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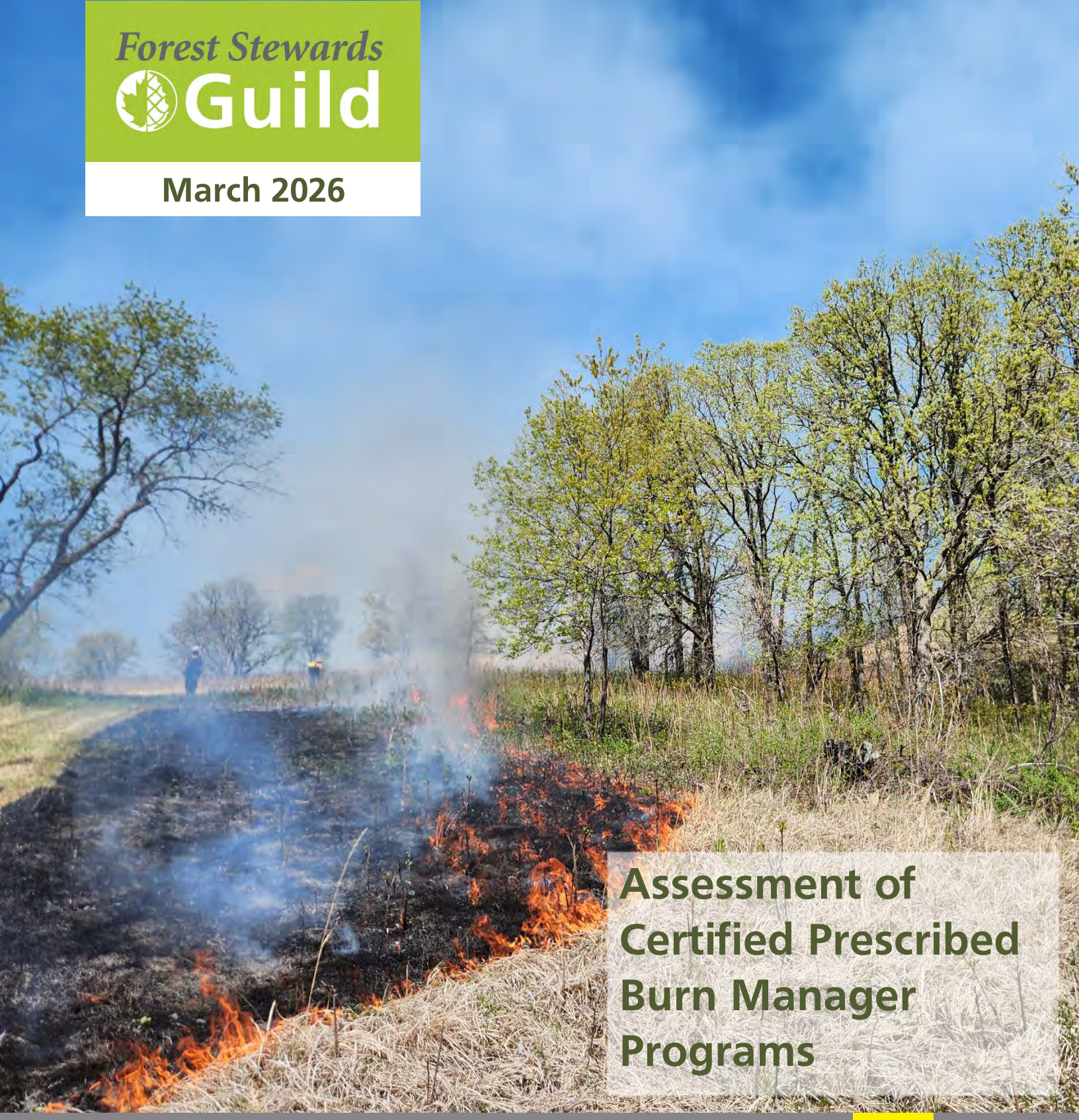

Assessment of Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Programs

REPORT

Assessment of Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Programs

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The Forest Stewards Guild (the 'Guild', www.foreststewardsguild.org) is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to practice and promote stewardship to forge a healthy future for people and forests. We are headquartered in the Southwest with regional offices in the Southeast, Northeast, Lake States, and Pacific Northwest. Our research program synthesizes existing knowledge and conducts novel scientific studies as a complement to Guild member's place-based experience. All photos in this report are credited to the Guild unless otherwise noted.

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The authors were supported by a steering committee in the development of this report. Steering committee members were instrumental in scoping the report and connecting us with experts in each state to be interviewed. We are grateful to each of them for their commitment to the development of this report. The steering committee consisted of the following individuals:

- Emily Hohman (Fire Learning Network, The Nature Conservancy)
- Laurel Kays (Fire Learning Network, The Nature Conservancy)
- Larry Mastic (National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy)
- Mike Norris (Washington Department of Natural Resources)
- Zach Prusak (Tall Timbers)
- Jack Rinck (Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation)
- Jonathan Stober (USDA Forest Service)
- Morgan Treadwell (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension)

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Executive Summary

There is growing understanding that fire is an essential ecosystem process and that prescribed burning can reduce hazardous fuels and restore ecological conditions. There is currently an unmet demand for prescribed fire nationally, and supportive programs and policies are needed to maintain and expand prescribed fire use (Melvin 2021). States approach this need in a variety of ways. Many states have opted for an integrated systems-based approach that addresses the interrelated elements of training, permitting, liability standard clarification or setting, a right-to-burn in statute, and more recently, the establishment of a prescribed fire claims fund.

This report focuses on Certified Prescribed Burn Manager (CPBM) programs that provide accessible, structured, prescribed fire training. We review CPBM programs across the country based on interviews with representatives from 43 states. We include states with an existing CPBM program, those developing a program, and without a CPBM program. From these interviews we examine national trends, highlight shared challenges, innovative approaches, and offer recommendations for supporting safe and effective prescribed fire through certification.

Twenty-four states currently operate formal CPBM programs, many of which are well-established, supported by enabling legislation, and adapted to meet regional fire needs. These programs have helped to standardize training, reduce liability exposure for practitioners, and build confidence among landowners and communities. Three additional states are actively developing programs demonstrating growing momentum and demand (there were five in development at the time of our interviews – two state programs have launched since June 2025). These states are navigating legal, political, and funding challenges, but are leveraging cross-sector coalitions and peer-state models to move forward. Among the states without current CPBM programs, several expressed openness to certification if key concerns, especially around improved liability standards and access to training, can be addressed. This sentiment was not universal. In some states, especially across the Great Plains, there is a strong, longstanding culture of prescribed fire rooted in agricultural and community-led land stewardship. In these contexts, burning is often passed down through generations or managed through cooperative agreements among neighbors. Some practitioners in these areas expressed concern that introducing certification could interfere with these trusted systems or impose unnecessary bureaucracy on landowners who already burn responsibly.

While CPBM programs are not needed in every state, our assessment reveals they can serve a critical role in expanding the safe use of prescribed fire. All states we interviewed with CPBM programs indicated that the development, and implementation, of a CPBM program has helped to build collaboration, engagement, and trust in the need and value of safe and effective burning and enhanced the state's ability to meet pace and scale goals.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 2

Executive Summary 3

Table of Contents 4

Purpose of the Report 7

Background on CPBM Programs 7

Methods 8

- Interview Design and Administration 9
- Data Management and Analysis 10

Category-Specific Findings 10

- States with CPBM Programs 11
  - Program Descriptions and Status 11
  - Alignment with NWCG Standards 12
  - Audience and Participation 13
  - Training and Certification Structure 13
  - Program Funding and Administration 14
  - Program Outcomes and Effectiveness 15
  - Challenges and Lessons Learned 15
  - Recommendations for Other States 16
- States Developing CPBM Programs 16
  - Program Development Stage and Leadership 16
  - Design Considerations 17
  - Expected Benefits and Incentives 18
  - Challenges and Support Needs 18
  - Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing 19
  - Timeline and Outlook 19
- States Without CPBM Programs 19
  - Current Permitting and Burning Practices 20

Barriers or Rationale for Lack of CPBM Development 22
Potential Interest and Incentives 23
Existing Training Opportunities and Adaptability 24
Outlook and Recommendations 24
State CPBM Program Descriptions 25
Alabama 25
Arkansas 26
California 27
Colorado 27
Florida 28
Georgia 29
Illinois 30
Kentucky 30
Louisiana 31
Michigan 31
Missouri 32
Mississippi 33
North Carolina 34
New Mexico 34
Ohio 35
Oregon 36
Pennsylvania 36
South Carolina 37
Tennessee 38
Texas 39
Virginia 40
Washington 40
Cross-Cutting Themes and Trends 42
Shared Challenges and Barriers 42

Common Motivations for Certification 43
Trends in Liability Standards and Legal Context 44
Shifts in Public Perception and Political Support 45
Role of Climate and Wildfire Risk 46
Regional Themes 47
Recommendations 49
For States with Existing Programs 49
For States Developing Programs 50
For States Considering Future Development 51
Opportunities for Collaboration and Standardization 51
Funding, Training, and Tracking 52
Funding 52
Training Delivery 53
Tracking Metrics and Evaluation 53
Next Steps 54
Future Direction for CPBM Efforts 54
Areas for Further Research 55
Appendix I: State by State Legislation and Liability Summary 56
Appendix II: State Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program Summaries 63
Appendix III: Interview Participants 70
Appendix IV: Interview Questions 72
States with CPBM Programs 72
States Developing CPBM Programs 77
States without CPBM Programs 79
Appendix V: Resource Library 81

Purpose of the Report

The Forest Stewards Guild published a report in February 2020 that compiled information on existing Certified Prescribed Burn Manager (CPBM) programs and provided recommendations for the development of the State of Washington's CPBM program. The findings and recommendations in that initial report were broadly applicable to other states considering new CPBM programs or revising existing programs.

This report updates and expands upon the information gathered in 2020 to provide a comprehensive, nationwide assessment of CPBM programs in the United States. Drawing on interviews with program administrators, practitioners, and partners across 43 states, the report documents how certification is being used to expand prescribed fire capacity, improve safety, and provide legal clarity. The findings are intended to inform states with established programs, those currently developing certifications, and those considering program initiation. In doing so, the report highlights cross-cutting trends, identifies challenges and lessons learned, and offers recommendations to guide future program design and improvement while recognizing that CPBM programs are not the only way to approach prescribed fire training and recognition.

Background on CPBM Programs

We use the term Certified Prescribed Burn Manager (CPBM) throughout this report, but specific program names differ slightly among states (see Appendix II: State Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program Summaries). For example, Texas's certification is called Certified and Insured Prescribed Burn Managers and Georgia's is called Certified Burner Program.

CPBM programs emerged in response to the growing demand for accessible, structured training to address liability concerns and to provide legal recognition of prescribed fire as a land management tool. Over the past three decades, states across the country have established programs intended to support safe and effective burning on private and public lands. As of 2026, twenty-four states operate formal CPBM programs, and three others are in the process of developing programs.

While course specifics vary, CPBM programs generally provide participants with formal instruction on fire behavior, planning, smoke management, safety, and regulatory compliance. These programs share common features such as clarifying the legal status of prescribed fire practice and the associated liability standard, setting minimum training standards, and being accessible to, if not primarily intended for, private landowners and nonprofit practitioners. Despite common elements, programs differ considerably in certification requirements, course length, recertification process, and administrative capacity, reflecting the legal frameworks, resources, fire culture, and ecological contexts of each state. Some programs closely mirror National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) standards, while others emphasize accessibility and flexibility for landowners with limited prior fire experience. Participant benefits also vary from state to state. For instance, some programs make certified individuals eligible for a conditional negligence standard, while others do not.

Early adopters, such as Florida and Georgia, institutionalized certification in the 1980's and 1990's, embedding it in statewide fire culture and legislation. Other states have followed more recently, often motivated by escalating wildfire risk, increased insurance costs, or the need to expand prescribed fire capacity beyond state and federal land management agencies.

Today, CPBM programs serve a diverse audience that include landowners, contractors, nonprofit organizations, tribal practitioners, and agency personnel.

Methods

Information for this report is based primarily on interviews with program administrators or representatives across 43 states which were augmented by a review of laws, statutes, agency policies, and other web content for each state; white papers and journal articles about prescribed burn certification and liability; and feedback from other experts (see Appendix V: Resource Library for a list of relevant reference information).

Forest Stewards Guild staff were aided by a steering committee that helped identify appropriate state contacts, refine the scope of inquiry, draft interview protocols, and interpret key findings. The steering committee was made up of the following individuals:

- Emily Hohman (Fire Learning Network, The Nature Conservancy)
- Laurel Kays (Fire Learning Network, The Nature Conservancy)
- Larry Mastic (National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy)
- Mike Norris (Washington Department of Natural Resources)
- Zach Prusak (Tall Timbers)
- Jack Rinck (Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation)
- Jonathan Stober (USDA Forest Service)
- Morgan Treadwell (Texas A&M AgriLife Extension)

Interview Design and Administration

This study relied on structured interviews with representatives from each state to collect the data. We utilized the information to investigate program effectiveness, barriers to implementation, and opportunities for support across states. The interview questions were tailored to the status of Certified Prescribed Burn Manager (CPBM) programs in each state:

1. **States with active CPBM programs** – questions focused on program structure, implementation, demand, challenges, and lessons learned.
2. **States developing a CPBM program** – questions explored progress to date, anticipated benefits, hurdles in legislation or design, and needs for support.
3. **States without a CPBM program** – questions investigated reasons for not developing a program, barriers, liability concerns, and interest in future development.

Interview questions can be found in: Appendix IV: Interview Questions.

Potential interviewees were identified by the steering team and included state fire managers, forestry agency staff, prescribed fire council leaders, extension specialists, and nonprofit partners. One representative was interviewed per state. This established base level fact finding and understanding about each state but should not be interpreted as a broad survey/consensus gathering exercise. We recognize that experience with each state's program varies from person to person and could not capture this variability with one representative per state.

Interview requests were sent via email, and interviews were scheduled between March and July 2025. We were able to find willing participants in 43 states (Figure 1). A list of state representatives can be found in Appendix III: Interview Participants. All interviews were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams. With permission from participants, interviews were transcribed using Teams' automated transcription feature. The interviewer also took contemporaneous notes, which were used to clarify transcription errors or fill gaps in automated text while conducting the data analysis.

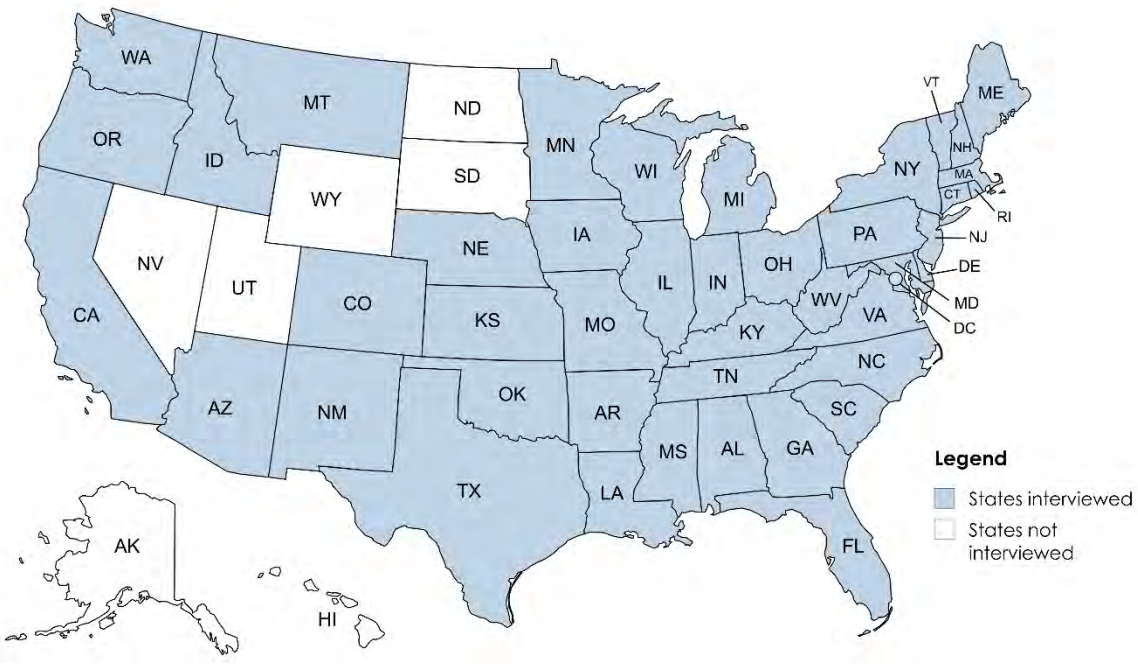

Figure 1. Forty-three states were interviewed for this report.

