



FY-03 Fire Program Accomplishments

- ≧ \$36,764 for fire training for southeast region parks.
- ≧ Regional Fire Program Personnel taught or assisted with eight midlevel to advanced level fire courses.
- ≧ Provided \$70,000 for fire cache and PPE for parks in the region.
- ≧ Secured \$690,065 for Fire Facilities Construction Funds for BISO, GUI5, and CHCH.
- ≧ Conducted Fire Program Reviews at EVER, BICY, GRSM, and NATR.
- ≧ Secured funding for the continued development of approximately 20 Environmental Assessments for FY-03 and FY-04.
- ≧ Completing approximately 17 Fire Management Plans.
- ≧ Distributed division newsletter and updated website.
- ≧ Maintained communications between Collaborative Groups for Fuel Treatment Planning with state and other federal agencies in the Southeast.
- ≧ Provided GIS support for fuels projects and fire management plans.
- ≧ Secured \$57,000 for fire history and other fire related GIS data development at BICY, EVER, GRSM, and GUI5.

Canaveral Implements Prescribed Fire to Improve Habitat for Protected Species

Canaveral National Seashore has a number of federally Threatened and Endangered species. Two of those include the Florida scrub jay which is found only in Florida, and the Eastern indigo snake. Another associated species is the gopher tortoise which is designated a Species of Special Concern. Considered a "keystone species," the tortoise burrows provide refuge for dozens of other animal species. The scrub jay, gopher tortoise, and indigo snake are seriously threatened by loss of habitat caused by human development and fire suppression.



Florida scrub jay



Eastern indigo snake



gopher tortoise



tortoise hatchling

These species live in coastal scrub vegetation which consists of several live oak species and other various shrubs with scattered openings. Scrub jays feed on the live oak acorns, and bury the nuts in the sandy openings. Gopher tortoises dig burrows in the sandy soil providing critical habitat for many species including the indigo snake.

Oak scrub is a fire adapted community that under natural conditions would burn every five to twelve years. However some sections of the park have not burned in 30-50 years. This has eliminated many of the openings and trees have doubled their normal height of 6-8 feet. Overgrown scrub allows blue jays to move into the area and prey on nests. In addition, migrating cooper hawks can hide in the dense vegetation and ambush the scrub jays. In the fall of 1992, 1/3 of the breeding scrub jays in the area were lost to hawks.

On February 21st the park conducted its first prescribed burn (named Scrub Jay 1) to restore openings and reduce the height of the canopy. Two months prior to ignition, mechanical reduction was utilized to remove trees too large to carry the fire. Since the area lies adjacent to Merritt Island Wildlife Refuge, the agencies worked together to conduct the burn. The total area burned was 752 acres.

The project successfully reduced the size of the canopy to less than five feet and created open sandy areas for the tortoises and jays to utilize. Researchers conducting studies on the gopher tortoise recorded numerous burrows after the fire. The park is also conducting a telemetry study with Towson University to determine the survivorship rate of neonate (newly born) gopher tortoises in the area that was burned. At least four families of scrub jays were seen foraging in the area. The park has begun color banding jays to document changes in the jay population.

Hazard Fuels Reduction

New Regional Gyrotracs — The National Interagency Fire Center purchased two Gyrotracs for the Southeast Region. The new brush cutters will be used to help with mechanical fuels treatments. They will be stationed at BICY, but are available to travel to other parks in the region. Each Gyrotrac will have a trailer and an operator. These low ground pressure tracked machines are well-adapted for park projects as they minimize ground disturbance. The Gyrotracs have been put to the test and have successfully thinned fuels in Big Cypress National Preserve once too thick to even crawl through.



Gyrotrac at Big Cypress National Preserve

Everglades National Park — In May, fire staff used prescribed fire to burn 141 acres of marshgrass and wetlands adjacent to the Coe visitor center. The project was undertaken in an effort to eliminate exotic vegetation, reduce hazard fuels, and reduce shrub encroachment into prairies. The visitor center was closed for about one hour while operations were conducted near the entrance, but was reopened as soon as conditions were deemed safe. This burn eliminated exotic plants from the area immediately adjacent to the visitor center, facilitating the introduction of native plants.



