

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge
85 Mattamuskeet Road
Swan Quarter, North Carolina 27885

Contact: Jerry Fringeli 252-926-4021



News Release

April 22, 2004 (see photos below)

Successful Prescribed Burns at Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge

Fire management personnel with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) successfully conducted nine separate prescribed burns on Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge over four days of operations between March 5 and March 15, 2004. Approximately 3,900 acres of salt marsh habitat and adjacent woodlands were burned. The fire crew consisted of firefighters from six refuges in North and South Carolina and was assisted by cooperating firefighters from the U.S. Marine Corps and the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources. Fire management officials were also able to burn woodlands and marsh on the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) Atlantic Field lands that were adjacent to the refuge.

Prescribed fire is the controlled burning of vegetation based on a prescription that takes into consideration fuel type, fuel moisture, relative humidity, air temperature, wind speed, wind direction, and other atmospheric conditions to ensure a safe and successful burn. During those four days in March, conditions were right for controlled burns that were able to meet management objectives outlined in each unit's Prescribed Fire Plan. Refuge Biologist Mike Legare said, "In general, intense fire occurred at the marsh-upland edge and running fires went out like fingers into the low marsh. The resulting mosaic of burned and unburned areas should provide good habitat for wildlife."

This coastal ecosystem has a history of natural and man-made fires. Vegetation and animals in these systems are adapted to fire. Prescribed burning mimics the role of natural fire and is an important tool for managing habitats. Prolonged periods without fire can result in adverse consequences, such as increased fire intensity. One of the added benefits of prescribed fire is that it reduces "fuels" – the underbrush, branches, pine needles, leaves, and dead plant debris that build up on the forest floor or in the marshes over time. If these fuels are not reduced periodically, wildfires can become hot and destructive. Prescribed fire is more cost and energy efficient than other fuel reduction tactics, such as mowing or herbicides.

Fire Management Officer Tom Crews was pleased that the Service was able to burn refuge land behind the Cedar Island Community along Highway 12 and the homes on Old Cedar Island Road in the Atlantic Community. The burns reduced the build up of fuels behind those homes. "Unfortunately due to the weather conditions experienced during our stay, we were not able to burn around the homes on Lola Road, which will become our top priority for next year's burns. I think the joint-jurisdictional burn with the USMC at Atlantic Field proved very timely and was definitely needed as evidenced by the recent wildfire that threatened Atlantic Community. The Cherry Point and Camp Lejeune Forestry personnel were essential in carrying out these series of burns." Service officials also wanted to express their appreciation to the Cedar Island Volunteer Fire Department for allowing Service fire crews to refill wildland fire engines from the Department's water tower during prescribed burning operations.

The Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge is one of 544 National Wildlife Refuges in the U.S. (<http://www.fws.gov/refuges>). The 14,480-acre refuge consists of approximately 11,000 acres of brackish marsh and 3,480 acres of pocosin and woodland habitat. Longleaf and pond pine are two woodland plant species that are dependent on fire-maintained ecosystems. Recreational opportunities on Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge include wildlife observation and photography, hiking, and waterfowl hunting. For more information, call 252/926-4021 or visit <http://www.fws.gov/northcarolina>.



Fire management officials with the Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge conduct a prescribed burn on the refuge for habitat management and fuel reduction.



A successful prescribed burn by the Cedar Island National Wildlife Refuge reduces the wildfire risk of Cedar Island homes by reducing the amount of fuel available for burning during an unplanned ignition.