



Inside Fire Management

*News from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Fire Management Program*

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Branch of Fire Management
www.fws.gov/fire Update 2006



FWS Fire Professionals Honored for Hurricane Recovery Work

Tom Crews, fire management officer for Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, was honored early this year with the Southeast Region's All Risk Management Program Award for his leadership in serving as incident commander for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Hurricane Katrina Response Team in Louisiana in fall 2005.



Tom Crews (USFWS)

The award was presented to Crews by Roger Boykin, Southeast Regional fire management coordinator at the region's annual fire management meeting in Orlando, Florida. The regional award follows a January 25 national ceremony where 125 Department of the Interior employees, including Crews, were honored by Secretary Gale Norton for their contributions to hurricane relief. Twelve other Fish and Wildlife Service employees were honored alongside Crews during the national ceremony including Russ Watson, Paul Yakupzack and Mark Parr of Louisiana; Glen Stratton and William D. Wolfe of Florida; Rick Huffines, William Ferguson and Fred Wetzell of Georgia; Paul Camp of Colorado; Curtis Heaton of Arizona; Richard Johnston of Texas and LeaAnne Thorne of Washington, D.C.

As incident commander, Crews credited his success to the quality of people on his team, as

well as the training and support he received from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"It was a situation where everyone had to 'think out of the box' in order to meet our goals, and everyone rose to the occasion," said Crews. "This award is especially meaningful to me because it was given by my peers, the fire management personnel in this region."

Preserving a Beauty for All to See

A fire crew from Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in November 2005 traveled to the state of Maryland's Soldiers Delight Natural Environment Area northwest of Baltimore to help fire specialists there restore habitat for the federally endangered sandplain gerardia.



The crew worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to manage the prescribed fire to benefit the pink-flowered member of the figwort family, which has been protected

throughout its range in the northeast United States since 1988. The state is working to restore the unique serpentine grassland at Soldiers Delight using a combination of mechanical thinning and prescribed burning to push back encroaching Virginia Pines. *(Continued)*

Sandplain Gerardia (USFWS)



State and federal fire crews burned 42 acres of grasslands on state land, and were assisted by Maryland Conservation Corps, Maryland Natural Heritage Program, The Nature Conservancy and members from the local county fire department.

“The partnership that has developed over the past several years between the (Blackwater) burn crew and the Natural Heritage Program has worked extremely well from our perspective,” said Glenn Therres, Associate Director of Wildlife and Heritage Service for the Maryland DNR, who watched as the fire was ignited and managed. “We should be proud of our efforts to restore this ecosystem.”

Volunteer Organization Receives Federal Recognition

The Greater Okefenokee Association of Landowners (GOAL) in November 2005 received the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Pulaski Award for the outstanding achievements of its members during several wildland fires that occurred between 2001 and 2004.

The group represents the interests of private landowners, commercial timber and manufacturing companies and state and federal agencies in and around Georgia’s Okefenokee Swamp. It works voluntarily to manage, protect and promote the area’s forest resources.

The group was nominated for its achievements in interagency cooperation and coordination, promoting safety for its firefighters and for outstanding fire management and suppression activities during the Blackjack Bay Complex Fires in 2001-2002, and during the Impassable Bay and Road 1 Fires in 2004. During these wildland fire incidents GOAL members used “minimal impact” firefighting strategies, which are designed to forestall damage to habitat, structures and commercial property. The group also was recognized for using effective communication and management during the incidents. The coordinated approach greatly increased the safety of fire fighters and resulted in one of the region’s lowest cost-per-acre suppression efforts in decades.

Named in honor of its creator, Edward “Big Ed” Pulaski, the Pulaski, a half ax, half hoe fire tool, has become the symbol of wildland firefighters. The tool is known worldwide for its utility, strength, and durability. In 1998, the Secretary of Agriculture chose the Pulaski to represent a national award for excellence in firefighting, fire safety, and interagency cooperation within the firefighting community. The November ceremony marked only the fourth time that the award has been presented.

Nina Rose Hatfield, deputy assistant Secretary of the Interior for Business Management and Wildland Fire, presented the Pulaski Award to GOAL at a ceremony in Fargo, Georgia. The group’s current chairman, Jim Barrett, vice-president of Langdale Woodlands, accepted the award. Representatives of GOAL, district Congressional offices, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Georgia Forestry Commission, Florida Division of Forestry and local community leaders also attended the ceremony.

Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge Takes on Hazardous Fuels

Using funds generated by the National Fire Plan, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge near Colville, Washington is removing hazardous fuels that threaten wildlife habitat and adjacent private lands and structures. *(Continued)*



A low-intensity prescribed burn at Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge. (USFWS)



Removing selected standing and downed trees reduces the chance that a small fire could become a large one and devastate public and private property. Refuge employees and local Washington Department of Natural Resources personnel surveyed adjacent properties and identified high-risk areas, then worked with landowners to reduce the fire threat. More than 15 miles of fuel along the refuge boundary have been burned or thinned since 1998, for a total treatment area of more than 5,000 acres. The refuge uses contractors to harvest trees with the intent of reducing density and restoring mature stand structures.