Data Management and Analysis

Interview transcripts were compiled and organized by state, with notes used only when clarification was needed. A structured dataset was then created to capture each respondent's answers by question, incorporating both categorical responses (such as liability standards, program initiation dates, number of classes offered, or recertification intervals) and open-ended commentary. This approach allowed for the standardization of responses across states, making it possible to compare information systematically. Quantitative data such as participant numbers, acres burned, and course delivery frequency were summarized, while qualitative responses were coded into themes that reflect program effectiveness, challenges, liability frameworks, and recommendations. The matrix design also enabled the team to examine patterns within and across the three categories of states – those with established programs, those developing programs, and those without programs. Through this combined descriptive and thematic analysis, the team identified cross-cutting themes, category-specific insights, and recommendations that inform the findings of this report.

Category-Specific Findings

To understand the status, challenges, and opportunities associated with CPBM programs, we sought representatives from states that have CPBM programs and those who do not. This allowed us to explore the conditions and considerations unique to states in each of these categories, including program structure, liability, training models, administrative capacity, and participant engagement.

At the time of our interviews there were 22 states with CPBM programs, five states developing programs, and 16 states without programs. Indiana and Wisconsin launched their programs during the writing and review of this report but as these programs were still in development during the survey period, they are summarized in this report along with the other developing programs. We were unable to find a representative for seven states, but our research indicates these states do not have CPBM programs and the total nationwide numbers are 24 with programs, three in development, and 23 without programs (Figure 2).

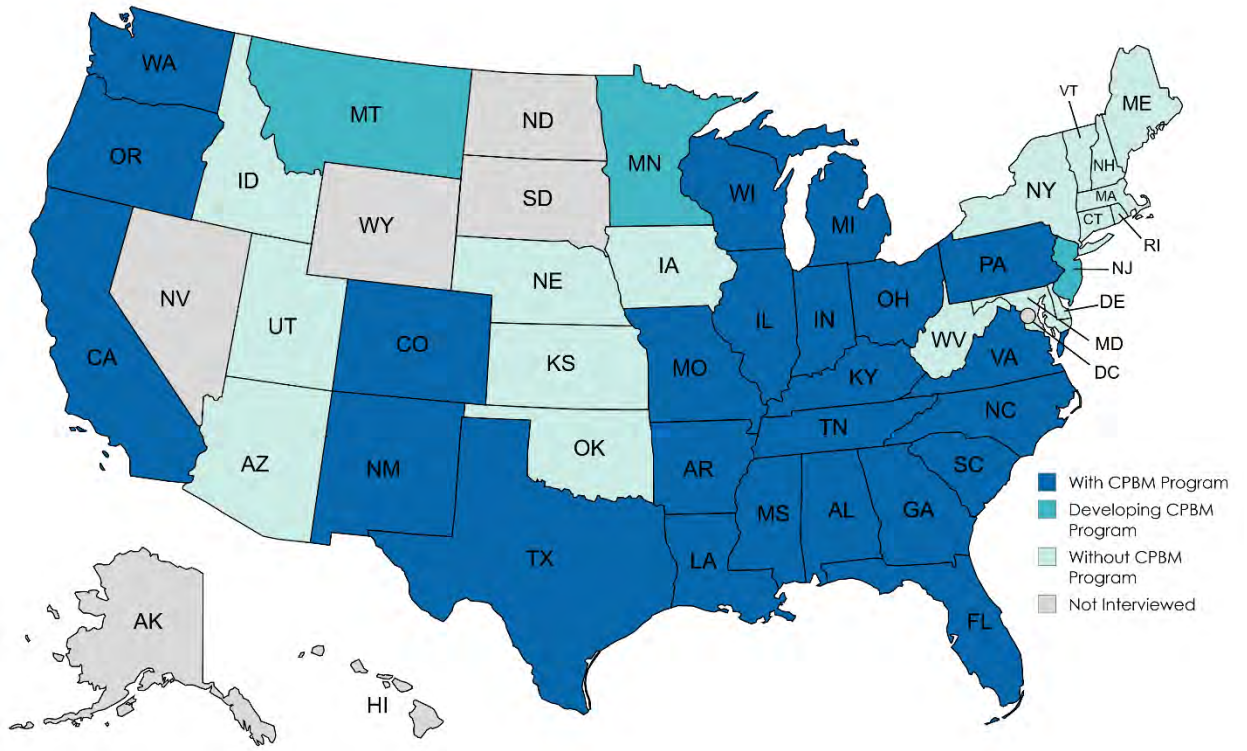

Figure 2. States and the status of their certified prescribed burn manager programs. None of the "Not Interviewed" States have CPBM programs. Indiana and Wisconsin completed development, and launched their programs, during the writing and review process for this report. As these programs were still in development during the survey period, they are summarized in this report along with the other developing programs.

States with CPBM Programs

Program Descriptions and Status

CPBM programs across 22 states with CPBM programs in Spring 2025 reflect a diversity of origin stories, legislative contexts, and implementation models. While most were developed in response to a growing demand for prescribed fire training, certification, and liability clarity, the structure and scope of these programs vary significantly. State by state summaries for the 22 states with CPBM programs are found later in the report along with the summary table found in Appendix II: State Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program Summaries.

Some states have long-standing programs that have not changed much over time, built around a single certification course, a standardized curriculum, and basic administrative oversight. For instance, several Southeastern states established their CPBM programs in the 1990s or early 2000s and have continued to operate with minimal structural change. In contrast, states like Arkansas and California have recently taken innovative approaches, Arkansas through industry-driven legislation, and California through a growing interest in multi-tiered certification to meet both agency and landowner needs, recognizing cultural burners, and establishing a claims fund.

A handful of states are currently in the process of revising or modernizing their programs. Revisions typically center around shortening course duration, integrating online components, updating training materials, and exploring more flexible recertification models. In Alabama, for example, discussions are underway about reducing the duration of their course and incorporating hybrid learning, while retaining a hands-on field component.

Alignment with NWCG Standards

There is no universal alignment between CPBM programs and NWCG standards, but most states acknowledged these national guidelines as either a core course requirement or an alternative learning pathway. An important distinction between states using NWCG standards is the level of training they are using. Several states use the introductory S130/190 course as the baseline prerequisite for enrollment in their course while others require a full NWCG Type 2 burn boss (RxB2) qualification. The S130/190 course takes about a week to complete whereas becoming a RxB2 is a multiyear process.

Some programs, particularly those embedded within state forestry agencies, are closely aligned with NWCG standards, using similar course content and qualification structures. Others, particularly those serving a broader private landowner audience, intentionally deviate from NWCG formats to better match participant needs. For instance, one Western state described their

CPBM program as purposefully distinct from fire agency training, aiming to reduce the burden of multi-day, high-rigor courses for non-professionals. Some programs are also considering creating more attainable certification options for small landowners pursuing lower complexity burns, while requiring higher tiers for larger-scale and more complex burning. For example, Colorado uses their state developed training and certification for pile burning while requiring a NWCG RxB2 qualification for broadcast burning.

Audience and Participation

Initial audiences for CPBM programs often skewed toward agency staff, fire professionals, and contractors. Over time, however, most programs reported a noticeable shift in participation toward private landowners, land trusts, and other non-agency practitioners. In many states, private landowners now constitute the majority of course participants, reflecting both the accessibility of these programs and the expanding need for landscape-scale fire management.

States with established programs are seeing strong demand, often surpassing their training capacity. For example, Arkansas exceeded its first-year goals for course offerings due to high enrollment interest, especially among landowners and timber operators. Alabama and North Carolina both expressed a desire to offer more courses annually but cited staffing and resource constraints as limiting factors.

Some states also noted that their original assumptions about program users have shifted. While they expected mostly agency participation, they now see increased enrollment from nontraditional audiences, such as conservation nonprofits, tribal land managers, and wildlife-focused landowners. A few programs said they are working to better engage underrepresented groups, including agricultural producers.

Training and Certification Structure

Training structures typically include classroom instruction on fire ecology, safety protocols, weather, smoke management, and legal responsibilities, followed by live burns or demonstrations. Course length ranges from two to four days, with some programs offering optional pre-course work or post-course burn opportunities.

Several states issue certification immediately upon course completion, provided the participant

passes a written exam. Others, like Georgia and Florida, include additional field-based requirements, such as completing supervised burns or developing a burn plan, before certification is finalized. While these added steps can deepen competency, some programs noted that they can also deter follow-through, especially among landowners who burn infrequently.

Recertification is typically required every 3 to 5 years. Requirements range from simply attending a refresher course to demonstrating ongoing burn participation. Some states allow recertification through alternative means, such as participation in a "learn and burn" field day or through continuing education credits. A few states do not have a recertification process.

Hybrid learning is becoming increasingly common. Several programs now offer pre-recorded lectures, digital materials, or live webinars in place of, or alongside, in-person instruction. This approach was noted as especially helpful for reaching rural or underserved participants who may not be able to travel to centralized training locations.

Program Funding and Administration

All the current CPBM programs are administered and maintained by a state forestry, agriculture, or natural resources agency. Prescribed Fire Councils in several states support curriculum development, course delivery, and review. Most CPBM programs operate with limited administrative infrastructure. Funding is typically drawn from state operating budgets and modest course registration fees. Staffing support is frequently placed on the shoulders of 1-2 individuals within the state forestry, agriculture, or natural resources agency.

A few states have formed cross-agency committees to administer their programs, allowing for more shared workload and broader stakeholder input. Arkansas, for example, relies on coordination between the state forestry division and the game and fish commission, both of which are mandated by law to co-develop the program.

Digital infrastructure is gradually improving. Several programs have adopted online registration portals, certification tracking databases, and interactive course platforms. However, others still rely on manual data management, limiting their ability to scale.

Program Outcomes and Effectiveness

States evaluate the success of their CPBM programs using a variety of metrics. The most frequently tracked outcomes include the number of individuals certified, annual acres burned by state certified burn managers, course satisfaction rates, and the reduction of escaped fire incidents.

States that have implemented CPBM programs reported that CPBM certification is contributing to safer burns, better record keeping, and more confidence among landowners and community members. In states like South Carolina and Texas, certification is also helping to recognize the role of private prescribed fire practitioners, particularly in areas with robust Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs).

In some cases, the presence of a CPBM program has been directly tied to increased fire activity across private lands, particularly where programs offer conditional liability levels for certified burn managers. Where such liability relief is in place, states have seen greater landowner engagement and less reliance on agency-led fire teams.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Common challenges for states with CPBM programs include limited staffing, inconsistent funding, and the administrative burden of tracking certifications and course completion. Programs serving large geographic areas also face difficulty providing equitable access to training, especially in rural or low-resource communities.

Several states expressed concern that their programs are not adapting quickly enough to rising demand or new realities posed by climate change. For instance, tighter burn windows, increasing regulatory constraints around smoke, and more frequent drought conditions are forcing programs to rethink when and how they schedule field trainings.

Programs emphasized the need for legal clarity, especially around liability. In states with vague liability laws, certification programs can be difficult to promote effectively. Programs affording certified individuals that follow protocols and plans a conditional liability standard reported higher participation and greater enthusiasm from participants. The emergence of claims funds in some states has provided practitioners with additional incentives to become certified.

States also highlighted the value of peer learning and inter-state collaboration. Many reported informally consulting other CPBM program managers when updating their own policies or training models, and several expressed interest in forming knowledge-sharing networks or working groups in the future.

Recommendations for Other States

States with active CPBM programs offered the following insights for peers developing or refining their own systems:

- **Clarify liability standards** early and ensure they are well-publicized. Legal reassurance is a major motivator for participation, especially among private landowners and contractors.
- **Design courses for accessibility and flexibility.** Hybrid models, tiered certifications, and field-based refreshers can improve participation and retention, especially in regions with travel or scheduling challenges.
- **Engage diverse partners.** Collaborations with NGOs, prescribed burn associations, tribal organizations, and universities can expand outreach and ease administrative load.
- **Regularly revisit and revise training content.** Incorporating new science, climate realities, and feedback from participants keeps programs current and relevant.
- **Invest in systems for tracking and reporting.** A centralized digital system for enrollment, certification, and renewal can improve efficiency, support evaluation, and enable scaling-up.
- **Recognize other state's certifications.** Collaborating across state lines and recognizing prior experience or existing credentials (e.g., NWCG qualifications or reciprocity from other states) can prevent unnecessary redundancy for seasoned practitioners.

States Developing CPBM Programs

Five states, Indiana, Minnesota, Montana, New Jersey, and Wisconsin, were actively developing CPBM programs as of July 2025. While these states were at varying stages of progress, several shared emerging themes regarding program design, barriers to implementation, and the kinds of support needed to bring their efforts to fruition.

Note that Indiana and Wisconsin completed development, and launched their programs, while this report was being written and reviewed. As these programs were still in development during the survey period, they are summarized in this report along with the other developing programs.

Program Development Stage and Leadership

Most of the states in this category are in the early-to-mid stages of program development. Minnesota and Wisconsin have engaged in multi-year planning processes, working through stakeholder input, liability questions, and legislative strategies. Indiana has developed a proposed

framework and begun informal outreach to training partners and landowners. New Jersey and Montana are still in the early conceptual or exploratory phases, gathering information from other states and considering possible administrative models.

Development efforts are typically led by state natural resource agencies, university extension offices, or nonprofit coalitions. In several cases, leadership is shared across multiple organizations, often through informal working groups, planning committees, and state prescribed fire councils. States like Wisconsin have emphasized broad coalition-building from the outset, involving prescribed burn associations, land trusts, and ecological consultants in their early planning efforts.

Design Considerations

States developing CPBM programs are carefully weighing which certification components to include and how best to structure the training. All states expressed a desire to offer both classroom-based instruction and field experience, with some considering prior experience as a substitute for parts of the training. Minnesota and Indiana are both exploring whether to accept or integrate other recognized certifications, including NWCG qualifications or training completed in neighboring states.

Several states are interested in building flexible trainings, with proposed programs featuring hybrid content delivery or multiple certification tiers. Most anticipate that recertification will be required, though timelines and processes are still under discussion.

The intended audience is broad, including private landowners, agency staff, nonprofit stewards, and consultants. However, most states are especially focused on serving non-agency practitioners who currently lack access to structured training or legal protections. These states recognize that supporting this audience will be critical for expanding prescribed fire capacity statewide. Additionally, CPBM programs are rarely developed in isolation. They are typically established alongside key policy components such as liability clarification (e.g., strict liability, simple negligence, or gross negligence), permitting frameworks, and statutory 'right to burn' provisions. Some are now paired with a claims fund. While this report focuses on CPBM programs, these other aspects work together to support the safe application of prescribed fire on the landscape.

Expected Benefits and Incentives

States typically develop CPBM programs to help expand the use of prescribed fire as a land management tool and nearly all respondents indicated the primary anticipated incentive or benefit of a CPBM program for participants is a conditional liability standard for trained burners. This can be a clear distinction of the liability standard like in North Carolina where certified managers are afforded the gross negligence standard, or in New Mexico where certified managers are exempt from the double damages clause in state statute. Interviewees expressed hope that certification could provide legal clarity and reduce the fear of lawsuits that currently deters many landowners and practitioners from implementing prescribed fire as a part of their land management strategy and limits many states' ability to meet pace and scale goals.

Other expected benefits include improved training quality, streamlined permitting processes, and increased access to variance permits. Indiana and Minnesota noted a hope that this leads to enhanced access to insurance, funding, and inter-agency cooperation.

Challenges and Support Needs

Legal complexity and liability concerns remain the most significant barriers to program implementation. Several states noted that their current liability frameworks are either unclear or do not explicitly support certified burners with an incentive. This legal ambiguity makes it difficult to propose new programs with confidence and often requires engagement with legislative counsel or legal scholars to explore solutions. Right-to-burn statutes and liability standards should be clarified, if not already established, during the development of any new CPBM legislation.

