative must always be present on-site while burn operations are actively conducted.

Project Communication

Initial coordination meetings will occur between Catawba Nation Natural Resources staff, Tribal leadership (as needed), and the contractor's project coordinator.

Following initial meetings, progress meetings, phone-calls, and on-site coordination will occur as necessary throughout project implementation. The Catawba Nation will review and approve progress payments in accordance with the agree-upon payment schedule and will evaluate

quality, completeness, safety and compliance, and adherence to project specifications prior to payment approval.

Estimated Timeline & Duration

Prescribed fire implementation will occur in phases based on seasonal burn windows, fuel conditions, and completion of site preparation activities.

Spring 2026 Burn Window:

Primary burn operations are anticipated to occur during the Spring 2026 burn season at:

- Gate 3 (stand 4, 17.8-acre previously thinned and herbicide-treated in fall of 2025)
- Gate 1 (stand 2, previously thinned woodland unit)

These stands are considered priority burns areas due to complete thinning and herbicide treatments and are expected to be operationally ready during the spring burn window, pending suitable weather conditions. Currently, this is the only burn for which proposals are being solicited. Information about Fall 2026 burns and Long-Term Strategy is provided only as background.

Fall 2026 Evaluation & Potential Burn Window

Additional thinned stands, including areas at Gate 2 and Gate 3 currently undergoing thinning (approximately 95.2 acres total), will be evaluated in late summer/early fall 2026 to determine:

- Adequacy of fuel loading for effective burn implementation
- Whether additional herbicide treatment is required prior to burning

If fuel conditions are insufficient or additional herbicide treatments are necessary, burn implementation may be delayed until treatments are completed and fuel conditions are appropriate. In such cases, burning may be postponed to late Fall 2026 or Spring 2027 burn window.

Long-Term Rotational Burning Strategy:

Following initial implementation, forest stands across the property will continue to be evaluated to determine appropriate burn intervals. A rotational prescribed fire plan will be developed and implemented to maintain desired basal area targets and open-canopy conditions necessary for forest restoration, prairie establishment, and wildlife habitat management objectives. Burn frequency will be aligned with maintaining target square foot basal area thresholds and preventing woody encroachment to sustain long-term ecosystem health.

Final burn dates will be coordinated based on weather conditions, site readiness, and mutual agreements between the contractor and the Catawba Nation Natural Resource Department.

Evaluation Criteria

Experience and Qualifications (30%)

- Demonstrated experience conducting prescribed burns of similar size and complexity
- Experience in forest restoration, prairie systems, and/or longleaf pine management

- Qualifications and certifications of key personnel (e.g. Burn boss, fire crew qualifications)
- Demonstrated the ability to safely implement burns in previously thinned and treated stands.

Technical Approach (25%)

- Quality and clarity of proposed burn implementation plan
- Understanding of project objectives, including basal area maintenance and rotational burning strategy
- Smoke management approach
- Safety plan and contingency procedures
- Realistic and well-defined timeline

Cost Proposal (20%)

- Overall cost competitiveness
- Clarity and completeness of itemized budget
- Daily operational rate and additional day rate

Safety Record and Compliance (15%)

- Insurance coverage and compliance documentation
- Ability to obtain any necessary permits and meet regulatory requirements
- Emergency response preparedness

References and Past Performance (10%)

- Record of completing projects on time and within budget
- Demonstrated professionalism and communication skills

The review team will evaluate proposals using criteria outlined above and may invite selected firms for an interview based on that assessment. Preference will be given to firms or teams that include Tribal Nation citizens.

Questions

Please submit any questions you may have concerning this proposal to Courtney Skeldon (courtney.skeldon@catawba.com) Questions and respective responses will be shared with all RFP holders.

