

National Key Deer Refuge
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News Release



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Blue Hole Fire Update

Big Pine Key, FL.... A 21 acre prescribed burn at Big Pine Key on the National Key Deer Refuge pushed across a control line on September 15, 2011 when the humidity, wind speeds, and temperature took an unpredicted turn. The fire grew to approximately 100 acres before it was contained by fire personnel at 8:00 pm that same day. The fire has been contained to pine rocklands habitat around the Blue Hole and Watson Nature Trails and west of Key Deer Blvd, completely within the refuge boundary. All areas impacted by the fire are currently closed to all public entry.

The pine rocklands are a habitat type that has been dependent on fire for centuries with a variety of plant and animals that are adapted to fire. The National Key Deer Refuge has been using fire since 1971 to maintain this fire-dependent community and to reduce the risk of wildfire to protect human lives and property in the urban interface. Prescribed fires are closely monitored and conducted using a burn plan, written well in advance of the prescribed burn according to national guidelines. Burn plans include necessary parameters within which burning is appropriate, such as wind speed and direction, relative humidity, and the fuel types. Often, site specific weather information is not available until 24-48 hours prior to when a burn will be conducted.

The National Key Deer Refuge would like to invite the residents of Big Pine Key to a community public meeting being held at the Methodist Church Community Building on Wednesday September 28 at 7:00 pm. The refuge will be presenting an update on the status of the Blue Hole Fire as well as fact sheets and handouts on making private property in the urban interface wildfire-safe, prescribed burn planning, post burn monitoring of plant and wildlife response, and the ecology of pine rocklands.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with the Monroe County Fire Department, Florida Forest Service, U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service conducting mop up operations from the ground and also utilizing a helicopter to drop water on interior portions of the burn area. Fire personnel will continue to monitor the area until the fire is 100% extinguished.

The U.S. 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 150-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 553 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas.