Other frequently mentioned challenges include limited staffing, lack of funding for program development, and uncertainty about which agency or organization should house and administer the program long-term. While most states have informal support from agency leadership, few have secured dedicated funding or formal mandates to create a CPBM program.

Training content development and instructional logistics are also seen as hurdles. Respondents acknowledged that while models exist in other states, adapting these curricula to local fire regimes, landownership patterns, and regulatory contexts will take time and resources. In several cases, staff have limited bandwidth to take on this work without external support.

Stakeholder engagement is underway in all five states, though strategies vary. Some have conducted listening sessions or formal needs assessments, while others are relying on one-on-one outreach or ad hoc conversations with burn practitioners. Landowners, burn associations, and NGO partners have generally expressed support for certification efforts, though some skepticism remains, particularly around the potential for increased bureaucracy or unintentional exclusion of skilled but uncertified practitioners.

Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing

All five states expressed strong interest in learning from existing CPBM programs and collaborating with peers in other jurisdictions. Many are already in communication with states like Arkansas, Georgia, and Missouri to understand training structure, liability statutes, and administrative best practices.

There is a clear appetite for multi-state working groups, shared training materials, and cross-agency dialogue. Respondents noted that even informal networks of support have been helpful in shaping early planning decisions. Minnesota and Indiana emphasized the need for model legislation, template course content, and guidance on navigating insurance and legal barriers.

Several states also indicated a willingness to recognize certification from other states and explore future reciprocity agreements, especially with neighbors that share ecological regions or have overlapping practitioner communities.

Timeline and Outlook

Implementation timelines vary. Some states anticipate launching pilot programs within one to two years, while others are still building foundational support. Most respondents acknowledged that progress would depend on resolving liability questions, securing funding, and formalizing agency roles. In the meantime, they continue to engage stakeholders, study peer models, and refine their proposed program structures.

Despite the challenges, there is a strong sense of momentum and commitment among these states. Interviewees emphasized that CPBM programs are not just a regulatory or administrative tool, but a critical strategy for scaling prescribed fire, improving safety, and supporting the growing community of landowners and practitioners working to restore fire-adapted landscapes.

States Without CPBM Programs

We were able to interview representatives from 16 of the 23 states that currently do not have CPBM programs in place. While these states vary in geography, ecological conditions, and agency structures, their interview responses reveal several consistent themes regarding why certification programs have not been developed to date, and what might change that in the future. Some respondents indicated a future CPBM program could be beneficial for their state while others, namely in the Great Plains, felt their existing system is meeting the needs of their prescribed burn

community.

A summary of the legislation and liability standards for all 50 states can be found in Appendix I: State by State Legislation and Liability Summary (Table 1).

Current Permitting and Burning Practices

In states without CPBM programs, prescribed fire is governed primarily through general permitting systems, informal burn associations, and agency-specific protocols. These systems vary widely in structure and restrictiveness depending on regional fire history, political context, and institutional capacity. Interviews revealed a spectrum of permitting environments, ranging from highly permissive and community-driven to restrictive and agency-centric.

In Idaho, for instance, private landowners are not allowed to burn during the closed fire season from May 10 to October 20 (Idaho code 38-115) regardless of site-specific conditions. This constraint can significantly limit burn flexibility and suppress opportunities for fire-adapted land stewardship. During the rest of the year, Idaho burners must obtain a burn permit which requires a burn plan and approval from the local Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) Fire Warden who determines which burn types are permitted based on wildfire safety risk. Additionally, county, city, and municipal entities may institute additional burn requirements for their jurisdictions. These regulations are based on wildfire risk and public safety but can create a barrier to implementing prescribed fire.

A different model prevails in Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma, one shaped by strong cultural traditions of fire in rangeland and prairie management. These states, which either have a simple negligence liability standard in statute or have one by default, have active prescribed burn associations and local networks that coordinate burns through informal planning, neighbor-to-neighbor support, and seasonal burn cooperatives. In many areas, permits are issued by county authorities or fire districts with relatively few restrictions. While state laws provide some guidance, much of the on-the-ground implementation is shaped by community norms and local trust. Burn plans may be encouraged but are rarely required, and training is provided through university extension programs or association-led workshops rather than state-run certification.

Delaware and Maryland present a contrasting structure. In both states, prescribed burning is primarily conducted by state agencies or conservation organizations, and often only on public lands. Permits are typically administered through natural resources agencies and burns by private landowners or nonprofits are less common due to concerns around liability, air quality regulations, and the absence of a formal certification system. While private burning is not prohibited, it often only occurs under agency oversight or informal partnerships. The lack of accessible training or a permitting framework was stated to deter broader participation by landowners or small conservation groups in these states.

In Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, the practice of prescribed fire is relatively rare

and tightly controlled. All three states require burn permits issued at the municipal level, and in many towns, prescribed burning is effectively limited to fire departments or state land managers. Air quality restrictions, population density, and public safety concerns all contribute to a cautious, risk-averse approach. Fire planning and operations tend to be specialized entities, with very few pathways for non-agency personnel to engage in burning directly. Some nonprofit landowners may partner with state agencies to implement burns, but this often requires years of relationship-building and project approval.

Vermont and New York allow prescribed burning under state-issued permits, but there is little infrastructure to support private landowner participation. In Vermont, burns are typically led by state agency staff or conservation NGOs with in-house experience. Training and guidance for landowners are sparse, and interviewees described fire as "not a common tool" for most landowners in the state. Similarly, in New York, prescribed fire is usually associated with state forest management or research institutions, and private use of fire remains uncommon outside a few specialized ecological stewardship circles.

In Arizona, burn permitting is managed by the state's Department of Environmental Quality and local fire jurisdictions. While the regulatory framework does allow for prescribed fires on private lands, there are air quality thresholds and visibility impact assessments that can restrict when and how burns may occur. There is no formal certification required for private landowners and burns are often conducted in partnership with agency staff. This shared-responsibility model helps ensure safety but can limit independent access for landowners who might otherwise be interested in leading their own burns.

Across these states, a few themes are evident:

- **Seasonal restrictions**, such as limited burn windows or designated "burn seasons," are common in states like Idaho and Arizona. These constraints are often linked to air quality management and fire danger indices, but they do not necessarily align with ecological or operational readiness.
- **Decentralized permitting**, particularly at the county or municipal level, can result in a lack of consistency across jurisdictions. In Kansas and Oklahoma, for example, two counties may have entirely different expectations for permit approval, burn planning, or

liability responsibility.

- **Limited outreach and training support** may hinder some participation. Even where permits are available, accompanying training, risk assessment tools, or standardized burn plan templates may not be available. Landowners often rely on word-of-mouth, peer networks, or self-taught methods to prepare and implement safe burns. This model can work great but can hinder participation for those without established peer networks to learn from.
- **Agency-centric models** in states like Massachusetts, Maryland, and New York create barriers for private, nonprofit, or community-led burning. These states often lack a mechanism for recognizing or supporting non-agency expertise, which limits the scalability of prescribed fire as a tool for landscape management.

These examples demonstrate that while prescribed burning does occur in many states without CPBM programs, the infrastructure for safe, accessible, and consistent implementation is often fragmented or underdeveloped. This uneven foundation presents both a challenge and an opportunity for future efforts.

Barriers or Rationale for Lack of CPBM Development

Respondents from states without CPBM programs identified several interrelated barriers that have prevented the development of certification systems or provided a rationale for why a certification system is not currently viewed as a good fit for their state. The most frequently cited challenges include:

- **Lack of funding**: Most agencies operate with limited budgets and do not have dedicated resources to design, launch, or administer a certification program. In some cases, the idea of creating a CPBM program has been discussed internally but consistently deferred due to staff capacity and financial constraints.
- **Low perceived demand**: Several states reported that they do not believe there is currently enough interest in certification to justify the time and expense of developing a formal program. This is especially true in states where prescribed fire is used infrequently, or where landowners already conduct burns independently.
- **Liability and legal uncertainty**: In nearly every case, respondents raised concerns about legal liability. In states where liability laws are unclear or highly restrictive, the absence of clear protections for certified burners discourages both state leadership and practitioner interest in developing a CPBM program. Some interviewees expressed worry that creating a certification system could raise the bar for participation in a way that excludes experienced but uncertified practitioners.
- **Lack of state agency leadership or political will**: In the absence of an agency champion or legislative directive, most interviewees noted that CPBM efforts tend to stall. Even where support exists among burn associations or conservation organizations, the lack of a state

agency lead makes it difficult to formalize or institutionalize new programs.

- **Pre-existing culture of burning:** In some states, especially across the Great Plains and western rangelands, there is a strong, longstanding culture of prescribed fire rooted in agricultural and community-led land stewardship. In these contexts, burning is often passed down through generations or managed through cooperative agreements among neighbors. Some practitioners and policymakers are concerned that introducing certification could interfere with these trusted systems or impose unnecessary bureaucracy on landowners who already burn responsibly.

Potential Interest and Incentives

Several states expressed conditional interest in exploring CPBM programs in the future. Several respondents indicated that if liability protections were improved, or if funding became available to support program development, they would be open to considering certification as a tool for improving safety and accessibility. This was not universal as some states indicated that a CPBM program does not seem like a good fit for their state.

Among the most compelling incentives were:

- **Conditional liability**: A consistent theme was the potential for CPBM programs to reduce uncertainty and provide structured conditional liability protection for certified individuals, particularly in cases where formal requirements such as burn plans, permits, or notification are met.
- **Improved permitting access**: In states with restrictive or seasonal burn windows, respondents noted that certification could help streamline permitting, allowing trained burners more flexibility to conduct burns when conditions are right.
- **Expanded training opportunities**: Several interviewees expressed that a CPBM program could provide more structured, accessible training for landowners, contractors, and conservation groups. They emphasized that certification could help ensure that individuals without agency affiliations or traditional access to training, such as small landowners, beginning burners, or rural conservation staff, have an equitable opportunity to build knowledge and confidence.

- **Adaptation to future fire and climate conditions**: Some respondents suggested that increased wildfire risk and changing climate conditions may lead to future demand for more formalized fire management infrastructure. In this context, CPBM programs could serve as a proactive investment in state-level resilience planning.

Existing Training Opportunities and Adaptability

Several states without CPBM programs already offer some form of prescribed fire training through university extension programs, conservation districts, or local prescribed burn associations. While these training programs vary in rigor and consistency, they represent a potential foundation upon which a formal CPBM program could be built. Some interviewees felt these programs currently fill the CPBM niche for their state.

Respondents in states like Kansas and Idaho indicated that existing programs could be adapted into a certification framework if legal and financial obstacles were addressed. Others noted that while informal training is valuable, they lack the legal recognition or standardization needed to fully support broader prescribed fire goals.

Openness to learning from peer states was widespread. Many interviewees expressed appreciation for the programs in states like Georgia, Arkansas, and North Carolina, and said that access to sample training materials, model legislation, or peer mentorship would help them explore certification more seriously.

Outlook and Recommendations

While these states do not currently have CPBM programs, there was recognition of their potential value, particularly in addressing liability concerns, improving burn safety, and expanding access to training. A few states appear to be on the cusp of taking initial steps, especially if external support or funding becomes available. For CPBM advocates and support organizations, the following strategies may be useful in catalyzing further interest:

- Provide **clear, state-specific summaries** of liability frameworks and potential reforms.
- Share **model training curricula** and adaptable program templates.
- Offer **targeted funding or technical assistance** to support program planning and stakeholder engagement.
- Foster **regional working groups** or mentorship networks to connect states at different stages of development.

Ultimately, while the decision to pursue a CPBM program and the path to get there may look different in each state, there is a shared recognition that improved training, legal clarity, and inter-state knowledge sharing are essential to safely and effectively expanding prescribed fire across the United States.

State CPBM Program Descriptions

This section provides brief profiles of each of the 22 U.S. states that currently* operate CPBM programs (Figure 2). Each profile outlines the program's purpose, target audience, structure, certification requirements, training availability, and unique features or implementation challenges. These summaries offer important context for understanding how prescribed burn certification is being used to expand capacity, support safe fire use, and promote ecological or wildfire risk reduction goals. A comparative summary of all 22 programs can be found in Appendix II: State Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program Summaries (Table 2). Note these summaries are intended to be an overview of these programs based on our interviews, please refer to each state's CPBM program website and associated legislation for a complete picture of these programs.

*Note Indiana and Wisconsin completed development, and launched their programs, during the writing and review of this report. As these programs were still in development during the survey period, they are not included in this summary of state programs, but they are included in Table 2.

Alabama

Alabama's Certified Prescribed Burn Manager (CPBM) Program was established in 1996 to provide formal certification for individuals conducting prescribed burns. The program's purpose is to ensure prescribed fire is used safely, legally, and effectively across the state. It is primarily designed for private landowners, agency personnel, and natural resource professionals.

To become certified, individuals must complete a 32-hour course delivered over four days. The training includes instruction on fire behavior, planning, safety, and legal considerations. As part of the course, participants draft a written burn plan and present it to the class. Certification is

awarded to those who successfully complete the course and pass a test. There is no live burn requirement for certification. Recertification is required every five years and can be completed through a six-hour refresher course or equivalent field experience.

The Alabama Forestry Commission typically offers three courses per year—one each in the northern, central, and southern regions of the state. Demand for certification is high, and there is interest in expanding course offerings to four annually, though staffing and funding limitations remain a barrier.

The program emphasizes accessibility and landowner autonomy, avoiding overly burdensome requirements and promoting widespread use of prescribed fire. However, because the course structure and duration are codified in state law, the program has limited flexibility to adapt or modernize without legislative changes.

Arkansas

Arkansas launched its Qualified Prescribed Burner Program following the passage of Act 695 in 2023, with the first classes held in July 2024. The program was developed jointly by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission and the Arkansas Department of Agriculture's Forestry Division. Its purpose is to certify individuals to safely conduct prescribed burns and to provide civil liability protections for those who meet the program requirements. Under the law, burners are protected from civil liability except in cases of simple negligence, provided they prepare a written burn plan and notify the Forestry Division prior to burning.

The program is designed for private landowners, agency staff, and contractors, and certification is open to individuals with a wide range of experience levels. To become certified, participants must complete a two-day course consisting of classroom instruction and a live burn demonstration and pass a final exam.

In its first year, the program met its goal of 20–25 classes, delivering 25 sessions and certifying approximately 500 participants. Each course is capped at 20 students, and demand remains high, particularly among private landowners seeking clarified liability and confidence in conducting their own burns.

A key strength of the Arkansas program is its strong legislative foundation and rapid rollout,

enabled by clear agency collaboration and stakeholder support. Ongoing challenges include securing stable funding, and the need to locate appropriate classrooms and burn sites across the state.

California

California's Certified Burner Program was initiated in 2020 under Senate Bill 1260 as part of a broader statewide effort to expand the use of prescribed in response to escalating wildfire risk. The program is administered through the Office of the State Fire Marshal and is designed to provide formal certification for non-agency burners, including private landowners, tribal members, conservation staff, and other practitioners. At the same time, California's largest fire department (CAL FIRE) developed internal state agency training for prescribed fire incident commander qualifications.

Certified burn bosses that are defined in California's public resource code operate under a gross negligence liability standard for suppression costs. If a prescribed fire escapes and causes damage, the landowner and/or burn boss may still be held liable under civil law. To help address this risk, California established a $20 million Prescribed Fire Claims Fund, which provides up to $2 million per project when the burn is conducted by a state certified burn boss.

Certification requires prerequisite leadership and fire experience, completion of a 40-hour training course, and participation in both classroom and field components, including at least one live burn. The program also requires initiation of a task book to document prescribed fire assignments. Certification is maintained through an annual refresher course or by assisting with class instruction. California typically offers three courses per year, each with about 20 participants, and demand continues to exceed available capacity due to the limited number of instructors.

A unique aspect of the California program is its explicit recognition of cultural burning experience and its use of adaptive management, with annual updates informed by practitioner input. Challenges include navigating complex smoke regulations, and limited instructor availability.

Colorado

Colorado's Prescribed Burn Manager Certification Program was established in 2014 after a tragic prescribed fire escape that led to fatalities. That escaped prescribed burn became the Lower North Fork Fire which led the state to remove prescribed fire and fire suppression from the Colorado State Forest Service and create a new agency, the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control. This agency administers the state's CPBM program which is designed to certify individuals who plan and implement prescribed burns on private and public lands outside of federal jurisdiction.

