

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Inside Fire Management

News from 2009





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December 2009

Cover photo: A smoke column rises from the Little Black Fire which burned in the summer of 2009 on the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge in northeast Alaska. Chase Marshall, USFWS



Service employee Steve Hubner; the Burn Boss for a prescribed burn, walks the edge of the fire at Patuxent Research Refuge. Catherine J. Hibbard/USFWS

RX Burn Near Nation's Capitol

Situated just miles away from the fourth largest metropolitan area in the United States, Patuxent Research Refuge in Maryland is a tricky place to conduct prescribed burning because of concerns with putting smoke into the air in heavily populated locations. However, in late March and early April, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with the help of interagency partners was able to burn two areas of the refuge to study the effect of fire on an invasive plant, maintain grassland breeding bird habitat, and clear forest understory to restore open savannah.

The refuge, nestled between Washington D.C. and Baltimore, is the only refuge in the National Wildlife Refuge System established to support wildlife research.

For both burns, the burn boss assigned a person to monitor the smoke column to ensure it did not blow into local communities or impair visibility on the Baltimore Washington Parkway, which lies within a quarter of a mile of both burns. Firefighters were prepared to extinguish the fire if necessary, but favorable weather conditions lifted and dispersed smoke, resulting in no smoke intrusion into neighboring communities or on the parkway. These conditions, along with advance notice to local and metropolitan media outlets, resulted in no complaints from the public.

Refuge managers had planned for 4 years to burn the two units, 30 acres of grassland and 15 acres of pine and oak forest. Due to limitations on needing the right weather conditions for proper smoke dispersal and the necessary conditions to achieve the resource goals of the burn, timing was critical. Even if weather

conditions are perfect, personnel and equipment needed to be available. An ample contingent of firefighters stayed vigilant during the effort to both conduct the burn and monitor weather conditions for smoke impacts. Firefighters from the National Park Service, the State of Maryland, and the AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps joined firefighters from the Service to complete the burns.

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