

Department of the Interior  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
Road 301, KM 5.1 Bo. Corozo  
P.O. Box 510  
Boquerón, PR 00622

Phone: 787-851-7258  
Fax: 787-255-6725

# News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
January 20, 2005

Contacts: **David Bocanegra**,  
787/851-7258, ext 235,  
**James Padilla**,  
787/365-2202 cellular

## **A Federal Fire program – “*Rural Assistance Program*” is implemented in local fire stations**

The US Fish & Wildlife Service manage a fire program know as *Rural Assistance Program* for local fire stations near wildlife refuges. The programs identify and select those local fire stations close to wildlife refuges and donate fire equipment, provide training and serves as an advisor for local firemen and volunteers in order to prepare them to fight forest fires.

This program was implemented for the first time in Puerto Rico last year (2004) to local fire stations in the towns of San Germán, Laja, Boquerón and the municipal islands of Vieques and Culebra. All this towns have wildlife refuges nearby. These stations received donations of fire equipment such as: fire hoses, hand tools, cleaning equipment, fire cloths (no-mex) first aid kits and also received fire trainings (pac-test) for their staff, including volunteers. The amount of donations and services provided under this program during 2004 exceed it \$25,000.00.

“This program consist in different steps that are implemented annually in order to enhance and maximize participating fire stations in forest fire techniques”, said Boyd Bilhumve, Program Coordinator. Fire Management Officer for the Caribbean Islands NWR, Jim Durrwachter and Forestry Technician for the Cabo Rojo NWR, James Padilla were very glad with the implementation of the first step of the program in Puerto Rico and anticipated the implementation of all the steps to complete the program in the following years to the selected fire stations. “That way the local fire stations could be better trained and equipped to fight forest fires as the ones in the United States”.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 94-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the

Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

