

# U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

News Release (For Immediate Release)

## **Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge**

8231 Beach Road, Chincoteague Island, VA 23336

Contact: John Kasbohm, Project Leader

Phone: 757-336-6122

## Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge Prepares for Prescribed Burns

In mid-December 2021, a wildland firefighter crew will begin preparing fields and impoundments on Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge for prescribed burns that are planned for January and February of 2022. These burns will help remove standing dead stalks of the invasive plant *Phragmites australis*. After the burns, herbicide treatments will be applied to targeted regrowth of *Phragmites* in the spring and summer. The refuge is currently targeting areas near the Wildlife Loop and the Marsh Trail, including patches within Snow Goose Pool.

Although management of this persistent plant requires multiple treatments, the results benefit wildlife and visitors alike. The newly open, sunlit ground will encourage beneficial native vegetation to grow. Native plants are a higher quality food source for migratory birds and grazing animals. The treatment will also open up views for visitors who enjoy watching wildlife while exploring refuge trails such as the Wildlife Loop.

Wildland firefighters may also conduct prescribed burning in northern portions of the refuge. Planned burn units are the wash flats and old fields impoundments, where the goal is to remove woody vegetation and dead grasses, making way for new growth of vegetation in the spring. In these areas, the burns will enhance grazing areas for the Chincoteague ponies and grassland birds. All burns will be coordinated with the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company Saltwater Cowboys to ensure that ponies are not present in areas that will be burned.

These prescribed fires are part of a series that will take place over the next few years to address ongoing habitat management needs throughout the refuge. Future burns will address vegetation management within our wetland impoundments. Under certain conditions, it will not be unusual for the refuge to conduct multiple burns in any given year.

Wildland firefighters ignite prescribed burns under a pre-determined set of conditions, in order to accomplish specific resource management objectives. These conditions include weather, fuel moisture and resource availability. All prescribed burns will be conducted as interagency projects, with local support, under the guidance and direction of trained and experienced U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wildland firefighters.

We anticipate the burns in early 2022 to take several days to complete. Smoke from the burns may be visible in and around the Chincoteague area. Take additional care if you are driving in smoky areas - reduce your speed and turn on your headlights.

Most refuge trails and parking areas will remain open during prescribed burn operations. However, the Wildlife Loop, the Service Road, and trails immediately adjacent to burn units may be temporarily closed for a short period to ensure visitor and firefighter safety, and to allow free flow of support services to the fire.

THE MISSION OF THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE IS WORKING WITH OTHERS TO CONSERVE, PROTECT AND ENHANCE FISH, WILDLIFE, PLANTS AND THEIR HABITATS FOR THE CONTINUING BENEFIT OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. WE ARE BOTH A LEADER AND TRUSTED PARTNER IN FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION, KNOWN FOR OUR SCIENTIFIC EXCELLENCE, STEWARDSHIP OF LANDS AND NATURAL RESOURCES, DEDICATED PROFESSIONALS AND COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC SERVICE. FOR MORE INFORMATION ON OUR WORK AND THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE IT HAPPEN, VISIT [WWW.FWS.GOV](http://WWW.FWS.GOV).