

## *Patuxent Research Refuge*

10901 Scarlet Tanager Loop, Laurel, MD 20708-4027

301-497-5772 (National Wildlife Visitor Center, South Tract, front desk)

301-497-5770 (Visitor Contact Station, North Tract)

Fax: 301-497-5765 <http://patuxent.fws.gov>

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### 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. Depending on weather conditions and available personnel, an **early spring burn is planned for South and North Tracts beginning the week of March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016**. Residents and visitors to the Laurel, Bowie and Odenton areas may see or smell smoke periodically during this time. The burns will occur on the North Tract portion of the refuge located off of MD Rt.198 and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway (Rt. 295), east of Laurel; and near the National Wildlife Visitor Center off Powdermill Road. Expert fire teams will burn to reduce hazardous fuels, remove dead biomass for future vegetation management, facilitate control of non-native plants, and restore important wildlife habitat. A forested area will be burned to restore a savannah and sandy barrens habitat to benefit rare insects and plants. Several small grassland areas will also be burned to control woody plants and maintain the fields in grassland habitat.

Fire personnel 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. Human safety is the number one priority during controlled burns therefore some refuge roads may be closed to the public. Visitors are encouraged to check with the refuge for possible closures (see contact information above).

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. However, controlled burns do much more than make 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>.

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