

News Release

Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge



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Contact: Chris Lowie
Refuge Manager

Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge will be conducting prescribed fire operations in the area over the next several months. The prescribed, or “controlled,” burns are part of the Refuge resource and fuels management program, and are conducted by trained personnel following approved plans, and are done in coordination with other Federal, State and local agencies, including the Virginia Department of Forestry and the North Carolina Forest Service. Burns will be conducted on the Refuge at several locations in both Virginia and North Carolina. All prescribed fire activities are dependent on short and long-term weather conditions, the potential wildfire threat, or ongoing wildfires on the refuge or in the state or region.

Fire was once an important part of the historical landscape on the Great Dismal Swamp. The Refuge itself encompasses several different habitat types, including upland areas of pine and hardwood, and areas of pine and pocosin in the refuge interior. These pine forests require the periodic use of fire to maintain forest health, reduce unwanted species, and most importantly, reduce the available fuels to prevent or lessen the impacts of a destructive wildfire. It is the mission of the Refuge to protect and restore these historic landscapes, and to provide protection to neighboring private properties and government facilities from unwanted fire.

Great Dismal Swamp and surrounding areas have a significant history of wildland fire occurrence, from both human and natural causes. Last summer, the South 1 wildfire on the Refuge affected the entire Hampton Roads area for several months. Smoke from the fire, and the larger Evans Road fire in North Carolina, was visible across the area much of the summer. The objective of doing hazardous fuel reduction burns is to lessen the possibility of a wildland fire in the swamp growing to large size, posing public safety concerns, and causing natural resource damage, particularly if they involve the organic, or peat soils of the swamp.

Refuge Manager Chris Lowie states that “while smoke from these prescribed burns may be noticeable for several days, depending on the size of the burn and the wind direction, the long-term goal is to reduce the chances of communities having to deal with weeks or months of smoke.”

Firefighter and public safety are the highest priority of any prescribed fire project. Planning, preparation and close monitoring of environmental conditions are geared toward achieving resource management goals, and maintaining safety and minimizing impacts on surrounding homes, roadways and communities. Please contact Refuge Manager Chris Lowie at 757-986-3705, Monday-Friday if you have any questions or concerns.