Prescribed fire and tree thinning reduced the fire risk to the refuge's main office. This action also restores fire's role in the ecosystem, particularly in ponderosa pine and western larch forest types.

Keno, Oregon Creating Fire Prevention DVD

Firefighters from the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuge Complex joined local cooperators recently to begin a wildfire prevention video for homeowners and landowners in the Klamath area.



An interagency crew, including firefighters from Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuge Complex help create real fire scenes for a wildfire safety video. (USFWS)

The video is the brainchild of Rural Fire Protection District Chief John Ketchum of Keno, Oregon, who organized the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Forest

Service, Klamath County, Kingsley Airfield, Oregon Department of Forestry and other county-wide volunteer fire agencies as well as the Klamath County Sheriff's Office to put together the 30-minute DVD. The video will emphasize the importance of wildfire safety will walk citizens through actions that can significantly reduce their risk of property loss or personal injury due to wildfire.

Structural and wildland fire groups worked together to film real fire suppression in staged burns. Chief Ketchum is emphasizing for the public the importance of interagency cooperation and is helping produce scenes that show how all the agencies work together to successfully and safely extinguish wildfire.

Bear Valley National Wildlife Refuge, part of the Klamath Basin complex of refuges, is bordered on two sides by the town of Keno.

The video should be available later this year. Learn more about the day-to-day making of this DVD at www.fws.gov/klamathbasinrefuges/fire/news.html

Bully Weed Threatens Native Plants

Since 2002, Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in Maine has been controlling non-native, invasive phragmites by mowing it without mercy. The tall, aggressive weed threatens not only refuge neighbors with its extreme flammability, but can adversely affect two rare wetland species.

The portion of the refuge with the biggest phragmites infestation also is home to the largest population of the state-endangered slender blue flag iris (*iris prismatica*). Thousands of these iris grow on the refuge's Webhannet Marsh, where phragmites is held at bay with a specialized mower that cuts the weeds each summer. The regimen seems to be working because the phragmites has become much less dense in the past three years. Other plants, including some of the rare iris, have begun to sprout in former phragmites strongholds. The periodic mowing also indirectly benefits the saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow, which inhabits the wetlands that phragmites can easily engulf.



Homeowners, Birdwatchers Benefit from Burns that Protect Whooping Cranes

Whooping cranes at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Texas responded well to the effects of fuels project burn in their wintering habitat. The fires had several benefits, including reducing the density of a plant called running live oak that poses a wildfire risk to nearby communities, and benefiting a critically endangered species.

Although in winter the cranes maintain a steady diet of blue crab and various clam species, they also use upland sites for fresh water and alternate food sources such as acorns from running live oak. The problem is that this type of oak tends to grow quickly, rendering parts of the refuge preferred by the cranes unusable to them once it grows beyond their long reach.



Whooping cranes' habitat is rejuvenated by prescribed fire. The species was on the verge of extinction in the 1940s, hunted relentlessly for their elegant plumage. Today, there are nearly 500 birds in the wild. (USFWS)

Prescribed fire is used here in late winter and early spring because it essentially prunes the top of the oak, allowing it to sprout again from its roots.

Surveys conducted in 2003 and 2004 show that the birds return area the day after prescribed burns and keep returning to the area. Crane densities also increased in burned areas.

Grant Means New Equipment in Central Valley

A rural fire department in California's Central Valley will be getting \$14,000 in grant money for equipment and training thanks to a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Fire and management staff at Coleman National Fish Hatchery Complex, Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex, and California Nevada Operations Office obtained the money for the rural fire district through the federal Rural Fire Assistance program. The Cottonwood district is about 20 miles south of Redding.

"This funding will go a long way toward helping our department obtain the safety equipment we desperately need," said department Fire Chief Randall Armstrong. He said fire shelters and other personal protective equipment will be the first items purchased.

In June 2005, the Cottonwood FPD was instrumental in preventing a wildfire from creating significant damage to both Fish and Wildlife Service and nearby Bureau of Land Management property.

The grant program has been focused on providing money to rural volunteer fire departments that abut DOI lands in order to enhance their wildfire preparedness.

Along with communities, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has benefited greatly from the rural fire assistance program because the majority of Service lands don't have dedicated wildland fire staff, and depend on rural departments to assist them when wildfires strike. The program has in turn allowed the Service to help rural departments increase their level of preparedness and safety, which improves fire protection for surrounding communities and federal lands.

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