Rx Fire at Everglade's Coe Visitor Center

- ✓ **SER continued to accomplish the highest fuel reduction acres in the National Park Service.** As of Sept. 30, 2003, we had accomplished a total of 70,608 acres, which exceeded our planned acres of 59,538.
- ✓ \$4,064,041 secured for fuels related projects and support.
- ✓ Over 62% of fuels funding was awarded through contracting.

Great Smoky Mountain National Park — The park completed its largest prescribed burn (1,034 acres) about a mile west of Cades Cove. The burn was intended to help the recovery of yellow pine in an area where the tree was once a predominate species. Five prescribed fires were used to treat a total of 1,352 acres in forestlands and grasslands.

Additionally, the park finished two hazard fuels reduction projects. Slash piles were successfully burned in January within the Gatlinburg Bypass project to reduce the potential of a wildfire that might escape the park into the Gatlinburg area. A similar project was completed in the Ace Gap area near Townsend, Tennessee. The project was completed on schedule and with positive feedback from influential neighbors.



First prescribed burn at Cowpens NB

Cowpens National Battlefield — On May 14, the park successfully completed its first prescribed burn. This was the second phase of a project that started in 2002. The 52-acre burn took place in an area treated by a Magnum brush-cutter as a mechanical fuels reduction project last year.

Kings Mountain National Military Park — The park has completed 123 acres of mechanical fuel reduction. Thinning by hand, burning stacked piles and chipping has helped to reduce the fuel load in wildland-urban interface areas by up to 75%.

The park's prescribed fire program is in its third year. The objectives of the program are threefold: hazard fuels reduction, habitat restoration, and cultural landscape restoration. Prescribed fire has also been used to help reduce heavy fuel loads that resulted from Southern Pine Beetle infestation, ice damage, and Hurricane Hugo.



Contract chipper helps with hazard fuels reduction in the wildland-urban interface

Mammoth Cave National Park — In April, the park burned 408 acres at Onyx Meadows. This was the park's third prescribed fire in two years.

"In accordance with the prescription in our Fire Management Plan, fire was used to enhance the barrens habitat and reduce hazardous fuels. We're very please with the result of the fire."

- Mammoth Cave National Park Superintendent Ronald Switzer

Gulf Islands National Seashore — The park completed two prescribed burns in the Naval Live Oaks Area of the Florida District in March. A total of 70 acres were burned for habitat restoration and to reduce hazardous fuels. One of the burns was the park's first ever re-burn of a previously treated area. In 2002, this block was the recipient of 22 gopher tortoise, a fire dependent species.

Rural Fire Assistance

Blue Ridge Parkway — The park has provided personal protective equipment, hand tools, power saws, blowers, S130/190 training, and safety training for 49 local fire departments.



More than 150 firefighters and 20 instructors from several VA localities and six states attended the 2003 Wildland Fire Academy held in Bedford County, VA

"For a county with only two paid firefighters, it's a big help, many say, for local firefighters."

- A. Dionne Waugh, writer for the Lynchburg News and Advance

Mammoth Cave National Park — The park provided eight local departments with Nomex pants, shirts, gloves, helmets, training fire shelters, goggles, hand tools, backpack leaf blowers, wildland fire hose, nozzles, and hose reels.



Mammoth Cave NP FMO Rich Caldwell delivered equipment to the Chalybeate, KY VFD, assisted by Fire Chief Gena Yoakem and one of the Chalybeate volunteers

Appropriations have enabled us to formalize and significantly advance the Rural Fire Assistance program. Each year of the program multiplies our capability to protect park resources, staff, and our visitors.

- paraphrasing Mammoth Cave National Park Superintendent Ronald R. Switzer

Distributed
\$447,000
 in RFA assistance for
153
Volunteer Fire Departments
 in
 Alabama
 Florida
 Kentucky
 Mississippi
 North Carolina
 South Carolina
 Tennessee
 and
 Virginia



Natchez Trace Parkway — The remoteness and length of the parkway have dictated the need for close cooperation with the fire service community. The Parkway collaborates with 52 rural fire departments along the 444 miles of parkway in three states. The RFA program helps provide basic wildland fire suppression training materials and gear for these departments as part of the National Fire Plan.



