

News Release

Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex

73 Weir Hill Road, Sudbury, MA 01776

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For Immediate Release

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Eastern Massachusetts Fire Management Group seeks public comment on fire management plan

The Eastern Massachusetts Fire Management Group, which includes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of Defense, is preparing a fire management plan and is seeking public comment. The Department of the Interior requires that every area with burnable vegetation have an approved fire management plan that describes actions to prepare for and respond to a wildfire, to plan and conduct prescribed fires and to complete other fire management operations.

The plan will include an environmental assessment and will analyze various treatment methods to achieve fire management objectives for units within each of the agencies in the fire management group.

The three alternatives being proposed for the fire management plan are:

- **Alternative A** would continue the current level of fire management by agencies working with each other and adjacent landowners to reduce fire hazards, use the proper treatment methods when necessary, such as prescribed fire, chemical and mechanical burns, and conserve habitat for federally and state endangered species that may be at risk, such as the New England cottontail
- **Alternative B** would eliminate mechanical and chemical treatments and prescribed fire. Any efforts to reduce hazard fuels, or restore systems to their natural state would not be done
- **Alternative C** would call for an increase in treatment activity; some units would double the amount of prescribed burns and other treatments they perform.

Our primary role is the protection of life, trust resources, such as wildlife and their habitat and tribal lands, along with infrastructure and other values at risk. A

secondary role is to increase the habitat viability for wildlife and further protection by reducing or modifying vegetation, establishing barriers to uncontrolled fire spread, and raising awareness through good prevention programs. We also strive to work with all partners to engage in landscape level management.

Parker River NWR and Thacher Island NWR are part of this fire management group. Up until the 1990s, Parker River used prescribed fire to manage impoundments and grasslands on the Refuge. With this fire management plan, staff will be considering using prescribed fire in fire-adapted habitats, such as pitch pines, and will plan for management of wildlife fires.

A complete list of units within the fire management group and the fire management plan can be accessed at:

http://www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/Region_5/NWRS/North_Zone/Eastern_Massachusetts_Complex/ScopingDocument_FireManagementPlan.pdf.

The scoping period is open now, and ends on December 20, 2013. Comments can be submitted via e-mail at libby_herland@fws.gov or via mail, Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex, 73 Weir Hill Road, Sudbury, MA 01776.