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News Release

Massasoit

National Wildlife Refuge

Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex
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For Immediate Release.

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PRESCRIBED BURN AT MASSASOIT NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE TO PROTECT PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

If you see or smell smoke this spring near the East Entrance to Myles Standish State Forest in Plymouth, don't be alarmed; it's probably a controlled burn. If weather conditions allow, firefighters from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service and other partners will be conducting prescribed burning on Massasoit National Wildlife Refuge (refuge) to reduce the risk of wildfire to nearby homes and to improve wildlife habitat. The burn area is next to the Patriot Properties subdivision; immediately south of Wildcat Lane, Strawberry Hill Road, Jason's Lane, Evelyn Road, and Crabtree Road and west of the junction of Alden and Long Pond Roads. Firefighters previously burned part of this area in 2007 and 2010. In 2015, additional fire breaks were constructed to facilitate the safe burning of additional parts of the refuge.

"The primary purpose of this controlled burn is to protect people and their homes from wildfires. A secondary goal is to improve wildlife habitat by mimicking natural fire conditions," said Tom Eagle, Deputy Refuge Manager of the Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service office that manages Massasoit Refuge. Burning in a controlled manner under predetermined weather conditions safely reduces buildup of leaf litter, dead wood, and other plant

material that could otherwise fuel a wildfire and make it burn dangerously fast. Plymouth is no stranger to destructive wildfires. In 1937 a wildfire in Pine Hills killed two firefighters and as recently as 1995, more than 100 homes were threatened by a fire in the Bourne Road area. Because of the high risk to communities from wildfire on federal lands, Plymouth was named a federal “Community at Risk” in 2001.

A team of trained wildland firefighters will keep the controlled burn safe. They will monitor wind direction and other weather statistics and will not start a burn if wind would blow smoke towards homes or roads or if conditions would not allow smoke to lift. They will post signs along Alden Road to warn motorists of a burn in progress and send a reverse 911 message the day of the burn to alert residents. Fire engines will be staged in the subdivision north of the burn, where pitch pine limbs were cut, white pines removed, and the ground mowed in a 100-foot buffer to reduce risk of fire spreading to homes. Firebreaks surround the entire burn area. Burning will be done under conditions of permits from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, Air Quality Division and town of Plymouth.

Putting fire on the ground, in a planned way, also improves the native pitch pine-oak habitat which is adapted to fire. The ponds in these areas are home to the Endangered Northern red-bellied cooter (an aquatic turtle). Although animals have ways to survive fires, firefighters take precautions to avoid harming the turtles. They schedule controlled burns when cooters are in ponds, burn a safe distance from ponds, and do not burn during the June to July nesting season. If conditions allow, it is possible for us to be burning anytime from now until May 15, 2017. For more information on Fire Management on National Wildlife Refuges in the Northeast visit: www.fws.gov/northeast/refuges/fire

Massasoit Refuge is one of more than 560 refuges of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It is 209 acres and was established in 1983 to protect the Northern red-bellied cooter. It is closed to the public. The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.