



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Inside Region 3 Regional Fire Program

A Prescription for Healthy Ecosystems

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Region's Fire Program Benefits Wildlife and Communities

A Message from the Regional Director

Throughout most of the last century, our society has sought to suppress fires that historically worked to naturally thin our forests and rejuvenate grasslands and prairies. As a result, the risk of uncontrolled wildfires occurring on public lands has never been greater.

The Great Lakes-Big Rivers Region now joins with other agencies within the Department of Interior, Department of Agriculture and state governments to implement the National Fire Plan. Our implementation of the plan will pay big dividends to wildlife while reducing the risk of wildfire to our local communities.

Region 3 enjoys an exceptional Fire Program. Our well planned and executed program safely restores and rejuvenates thousands of acres of wildlife habitat on our refuges and wetland management districts, reduces the risk of wildfires to our rural communities and promotes partnerships with rural fire depart-

ments throughout the Midwest.

Prescribed fire safely promotes healthy ecosystems and is a key tool in managing our lands for wildlife. Controlled burning helps mimic natural restorative processes while reducing the buildup of hazardous fuels. This year, our fire program has accomplished one of its best years ever. Controlled burns have restored habitat on more than 60,000 acres. This noteworthy achievement is accomplished through good planning, good communication, excellent cooperation and teamwork.

The recent controlled burning of the Upgrala Unit of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge exemplifies the teamwork and professionalism of our fire crews. Thirty-four trained employees from throughout the region safely and efficiently burned 152 acres on the largest prairie tract of the refuge, which is surrounded by suburban residences, industrial sites, an airport and one of the busiest high-



Bill Hartwig

ways in the Twin Cities.

Another integral part of our fire program is the assistance we receive from rural fire departments. Our participation in the Rural Fire Assistance Program helps reinforce valued partnerships with local communities that provide critical fire fighting capabilities to our national wildlife refuges and wetland management districts. Last year, our region provided \$248,000 in financial assistance to 34 fire departments in the Midwest.

As this special issue of *Inside Region 3* goes to press we are nearing the end of our prescribed fire season, but entering the wildfire season. The accomplishments highlighted in this issue make me justifiably proud of our Region's fire program, and of our successful contributions to the National Fire Plan. I am confident that our continued professionalism and vigilance will provide for a continued safe and productive fire season.

Bill Hartwig
Regional Director
Great Lakes - Big Rivers Region

- Cover Photo Necedah NWR
 - Cover Inset Photo Agassiz NWR



- USFWS Photo Union Slough NWR

Prescribed burns, like this one at Union Slough NWR in Iowa, naturally restore ecosystems and reduce wildfire hazards.

Prescribed Fire - Restoring Native Ecosystems

For thousands of years, the North American prairies were subject to short period of disturbance from both natural fires and intense grazing as huge herds of bison moved across the landscape. Because of these natural disturbances, grassland plants are fully adapted to short pulses of disturbance.

In fact, on the eastern edge of the prairie, where trees will grow if given a chance, grasslands and the wildlife that depend on grasslands actually require some sort of harsh disturbance such as an occasional fire for their very survival. Without some periodic disturbance, thick layers of thatch build up, reducing the health and vigor of the grassland plants. Worse still, trees begin to take over. When this happens, the grasslands lose their value to the animals that depend on open spaces.

Some of the more common species requiring grasslands include many prairie ducks such as the blue-winged teal, grassland songbirds like the meadowlark and wildflowers such as the purple coneflower and the pasque flower. Wildlife managers help these species survive by setting controlled fires to maintain the grassy habitats on which they depend.

The controlled burns are often called prescribed burns because the managers write a carefully crafted prescription for each burn describing appropriate temperatures, winds, and so on to ensure both a safe burn and the desired ecological effect.

A fire actually stimulates the prairie plants and makes them grow better while setting back the invading trees and other species not adapted to life on the prairie. Most grassland plants store nutrients and calories in their large root systems. The growing point for these plants is not at the tip of the plant, as in a tree bud, but rather at the base of the plant. When a fire burns off the top of a grassland plant, or a grazing animal eats the top, the plant can immediately continue growing since its growing point is unharmed at or below the soil surface.

