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News Release



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SAVANNAH NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE PLANS TO CONTROL BURN

Savannah National Wildlife Refuge will plan to conduct several control burns during the coming fall and winter months. The goal of control burning is to enhance wildlife habitat and reduce the risk of wildfires on the Refuge.

The 2013 Annual Prescribed Fire Plan includes 2,062 acres targeted for burning during the next three months. Most of the units involve burning wetland impoundments to open up and provide quality habitat prior to the arrival of wintering waterfowl. Burns are timed so they minimize impacts on wildlife and people. Units are burned in small blocks to reduce smoke impacts. The burn plan addresses a wide range of factors such as safety, weather, fuel conditions, smoke impacts and also resources needed to conduct the burns. These burn treatments restore the grassland areas, control brush in bottomland hardwood forests, control invasive woody vegetation, and increase the diversity of native plants and wildlife. Other benefits include protection of communities and watersheds by reducing fuels and thus the potential threats of a wildfire.

Control burns are planned and carried out by trained firefighters operating under strict conditions, known as prescriptions. These plans spell out the number of qualified firefighters, and types and number of equipment that must be present to burn. The weather conditions, including wind speed and direction, humidity, fuel moisture, and other factors described in the plan must be within a prescribed range. If the weather conditions don't match the prescription, the fire is not started. Smoke from the fires is a concern, and plans call for specific winds to minimize public impact on roads and communities.

Plans include burning around the refuge Visitor Center this year for the first time since the facility was constructed. Fire breaks have been constructed to keep the fire in small manageable blocks to minimize any problems with smoke along highway 17 and around neighboring residences.

Control burns have been conducted for many years at Savannah National Wildlife Refuge, and are considered a good tool by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for managing wildlife habitat and reducing the risk of serious wildfires. Due to difficulties in predicting weather, the refuge is not able to notify the public of the exact day the burn will be conducted. Landowners adjacent to the burn areas and local fire departments are notified prior to igniting the fire. Questions about the control burns can be answered by calling the Refuge office at (843) 784-2468.

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. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.