

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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News Release

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Lake Phelps Wildfire Drill

FIRE! Well, not really. But 42 people from 8 agencies did turn out with lights whirling on Saturday, August 11 for a wildland-urban interface fire drill on Lake Phelps. The simulated wildfire was burning on Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and “threatened” structures near Conman’s. The US Fish and Wildlife Service organized the drill with help from the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources (NC DFR) and Washington County Emergency Management. Drill participants included Pocosin Lakes and Alligator River refuges ; the NC DFR; Lake Phelps, Pungo River, Creswell, Roper, and Tyrrell Volunteer Fire Departments (VFD); and Washington County Emergency Management, EMS and Fire Marshal.

While refuge employees and NC DFR controlled the wildfire, VFD resources were assigned structure protection. Role players (spotter plane, tractor-plow operators, Incident Commander, and Operations Chief) used radio traffic to keep the scenario going with updates to participants on fire behavior and suppression efforts. The “wildfire” eventually spotted across the road and advanced on the houses. VFDs used their training to extinguish several spot fires, indicated by smoke bombs, which threatened the housing area. Assigned observers also threw kinks into the scenario that participants had to handle. These included a flat tire on an engine, a smoke induced car wreck with injuries and a roadside fire, and a “heart attack” suffered by a volunteer firefighter from his suppression efforts.

The drill lasted about 3 hours before everyone converged under the picnic shelter. An After-Action Review highlighted the lessons learned about communications, county emergency management responses, and fire department standard operating procedures. It was an excellent exercise in use of the Incident Command System and a great relationship-building experience among the local, State and Federal firefighters. The Service hopes to do more such drills at Pocosin Lakes and other national wildlife refuges in the area to improve efficiency and integration of efforts between cooperators when fighting wildland fires. The drill finished with a great summer picnic of fried chicken and watermelon.



During a simulated wildfire drill on Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, volunteer firefighters were further put to the test when a "car wreck" started another wildfire (indicated by smoke bombs).
Credit: USFWS



EMS and volunteer firefighters treat a volunteer firefighter who suffered a simulated heart attack in the midst of a wildfire drill near Conman's.
Credit: USFWS