Prairie animals are also adapted to fire. Some go underground during the fire. Others simply fly or run away from the fire. Sadly, any nesting birds lose their nests to the fire but the grassland birds even have an adaptation for this: birds that nest in grasslands quickly respond to a lost nest by building a new one and laying a new clutch of eggs. While there is some short-



- USFWS Photo by Stacy Salvevold

Smoke rises above the backing fire on Meadows Waterfowl Production Area in Wilkin County, Minn.

term harm to a few eggs or animals, these same species actually depend on fire for their survival since many prairie plants and animals cannot survive for long once trees take over their grassland habitat.

As we learn more about managing grasslands with prescribed burning, we are beginning to conduct prescribed burns in the summer and autumn as well as during the traditional spring burning season. Fires during different seasons have different effects on the plants and animals. We are learning that there is value in occasionally rotating the timing of our burns.

Most experts believe that before settlement any single acre of prairie was naturally burned every four or five years. Prairie plants seem to thrive on this four or five year cycle.

Ideally, to match this natural cycle, wildlife managers should match this four or five year burn cycle for a patch of grass and allow it to rest for three or four years between burns. However, due to funding and staffing limitations, it is difficult to burn enough acres each year to reach this goal. Realistically, most areas are burned no more than every five to ten years at best. *Steve Delehanty, Morris WMD*



- USFWS Photo

Service managers use prescribed burns to mimic natural processes and improve prairie habitats.

Grant Program Bolsters Rural Fire Departments While Adding Firefighting Capabilities to National Wildlife Refuge System

Program Helps Build Community Support, Safeguard Federal Lands

Thirty-four rural fire departments in five Midwest states shared more than \$248,000 awarded last year through a program designed to bolster firefighting capabilities of small rural departments that help protect lands managed by the federal government. Rural fire departments in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Missouri, Illinois and Michigan that support U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refuges and wetland management districts benefitted from the Rural Fire Assistance Program, a federal pilot program that allowed the Service to provide more than \$1.2 million to fire departments nationally.

The Pelican Rapids, Minn., fire

department was one of 17 departments in Minnesota to benefit from the grant, receiving \$9,583. In addition to serving Pelican Rapids (population 2,374) the all-volunteer department serves five outlying townships, all with populations of 300 or less, and has a fire agreement with the Fergus Falls Wetland Management District in Fergus Falls, Minn. The department used RFAP funds to offset the costs of a new truck

designed to fight grass fires. The truck carries an all-terrain vehicle with a 47 gallon water tank used to reach less-accessible areas.

According to fire chief Richard Peterson, the department has to rely on surrounding townships for funds to purchase firefighting equipment, not an easy task for towns with fewer than 300 people.

"The fire assistance grant helped offset the costs for this truck, reducing what the townships had to pay," Peterson said. "The truck has done a great job. Since we bought it we haven't had a single grass fire!"

Peterson, a volunteer fireman for 39 years, said the grants helped his department, and would welcome the opportunity to apply for additional grants in the future.

"We would probably use future



- USFWS Photo by Scott Flaherty

Pelican Rapids Fire Chief Richard Peterson used Rural Fire Assistance Grant funds to help purchase this new grass fire response truck. Pelican Rapids has thousands of acres of Service land nearby and this truck will help ensure a quick and safe response to any uncontrolled fires.

grants to buy new turnout gear (boots, coats, etc.) designed for fighting grass fires," Peterson said.

The Rural Fire Assistance Program is a cost-share program. Fire departments contribute 10 percent, the federal contribution is 90 percent. To receive funds provided by the Program, fire departments must have a fire agreement with a local refuge or wetland management district, or be part of a statewide agreement with the state forester who maintains cooperative agreements with rural and volunteer fire departments. Fire departments must also serve a community with less than 10,000 inhabitants. Fire departments can use the funds to purchase equipment and supplies and conduct fire training and prevention activities. *Scott Flaherty, External Affairs*

Midwest Communities Receiving Grants:

Illinois:

Havana, Lewiston, Ridgeland, Lake Egypt, Makanda and Williamson

Michigan:

Spaulding

Minnesota:

Ashby, Pelican Rapids, Carver, Green Isle, Clinton, Glenwood, Starbuck, Detroit Lakes, Erskine, Mentor, La Crescent, Stoddard/Bergen, Minnesota City, Pickwick, Rolling Stone, Odessa and Palisade

Missouri:

Rosendale, Southern Fire/Police Department of Holt County

Wisconsin:

Brownsville, Wapun, Deer Park, New Richmond, Roberts/Warren, Lincoln, Necedah and Knowles

Effective Fire Program Requires Highly Trained Staff

Department of Interior Hiring Under the National Fire Plan

As of May 30, 2002

	Projected	Actual	Filled
BLM	3,838	2,255	59%
BIA	1,833	953	52%
FWS	663	658	99%
NPS	1,297	774	60%
Total	7,631	4,840	63%

Trained staff are critical to developing, maintaining and conducting a successful prescribed burning program. Without the appropriate people, prescribed fires can not be ignited, or worse yet, they are ignited and then become uncontrolled fires.