The program primarily targets land management professionals, conservation staff, private landowners, and fire practitioners who work across agency and private boundaries. Certification is offered at two levels. *Certified Burner B* is geared towards pile burning and requires completion of a two- to three-day training, passing a test, developing burn plans, and participation in supervised training burns documented in a task book. *Certified Burner A* covers both broadcast and pile burning and requires applicants to be currently or formerly qualified as an NWCG RXB2. Candidates must submit documentation of qualifications, provide letters of reference, and complete the state's course and test.

Colorado typically offers four classes per year, rotating locations across the state, with enrollment dependent on instructor availability and fire season scheduling. Recertification is required every five years and involves documentation of at least two burns and two burn plans during that period. Demand for the *Certified Burner B* program is steady but constrained by the need for qualified trainers and the state's variable burn windows. Certification is often viewed as essential for individuals working in partnerships with state agencies or seeking burn authorization on complex landscapes.

A distinctive feature of Colorado's program is its focus on fire planning complexity and the need for documented operational competency. One way the program handles this is to have separate certifications for pile and broadcast burning. The pile burning certification is more attainable by private landowners while the broadcast burning certification aligns with NWCG RXB2 and is therefore mostly catering to active and retired professionals. Additionally, challenges include coordinating across federal, state, and private jurisdictions, navigating complex air quality rules, highly variable permitting from county to county, and expanding the program's accessibility to private landowners with less formal fire training.

Florida

Florida operates one of the most robust and long-standing Certified Prescribed Burn Manager programs in the country. Established in 1985 and administered by the Florida Forest Service, the program is a foundational component of the state's fire management infrastructure and plays a central role in enabling large-scale prescribed fire use across public and private lands.

The program is designed for private landowners, agency personnel, contractors, and land managers of all experience levels. Certification requires completion of a four-day training course

that includes classroom instruction on fire behavior, legal regulations, smoke management, and planning. Participants must pass a test, develop a written burn prescription, and complete three burns within three years and a final "check-off burn" under Florida Forest Service observation.

Florida typically offers seven to twelve certification courses annually, rotating locations across the state, with high participation rates and a well-organized training calendar. Recertification is required every five years and includes either refresher coursework or documented ongoing burn activity.

The program's success is supported by favorable liability laws, a strong fire culture, and clear administrative support. Florida also tracks certified burners and burn activity statewide through a centralized database. Key strengths include program scale, consistency, and strong integration with state permitting systems. One ongoing challenge is ensuring access to training in rural or underserved areas.

Georgia

Georgia's Certified Burner Program is administered by the Georgia Forestry Commission and provides formal training, liability protection, and recognition for individuals conducting prescribed fire on non-federal lands. The program was established in 1992 and has evolved to support both professional fire practitioners and landowners.

The program is open to anyone conducting burns in Georgia, with a primary audience of private landowners, conservation organization staff, and contractors. To earn certification, participants must complete a two-day training course, pass an exam, have two years of fire experience, and complete and document five training burns for their certification to be fully validated.

The state typically offers seven to eight classes annually and has consistently high interest with approximately 400 participants annually and nearly 6,000 over the life of the program. Participants are primarily landowners seeking training and certification to reduce their liability exposure or interested in joining prescribed burn associations. The Georgia Forestry Commission supports this process by helping track participant progress and offering follow-up technical guidance after course completion.

One of the program's strengths is its emphasis on smoke management and liability clarifications,

which has increased both landowner and professional participation. Challenges include funding for participants. When funding for student registration is obtained through a grant most classes fill up. The classes tend to be smaller with several open slots when the cost or the course is on the burner.

Illinois

Illinois' Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program is administered by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and provides structured training for individuals conducting prescribed burns, primarily on private and conservation lands. The program was developed in response to the need for consistent fire practices across the state.

Established in 2007, the program serves private landowners, conservation organization staff, ecological contractors, and agency personnel. Certification requires completion of the NWCG FFT2 coursework (S-139, S-190, L-180, I-100, and I-700) and field day, plus documented experience as a burn crew member on at least five burns. Applicants must then apprentice under a certified prescribed burn manager on a minimum of two burns, record their experience in a task book, and obtain a letter of recommendation before applying for certification.

Illinois typically offers several classes per year, with demand driven by both conservation projects and contractor interest. Participants come from across the state and often represent partners in ecological restoration, prescribed burn associations, and land trusts.

One of the program's strengths is its connection to the Illinois ecological restoration community. Challenges include limited availability of certified burn managers to serve as mentors for apprentices in the CPBM program, as well as variation in apprenticeship experiences since there is no formal standard for who may serve as a mentor. There is also ongoing interest in expanding course accessibility through partnerships with NGOs and community colleges.

Kentucky

Kentucky's Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program is managed by the Kentucky Prescribed Fire Council. The program's purpose is to improve safety, consistency, and legal compliance for prescribed burning across a range of private and public landscapes.

The Kentucky Prescribed Fire Council began in 2008 and started developing the coursework for the CPBM program in 2010. The legal framework to support the program wasn't finalized until 2016, when the program was officially launched. The program is primarily designed for private landowners, agency personnel, fire departments, and nonprofit conservation staff.

Prerequisites include NWCG FFT2 qualifications and participation in five prescribed burns or wildfires. The certification course is three days long, with half-day classroom and half-day field sessions each day. After completing the course, participants receive an apprentice task book with

12 tasks. To complete the task book, they must participate in at least three mentored burns and fulfill specific requirements during each. Once completed, the task book is submitted to a board for review and forwarded to the Division of Forestry for final approval as a Certified Burn Boss.

The state offers the training every September and participation varies annually based on demand and instructor availability, but interest is generally steady.

One of the program's strengths is its mentored apprenticeship, ensuring participants have experience burning prior to certification. A key challenge is the lack of liability language in state law, which creates uncertainty for burners.

Louisiana

Louisiana's Certified Prescribed Burner Forestry Program is managed by the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry. Louisiana has three types of certification forestry, marsh, and agriculture. All three are overseen by the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry but they are separate programs that are run through different parts of the agency.

The Louisiana Certified Prescribed Burner Program targets private landowners, contractors, and forestry professionals and has been administered by the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry since the 1993 Act #589 instructed the agency to conduct training and certify burners. Certification requires attendance at a state-approved training course taught by the Louisiana State University AgCenter based on the LSU Smoke Management Guideline for Agriculture, which includes instruction on fire planning, laws and regulations, smoke management, and fire behavior. Participants must pass a test and conduct five burns within five years as the supervising professional to earn certification.

Louisiana offers at least three classes per year, often in partnership with forestry organizations and extension services. More classes are offered when demand is high.

The program benefits from strong support within the state's forestry sector and has helped increase comfort with prescribed fire among private landowners. One ongoing challenge is a lack of consistency with multiple agencies offering the training course.

Michigan

Michigan's Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program is coordinated by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and was developed to formalize prescribed fire training and ensure consistent, safe practices across both public and private lands. The program supports ecological restoration, habitat management, and hazardous fuel reduction.

The initial legislation was passed in 2004, but the program was not implemented until 2025. The program is geared toward a broad audience, including state agency personnel, nonprofit staff, landowners, and contractors involved in land stewardship. Certification requires participants to

take the NWCG S-130/S-190 courses and field day to become a FFT2 and then document participation on five burns. Participants must serve as the burn boss for at least two of the five burns.

The training was first offered in 2025 and the intention is to have at least three courses per year, depending on seasonal demand and training staff availability. Interest is high with professionals from land conservancies, nature centers, and regional planning entities.

Michigan's program stands out for its integration of ecological fire objectives into state planning and its collaboration with conservation partners. However, the program faces challenges in expanding reach beyond the professional land management community and providing ongoing support to landowners unfamiliar with prescribed fire protocols.

Missouri

Missouri's Prescribed Burn Certification Program is managed by the Missouri Department of Conservation and provides foundational training for landowners and professionals who conduct prescribed burns. It was created to improve safety, establish a liability standard, and support broader habitat and fuels management goals throughout the state.

Courtesy of Southern Blue Ridge PBA

The current program was developed following the 2021 Prescribed Burning Act with the first class in 2022. The current course is based on the Private Landowner Burner Workshop which was a program that enabled private landowners to receive Missouri Department of Conservation cooperation and assistance for burn plan writing and cost share as part of community and private lands forestry. The 2021 act set simple negligence as the standard for certified burn managers and included the creation of a formal certification program. Missouri is a right-to-burn state but prior to the 2021 Prescribed Burning Act there was no language that allowed protection for certified burners.

Certification requires completing online course material and attending a one-day field training course that covers basic fire ecology, planning, safety, and Missouri burn regulations. A live burn is planned as part of the field day, but weather conditions do not always allow for the demonstration. Participants are not required to complete the live burn for certification if weather prevents the demonstration but finding ways to participate in a subsequent burn is highly encouraged.

The number of classes offered per year varies based on demand and are typically offered in coordination with local extension offices or partner organizations. The program consistently attracts landowners managing wildlife habitat and native prairies.

A strength of the program is its on-demand online course paired with field days scheduled to meet demand. A key challenge is the difficulty of acquiring burn insurance, as few agencies provide coverage in Missouri, leading to hesitance among landowners to engage in prescribed burning. Missouri has worked to monitor prescribed fire and gather data on property damage outcomes, or the lack thereof, associated with prescribed fire. This data helped establish simple negligence and explicit statutory immunity from strict liability for certified burners and could be used to support insurance underwriting.

Mississippi


Courtesy of Southern Blue Ridge PBA

Mississippi's Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program is administered by the Mississippi Forestry Commission and provides training, certification, and legal protection for individuals conducting prescribed burns under state guidelines. The program is part of Mississippi's broader wildfire mitigation and forest management strategy.

Established following 1992 legislation, the program is aimed at private landowners, forestry consultants, agency staff, and contractors. Certification requires completion of either a one-day or a 2 ½-day course that covers S-190 content, state fire laws, permitting, burning techniques, smoke management, and burn planning. Participants must develop a burn plan, complete mapping and smoke screening exercises, and pass a state burner exam. In the 2 ½-day format, students also take the NWCG S-190 exam. Live fire is included in small-scale demonstrations in the 2 ½-day course.

The state typically offers six to seven courses annually, with high demand from landowners managing timber and wildlife habitat. Course availability is distributed regionally to meet the needs of rural communities and landowner associations.

A key strength of Mississippi's program is its flexible training format, which accommodates different participant needs. A challenge is the inability to consistently provide live-fire experience during training.

North Carolina

North Carolina's Certified Burner Program is administered by the North Carolina Forest Service and plays a key role in expanding safe prescribed fire use on both public and private lands. This program comes from the 1999 North Carolina Prescribed Burning Act and subsequent 2023 amendment to include a gross negligence standard. The program was developed to reduce wildfire risk, support ecological land management, and provide legal protection for trained practitioners.

The program targets private landowners, forestry professionals, wildlife managers, and conservation staff. To earn certification, individuals must attend a structured training course with a field day that covers fire behavior, planning, smoke management, legal compliance, and safety. Participants must pass a written exam and demonstrate knowledge of state burn laws. Participants must demonstrate proficiency to another certified burner after completing the coursework. Participants must write a burn plan and then execute the burn to the satisfaction of the certified burner. If the certified burner mentor is not satisfied, the participant must complete additional plans and burns.

North Carolina offers a hybrid format with two online classes per year, with each online class followed by an in-person field day at various sites throughout the state. Participation is consistently high, reflecting strong demand for training and certification.

New Mexico

New Mexico's Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program is administered by the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department and is part of a broader statewide strategy to increase prescribed fire use and reduce wildfire risk across diverse land ownerships. The program was formalized in 2021 and features two certification levels; pile burn and broadcast.

The certification is open to private landowners, tribal land stewards, agency personnel, and NGO partners. To become certified, participants must complete a state-approved training course and pass a written exam. The courses are different for pile burning and broadcast burning but generally cover fire ecology, planning, risk assessment, state fire laws, and smoke management. For broadcast burning participants

must also take a burn plan writing course, and a burn plan is typically developed during the course. To complete certification as either pile burn manager or broadcast burn manager they must complete a proficiency workbook which requires them to lead a burn in a trainee position under the supervision of a certified manager. Participants are guided through a proficiency workbook by a mentor and success is based on tasks completed, not the number of burns. There is an opened ended timeframe for completing the workbook.

New Mexico offers several training sessions annually, often in collaboration with conservation nonprofits, interagency partners, and local landowner coalitions. The program has steadily grown, with increasing interest from both private practitioners and community-based fire groups.

One of the program's distinguishing features is its effort to develop a reciprocity list and willingness to recognize certifications from other states. Potential participants have raised concerns that the amount of effort required to complete the training is not commensurate with the liability relief provided under statue. Other ongoing challenges include providing sufficient training opportunities to provide opportunities for participants to complete their workbooks, navigating smoke and air quality regulations, and providing consistent access to training across remote areas of the state.

Ohio

Ohio's Certified Prescribed Fire Manager Program is led by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry and is designed to improve the safety and effectiveness of prescribed burning on public and private lands. The program was launched in 2001 to address growing demand for training, improve coordination among practitioners, and reduce liability for certified individuals.

The program serves a mix of audiences, including agency staff, land conservancies, wildlife managers, and private landowners. Certification requires completion of a multi-day training course, which includes instruction in fire ecology, operational planning, safety, laws and permitting, and smoke management. Participants must pass a written exam, and while live burns are not always included in the training, participants are required to have documented training and experience before they are admitted into the training, including a minimum of six hours of training in wildland fire suppression and prior professional experience on at least ten wildfires on at least ten days, ten prescribed fires on at least ten days, or a combination thereof. Maintaining the certification requires consistent reporting of work conducted on prescribed fires over time.

Ohio offers the certification course biannually, with participation often prioritized for public land managers and conservation professionals. Demand has increased in recent years as prescribed fire becomes a more common tool for managing invasive species and restoring native ecosystems.

The Ohio program is integrated with other conservation training efforts and benefits from strong partnerships with local and regional land trusts. Challenges include scaling training opportunities

to meet demand and building a more accessible path for private landowners who may not have formal fire experience.

Oregon

Oregon's Certified Burn Manager Program is administered by the Oregon Department of Forestry and is part of a growing statewide strategy to increase prescribed fire capacity in response to heightened wildfire risk. The program was authorized under legislation that was passed in 1999 but was not formally established until 2022 and represents a significant step forward in recognizing non-agency practitioners as key partners in fire-adapted landscape management.

The program targets private landowners, nonprofit land stewards, tribal members, forestry consultants, and other individuals with previous prescribed fire experience who are interested in developing leadership and management skills to conduct burns on non-federal lands. To earn certification, participants must complete a state-approved training course, pass a written exam, and complete three training burns under a certified burn manager. The training covers prescribed fire planning, legal requirements, risk mitigation, safety protocols, and smoke management. After the classroom training, participants are issued a field certification book from Oregon Department of Forestry to document proficiency. An ID card which serves as documentation of certification is then issued. Individuals with prior experience or NWCG RXB2 Burn Boss qualification may apply under historical recognition and bypass training and testing requirements. Courses are offered multiple times per year, in collaboration with local partners such as Oregon State University Extension, prescribed burn associations, and tribal organizations. Participation has steadily increased, with many practitioners seeking certification to gain skills and alleviate liability.

A unique feature of Oregon's program is that certification enables access to a claims fund, provided the burn is registered and meets the criteria. Claims may be eligible for up to $1 million in damages per burn. Challenges include lack of funding for growth of the program and long-term administrative capacity, inadequate quantity of live fire training opportunities for CBM trainees creating a backlog, and a need for more prescribed fire experiential opportunities to help prepare those going through CBM classroom training for field certification.

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program is administered by the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry in partnership with the Pennsylvania Prescribed Fire Council. It was created in 2024 to expand the safe and effective use of prescribed fire on private lands across the state.

The program primarily targets contractors, NGO partners, and private landowners. Certification requires prerequisites such as NWCG FFT2 training and participation in at least five burns. Certification is then based on completion of a multi-day training course, passing a written exam, and demonstrating a foundational understanding of Pennsylvania burn laws, planning standards,

and operational safety protocols. While a live burn is not included in the 2-day course, it is required as part of the mentorship after completing the course. Participants must work through a checklist with a mentor on a minimum of two burns which includes writing a burn plan, pre-day operations, and participating on the burn. The mentor can then recommend the participant to be certified. There is a three-year window to complete the checklist and two burns with the mentor.