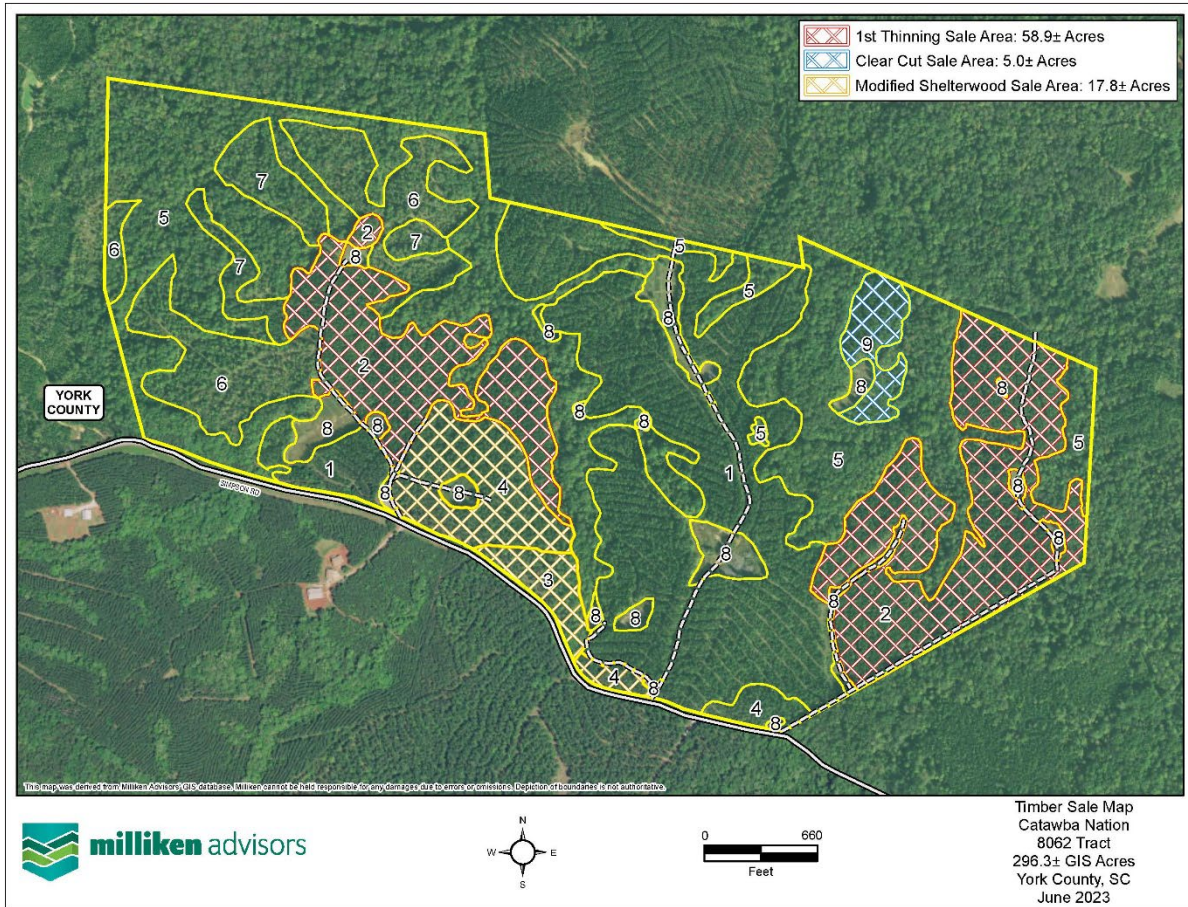


Figure 1: Projected Spring 2026 burn to include 17.8-acre parcel on stand 4 and gate 1 stand 2 (36.4 acres)

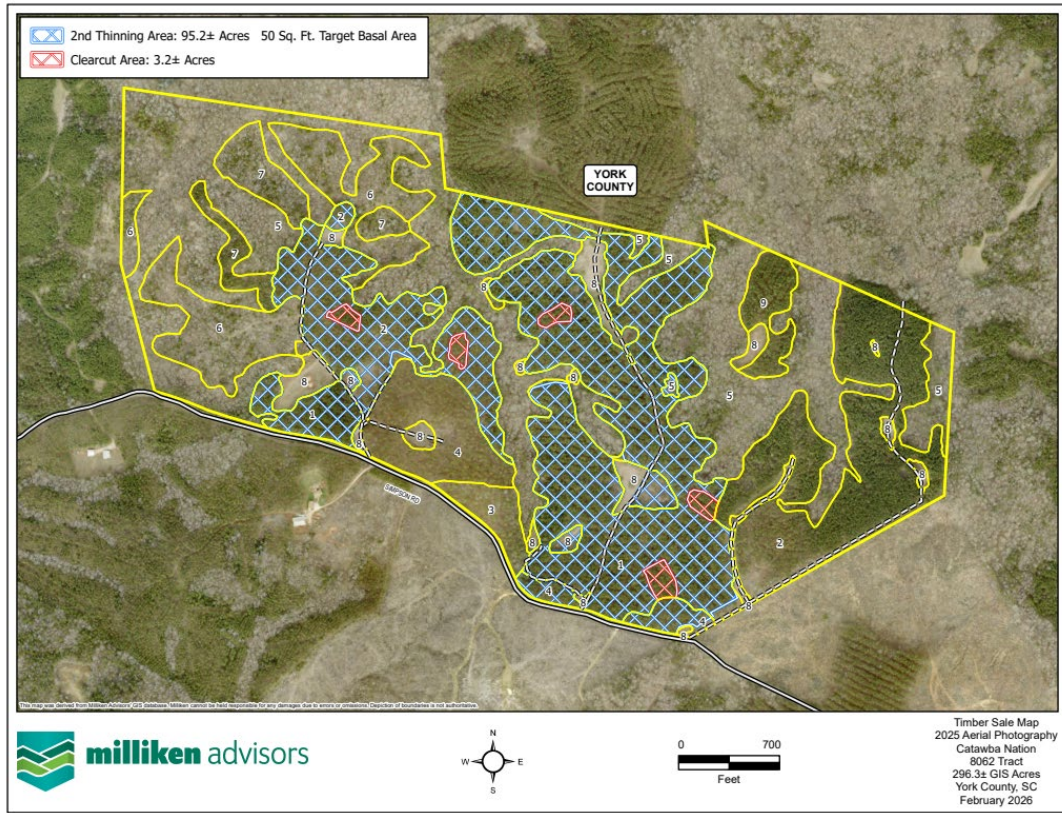


Figure 2: Projected 95.2 acres to be thinned this summer including 3.2 acres of clearcuts