Region 3 has been authorized to fill 42 temporary and 21 permanent

additional fire-related jobs. These jobs are located strategically across our eight state region and will help managers create effective fire use modules that can be deployed throughout the region and the nation.

The basic qualifications for these positions is the completion of a Basic Firefighter Course, the Introduction to Wildland Fire Suppression Course and the ability to complete a three-mile walk with a 45-pound pack in under 45 minutes. These basic qualifications only allow individuals to work at burn sites.

Extensive training and practical experience is required to advance in positions and begin planning and managing burn operations. Each individual is given a task book that identifies the specific skills an individual must be proficient at to advance in levels. While on actual

burn sites, supervisors evaluate individual performance and update their task books when the supervisor is confident that individual has the needed skills.

Because fire professionals must actually work on fires to advance and maintain their qualifications, hiring, training and retaining qualified individuals can be a challenging task. *Chuck Traxler, External Affairs*

Region Develops Rural Fire Assistance Program Website

Meredith Weltmer and Larry Dean worked collectively to establish the Region 3 Rural Fire Assistance Program website to provide online materials for those interested in applying for funding through the Department of Interior's Fire Management Pilot Program.

This program was developed by Interior to enhance the fire protection capabilities of rural fire departments located around national wildlife refuges and waterfowl production areas nationwide. The website offers applicants the opportunity to apply and compete nationally for funds.

The funds are used by rural fire departments to increase safety and the overall capabilities of the departments that can be called to assist in fighting wildland fires on federal lands.

This year, Region 3 distributed \$248,000 to fire departments located within our eight states. Those interested in learning how to apply in future years can download an application and samples to help them fill out the required paperwork. The website is at: <http://midwest.fws.gov/FireManagement/> *Larry Dean, External Affairs*



- USFWS Photo by Scott Flaherty

Doug Wells, of the Fergus Falls WMD, pauses to observe a prescribed fire on Craig Slough WPA in western Minnesota. Prescribed fire professionals document burns they work on and skills they learn in a task book. A combination of training and experience is needed to advance in the career.

Prescribed Fire - How We Burn Safely

While starting a fire may seem as simple as throwing a match in a field, conducting a "prescribed" fire takes months, and sometimes years, of planning, coordination and training.

A prescribed fire is a carefully planned and coordinated management technique that creates specific biological results. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service uses prescribed fires to help restore and improve ecosystems and reduce the chance of wildfires on federal land. In order to ensure prescribed fires are safe and effective, the Service is just as concerned about how we conduct them, as why we conduct them.

Develop The Plan

Long before any prescribed fire is ignited, a detailed plan is developed by a designated prescribed fire specialist. The plan incorporates the current



- USFWS Photo Minnesota Valley NWR

Prescribed fires can temporarily effect communities and roadways. Coordination with local residents and agencies before, during and after is critical when conducting a prescribed fire.



- USFWS Photo Minnesota Valley NWR

Conducting a safe and effective prescribed burn requires careful planning and properly trained people. A recent prescribed burn at Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge required two years of planning and 34 employees on-site during the burn.

biological condition of the burn site, the desired results and the people and equipment needed to complete the burn. In addition, the plan considers adjacent land types, building, roads or communities. Smoke issues, including any threats to nearby communities or the possibility of needing to control traffic are also addressed. The plan identifies specific weather conditions required before the fire can be ignited as well as numerous contingency plans are developed in case of emergencies. These detailed plans can take months to develop and must be reviewed by a fire management officer and approved by the project leader.

Watch the Weather

Developing the plan is only the first step in actually lighting the fire. Now the prescribed fire specialist must watch weather forecasts and arrange to have the required personnel on-site when the weather is right. With the unpredictability of weather, it is no small task to have the appropriate personnel on-site at the right time.