The state offers one course per year, often hosted in a central location of the state. Interest in certification has grown in recent years, particularly among private landowners and contractors managing invasive species and restoring early successional habitat. The current program targets low complexity burns.

A notable strength of Pennsylvania's program is its strong institutional support and focus on ecological objectives. Challenges include limited availability of training outside agency circles and the need to make certification more accessible to private and nonprofit land managers who may lack institutional backing or staff capacity.

South Carolina

South Carolina's Certified Prescribed Fire Manager Program is managed by the South Carolina Forestry Commission and is one of the older programs, established in 1992. It was created to improve prescribed fire safety, promote ecological burning, and offer legal clarity for qualified burners.

The program serves a wide audience, including private landowners, forestry consultants, nonprofit land managers, and state agency staff. Certification involves attending an 8-hour training course, passing a written exam, and reviewing state fire laws, smoke management regulations, and planning principles. After the class portion and passing the exam, participants must conduct five burns that are reported through dispatch. If there are no complaints, and the five burns are successful, the participant will send in documentation and become certified once the five burns are verified by dispatch. It takes most people nine months to get certified – two burn seasons – but there is no time window where it must be completed. There are people who never complete

Courtesy of Southern Blue Ridge

this part and therefore fail to achieve certification.

South Carolina typically offers multiple classes annually, with strong demand from both public and private sector participants. The program also plays a role in community outreach and helps promote the benefits of prescribed fire across diverse stakeholder groups.

The program's legal structure provides the gross negligence liability standard as an incentive to certified individuals who operate under an approved plan and state-issued permit. Its simplicity and accessibility are key strengths, though challenges include keeping course content up to date and expanding opportunities for hands-on experience among newer burner practitioners.

Tennessee

The Tennessee Certified Burn Manager Program is coordinated by the Tennessee Division of Forestry under the authority of the Tennessee Prescribed Burning Act (T.C.A. §§ 11-4-1001 – 11-4-1003) and provides essential training for individuals conducting prescribed burns in the state. The program is offered free of charge and is designed for private landowners, contractors, agency staff, and conservation professionals who use prescribed fire for habitat management, fuel reduction, and other land stewardship objectives. Certification offers formal recognition and provides a simple negligence standard under Tennessee law for those who obtain a burn permit and follow an approved burn plan.

The course is offered twice per year and includes a virtual classroom component and an in-person field day. Participants learn fundamental concepts such as fire behavior, fire weather, smoke management, ignition and holding strategies, contingency planning, and drafting a burn plan. During the field day, students develop their own burn plan for a potential unit with guidance from instructors. There is no written exam requirement; the focus is on understanding the Tennessee Prescribed Burning Act and promoting safe, effective prescribed fire practices.

The program introduced an optional supplemental day in 2024 which serves two purposes: 1) providing advanced learning opportunities through guest speakers and presentations, and 2) offering continuing education credits for recertification. Certified Burn Managers must earn at least three hours of continuing education every three years to maintain their certification. Attendance at the supplemental day counts toward these recertification requirements.

This program supports Tennessee's wildfire mitigation and habitat management goals by promoting safe prescribed fire practices and providing conditional liability protection for certified burners under state law. The program benefits from strong agency support and alignment with Tennessee's wildfire mitigation goals. Ongoing challenges include increasing awareness of the program in rural areas and providing more field-based learning opportunities for new practitioners.

Texas

Texas's Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program is overseen by the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA). The program is rooted in state legislation passed in 1999 and is designed to professionalize prescribed burning, reduce liability, and ensure ecological and agricultural goals are met safely.

The program targets experienced fire practitioners, including contractors, ranchers, landowners, and natural resource professionals. Certification is offered for private, commercial, non-profit, and governmental burn managers. Requirements include completion of a TDA approved prescribed burn school taught by a TDA approved Lead Burn Instructor (LBI), documentation of at least $1 million per occurrence and $2 million aggregate private insurance coverage, completed application documenting burn experience, and $500 certification and renewal fees that cover a two-year license. The number of classes offered each year varies but is supported by a well-established training infrastructure and backing from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, regional prescribed burn associations, and state agencies such as Texas A&M Forest Service and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Participation remains high, particularly among private landowners managing rangelands, forest lands, and wildlife habitat. There is an increasing number of participants from local fire departments and municipalities.

The Texas legislature passed HB 2563 in 2025. This reform to prescribed fire related statues in the state establishes a certified and insured prescribed burn manager self-insurance pool with an amount not to exceed $25 million. This emerging policy development is still being developed and has not yet "rolled out" to Texas certified burn managers so further time is needed to understand how this development impacts prescribed fire in the state but it is intended to provide an alternative mechanism for meeting required liability coverage levels.

Certification is valid for two years, with recertification contingent on completing a specified number of Continuing Fire Training hours, paying a renewal fee, and maintaining annual proof of liability insurance.

Texas's Certified Prescribed Burn Manager program is notable for its structured certification process, which includes a requirement for documented prescribed burning experience, completion of approved training courses, and carrying a

qualifying insurance policy. The liability standard protecting certified burners is based on simple negligence, providing a level of legal protection when prescribed burns are conducted according to state regulations and best practices. One ongoing challenge is ensuring the program remains accessible to less-experienced landowners who may not yet meet the minimum burn experience requirements needed to achieve certification.

Virginia

Virginia's Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program is administered by the Virginia Department of Forestry and was created in 1999 (revised in 2017) to provide legal protection, standardized training, and public confidence in prescribed fire as a management tool. The program contributes to the state's wildfire mitigation strategy and supports ecological restoration, particularly in longleaf pine and mixed hardwood systems.

The program serves private landowners, forestry consultants, conservation staff, and agency personnel. Certification requires completion of a two-day training course, passing a written exam, and reviewing the state's legal and permitting requirements. Participants are not required to complete a live burn as part of the certification process.

Courtesy of Southern Blue Ridge

Virginia typically offers the course several times per year, with participation drawn from across the public and private sectors. Certified burners in Virginia receive the gross negligence liability standard under state law when conducting burns with a permit and written plan. Certified burners also receive preferential permitting status through an exemption to the 4 PM Burning Law §10.1-1142 B.

A unique feature of Virginia's program is its strong coordination with partner agencies and NGOs involved in fire-adapted habitat restoration. Challenges include limited capacity for field mentoring and outreach to new landowners unfamiliar with fire.

Washington

Washington's Certified Burner Program is coordinated by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and is part of the state's broader strategy to scale up prescribed fire as a tool for

wildfire risk reduction and forest health. The program was formalized through legislation in 2018 and rolled out four years later.

The certification is aimed at private landowners, forestry professionals, tribal fire practitioners, and nonprofit conservation staff. To become certified, individuals must complete a training course that covers fire behavior, planning, safety, and regulatory compliance. Participants must pass a written exam and develop a sample burn plan, and finally participants must lead and implement a burn under state supervision.

Washington currently offers several classes per year, often delivered in collaboration with universities, fire councils, and tribal partners. Demand is increasing as state and federal funding supports expanded prescribed fire training and workforce development.

The Washington program is notable for its inclusion of cultural burning practitioners, emphasis on community-based fire, alignment with the state's 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan, and development of a prescribed fire claims fund in 2025 to further incentivize the practice. Challenges include limited burn windows due to air quality regulations and a need for broader outreach in eastern Washington and other rural areas.

Cross-Cutting Themes and Trends

The CPBM program landscape continues to evolve across the United States. Interviews revealed several recurring themes that cut across program status, geography, and administrative structure. This section outlines the major challenges, motivations, legal contexts, and sociopolitical dynamics shaping CPBM program development and implementation in 2025.

Shared Challenges and Barriers

States face several common challenges in both implementing and sustaining CPBM programs. One of the most frequently cited issues is the **rigidity of existing legal and regulatory frameworks**. In some states, aspects of the CPBM programs such as course length, certification structure, or liability standards are embedded in state statutes. This makes it difficult to adapt the program to emerging needs or lessons learned from implementation. Efforts to revise these requirements often involve lengthy legislative processes and inter-agency negotiations, slowing down responsiveness and innovation.

Limited funding and staffing are also persistent barriers. Many state agencies responsible for CPBM programs operate with constrained budgets, which limits their capacity to expand training opportunities, enhance outreach, or develop continuing education components. Even in states with high demand for certification, these resource constraints can hinder the ability to scale programs effectively. Some interviewees noted that they would like to offer more training sessions annually or cover a broader geographic area but lack the personnel or funding to do so.

Training accessibility poses another challenge, particularly when trying to serve both seasoned professionals and new or inexperienced burners. Programs often struggle to strike the right balance between ensuring rigorous, safety-focused instruction and maintaining accessibility for landowners and practitioners who may not have formal training. In many states, certification requires participation in live burns or serving in a training role on one to several burns following course completion. However, **logistical barriers**, such as access to burn units, weather limitations, finding a certified trainer, and the time needed to complete multiple burns, can prevent participants from completing certification in a timely manner or at all.

Finally, **air quality regulations and smoke management standards** are growing areas of concern. As PM 2.5 thresholds become more stringent and as population growth increases pressure around the wildland-urban interface, practitioners are finding it increasingly difficult to conduct prescribed burns without triggering public health or regulatory pushbacks. Several states indicated that while they have long-standing burn cultures, they now face increased scrutiny or new limitations that complicate implementation.

Common Motivations for Certification

States that have developed, or are developing, CPBM programs emphasized a consistent set of motivations that make certification both valuable and necessary.

States are increasingly motivated by the need to **restore fire adapted ecosystems** and **mitigate wildfire risk**. Several states identified Fire Needs Assessments that highlighted a deficit of good fire on the landscape. In these regions CPBM programs are being positioned as tools to promote proactive fire management. Certification helps expand the pool of qualified burners and facilitates the implementation of prescribed fire as a restoration tool, risk reduction strategy, and helps states meet pace and scale goals.

Nearly all states identified the **clarification or change of liability standard for certified burners** as a primary motivator for CPBM participation. CPBM certification helps create a clearer legal framework, offering some assurance to individuals and organizations that they can conduct prescribed burns responsibly without facing undue legal risk, so long as they follow established protocols.

Another key motivation is the **desire to standardize the training and permitting processes** across diverse landowners and practitioners. By providing structured coursework, clear expectations, and documented competencies, CPBM programs help ensure that prescribed fire is being conducted in a safe, consistent, and ecologically informed manner.

Many states also reported that certification **increases the confidence and capability of private landowners** to engage in prescribed fire, which is essential for scaling-up burn activity at a landscape scale. In several programs, private landowners now make up a substantial portion of certified participants. Certification provides these individuals with not only clearer liability status, but also a greater access to training and a network of support.

Trends in Liability Standards and Legal Context

The legal environment surrounding prescribed burning varies significantly between states (Table 1). Legal environments are established by state statutes or through case law where the state has not developed a statute specifically related to open or prescribed burning. The standards that have emerged for prescribed fire are classified as strict liability, simple negligence, and gross negligence.

Strict liability is the most stringent standard for those using prescribed fire. Under this standard, a court can hold burners liable for any property damage caused by an escaped prescribed fire regardless of the action of the burner. In this situation a plaintiff may win a lawsuit against a burner simply by showing that the fire escaped, regardless of the burner's actions leading up to the escape. Simple negligence standards require the burner to practice reasonable care in applying a prescribed burn and require the plaintiff to show negligence by the burner to be liable for damages caused by the escaped prescribed fire. Finally, gross negligence states that if a burner follows a set of burning regulations (outlined in the statute), a plaintiff must show reckless disregard by the burner.

Most states with CPBM programs have **codified simple or gross negligence liability standards in statute** as part of their comprehensive prescribed fire statutory reform. These laws outline the conditions under which certified burners are protected from legal claims and have been instrumental in reducing the perceived legal risk associated with prescribed fire, particularly for private landowners and contractors. These conditions typically include completion of an approved certification course (CPBM), the development of a written burn plan, and the acquisition of a burn permit. These elements form the basis for demonstrating due diligence.

In some states without CPBM programs, unclear liability standards or those that are unfavorable to prescribed burning are a major barrier to implementing prescribed fire. Concerns about civil lawsuits, exposure to being held liable for either limited or actual suppression costs, insurance requirements, and the lack of a defined legal framework continue to discourage both individual burners and agencies from supporting certification efforts. Even among states developing programs, the need to clarify liability standards was cited as a top priority.

Another emerging trend is the development of **prescribed fire claims funds**. California established a $20 million pilot fund through SB 926 in 2022 and tied program eligibility to their CPBM program by requiring that the burn be managed by a state CPBM, a NWCG Burn Boss type 1 or 2, or a Cultural Fire Practitioner. Once a burn is registered in the claims fund system, a project is eligible for coverage up to $2 million. Oregon also established a claims fund in 2024 that is tied to state certification. More recently Colorado established a claims fund in 2025 through SB25-007 and like California, ties eligibility to the state's CPBM program. While the Colorado fund was established, it currently remains unfunded. Claims funds are emerging as an additional incentive to attain certification while also providing a measure of financial backstop for landowners and practitioners.

Shifts in Public Perception and Political Support

Programs that integrate outreach into their course structure or provide hands-on demonstrations noted success in converting curiosity or concern into active engagement. Several states indicated that increased awareness of wildfire risk has also contributed to shifting public opinion, with prescribed fire being reframed as a preventative strategy.

Some states, especially in the West, that have experienced recent and significant prescribed fire escapes like New Mexico did with the 2022 Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Fire mentioned experiencing setbacks in public perception. This led to burn ban bills being introduced at the state legislature and permitting challenges where some counties are very hesitant to permit prescribed burns or have outright bans in place. While the New Mexico Prescribed Fire Act of 2021 did require the state to standardize ignition permits across all counties, the state has not implemented that part of the statute and is still in the rule making phase. Colorado is an interesting example in that its CPBM program grew out of the 2012 Lower North Fork Fire which was a prescribed fire escape with tragic fatalities. Pressure to avoid conducting prescribed burns remains in Colorado in part because ignition permits are issued by county fire marshals. County fire marshal responsibilities are typically held as additional duties assigned to elected sheriffs. As an elected official, county sheriffs have little incentive to entertain risk and as a result, some counties are essentially in multi-year burn bans. While the political and social fallout from escapes are very real issues for practitioners, these examples also point to need for CPBM programs to be part of a functional prescribed burn system that creates a steady and clear environment for landowners and practitioners to operate within.

Political support, while growing nationally, often depends on the visibility of program benefits and the level of alignment with broader state goals, such as wildfire mitigation, habitat restoration, or agricultural resilience. National political support is evidenced by the National Prescribed Fire Act which has been introduced with bipartisan support several times in recent years. While this legislation is mostly focused on prescribed fire on public lands, the 2025 version indemnifies non-federal cooperators when burning on public lands and establishes a national prescribed fire education program. Both elements of this national legislation would support state programs who operate in multi-jurisdictional environments and with public perception and understanding. Where political will exists, it can drive the creation of new programs or the expansion of existing ones. Conversely, a lack of political interest or leadership remains a limiting factor in several states where CPBM program development has stalled, is part of an incomplete system, or has yet to begin.

Role of Climate and Wildfire Risk

Climate change and escalating wildfire risk are playing an increasingly prominent role in shaping state perspectives on prescribed fire and the implementation of CPBM programs. Across all three categories, states with programs, those developing them, and those without, interviewees referenced shifting environmental conditions as a central driver of both urgency and complexity in prescribed fire planning.

In states already experiencing longer fire seasons, increased fuel accumulation, or a rise in catastrophic wildfires, prescribed burning is increasingly being viewed as a necessary tool for landscape resilience and risk mitigation. For many of these states, CPBM programs provide a structured way to expand the number of trained individuals capable of conducting burns safely and effectively, thus enabling more proactive management of fire-adapted ecosystems. Interviewees often framed certification not as a luxury or secondary initiative, but as a critical part of adapting to a more fire-prone future.

At the same time, climate change is introducing new constraints on when and where prescribed fire can be applied. Interviewees described narrowing burn windows due to drought conditions, higher-than-normal wind events, and unpredictable shifts in seasonal weather patterns. These climate-related variables are increasing the need for flexibility in certification standards, training content, and permitting systems. In some cases, they are also forcing states to reconsider how they define "safe" or "ideal" burning conditions.

