Fire on National Wildlife Refuges

We manage wildfires to protect communities and sustain wildlife habitat.
- An average of 500 wildfires burn 600,000 acres of national wildlife refuge lands annually. Most are caused by human carelessness.
- More wildfires occur on refuges in southern and eastern states than in the west, partly because of the relative size of the Refuge System’s land base.
- Managing fires as they burn without threatening lives, homes, or critical habitat is a natural way to clear overgrown vegetation and rejuvenate ecosystems.

We use prescribed fire to protect wildlife and people.
- More than 50% of refuge lands (and more than 90% in Alaska) are fire-adapted ecosystems, which depend on periodic fire.
- Using planned burns clears dead and overgrown vegetation before it can fuel a large, damaging wildfire. These burns also stimulate growth of plants, which are forage for wildlife.
- No other method of clearing overgrown vegetation yields the same ecological benefits or cost-savings as wildland fire.
- An average of 1,500 planned burned are conducted each year on refuges, treating over 350,000 acres.

Our Fire Management Program
- Annual budget: $80 million.
- Staff: 500 full-time fire management specialists across the country.
- Climate change will lead to more fire in many areas: larger, more intense, longer lasting, with more smoke. Fire managers can help refuges cope with these challenges.
- Invasive species continue to spread on refuges. Ongoing research is helping fire managers learn how best to combat different non-natives.

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Managing wildland fire in natural areas near homes takes expertise and experience. More than 200 communities are adjacent or close to refuges.