Congressman Benny Thompson (center) visited the Natchez Trace Parkway to meet with Superintendent Wendell Simpson (left) and FMO Dan Mapstone (right) to help distribute gear and equipment to local volunteer fire departments



PPE and gear distributed to local firefighters

Great Smoky Mountains National Park — The park provided tools, training, and equipment for 10 fire departments along the 250 miles of park boundary in the wildland-urban interface.

"Parts of Gatlinburg are a mix of homes and rental units built on steep slopes and closely surrounded by dense brush and forest. Some of this terrain is not easily accessible for regular fire trucks and hoses, so this equipment will help us go in and knock down fires before they can reach structures."

- Gatlinburg, TN Fire Chief, Gary West

Education, Prevention, and Information

Firewise — The Jefferson-Shelby Wildland Urban Interface Advisory Council, in association with the NPS, sponsored Alabama's first-ever Firewise Communities workshops in June. They utilized an innovative tele-conference format to link workshops in Gadsden and Birmingham. A second workshop was offered in Little River Canyon NP. In October, an additional workshop was held in Alexander City, in association with Horseshoe Bend NMP. More than 80 participants from a variety of disciplines represented their federal, state, and local agencies and communities.



Alexander City, AL Firewise Workshop

Natchez Trace Parkway — Fire management staff collaborated with the Tupelo Fire Department, Mississippi Forestry Commission, Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, and Smokey Bear to host a special event for local school children and park visitors during Fire Prevention Week. Each agency showed their fire equipment and presented both structural and wildland fire prevention information.



Smokey Bear reaches out to local youth during Fire Prevention Week

Distributed \$1,839,950 Community Assistance Contract Funding to five states to help support projects in communities that border parks.

Alabama — The Jefferson-Shelby Wildland Urban Interface Advisory Council is developing and distributing Alabama Reader newspaper supplements for 5th grade students. The educational material teaches the role of fire in the ecosystem and fire prevention. Educational CD-ROMS will also be distributed to classrooms.

Florida — The Division of Forestry is working on numerous Firewise projects, including an education, prevention and mitigation brochures, newspaper supplements, public service announcements, mobile displays, CD-ROMS, teacher workshops, and Firewise workshops. Funding will also be provided for a bi-lingual position in South Florida to help spread the Firewise message.



Mississippi — The Mississippi Forestry Commission is training personnel to teach Firewise workshops and develop a collaborative approach to Firewise messages across local, state, and federal jurisdictions. They are also developing an interactive CD-ROM for students to learn about Firewise concepts.

North Carolina — The North Carolina Division of Forest Resources is promoting Firewise concepts, including distributing a Living with Fire newspaper supplement and creating a mobile Firewise display.

Southern Area Risk Assessment — This interagency risk assessment will provide specific information about fire risk on local, state, and federal lands.

SER Fire Display — Two Southeast Fire Management Program displays and mannequins in full PPE were circulated around the region for community outreach and education efforts. Exhibits were utilized prior to and during planned fuel treatments or high fire danger periods.

Displays visited parks including Big Cypress NP, and Chattahoochee River NRA, Cowpens NB, Cumberland Gap NHP, Guilford Courthouse NMP, Gulf Islands NS, Kings Mountain NB, Natchez Trace NST, and Mammoth Cave NP.



Southeast Fire Management Display

Webpages — Information on the Southeast Region Fire Management Program can be found on NPS FireNet (www.nps.gov/fire). This page includes regional information and links to parks with Fire Management web pages including:

- Big Cypress National Preserve
- Canaveral National Seashore
- Cape Hatteras National Seashore
- Cowpens National Battlefield
- Everglades National Park
- Great Smoky Mountains NP
- Gulf Islands National Seashore
- Mammoth Cave National Park
- Vicksburg National Military Park



www.nps.gov/maca/fire.htm