Several states indicated that concerns around wildfire risk have helped to galvanize public and political support for prescribed fire in recent years. Communities that may have previously been hesitant to allow burning are now more receptive when it is framed as a fire prevention strategy. This has been particularly true in wildland-urban interface zones, where the convergence of development and natural fuels has heightened interest in mitigation tools like CPBM programs.

Still, the integration of climate risk into CPBM planning is uneven. While some states are actively adapting their programs to reflect these realities, through updated course materials, smoke modeling tools, or partnerships with climate science agencies, others are just beginning to explore how to incorporate climate resilience into their certification structures. As the effects of climate change continue to intensify, the need for CPBM programs to be climate-responsive will only grow.

Regional Themes

While state-specific dynamics shape the development and implementation of CPBM programs, distinct regional patterns also emerged. These patterns reflect shared ecological conditions, fire histories, administrative structures, and institutional relationships.

The **Southeast** remains the national leader in CPBM program implementation. Nearly all states in the region have active programs supported by formal legislation, long burn seasons, and a strong cultural acceptance of fire. The CPBM program in Florida for example has been operating for decades and is widely viewed as a model with well-established training requirements, legal protections, and a clear permitting system. This program has helped institutionalize prescribed fire at all levels of land management.

Given the similarities in ecological systems, burn objectives, and fire culture across much of the Southeast, several respondents suggested sharing course materials and recognizing other state's training programs. A common curriculum with standardized content on fire ecology, weather, smoke management, and safety could be adapted for use across multiple states, with state-specific modules addressing local permitting processes, legal requirements, and liability statutes.

While strong overall, Southeastern programs still face challenges in keeping up with demand, addressing staff capacity, and modernizing content delivery. Nonetheless, the region demonstrates how prescribed fire, when supported by legislation and cultural acceptance, can be safely and widely implemented at scale.

The **Great Plains** states offer another approach, one shaped by strong cultural traditions of fire in rangeland and prairie management. Many of these states do not have CPBM programs and did not express interest in establishing one during our interviews. These states, which either have a simple negligence liability standard, in statute or through case law, have active prescribed burn associations and local networks that coordinate burns through informal planning, neighbor-to-neighbor support, and seasonal burn cooperatives. In many areas, permits are issued by county

authorities or fire districts with relatively few restrictions. While state laws provide some guidance, much of the on-the-ground implementation is shaped by community norms and local trust. In these contexts, burning is often passed down through generations or managed through cooperative agreements among neighbors. Some interviewees in these areas expressed concerns that introducing CPBM certification could interfere with these trusted systems or impose unnecessary bureaucracy on landowners who already burn responsibly.

States across the **West** have experienced several years of severe wildfires and face pressure to address the crisis including expanding the safe use of prescribed fire. States such as California, Oregon, and New Mexico have developed or are expanding CPBM programs with strong support from state legislatures and public pressure to seek ways to mitigate the risk of wildfires.

Air quality regulation and smoke management remain significant challenges in the West. PM2.5 thresholds, red flag warnings, and narrow burn windows frequently delay or cancel planned burns. These constraints have prompted interest in certification structures that include training on smoke modeling, contingency planning, and interagency coordination.

Because of the predominance of federal and tribal land in the West, coordination is essential. Many Western states are already developing reciprocity agreements and shared burn protocols in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and tribal nations. There is also growing interest in creating Western regional working groups to align certification frameworks, share training tools, and support cross-jurisdictional prescribed fire teams.

Great Lakes and **Northeastern** states did not feature as many consistent trends. Many of these states indicated they are in the process of rebuilding a prescribed fire culture and CPBM programs either are, or will be, a key part of that shift.

Recommendations

Several key recommendations emerged from our interviews and analysis. These are organized by states with existing CPBM programs, those in the process of developing programs, and those considering future development, and conclude with opportunities for broader national coordination. It is important to note that a CPBM program is not the only pathway to safe and effective burning in a state, and other models have been successfully established and maintained in areas like the Great Plains.

For States with Existing Programs

States with active CPBM programs are encouraged to **modernize course delivery** by incorporating hybrid learning models that combine online modules with in-person field components. This approach can increase accessibility for rural participants and working professionals. Additionally, states should explore **flexible continuing education formats**, such as topic-specific training sessions or online modules, that allow participants to meet recertification requirements without committing to full-length courses.

To serve a wider audience, states should consider implementing **tiered or flexible certification models**. These can be more costly to maintain but include entry-level certifications for private landowners and advanced training for contractors or agency personnel. **Recognizing prior experience or existing credentials** (e.g., NWCG qualifications or reciprocity from other states) can also prevent unnecessary redundancy for seasoned practitioners.

Updating program content is another critical need. States should integrate evolving information on smoke management, air quality regulations, and climate adaptation into their curricula. There is also growing interest in including content on cultural burning, community-led fire, and collaboration with tribal nations.

States should **expand their training capacity** in areas where demand out paces available trainings. This could include investing in more instructors, establishing regional partnerships, or adopting train-the-trainer models. Equity of access should be a guiding principle, with efforts made to reduce barriers for landowners, small organizations, and historically excluded communities.

States should strengthen how they **evaluate CPBM program effectiveness**. Tracking the number of certified individuals, acres treated, participant satisfaction, and other metrics can help inform improvements and demonstrate the program's value to funders and policymakers.

Finally, states with existing programs should look at how their CPBM program operates as part of a whole prescribed fire ecosystem and evaluate what could be done to improve the system and further incentivize the practice. This may include updating and expanding the CPBM program, addressing permitting challenges, addressing liability in statute, or establishing a liability claims fund.

For States Developing Programs

States in the process of designing CPBM programs should prioritize early and inclusive **stakeholder engagement**. Advisory groups should represent a wide range of voices, including landowners, NGOs, fire professionals, tribal representatives, and agency staff. This collaborative approach can identify shared goals and minimize resistance to new policies. This process can also be critical in **identifying the state agency or department that will house the program.** There are often several agencies or departments with a role in fire (forestry, agriculture, ecosystem services), but one agency or department will ultimately be responsible for certifying and tracking burners.

Developing states are encouraged to **adapt existing CPBM models** from peer states like Arkansas, Oregon, or Florida rather than building from scratch. Many states already offer relevant training through extension programs or nonprofit-led workshops, which could be formalized into certification tracks with relatively little adjustment.

Clarifying legal and liability frameworks is essential. States should work with legal experts to understand their current standards and identify opportunities for reform. Where appropriate, legislation should be pursued to provide civil liability protection to certified burners and remove potential disincentives for participation.

Keep legislation **descriptive rather than prescriptive** to allow programs to grow and evolve and avoid costly and difficult repeated legislative updates.

To help build the pool of certified burn managers, plan to **recognize certifications** from other states, NWCG trainings related to the burn tier, and recognition of prior fire (wildfire, prescribed, or cultural fire) experience. This would alleviate the challenge of finding certified burners to train or mentor others.

To manage risk and build momentum, states may benefit from launching pilot programs or phased rollouts. Starting small, regionally or voluntarily, can help refine training content and administrative procedures before committing to full-scale implementation.

Cross-state collaboration is also highly encouraged. Neighboring states can share needs, align expectations, and pursue regional reciprocity agreements. Participation in regional working groups can offer real-time insights from more experienced states and accelerate program development.

For States Considering Future Development

For states without CPBM programs, the first step is to conduct a thorough **needs assessment**. Surveys or interviews with landowners, agencies, and practitioners can help determine whether there is demand for certification, current access to training, and specific barriers that would need to be addressed. This needs assessment may reveal the region does not require a CPBM program.

Many of these states already have valuable training infrastructure in place, including university extension programs, prescribed burn associations, and conservation NGOs. States should consider how a **CPBM program could help enhance or support these existing workshops** and determine if a pathway is needed to formalize training opportunities so they can become recognized with policy and legal frameworks.

Addressing liability is another priority. States should **evaluate their current statutes and, where needed, pursue reforms that offer civil protections** to trained, permitted burners—drawing on examples from Arkansas, Alabama, or North Carolina.

Certification efforts should be framed as supportive and empowering, not exclusionary. Messaging should focus on expanding access to training, increasing confidence, and reducing legal uncertainty, especially for private landowners and local practitioners who currently operate without formal recognition.

Lastly, these states should seek technical assistance and peer mentorship if they choose to develop a CPBM program. States with active programs can offer templates, sample legislation, and advice, while national grant programs can provide start-up resources focused on wildfire risk reduction and fire resilience.

Opportunities for Collaboration and Standardization

While CPBM programs must reflect state-specific laws, landscapes, and agency structures, there are strong opportunities for regional collaboration and standardization, particularly among states with similar ecological conditions, burn cultures, and management challenges. States within the same region often face similar prescribed fire conditions, such as vegetation types, seasonal weather patterns, smoke concerns, and landownership structures. These shared contexts create a strong foundation for developing regional curricula, shared outreach materials, and aligned certification tracks. For example, Southern states could collaborate on a common base training with modular add-ons tailored to each state's legal statutes or permitting systems. Likewise, Great Plains states may benefit from sharing the successful non-CPBM models being used by local burn associations and agricultural stewards.

Developing regional reciprocity agreements, where **states mutually recognize each other's certification programs**, could help practitioners work across borders and enable more efficient collaboration during training and implementation. This is especially valuable in regions where

burn practitioners regularly operate in multiple states or where large landscapes span jurisdictional lines. The wildfire workforce regularly moves across the country and models that allow prescribed fire professionals to do the same can help increase pace and scale of implementation.

Regional working groups or learning networks would further enhance these efforts by facilitating ongoing dialogue between state leads, enabling peer mentoring, and reducing the burden of program development for emerging or under-resourced states. Additionally, regional collaboration and coordination may further the expansion of liability claims funds as it can be difficult for states to shoulder the financial burden of establishing a claims fund on their own.

Funding, Training, and Tracking

Implementing or expanding CPBM programs requires careful planning in three critical areas: funding, training delivery, and program tracking. While many states have found creative ways to support their programs with limited resources, interview responses highlighted persistent challenges and emerging best practices that should be considered across regions.

Funding

Sustainable funding remains one of the most consistent barriers to CPBM program development, expansion, and modernization. States with established programs often rely on a mix of state budget allocations, federal grants, registration fees, and in-kind staff support. However, these sources are rarely consistent year-to-year and may not scale with rising demand.

Emerging and under-resourced programs would benefit from dedicated seed funding, especially to support curriculum development, pilot courses, instructor training, and initial program coordination. In some cases, federal wildfire mitigation or climate resilience grants may be leveraged to support CPBM work, especially when tied to goals like workforce development or private landowner engagement.

Regional partnerships may also offer funding efficiencies. States with shared ecological conditions could jointly apply for regional implementation funds or collaborate on cross-state projects that align with federal priorities.

Training Delivery

Training structures must be designed to meet diverse audience needs, from professional fire staff to private landowners and conservation volunteers. Programs that succeed in expanding access often use multiple formats: online pre-course work, classroom instruction, in-person field days, and seasonal refresher offerings.

States should consider investing in:

- **Hybrid or modular training platforms** to accommodate remote participants and reduce travel costs.
- **Train-the-trainer programs** to scale up instructor capacity across multiple regions within a state.
- **Regional training partnerships**, such as prescribed burn associations, universities, tribal colleges, or conservation NGOs, to help deliver content locally and more frequently.
- **Develop solid instructor pools**. Adapt legislation or regulation to expand instructors legally able to deliver the course.

Training content should remain adaptable over time, with updates that reflect emerging challenges like smoke modeling, drought constraints, climate science, and new technologies for fire planning and documentation.

Tracking Metrics and Evaluation

There is typically limited funding tied to tracking CPBM outcomes and very few programs currently collect robust, standardized, evaluation data. Where metrics are used, they typically include:

- Number of certified participants
- Acres burned under certified supervision
- Frequency and location of course offerings
- Participant satisfaction or feedback

To improve accountability and support program refinement, states should develop consistent tracking systems, ideally digital platforms, for enrollment, certification status, recertification needs, and burn activity reporting. These systems can also support coordination with permitting authorities and improve statewide visibility into prescribed fire use.

At a regional or national level, developing a shared metrics framework would allow states to benchmark progress, justify program funding, and advocate for broader investment in prescribed fire capacity.

Next Steps

Twenty-four states now operate formal CPBM programs, many of which are well-established, supported by enabling legislation, and adapted to meet regional fire needs. These programs have helped to standardize training, clarify liability for practitioners, and build confidence among landowners and communities. Three additional states are actively developing programs, demonstrating growing momentum and demand. These states are navigating legal, political, and funding challenges, but many are leveraging cross-sector coalitions and peer-state models to move forward.

Not all states need or want CPBM programs but nearly all interviewees from states without CPBM programs expressed openness to certification if key concerns, especially around increased liability standards and access to training can be addressed.

Future Direction for CPBM Efforts

Looking ahead, the future of CPBM programs will require both state-level innovation and regional collaboration. States with mature programs are increasingly turning their attention to accessibility, flexibility, and climate resilience. Hybrid training formats, tiered certification models, and updated curricula will be essential to reach a broader audience and adapt to shifting fire regimes.

At the same time, states developing or exploring CPBM programs can design systems that are scalable, inclusive, and responsive to local burn cultures. The development of a state statute template could help align statutes around this issue. By focusing on liability reform, pilot programs, and stakeholder-led design, these states can accelerate progress while avoiding common pitfalls.

CPBM programs are not applicable everywhere and, in some states, they may not be wanted or useful.

Regionally, there is strong potential to align training content, build reciprocal recognition agreements, and share resources across state lines. This regional approach offers opportunity to harmonize standards while respecting differences in state law, ecology, and capacity.

Areas for Further Research

Several areas of inquiry emerged during this research that warrant further exploration:

- **Liability Framework Analysis**: A comparative study of state prescribed fire liability laws could help identify best practices, support policy reform, and guide legislative language for states seeking to offer protection for certified burners.
- **Statute Templates**: The development of a state statute template could help align statutes around this issue.
- **Training Effectiveness and Accessibility**: Research is needed to evaluate how different training formats—online, in-person, hybrid—impact participant outcomes, long-term retention, and application in the field. This includes understanding how training delivery affects equity and inclusion.
- **Certification Outcomes and Burn Activity**: More robust tracking of CPBM-certified burners, including acres treated, burn types, and post-certification activity levels, would help quantify program impact and identify gaps in training or support.
- **Public Perception and Messaging**: Understanding how certification affects public perception of prescribed fire—and how certification programs can be used as a tool for community education—would strengthen outreach and legitimacy.
- **Cross-Jurisdictional Collaboration**: There is an opportunity to explore models for regional working groups, reciprocity agreements, and shared infrastructure that could streamline CPBM adoption and maintenance across states with similar fire regimes.

Next steps should include supporting ongoing dialogue among states at all stages of implementation, prioritizing technical assistance for under-resourced or developing programs, and identifying funding pathways that enable pilot testing, innovation, and expansion. As wildfire risk increases and land stewardship needs evolve, CPBM programs represent a scalable, adaptive solution.

Appendix I: State by State Legislation and Liability Summary

Table 1. Prescribed burning acts or statues and liability standards across all 50 states. Based on information gathered during interviews and augmented by online searches. Contact each state for specific information about these programs and liability standards.

