

Storm, continued from page 33.

"One of our successes was getting into Katrina as quickly as we did," he said. "We went in with a small force. FEMA might show up with a supply train 20 miles long. Our small compact group could be easily supported, so we could get in there fast and see what we need and then build from there."

Housh added that one of the benefits of this type of drill is to get outside of the typical fire response.

"Fire people talk with each other all the time, so we pretty well know what we need to do to fight a fire or do a prescribed burn treatments," he said. "But with a hurricane, you need some unique skills, like construction, finance, water treatment, and electrical technicians. This exercise helps us plan ahead to gather the skilled people we would need to respond effectively."

"We are all glad this wasn't a real hurricane," added Hardison. "But at least we know we are better prepared to deal with it if it happens again." □

Tom MacKenzie, Media Services, Atlanta, Georgia

northeast 

Tribal Grant Reaps Harvest

The Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) Natural Resources Department in Massachusetts has boosted commercial scallop harvests on the Aquinnah side of Menemsha Pond as a result of funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Tribal Wildlife Grants program

As part of the Bay Scallop Restoration and Enhancement Plan, the commercial scallop harvest has boomed in the past three years, providing a large benefit to local fishermen, improving the ecology of the pond complex and restoring a cultural practice which had been a way of life for the Tribe.

During the harvest season (October to April) of 2005–2006, the commercial harvest was 600 bushels, consistent with recent

Lee Sheppard of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) Natural Resources Department holds a hatchery-reared purple bay scallop found during a scuba-dive survey in 2006.



ARIANNA FELDBERG / IWTHA

previous years. The benefits of the program became evident in 2006–2007, however, as the harvest increased to 1,700 bushels. This past year, the harvest exceeded 3,000 bushels. Each bushel conservatively equates to roughly seven pounds of shucked scallops, which sell for approximately \$12 a pound.

"Not only is this project an economic benefit to the Tribe, it also has the potential to improve the bay scallop population for Cape Cod," said D.J. Monette, the Service's Northeast Regional Tribal Liaison. "Although bay scallops are not a Service trust species, they are a species of tribal significance used historically traditionally as food by the Tribe." □

Bret Stearns, Director, Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) Natural Resources Department

Better Burns

On wildlife refuges throughout the country, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service practices planned or "prescribed" burning, a critical tool used to care for natural areas enjoyed by millions of Americans. With many small refuges and relatively small staffs, finding the minimum number of qualified personnel to safely and effectively carry out annual burn projects can be a challenge. In Virginia, an innovative interagency partnership is addressing this problem.

Periodic burns reduce the accumulation of brush and other vegetation that would quickly become hazardous fuel for dangerous wildfires that threaten communities and natural areas. Fire also helps regenerate vegetation that helps landscapes and wildlife flourish.

A partnership between the Service Virginia-West Virginia zone fire management program based at the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation's Natural Heritage Division (DCR) has created a cost effective and safe way to expand the state's prescribed burning treatments while assisting each other.

All three agencies use prescribed burning, so the agreement enables them to share personnel and costs to apply fire where it is needed, regardless of land ownership. The host burn agency covers the cost for its personnel and the cooperators do the same for their crew.



Fire staff from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Natural Heritage Division (DCR) work in partnership to complete prescribed burns. Back row left to right. Bert Wyatt (FWS), Adam Wilson (DCR), Tim Craig (FWS), Jason Leasor (FWS), Darren Loomis (DCR).

Sam Lindblom, Fire Manager for TNC's Virginia Program, said, "Collaboration helps us meet our goals including improved habitat for rare, threatened, and endangered species." Among those species is the state's only Red-cockaded Woodpecker population, living in TNC's Piney Grove Preserve.

Rick Myers, DCR's Natural Areas Stewardship Manager added, "Our organizational goals are so similar that almost all the burning we do on non-state lands helps to achieve the mission of our agency, which is to conserve Virginia's biological diversity. This partnership has effectively tripled our agency's resources without significantly increasing total costs. We are getting more accomplished than ever before, and more than I thought possible."

In the 2007 and 2008 spring burn seasons, the partner agencies formed an interagency prescribed fire crew to help meet the expanding workload. FWS hired two seasonal fire staff, and TNC and/or DCR also hired two seasonal fire staff members to be used as a shared resource among all the partners. FWS provided quarters, personal gear, access to equipment and transportation, and day-to-day supervision. With more resources available, prescribed burns can be carried

out in a way that is safer for the crew on the ground.

The Service Virginia-West Virginia zone program averages over 30 burn days a year. In 2007, zone personnel conducted burns on five refuges, and conducted or assisted with burns on three state natural area preserves, one state park, one state wildlife management area, one TNC preserve, and one national park. Combined, more than 3,500 acres were treated.

So far in 2008, partnership burn projects have taken place on three refuges, two national parks, one national forest, four TNC preserves, five state natural areas, one state park, and two private properties. More than 6,500 acres have been treated in an assortment of habitats including marshes, grasslands, pine and hardwood forest understory.

The zone fire program and the partnerships have helped the Service expand its prescribed fire activities to nine refuges in Virginia and West Virginia since 2002. Seven of the nine refuges applied prescribed fire for the first time because of the efforts of the individual refuges and zone fire personnel. □

Tim Craig, FWS Fire Management Officer, Virginia/West Virginia

around the service

mountain-prairie



Of People and Wildlife

Working for Public Affairs in the Service's Headquarters Region gives me an excellent overview of conservation issues as well as a thorough understanding of the Service's programs. But occasionally I am overwhelmed by the fast pace of life in the Washington, DC area and need a fresh perspective. Not long ago I found one out West.

For a couple of years, my interest has been in habitat partnerships. I've been volunteering on agricultural and land conservation issues, learning as I went along and frequently flying by the seat of my pants. A couple of summers ago I decided it was time for some real education—and that means getting out in the field. I signed up for a partnership training course in the Nebraska Sand Hills with Gene Mack, one of the Service's most experienced partnership coordinators.

The Nebraska Sand Hills are home to a variety of grasses, flowers, and shrubs.

Flying into the Nebraska Sand Hills from crowded northern Virginia is like entering another world. Recent rains unveiled a beautiful, empty, rolling green expanse of grass—there were a few human beings, but not many. Gene met us at the airport and gave us a brief history lesson of the people, geology and biology of Nebraska. The next three days were jam-packed. Mornings were spent talking about the dynamics of partnerships—appreciating and seeing the strength of differing viewpoints, sustaining enthusiasm, and the importance of really listening to partner needs. The afternoons were spent in the field.

The Nebraska Sand Hills are just that—hills of sand. A variety of beautiful grasses, flowers, shrubs and a few trees flourish in the hills and these rolling dunes go on for as far as you can see. >>

