

Patuxent Research Refuge
National Wildlife Visitor Center

10901 Scarlet Tanager Loop, Laurel, MD 20708-4027
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April 9, 2015

Fire to Benefit Wildlife Habitat and Visitors

Laurel, MD. Personnel from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are scheduled to conduct a series of controlled burns on Patuxent Research Refuge lands from April 10th – April 30th, 2015. Residents and visitors to the Laurel/Odenton area may see or smell smoke periodically during this time. Depending on weather conditions and available personnel, burns may occur on both the North and South Tract portions of the refuge located south of MD Rt.198 and east of the Baltimore/Washington Parkway (Rt. 295). Expert fire teams may burn grassland fields to reduce hazardous fuels, conduct research on controlling non-native plants, and restore important wildlife habitat. Additionally, a forested area may be burned to restore a savannah/sandy barrens habitat to benefit rare insects and plants. Patuxent Research Refuge will only burn under favorable weather conditions to keep the fire manageable and minimize smoke in local communities. Because burning is weather-dependent, it is difficult to provide significant advanced notice of the timing of each burn. However, appropriate State and County agencies will be notified ahead of each burn.

Because human safety is the number one priority during controlled burning, some refuge roads may be closed to the public. Visitors are encouraged to check with the refuge for possible closures (phone 301-497-5770/5772) before visiting the Refuge.

One of the reasons the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service uses controlled burns is to reduce flammable vegetation that could pose hazards to visitors and local communities if they burned in an uncontrolled wildfire. But they do much more than making the refuge safer. According to Refuge Manager, Brad Knudsen, controlled burning is an appropriate and effective tool to manage wildlife habitat: “Research indicates that controlled burning has many benefits over other habitat management practices. Fire helps control undesirable exotic plants, maintains grassland habitat for nesting birds and small mammals, promotes wild flowers and other native plants, reduces the accumulation of organic debris and releases nutrients back into the soil. The use of controlled burns also supports Patuxent’s unique role as a research refuge by allowing scientists to study the effect of fire on a variety of refuge habitats.”

Controlled burns are authorized under Patuxent Research Refuge’s Prescribed Fire Plan, updated and approved by Fish and Wildlife Service officials every three years.

For additional information regarding Patuxent Research Refuge please visit <http://patuxent.fws.gov>.