State	Certified Program(s)	Statute or Regulation Citation(s)	Baseline Liability Standard	Conditional Liability Standard	Conditions Required for Conditional Liability Standard	Other Relevant Notes
Alabama	Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program	Ala. Code §§ 9-13-270 – 9-13-274	Simple negligence	Gross negligence	Certification, burn plan, burn permit, compliance with state laws and smoke rules, no obvious negligence	Certified manager not required for all burns
Alaska	No formal certification program	Alaska Stat. §§ 41.15.010–41.15.170	Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Escape of fire is presumptive negligence with potential double damages
Arizona	No formal certification program	Ariz. Admin. Code R18-2-1505	Undefined / Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Daily burn authorization required
Arkansas	Qualified Prescribed Burner Program	Ark. Code Ann. §§ 15-30-101 – 15-30-107	Simple negligence	Gross negligence	Qualified prescribed burner, written prescription, on-site supervision, notification, compliance with burn plan	Provides liability protection when statutory requirements are met; burns in compliance are not a nuisance
California	Certified Burner Program	Cal. Pub. Res. Code §§ 4475–4483	Simple negligence	Gross negligence	Certified Burn Boss, burn plan, permits, compliance with smoke rules, on-site supervision	SB 332 provides gross-negligence protection for certified burn bosses
Colorado	Prescribed Burn Manager Certification Program	C.R.S. §24-33.5-1217	Undefined / Simple negligence	Gross negligence	Certification, good-faith conduct, compliance with state/local burning requirements	Certified burners on their own land have gross-negligence protection

Table 1. Continued

State	Certified Program(s)	Statute or Regulation Citation(s)	Baseline Liability Standard	Conditional Liability Standard	Conditions Required for Conditional Liability Standard	Other Relevant Notes
Connecticut	No formal certification program	Conn. Gen. Stat. § 52-559	Undefined / Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Air quality and forest-fire restrictions apply
Delaware	No formal certification program	Del. Admin. Code 1113	Strict liability	N/A	N/A	Burn permits required; notification required
Florida	Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program	Fla. Stat. §590.125	Simple negligence	Gross negligence	Certification, burn plan, authorization, compliance with FL Forest Service rules	Certified burns deemed not a nuisance; smoldering alone not gross negligence
Georgia	Certified Burner Program	O.C.G.A. §12-6-145 - 149	Simple negligence	Gross negligence	Permit, qualified person in charge, on-site supervision, compliance with state rules. Gross negligence only applies if the burn is permitted for community protection, silvicultural, environmental, and/or wildlife management purposes.	Prescribed fire deemed public interest
Hawaii	No formal certification program	HI Rev Stat § 185-7	Strict liability	N/A	N/A	Burn permits required during fire danger periods
Idaho	No formal certification program	Idaho Code §38-115	Strict liability	N/A	N/A	Burn permits required during closed fire season
Illinois	Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program	525 ILCS 37	Undefined / Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Nuisance protection when compliant

Table 1. Continued

State	Certified Program(s)	Statute or Regulation Citation(s)	Baseline Liability Standard	Conditional Liability Standard	Conditions Required for Conditional Liability Standard	Other Relevant Notes
Indiana	Certification program in development	IC 14-23-6.6	Undefined / Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Fire and smoke not a nuisance; local regulation limits
Iowa	No formal certification program	Iowa DNR Fire Policy	Undefined / Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Burn permits required; air quality rules apply
Kansas	No formal certification program	K.A.R. §28-19-648	Undefined / Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Notification to local fire authority required; traffic and airport safety protections
Kentucky	Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program	401 KAR 63:005	Simple negligence	Gross negligence	Burn plan, authorization/permit, compliance with KDF rules, qualified supervision	Burn permits required; air quality and seasonal restrictions apply
Louisiana	Certified Prescribed Burner Program	La. R.S. §3:17 et seq.	Simple negligence	Gross negligence	Certification, written burn authorization, compliance with burn plan, weather and smoke guidelines	Prescribed burning deemed a property right
Maine	No formal certification program	12 MRS §9325	Undefined / Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Burn permits required; burns may not create a nuisance
Maryland	No formal certification program	Md. Code, NR §5–209	Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Burn permit required; burning bans possible
Massachusetts	No formal certification program	MGL c.48 §13	Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Burn permits required; local fire authority approval; suppression costs recoverable

Table 1. Continued

State	Certified Program(s)	Statute or Regulation Citation(s)	Baseline Liability Standard	Conditional Liability Standard	Conditions Required for Conditional Liability Standard	Other Relevant Notes
Michigan	Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program	MCL §324.51501 et seq.	Simple negligence	Gross negligence	Certification, written burn plan, DNR permit, compliance with plan and DNR rules	Burn permit required; smoke management and air quality rules apply
Minnesota	No formal certification program	Minn. Stat. §88.16	Strict liability	N/A	N/A	Permits required; failure to report creates prima facie negligence
Mississippi	Mississippi Prescribed Burning Short Course	Miss. Code §49-19-307	Simple negligence	Simple negligence (statutorily reaffirmed)	Certification; written prescription; burn permit; compliance with MFC rules and air quality laws	Burns declared in the public interest; nuisance claims limited
Missouri	Prescribed Burning for Missouri Land Managers	RSMo §537.354	Undefined / Simple negligence	Simple negligence (explicit statutory immunity from strict liability)	Approved burn plan; MDC-approved certification (for burn manager); compliance with plan	Immunity does not apply to damages involving utilities or railroads; smoke included in liability protections
Montana	Certification program in development	HB 84, 2025	Undefined / Simple negligence	Simple negligence	Certification; burn plan; permit; compliance with DNRC rules	Permit required; claims fund created but contingent on appropriation
Nebraska	No formal certification program	Neb. Rev. Stat. §81-520.05	Undefined / Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Burn permit and written burn plan required; local fire chief approval
Nevada	No formal certification program	NRS §527.126	Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Government-authorized prescribed fires receive gross-negligence protection
New Hampshire	No formal certification program	RSA 227-L:17-L:26	Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Burn permits required; escaped fires subject to suppression cost recovery

Table 1. Continued

State	Certified Program(s)	Statute or Regulation Citation(s)	Baseline Liability Standard	Conditional Liability Standard	Conditions Required for Conditional Liability Standard	Other Relevant Notes
New Jersey	Certification program in development	N.J.S.A. 13:9-44.21 (Act)	Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Compliance w/ a Burn Plan, the Act, and a DEP authorization are required; state and employees immune when acting in good faith
New Mexico	New Mexico Certified Burn Manager Program	N.M. Stat. Ann. §§ 68-5-1 – 68-5-8	Undefined / Simple negligence	Simple negligence (lower damages)	Certification; burn planning; notification; weather compliance	Nuisance protection; double damages for uncertified burners
New York	No formal certification program	6 NYCRR Part 194	Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Permit and reporting requirements
North Carolina	North Carolina Certified Burner Program	N.C. Gen. Stat. §§ 106-955 – 106-968	Simple negligence	Gross negligence	Certified prescribed burner; written prescription; permit obtained; compliance with air quality, smoke management, and Forest Service rules	Civil immunity if compliant; nuisance immunity; public utility damage excluded
North Dakota	No formal certification program	N.D. Cent. Code. § 18-08	Undefined / Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Liability for escaped fires and suppression costs
Ohio	The Ohio Certified Fire Manager Program	OAC 1501:3-13-01	Undefined / Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Certification allows burn-time waivers
Oklahoma	No formal certification program	2 Okla. Stat. §§ 16-24.1, 16-28.1, 16-28.2	Simple negligence	Simple negligence (limited liability)	Notification/approval; continuous supervision; confinement to property	Limited-liability framework applies only in protection areas; criminal penalties for careless or willful violations

Table 1. Continued

State	Certified Program(s)	Statute or Regulation Citation(s)	Baseline Liability Standard	Conditional Liability Standard	Conditions Required for Conditional Liability Standard	Other Relevant Notes
Oregon	Certified Burn Manager in Oregon	OAR 629-042-1000 to 629-042-1070	Simple negligence	Gross negligence	Burn conducted or supervised by a Certified Burn Manager; approved prescribed burn plan; compliance with applicable permits and rules	CBM not required for all prescribed burning
Pennsylvania	Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program Pennsylvania	Act of July 14, 2009, P.L. 76, No. 17	Simple negligence	Gross negligence	Certification, written burn plan, burn boss on-site, compliance with standards	Burn deemed public interest
Rhode Island	No formal certification program	R.I. Gen. Laws §2-12-6	Strict liability	N/A	N/A	Written burn plan required
South Carolina	South Carolina Certified Prescribed Fire Manager	S.C. Code §48-34	Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Conditional liability for smoke only
South Dakota	No formal certification program	SDCL §34-35-16	Undefined / Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Statute applies only within Black Hills Forest Fire Protection District; no statewide prescribed fire statute
Tennessee	Tennessee Certified Prescribed Burn Manager	T.C.A. §§ 11-4-1001 et seq	Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Certification required to conduct burns

Table 1. Continued

State	Certified Program(s)	Statute or Regulation Citation(s)	Baseline Liability Standard	Conditional Liability Standard	Conditions Required for Conditional Liability Standard	Other Relevant Notes
Texas	Certified and Insured Prescribed Burn Manager	Texas Natural Resource Code 153	Simple negligence	Gross negligence	Certification; written prescription; insurance minimums	Gross negligence or intentional acts excluded
Utah	No formal certification program	Utah Code §19-2a-105	Undefined / Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Burn plan submission required for large prescribed fires and pile burns.
Vermont	No formal certification program	10 V.S.A. §2645	Undefined / Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Permits required
Virginia	Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Course	Va. Code Ann. §§ 10.1-1150.1 – 10.1-1150.6	Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Certification provides nuisance and smoke liability protection only
Washington	Certified Burn Manager Program	RCW 76.04.183 HB 2733 (2018)	Simple negligence	Gross negligence	Certification, burn conducted under RCW 76.04 requirements, compliance with permit terms, no willful or wanton misconduct.	Certification not required for burn permits
West Virginia	No formal certification program	W. Va. Code §20-3-5	Undefined / Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Burning restricted by season and time of day
Wisconsin	Certification program in development	Wis. Stat. §§ 26.11–26.14, 26.21	Strict liability	N/A	N/A	Liability for costs of slash removal and suppression
Wyoming	No formal certification program	W.S. § 6-3-105 - 106	Undefined / Simple negligence	N/A	N/A	Statutes address criminal liability for negligent burning and failure to extinguish or contain fire

Appendix II: State Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program Summaries

Table 2. This table provides a summary of the 24* U.S. states that currently operate formal CPBM programs. Each entry includes key details such as program name, year of establishment, target audience, certification requirements, annual course offerings, notable features, and whether the state expressed interest in certification reciprocity. *Note Indiana and Wisconsin launched their programs during the writing and review of this report. As these programs were still in development during the survey period, they were not included in the summary of state programs earlier in the report, but they were included in this table.

State	Program Name	Year Est.	Target Audience	Certification Requirements	Courses/ Participants per Year	Unique Features & Challenges	Reciprocity Interest
Alabama	Certified Prescribed Burn Manager (CPBM) Program	1996	Private landowners, agency personnel, and natural resource professionals	32-hour course, written burn plan, test (no live burn)	Three regional courses annually; high demand	Emphasis on accessibility and landowner autonomy; codified structure limits flexibility	Yes
Arkansas	Qualified Prescribed Burner Program	2023	Private landowners, agency staff, contractors	Two-day course, live burn, exam, burn plan	25 courses in year one; high demand	Strong legislative backing; securing stable funding	Yes
California	Certified Burner Program	2020	Private landowners, tribal members, conservation staff	40-hour training course, burn plan, live burn	Three courses per year; high demand	Includes cultural burning; limited instructor availability	Unsure, leaning yes; discussions underway but program too new and California-specific
Colorado	Prescribed Burn Manager Certification Program	2014	Landowners, conservation professionals, agency staff	Burner B: Multi-day course, test, burn plans, supervised burns. Burner A: current/former NWCG RXB2 references, state course, and test	Four classes per year; high demand	Focus on operational complexity; permitting challenges	Yes

Table 2. Continued

State	Program Name	Year Est.	Target Audience	Certification Requirements	Courses/ Participants per Year	Unique Features & Challenges	Reciprocity Interest
Florida	Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program	1985	Private landowners, agency staff, contractors	Four-day training, burn plan, test, completion of three burns, final check-off burn	Seven to twelve courses statewide per year; high demand	Integrated tracking; rural accessibility remains a challenge	Not at this time
Georgia	Certified Burner Program	1992	Landowners, contractors, conservation staff	Two-day course, pass exam, five documented burns as the burn boss, and 2 years of experience. Test does not have to be before experience.	Seven to eight courses per year; high demand	Emphasis on smoke management; limited instructors	Not beyond what is currently established
Illinois	Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program	2007	Landowners, contractors, agency and nonprofit staff	NWCG FFT2 coursework and field day, five burns, apprenticeship, letter of recommendation	Five to six field days per year; meeting demand	Restoration-focused; limited mentorship for new burners	Yes
Indiana	Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program	2025	Landowners, contractors, conservation staff	NWCG FFT2 (no pack test), Indiana DNR Rx Fire for Managers Course (2-day course), completion of 5 burns across timber litter and grass fuels, 2 of which are apprentice burns.	1-2 courses, TBD on participants	Finding interest for the new certification	Not currently as the program is new
Kentucky	Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program	2016	Landowners, agency staff, nonprofit conservationists	FFT2 qualifications, 5 prescribed burns, three day training course, task book completion	One course per year; meeting demand	Mentored apprenticeship; unclear liability standards	Yes
Louisiana	Certified Prescribed Burner Program	1993	Landowners, consultants, forestry contractors	Training course, test, lead 5 burns	Three courses per year or more depending on demand	Strong support from state; lack of consistency in trainings	Unsure

Table 2. Continued

State	Program Name	Year Est.	Target Audience	Certification Requirements	Courses/ Participants per Year	Unique Features & Challenges	Reciprocity Interest
Michigan	Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program	2004 (imple mented 2025)	Agency staff, nonprofits, landowners	Training course, burn plan, exam, and live fire experience	Intend to hold at least three courses per year	Ecological emphasis; limited reach to small landowners	Yes
Missouri	Prescribed Burning for Missouri Land Managers	2021	Landowners, restoration professionals, agency staff	Online course, one-day field training course, live burn included when conditions permit	Amount of field days per year vary based on demand	Online course offered on-demand; burn insurance is difficult to acquire	Yes
Mississippi	Mississippi Prescribed Burning Short Course	1992	Landowners, forestry consultants, contractors	One- or 2 ½-day course, burn plan exercise, exam(s), small live fire demo for 2 ½-day course	Typically six to seven courses per year; meeting demand	Multiple training tiers; limited ability to demonstrate live fire	Yes
North Carolina	North Carolina Certified Burner Program	1999	Landowners, agency and conservation staff	Training course, written exam, burn plan, no live burn required as part of course but must execute a burn after completing coursework	Two classes per year, each followed by a field day hosted at multiple locations; high demand	Hybrid training model with field days across state; rapid urbanization causing increase in smoke management areas	Not specified

Table 2. Continued

State	Program Name	Year Est.	Target Audience	Certification Requirements	Courses/ Participants per Year	Unique Features & Challenges	Reciprocity Interest
New Mexico	New Mexico Certified Burn Manager Program	2021	Landowners, tribal stewards, conservation staff	Pile burning: S-110, nine-element training, proficiency workbook, application to committee; waiver and reciprocity options require legal requirements/smoke management/permitting; letters of support accepted for proficiency waiver. Broadcast burning: nine-element training, S-190/290, burn plan course, proficiency workbook, application; waiver allowed with RXB1/2 plus three elements; reciprocity with approved states plus three elements.	Varies based on demand; unsure if meeting demand	Multiple certification pathways; limited field training due to anti-donation and suppression-only restrictions	Yes
Ohio	The Ohio Certified Fire Manager Program	2001	Agency staff, nonprofits, and conservation staff	Multi-day course, professional experience on live burns. Live burn as part of the class is optional.	One class every other year; typically meeting demand	Strong conservation ties; fewer private landowner options	Unsure but willing to explore
Oregon	Certified Burn Manager in Oregon	2022	Landowners, nonprofit staff, PBAs, contractors, conservation staff	Three-day (24-hour) training, field book, completion of three burns with a certified mentor, documentation of all task elements	Three to four classes per year; somewhat meeting demand	Inclusive design; legal and smoke policy in flux	Yes

Table 2. Continued

State	Program Name	Year Est.	Target Audience	Certification Requirements	Courses/ Participants per Year	Unique Features & Challenges	Reciprocity Interest
Pennsylvania	Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Program Pennsylvania	2024	Landowners, conservation staff, contractors	FFT2 prerequisites (S-130/190, L-180, I-100, I-700), five burns prior, 24-hour course (2 days in-person + 8 hrs online), optional burn plan workshop, two mentored burns with checklist, three-year window	One class per year; currently meeting demand	Certification review board shared between the agency and the Prescribed Fire Council; limited staff capacity and insurance barriers slow participant progress	Case by case basis
South Carolina	South Carolina Certified Prescribed Fire Manager	1992	Landowners	One-day course with eight hours of pre-work, exam, five verified burns (no legal protection until burns completed), no live burn included in class	Minimum of four classes per year; meeting demand by adding more classes as needed	Coursework focuses on smoke management and regulatory compliance; program needs updated technology for ease of delivery	Yes
Tennessee	Tennessee Certified Burn Manager	2018	Landowners, conservation staff, agency staff	Computer-based modules with required tests; two-day in-person class with final exam; group field exercise involving planning a burn; live burn optional.	Two classes per year; slightly more interest than capacity	Course includes field-based burn planning; weather and staffing limit live-burn opportunities	Possibly