Assemble the Crew

Beyond the difficulty of trying to plan around the weather, it is often difficult to assemble the correct crew. Stations rarely have enough qualified staff to handle a burn themselves. Usually they need to bring in qualified personnel and additional equipment from other stations and agencies. To accomplish this requires a true team effort.

Project leaders from across the country work together to help each other staff fires. To help make this process easier, project leaders develop groups of five to six qualified firefighters and equipment, often called fire use modules, that are able to quickly go where they are needed.

Another challenge in assembling a team is that each person needs to meet specific training and physical requirements. The minimum requirements for any individual working on a fire is to have completed the Basic Firefighter and Introduction to Wildland Fire Suppression Courses and be physically able to complete a two-mile walk with a 25 pound backpack in under 30 minutes.

Continued on next page

Coordinate With the Community

Finally, once the plan is approved, the weather is perfect and the appropriate staff and equipment are on-site, the burn boss (title given to the on-site fire supervisor) can begin the final preparation to actually ignite the prescribed fire. The process begins by contacting and coordinating with all the individuals and agencies that may have concerns about the fire. Nearby landowners are notified and local law enforcement agencies and fire departments are alerted in case smoke may cause traffic or health concerns, or in case a fire gets out of control.

Prepare the Crew and the Site

Prior to the crew getting on-site, 12-20 foot wide fire breaks are created around the burn site. Often there are natural fire breaks, such as streams or plowed fields, but if not, the breaks are created manually.

The burn boss then conducts a pre-fire briefing and goes over every detail of the fire plan. The burn boss ensures each team member knows exactly what they must do to ensure a safe and effective fire. The burn boss

also ensures everyone knows what to do in case of emergency.

Once the crew is on-site, they create a "wet line" around the burn site. The wet line is just what it sounds like, a line of water -- or water mixed with a flame retardant chemical-- several feet wide along the inside edge of the burn area. The burn boss then completes a final checklist, ensuring all conditions are correct.

Start the Fire

The first fire ignited is a small test fire. This fire is watched for 10-15 minutes to ensure burn rates, direction of travel and smoke issues are consistent with the plan.

If the test fire confirms conditions are correct, the crew begins the prescribed burn. They start by igniting the "backfire." This fire is started inside the wet line and burns into the wind, toward the main fire area. This is generally a slow-burning fire that is designed to increase the fire break area. Once the backfire is established, the main fire, called the "headfire," is ignited on the opposite end from the backing fire. The



- USFWS Photo Minnesota Valley NWR

Most prescribed burns in Region 3 are ignited with a hand held drip torch.

headfire burns with the wind and is much larger, hotter and faster moving than the backfire. When all goes as planned, the headfire and backfire meet and burn each other out.

During the fire, the burn boss is constantly monitoring the fire and directing crew members. The crew keeps the fire burning in a controlled manner, monitors smoke movement, watches for any problems that may effect surrounding areas and quickly extinguishes any spot fires (spot fires are fires that go beyond the wetline or fire break and begin burning outside of the burn area). Once the fire is completed, crew members stay on-site for several hours to ensure the fire is completely extinguished.

Monitor the Results

After the fire, biologists monitor the site to ensure the desired biological goals are reached. Information learned from conditions after the fire help managers design future fires.

So much for just throwing a match in some grass. *Chuck Traxler, External Affairs*

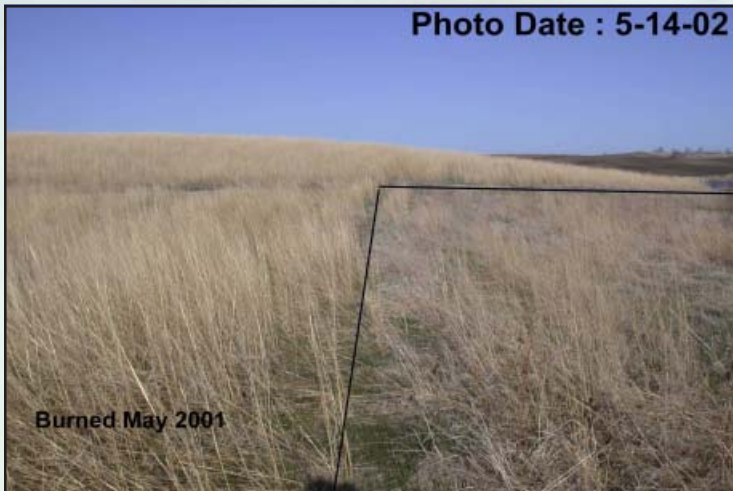


- USFWS Photo

This "headfire" burns with the wind and is much faster and hotter than the "backfire." When the headfire and the backfire meet, the fire is designed to extinguish itself. These carefully planned ignitions, along with wetlines, fire breaks and trained personnel keep the fire under control.

