



South One Fire Florida Interagency Incident Management Gold Team



PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Specialized Equipment on the Fire Line

Great Dismal Swamp (July 7, 2008): Crews have been battling a blaze in the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge since June 9th, 2008. The fire started from logging equipment salvaging Atlantic White Cedar blown down during Hurricane Isabel in 2003. The terrain is extremely rough and firefighters work in dangerous conditions. Trees fall as root systems burn out, footing is unstable as deep pockets of peat burn and hot, humid temperatures can cause heat exhaustion. It's easy to see that fighting a swamp fire is no simple task, as the South One Fire has been showing firefighters and locals alike. To get a good hold on the fire, several specialized pieces of equipment have proven invaluable on the fire line. With names like GeoBoy, Bombardier, and Masticator, you wonder just what in the world is going on out there.

These pieces of equipment include several low ground pressure vehicles. Low ground pressure refers to the distribution of the surface area of the equipment to reduce the risk of sinking. This weight distribution allows the equipment to operate efficiently in swampy terrain. Some of the specialized equipment includes the following:

The Masticator is a rotating mulching head attachment often used with an excavator. This equipment acts like a giant rototiller, because it eats its way through soil, roots and stumps, as it mulches. This may sound harmful to the areas it passes; however, the Masticator is a good tool for reducing hazardous fuels, while protecting the soil. Mulched roots and stumps mixed into the soil provide vital nutrients. On the South One Fire, the Masticator does its job by mulching vegetation along the fire perimeter to reinforce the containment lines.

The GeoBoy is not a boy, but a brush cutting vehicle with low ground pressure tracks that allow it to navigate through marshy areas. The GeoBoy has a mulching head attached to the front of the vehicle used for site-preparation, clearing the way for other equipment and personnel to work. On the South One Fire, the GeoBoy has been clearing the way for equipment through swampy, heavy brush areas along Railroad Ditch, at the northern edge of the fire.

The Bombardier and the Marshmaster are both low ground pressure tracked vehicles that float, similar to a boat. The Bombardier is a fixed piece of equipment (meaning attachments are not needed for operation), with a 300 gallon water tank. The Marshmaster provides the option of adding attachments, like a mower, and also carries a water tank under its belly. The Bombardier is used along the hot fire edge west of Interior Ditch to walk down or smash vegetation, on the South One Fire. The Marshmaster is also used to walk down vegetation in areas of heavy brush to reinforce the fire perimeter.

The Harvester, or Hot Saw, is an attachment tool often used in logging. This attachment is a feller buncher with a saw head on the front. The hot saw wraps around the tree, cuts and then tosses the cut tree behind it as it moves onto the next cut. The hot saw can also plan ahead when cutting by electronically measuring the cut diameter in an effort to minimize scrap. The Harvester Saw is clearing large trees and brush to reinforce the fire perimeter along West Ditch and Railroad Ditch Roads.

The Flex-Trac is similar to a bulldozer in shape and appearance, however it operates differently. The Flex-Trac is another low ground pressure vehicle with wide tracks which literally shape themselves to the terrain. This vehicle has both six and four wheel drive capabilities and operates in either a sway-back or arched-back position as it maneuvers across terrain. It has the capability to pull a plow and has been used on the north and east sides of the fire for site preparation and brush clearing.

Other types of “common” equipment used include engines, bulldozers, and water tenders. When it comes to fighting fire in a swamp, there’s no end to the types of specialized equipment needed.