Table 2. Continued

State	Program Name	Year Est.	Target Audience	Certification Requirements	Courses/ Participants per Year	Unique Features & Challenges	Reciprocity Interest
Texas	Certified and Insured Prescribed Burn Manager	Late 90's/ early 2000's	Landowners, contractors	24-hour course (3–4 days, hybrid or in-person), live-fire evaluation, 80-question exam, 30 days burn experience over 3+ years, 5 days as responsible burner with burn plan submissions, $1M liability insurance	Multiple courses per year; meeting demand	Hybrid certification pathway; liability law changes and insurance instability are reducing the number of people pursuing full certification; new 2025 burn manager self-insurance pool still being developed	Not specified
Virginia	Certified Prescribed Burn Manager Course	1999	Landowners, state agency staff, contractors	Self-paced 12-hour online course with quizzes and final exam; no prerequisites for landowners; DOF staff must complete a task book and burn-plan experience before the course; no live burn required	One course per year; more interest than capacity	Self-paced coursework; High applicant volume and the need to split private landowners and practitioners into separate course tracks.	No
Washington	Certified Burn Manager Program	2022	Landowners, conservation staff, contractors, tribal stewards	Two-day classroom course + one field day; 4 hours pre-work videos; written exam; completion of one successful evaluation burn using a burn plan (no live burn demo required).	Two courses per year; meeting demand, but demand rising	Incorporation of cultural burners into the program; administering reciprocity and prior-experience pathways is challenging due to internal agency processes	Yes

Table 2. Continued

State	Program Name	Year Est.	Target Audience	Certification Requirements	Courses/ Participants per Year	Unique Features & Challenges	Reciprocity Interest
Wisconsin	Certified Burn Boss Program	2025	Practitioners who burn multiple parcels in multiple locations within a year (Contractors, NGOs, some landowners)	Four training pathways a) NWCG, b) Wisconsin standard, c) university course work, and d) certification through other states. Participants can also mix courses from each pathway.	TBD, new program	This program has preceded legislation, with the intent to provide proof of concept and do legislation later. The program is jointly administered by the WI DNR and WI Prescribed Fire Council.	Yes

Appendix III: Interview Participants

This report would not have been possible without the following experts who provided invaluable insights into the best practices and lessons learned for certified prescribed burn manager programs. We are grateful for their time and contributions.

State	Interview Participant	Organization
Alabama	Richard Fields	Alabama Forestry Commission
Alaska	We were unable to find anyone willing to be interviewed in this state.	
Arizona	Neil Chapman	Flagstaff Fire Department
Arkansas	Emily Roberts	Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
California	Len Nielson	Cal Fire
Colorado	Kirk Will	Fire Adapted Colorado
Connecticut	Thomas Trask	Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection
Delaware	Sam Topper	Delaware Department of Agriculture
Florida	Barry Coulliette	Alachua Conservation Trust
Georgia	Ken Parker	Georgia Forestry Commission
Hawaii	We were unable to find anyone willing to be interviewed in this state.	
Idaho	Heather Heward	Idaho Prescribed Fire Council
Illinois	Ben Snyder	Illinois Division of Forestry Resources
Indiana	Jarred Brooke	Purdue University, Department of Forestry and Natural Resources
Iowa	Jason Walker	Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Kansas	Dennis Carlson	Kansas Forest Service
Kentucky	Cody Rhoden	Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources
Louisiana	Matthew Polk	Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry
	Epney Brasher	
Maine	Rob Gross	Maine Forest Service
Maryland	Chase McLean	The Nature Conservancy
Massachusetts	Dave Celino	Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
Michigan	Grace Anna Cooper	Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Minnesota	Lane Johnson	University of Minnesota Cloquet Forestry Center
Mississippi	Allen Stroud	Mississippi Forestry Commission

State	Interview Participant	Organization
Missouri	Ben Webster	Missouri Department of Conservation
Montana	Jack Rinck	Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Nebraska	Brian Teeter	Nebraska Pheasants Forever
Nevada	We were unable to find anyone willing to be interviewed in this state.	
New Hampshire	Chris O'Brien	New Hampshire Forest and Lands
New Jersey	Jeremy Webber	New Jersey Forest Service
New Mexico	Brian Filip	New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department
New York	Polly Weigand	Forest Stewards Guild
North Carolina	Phillip Wallace	North Carolina Forest Service
North Dakota	We were unable to find anyone willing to be interviewed in this state.	
Ohio	Tom Shuman	Ohio Department of Natural Resources
Oklahoma	Christian Hayes	Oklahoma Forestry Services
Oregon	Amanda Rau	Oregon Department of Forestry
Pennsylvania	Todd Breininger	Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Rhode Island	Patrick MacMeekin	Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
South Carolina	Darryl Jones	South Carolina Forestry Commission
South Dakota	We were unable to find anyone willing to be interviewed in this state.	
Tennessee	Michael McCord	Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency
Texas	William "Andy" McCrady	Texas A&M Forest Service
Utah	We were unable to find anyone willing to be interviewed in this state.	
Vermont	Dan Dillner	Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation
Virginia	Michael Downey	Virginia Department of Forestry
Washington	Kyle Lapham	Washington Department of Natural Resources
West Virginia	Thomas Fielden	West Virginia Prescribed Fire Council
	Will Evans	The Nature Conservancy
Wisconsin	Jeb Barzen	Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council
Wyoming	We were unable to find anyone willing to be interviewed in this state.	

Appendix IV: Interview Questions

States with CPBM Programs

Purpose: To assess program effectiveness, updates, challenges, and recommendations for improvement.

Section 1: General Information

1. State/Region:
2. Name of the Program:
3. Name of Respondent:
4. Title/Role:
5. Contact Information:

Section 2: Program Status and Description

1. Briefly describe your state's CPBM program. [Open-ended]
2. When was your state's CPBM program initiated? [Open-ended]
3. Has your CPBM program been revised or updated since its original implementation?
    - Yes
    - No
    - In progress
    - If yes, please describe the updates: [Open-ended]
    - Are there current plans to revise or update the program in the future? [Open-ended]
4. Does your CPBM program align with NWCG (National Wildfire Coordinating Group) standards?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Partially
    - If no or partially, please explain why: [Open-ended]

Section 3: Audience and Outreach

5. What does demand for your CPBM program currently look like?
    - Approximately how many training classes are offered per year? [Open-ended]
    - Approximately how many individuals participate annually? [Open-ended]
    - Is current program capacity meeting demand in your state?
        - Yes
        - No, there is more interest than capacity
        - No, there is less interest than expected
        - Unsure
    - Comments: [Open-ended]
6. Who is the primary audience for certification? (Select all that apply)
    - Private landowners
    - Conservation organizations
    - State agency personnel

- Federal agency personnel
- Contractors
- Indigenous/tribal land managers
- Other: [Open-ended]

7. Who did you originally envision would use your program? [Open-ended]
8. Who is currently participating in your program? [Open-ended]
9. Do you feel there are audiences missing from participation?
   - Yes
   - No
   - If yes, which groups do you feel are underrepresented and why? [Open-ended]
10. How do people typically find information about your CPBM program? (Select all that apply)
    - Website
    - Word of mouth
    - Outreach through partner organizations
    - Social media
    - Other: [Open-ended]
11. What outreach or recruitment efforts does your program use to attract new participants? [Open-ended]

Section 4: Certification Process

12. What coursework and field training are required for certification? [Open-ended]
13. Does your program include live burn demonstrations as part of the certification process?
    - Yes, always
    - Yes, when conditions permit
    - No
    - Comments: [Open-ended]
14. Are participants required to plan, lead, or participate in prescribed fire events to obtain certification (e.g., a minimum number of burns, burn plan submissions)?
    - Yes
    - No
    - In development
    - If yes, please describe the requirements (e.g., number of burns, documentation needed); [Open-ended]
15. Is continuing education required to maintain certification?
    - Yes
    - No
    - In development
    - If yes, please describe the continuing education requirements: [Open-ended]
16. How frequently is recertification required, and what is the process? [Open-ended]
17. Have there been updates to recertification or renewal requirements?
    - Yes
    - No
    - If yes, please provide details: [Open-ended]

18. Does your program include different tracks or tiers of certification (e.g., basic burner vs. burn boss, or separate tracks for landowners vs. professionals)?
    - Yes
    - No
    - In development
    - Comments: [Open-ended]
19. Have there been changes to certification tracks, tiers, or requirements?
    - Yes
    - No
    - If yes, why, and please describe: [Open-ended]

Section 5: Training and Technology

20. Are new technologies or tools being used in your program (e.g., online learning, simulations)?
    - Yes
    - No
    - If yes, please describe: [Open-ended]
21. Does your program offer online or hybrid training options?
    - Yes
    - No
    - In development
    - Comments: [Open-ended]
22. How do you accommodate participants with varying levels of experience, i.e., can someone start from zero and become a burn boss, is it geared to an existing audience, are there ways for people with other certifications to transfer into the system? [Open-ended]
23. Does your program recognize or offer reciprocity for certifications or training completed in other programs or jurisdictions?
    - Yes
    - No
    - In development
    - Comments [Open-ended]
24. Would your state be interested in establishing reciprocity agreements with other state programs in the future?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Unsure
    - If yes, to what extent or under what conditions? [Open-ended]

Section 6: Administrative and Policy Changes

25. How is your program funded? [Open-ended]
26. Have there been changes in funding or staffing for program administration?
    - Yes
    - No
    - If yes, please explain: [Open-ended]

27. Are there new policies or regulations impacting your CPBM program (e.g., liability standards, air quality laws, claims fund, etc.)?
    - Yes
    - No
    - If yes, please describe: [Open-ended]
28. Are there policies or regulations that could be developed to help support your CPBM program? [Open-ended]
29. What is the current liability standard for prescribed fire in your state?
    - Gross negligence
    - Simple negligence
    - Strict liability
    - Uncertain
    - Other (please specify): [Open-ended]
30. Are you aware of any legal actions or lawsuits that have involved your state's CPBM program or certified individuals?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Unsure
    - If yes, please briefly describe the nature and outcomes of any known cases: [Open-ended]
31. How has changing wildfire risks influenced your program? [Open-ended]

Section 7: Program Effectiveness

32. What metrics are used to evaluate the success of your CPBM program? (Select all that apply)
    - Number of certified participants
    - Area of land treated with prescribed burns
    - Number of successful prescribed burns
    - Reduction in escape incidents
    - Public satisfaction/feedback
    - Participant satisfaction/feedback
    - Other: [Text Field]
33. How would you rate the overall success of your CPBM program in achieving its goals?
    - Very Successful
    - Moderately Successful
    - Neutral
    - Slightly Unsuccessful
    - Very Unsuccessful
    - Comments: [Open-ended]
34. Since the implementation of the CPBM program, have there been measurable changes in prescribed burning activity?
    - The number of prescribed burns?
    - Acreage burned?
    - Changes in who is conducting burns (e.g., increase in private landowner burns vs. agency-led burns)?

- Comments: [Open-ended]

35. Have you made adjustments to improve program accessibility or participation (e.g., course frequency, content delivery methods)? [Open-ended]
36. How has public perception of prescribed burning and CPBM programs evolved in your state since the CPBM program was initiated? [Open-ended]

Section 8: Challenges and Recommendations

37. What are the primary challenges currently facing your CPBM program? [Open-ended]
38. What additional resources or support would be most helpful to improve your program? [Open-ended]
39. What best practices or lessons learned would you recommend to other states developing or refining CPBM programs? [Open-ended]
40. Would your program be interested in collaborating with other state's CPBM programs to develop and deliver training? [Open-ended]
41. Is there anything else you would like to share about your CPBM program or prescribed burning in your state? [Open-ended]

States Developing CPBM Programs

Purpose: To assess progress, challenges, and support needed to successfully implement the program.

Section 1: General Information

1. State/Region:
2. Name of the Program (if applicable):
3. Name of Respondent:
4. Title/Role:
5. Contact Information:

Section 2: Program Development Status

6. What stage is your CPBM program currently in?
    - Initial planning
    - Drafting legislation/regulations
    - Pilot phase/testing
    - Near full implementation
    - Comments: [Open-ended]
7. What agencies or organizations are leading the effort to develop the program? [Open-ended]
8. Who is the intended audience for your program? [Open-ended]
9. What funding sources are being used (or considered) to support the program?
    - State budget allocation
    - Federal grants
    - Private or non-profit funding
    - Other: [Open-ended]

Section 3: Program Structure & Design

10. What key components will be included in your certification process? (Select all that apply)
    - Classroom coursework
    - Field training
    - Live burn demonstrations
    - Prior experience
    - Recognition of other certifications
    - Reciprocation from other states
    - Other: [Open-ended]
11. Please describe what the recertification process will be. [Open-ended]
12. What are the expected benefits of your program?
    - Variance permits
    - Early permitting
    - Online permitting
    - Liability consideration for certified burners
    - Other: [Open-ended]

13. What challenges have you encountered in developing your CPBM program? (Select all that apply)
    - Legal or regulatory hurdles
    - Funding and staffing constraints
    - Lack of public support
    - Lack of political support
    - Developing appropriate coursework
    - Other: [Open-ended]
14. What steps have been taken to engage key stakeholders (e.g., landowners, fire professionals, policymakers)? [Open-ended]
15. Please describe the burner liability system in your state. [Open-ended]
16. Please describe the general process for how non-agency burning is currently permitted and implemented in your state. [Open-ended]
17. How does your state plan to develop or improve the permitting and monitoring process for prescribed fire? [Open-ended]

Section 4: Support & Collaboration

18. What additional resources or assistance would be helpful in developing your CPBM program? [Open-ended]
19. Have you consulted with other states that have active CPBM programs for guidance?
    - Yes
        - If yes, which ones? [Open-ended]
    - No
    - Plan to in the future
        - If you plan to in the future, which ones? [Open-ended]
20. Would you be interested in participating in a working group or knowledge-sharing network with other states?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Comments: [Open-ended]
21. What is your estimated timeline for full implementation of your CPBM program? [Open-ended]
22. Is there anything else you would like to share about your state's CPBM program development? [Open-ended]

States without CPBM Programs

Purpose: To understand why a CPBM program has not been established and identify potential interest and barriers regarding future development.

Section 1: General Information

1. State/Region:
2. Name of Respondent:
3. Title/Role:
4. Contact Information:

Section 2: Interest & Challenges in Establishing a CPBM Program

5. Please describe the general process for how non-agency burning is permitted and implemented in your state. [Open-ended]
6. Has your state previously considered developing a CPBM program?
   - Yes, but it was not implemented
   - No, there have been no discussions
   - Currently being explored
   - Comments: [Open-ended]
7. What are the primary reasons a CPBM program has not been established in your state? (Select all that apply)
   - Lack of funding
   - Low demand for certification
   - Liability/legal concerns
   - Lack of state agency leadership
   - Preexisting culture of burning
   - Other (please specify): [Open-ended]
8. Would your agency or organization support the development of a CPBM program?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Unsure
9. What would be the incentives for your state to establish a CPBM program? (Select all that apply)
   - Streamlining the burn permitting process / Increasing access to variance burn permits
   - Liability clarification and/or additional liability considerations for certified burners
   - Improved prescribed burn safety and training
   - Increased prescribed burning activity
   - Other: [Open-ended]
10. Of the incentives you selected, what would be the biggest incentive for your state to establish a CPBM program? [Open-ended]
11. Please describe the burner liability system in your state. [Open-ended]

Section 3: Future Prospects

12. What resources or information would be helpful for your state to explore the possibility of a CPBM program? [Open-ended]
13. Would your agency be interested in learning about states with active CPBM programs?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Unsure
14. Are there existing training programs in your state that could be adapted into a CPBM program?
    - Yes
    - No
    - If yes, please describe: [Open-ended]
15. Would legislation or funding incentives increase interest in creating a CPBM program in your state? [Open-ended]
16. Is there anything else you would like to share about prescribed burning or the potential for a CPBM program in your state? [Open-ended]

Appendix V: Resource Library

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