Wetland Management Districts

Preserving and Restoring the Prairie, Reducing Hazardous Fuels



- USFWS Photo by Stacy Salveold

This prescribed fire on a waterfowl production area was used to stimulate a warm season grass seeding. The root systems of well established native grasses are more extensive than those of noxious weeds and will literally choke the weeds at the root, preventing them from becoming established. This allows managers to control weeds without chemicals. The dense standing grass on the left side of the photo also provides excellent habitat for ground-nesting birds, including grassland birds and waterfowl. This area was seeded in 1985 and was burned in 2001, 1998, and 1995. The area shown on the right has not been burned since 1996.



- USFWS Photo by Stacy Salveold

Hot fires produce erratic fire behavior like this "fire whirl" seen during a prescribed fire at the Fergus Falls Wetland Management District. Prescribed fires are a very effective and inexpensive way to reduce the numbers of invading trees in prairie systems. The purpose of this prescribed fire was to remove invading trees that were encroaching on the seeded warm season grasses.



- USFWS Photo by Stacy Salveold

If prairies go too many years without being burned, a thick litter layer will develop and inhibit the growth of native grasses. Spot fires occurred in the mowed fire break due to this thick litter layer on the fire line. Prescribed burning helps to remove these hazardous fuels before they become a threat to communities.

- Background photo by Scott Flaherty, USFWS

Fall 2001 - Spring 2002 Accomplishment Reports

Region 3 Field Stations Use Prescribed Burns to Improve Habitat, Remove Hazardous Fuels, Build Community Support

Spring Burning Successful on Port Louisa Refuge

The Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge completed 14 prescribed burns totalling 2,326 acres on the Horseshoe Bend, Louisa and Keithsburg Divisions. Prescribed fire was used to manage and enhance native prairie, wet meadow, grassland and open woodland plant communities as well as reduce hazardous fuel levels.

One 30-acre wildfire occurred on private land adjacent to the refuge. The refuge fire crew assisted the Oakville Fire Department with suppression of the wild fire.

Through the extensive use of regional fire funding, the refuge was able to train and hire seven additional firefighters from the Louisa County Conservation Board and The Nature Conservancy to help with the burns. The funds were also used to purchase essential fire supplies and equipment and bring in additional firefighters from Union Slough, Desoto, Windom, Neal Smith and Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuges.

The availability of funding was critical to the success and safety of our fire program. *Tim Julison, Port Louisa NWR*

Patience Pays Burning Dividends for Litchfield WMD

Persistent petulant weather delayed the start and frequently interrupted Litchfield Wetland Management District's prescribed burning efforts this spring. In between gales and rain drops, however, the District managed to salvage a respectable burning season, blackening 15 sites totaling 2,578 acres on both federal and private lands.

Management goals primarily targeted the rejuvenation of native prairie, stimulation of decadent



- USFWS Photo Port Louisa NWR

Fire crews at Port Louisa NWR in southeastern Iowa completed 14 prescribed burns covering 2,326 acres this spring. The burns will help enhance native prairie habitats and wildlife species.

stands of reestablished native grasses, the reduction of woody vegetation encroachment and removing hazardous fuels. Extraneous fire personnel and equipment were allocated to the District from refuges located in Texas, California and Minnesota as well as from the Bureau of Land Management's Boise office and were instrumental in the District's burning achievements. *Todd Luke, Litchfield, WMD*

Prescribed Burning at St. Croix WMD — It Was a Team Effort!

The weather forecast for May 4 - 5, 2002, made prescribed burning look promising for St. Croix Wetland Management District. Prescribed burn trainee David Bolin began recruiting volunteers early on May 3 and the teams began arriving that afternoon. Big Oaks, Rice Lake, Necedah and Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuges, plus the Mingo Job Corps, generously sent burn bosses, firefighters and fire equipment to help St. Croix WMD complete their prescribed burns.

