



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Fire Management

### *Keeping Fire on Our Side*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages fire in order to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats, protecting 545 National Wildlife Refuges, 200 Waterfowl Production Areas and 69 National Fish Hatcheries, as well as the communities that surround these facilities. Whether fire is used to restore and maintain healthy ecosystems or suppressed to protect valuable resources, fire management is integral to ensuring the safety and health of human and biological communities.

The majority of Service-managed lands are fire-dependent ecosystems – meaning they require periodic fire to survive as useful wildlife habitat. Without the unique ecological benefits of fire, the health of most refuges and wildlife using them would suffer greatly and the threat of catastrophic wildfire would increase dramatically.

Refuge managers have been using prescribed fire safely and cost-effectively since the 1930s. Although it has the smallest fire management staff and budget among the federal land management agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has traditionally been the Department of Interior leader in the number of acres it treats with fire to maintain safe and healthy habitats.

Each year, the Service conducts prescribed burns on a greater percentage of its lands, at the lowest cost per acre of any federal agency within the Department of Interior. The Service also allows wildland fire to play a natural role on its refuges, especially in wilderness areas.

This is the least-expensive method of managing fire, involving Service personnel monitoring the fire within defined parameters.

Every National Wildlife Refuge with flammable vegetation has a detailed Fire Management Plan to provide specific guidance for such “hazardous fuels” reduction. The plans also discuss wildland fire and prescribed fire use, fire suppression, and stabilization and rehabilitation of resources damaged by wildfire. These plans are part of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) Comprehensive Conservation Planning process. Due to the traditional and ongoing use of fire to maintain ecosystems, 70 percent of Service-managed lands are currently rated Fire Regime Condition Class I, which is the least hazardous condition. Loss of life and property due to fire on Service lands has historically been minimal as a result of regular controlled use of fire.



*A prescribed burn on Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina reduces wildfire risk to nearby homes by thinning hazardous overgrowth of long-leaf pine. (USFWS)*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages lands in every state, with fire staff located throughout the country. Service fire staff coordinates activities with and provides training to other agencies, fire departments, military and international partners. Policy, oversight and support for the Service’s fire program is provided by the NWRS Branch of Fire Management headquartered at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho. The Service is an equal partner at NIFC and in the National Wildlife Coordinating Group (NWCG), which also includes the national fire directors and staffs of the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, along with representatives from the National Association of State Foresters and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

