

**For immediate release**

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## **Prescribed Burns Planned for March, April at Great Meadows, McKinney National Wildlife Refuge**

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STRATFORD, CONNECTICUT – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service plans to conduct a series of small prescribed burns between Monday, March 22, and Thursday, April 15, in the Great Meadows Marsh Unit of Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge. The burn is part of a larger effort to improve habitat for wildlife, increase resilience of the marsh to rising sea levels and coastal storms, and reduce mosquito nuisance problems.

Prescribed burns occur under a tight set of conditions to minimize impacts to wildlife and the public. The dates of the burns will depend on weather conditions, tides, and proper fine fuel moisture. Using multiple small burns will reduce smoke and increase safety. Smoke may still be visible from the west side of the Great Meadows Marsh Unit.

The Service is working with local municipalities to provide updated prescribed burn information. We have requested the municipalities share the information via the reverse 911 messaging systems or other mechanisms they use to share information with local residents. The Service is also working with the Stratford Fire and Police Departments and has notified other authorities, including the United States Coast Guard and CT DEEP. The Service will remain in contact with municipal offices and local organizations throughout the burn period. The Great Meadows Unit will be closed to the public during prescribed burn operations.

The prescribed burn will be accomplished by a team of trained wildland firefighters from the Service's Northeast Regional Fire Program, in close coordination with the Stratford Fire Department and nearby Sikorsky Airport.

The Great Meadows Marsh Unit in Stratford, Connecticut, is one of the largest salt marshes remaining in the state. However, manmade changes to the marsh decades ago led to prolonged flooding and invasion by dense common reed and other non-native plants. The prescribed burn will reduce the amount of vegetation so refuge staff can implement restoration in the fall.

The project will restore critically important nesting habitat for the at-risk saltmarsh sparrow. It will also benefit the state endangered marsh pink plant, which occurs nowhere else in Connecticut, and the diamondback terrapin, a species of special concern in the state. Increasing tidal exchange and eliminating ponded freshwater will benefit other wildlife, including fish that eat mosquito larvae, and reduce mosquito production sites.

Restoration partners include the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Service, as well as Audubon Connecticut through a public-private partnership working collaboratively on the project. The effort is supported by funds for natural resource injuries related to the Raymark Industries Superfund Site, Lordship Point Gun Club Site, and the Housatonic River – Connecticut Site.

For more information on fire management on national wildlife refuges in the Northeast, please access the website: [www.fws.gov/northeast/refuges/fire](http://www.fws.gov/northeast/refuges/fire)

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