Even though actual weather

conditions limited our prescribed burn site options, two burns totaling 188 acres were completed. In addition, and very importantly, the burns provided needed training experience for the prescribed burn team. Under the supervision of Burn Boss Brian Winters from Big Oaks NWR, Duane King, burn boss at Rice Lake NWR, completed his Prescribed Burn Boss Type II Task Book. Trainees Jennifer Rabuk from Necedah NWR and David Bolin from St. Croix WMD also learned from Winters and King. Also participating was Temporary Firefighter Kevin Hanson (also a Smoke Chaser for Minnesota DNR) who has 10 years experience with wildfires, but no previous experience with prescribed burning.

Early Sunday morning, the Mingo crew of seven had to return home and Necedah NWR sent four additional firefighters.

Thanks to the leadership of Region 3's Fire Management Coordinator Brian McManus and Fire Management Officer Tom Zellmer, this was a successful team effort! *Chet McCarty, St. Croix WMD*



- USFWS Photo by Stacy Salvevold

Big Oaks NWR in southern Indiana completed 18 prescribed burns totalling 13,227 acres. Big Oaks has been designated a globally important bird area and managers use prescribed fires to keep grassland areas free from hardwood encroachment and remove hazardous fuels.

Hamden Slough Refuge Completes Burning Season

Hamden Slough National Wildlife Refuge completed eight burns totalling 666 acres on native prairie remnants and restorations. The burns were completed to remove hazardous fuels and control brush and invasive tame grass in prairie remnants and restored prairie sites.

The burns required teams of five to six firefighters. Firefighters from Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge provided substantial staffing. The Tamarac team gained valuable experience working with the lighter, faster moving fires of the prairie grasses, as compared to the slower, but more intense burns in the Tamarac refuge forest. *Mike Murphy, Hamden Slough NWR*

Driftless Area Refuge Completes Prescribed Burn

An eight-acre prescribed burn was completed on the Howard Creek unit of the Driftless Area National Wildlife Refuge on April 29. The objective of the burn was to remove woody plants, rejuvenate a native prairie remnant and prepare adjacent ground for native prairie restoration.

The refuge was primarily established for endangered species that occur on a specialized habitat type, algific talus slopes. Forested and grassland habitat surrounding endangered species habitat often requires restoration from past agricultural or other human activities. Staff of the McGregor District, Upper Mississippi River NWFR assisted with the burn. *Cathy Henry, Upper Miss. NWFR*

Big Oaks Refuge Completes 2002 Spring Prescribed Fire Season

Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge, with the help of the Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge staff and the New Marion Volunteer Fire Department, completed their spring prescribed burns. Despite a wet spring, 18 prescribed fires were accomplished. The burn units totaled 13,227 acres.

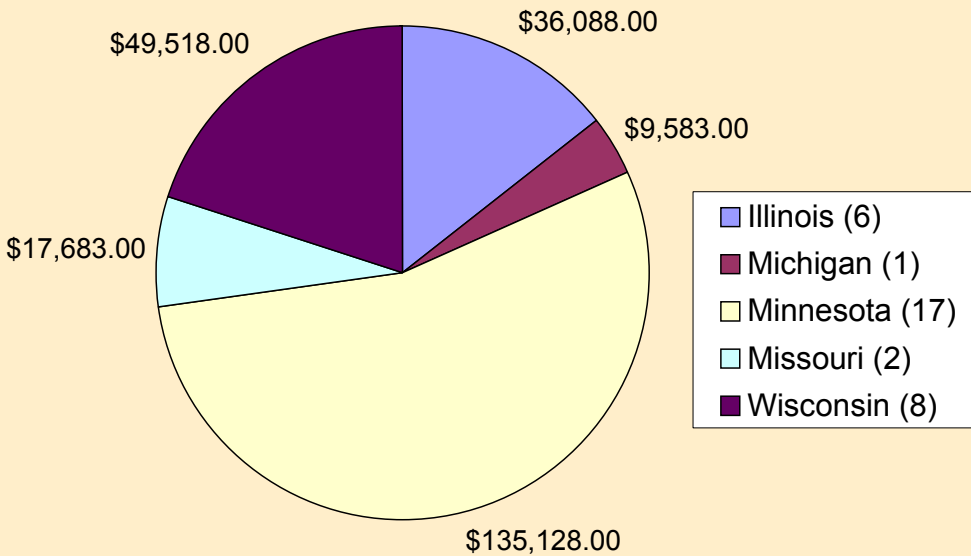
One of the objectives of the prescribed fires at Big Oaks is to keep grasslands open and free from hardwood encroachment. The American Bird Conservancy has labeled Big Oaks a Globally Important Bird Area. Several grassland and shrubland bird species of management concern depend on these vast grassland and shrubland complexes maintained through prescribed fire. Species such as Henslow's sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, sedge wren, eastern meadowlark, American woodcock and prairie warblers nest in these areas. *Stephen Miller, Big Oaks NWR*

Great River Refuge Completes a Successful Burn Season

Staff at the Great River National Wildlife Refuge, with some assistance from Two Rivers National Wildlife Refuge and the Mark Twain Complex Headquarters, completed 16 prescribed burns for a total of 629 acres. Had conditions been ideal in each unit to allow for complete burns, total acreage could have reached 1,150 acres.

Even with the lower acreage, the season was considered a success. We were able to burn units which haven't been burned for more than 10 years and set back woody encroachment in significant waterfowl and other migratory bird habitats such as cattail marshes, sedge meadows, and prairie fields. We were also able to prepare some fields for planting by cooperative farmers. *Carolyn Gregory, Great River NWR*

Region 3 Rural Fire Assistance Program Grants Fiscal Year 2001



Rural Fire Districts Receive Federal Grant for Enhancements

Two rural fire departments in the Fergus Falls district received grants to enhance the fire protection capabilities of their rural fire districts. The Ashby and Pelican Rapids Fire Departments each received grants of \$9,583.00.

The Pelican Rapids Fire Department used their funds to help pay for a new grass fire fighting truck.

The Ashby fire department used funds to update their water tender and buy some fire protection equipment.

The two fire districts cover an area of 240,000 acres and have a total of 5,640 acres of WPA land on 34 WPA's within their districts.

Kevin Brennan, Fergus Falls WMD/PWLC

Agassiz Refuge Fire Program Gets Boost With New Equipment

Three major pieces of fire equipment were replaced with fire funds this year.

A new Messick all-track vehicle with mower and 400 gallon tank with two Honda pumps replaced the old Bombardier.

A Terra Torch, 140 gallon unit that meets OSHA and DOT specifications arrived in mid-August. The torch allows faster ignition over a greater distance and provides a safety factor by keeping firefighter fatigue low, as they don't have to hand ignite miles of marsh, and minimizing their exposure to leg/burn injuries when they fall into rat or beaver runs or sink in deep muck.

The last piece of equipment is a retrofitted Army deuce-and-a-half truck (12' bed) with a 830 gallon tank with a BB4 pump and fire-suppressant foam capability. The new vehicle allows for better maneuverability on refuge roads and dikes.

Margaret Anderson, Agassiz NWR



- USFWS Photo Agassiz NWR

Agassiz NWR recently acquired this new Terra Torch to help with their prescribed burning program. Although not suited for most prescribed burns managed throughout the region, the Terra Torch is ideal for the difficult terrain of northern Minnesota.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Prescribed Burn Acreage Report

As of June 1, 2002

REGION	HAZARDOUS FUEL REDUCTION				WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE			
	GOAL (acres)	ACCOMPLISHED RX	MECH	% COMPLETED TOTAL	GOAL (acres)	ACCOMPLISHED RX	MECH	% COMPLETED TOTAL
1	31,697	35,950	1,323	117.59%	19,831	575	886	7.37%
2	70,680	63,931	980	91.84%	4,347	2,941	320	75.02%
3	30,283	46,892	294	155.82%	10,188	13,540	529	138.09%
4	94,359	102,961		109.12%	856	5,000	0	584.11%
5	8,826	11,555	53	131.52%	4,775	2,012	72	43.64%
6	42,198	32,218		76.35%	8,114	2,754	580	41.09%
7	3,336	0	0	0.00%	1,385	475	1	34.37%
TOTAL	281,379	293,507	2,650	105.25%	49,496	27,297	2,388	59.97%
SERVICE TOTAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS				325,842	ACRES		98.48%	

The Windom Wetland Management District Conducts Its First Fall Burns

The Windom Wetland Management District conducted its first fall burns since being established in 1990. Four fall burns totaling 169.6 acres were completed on waterfowl production areas in Jackson County. The prescribed fires on the Boot Lake and Skunk Lake WPA's were intended to stress the cool-season brome grass and to provide a clean field for a more effective herbicide treatment of the brome prior to seeding.

The sites will be converted from introduced cool season grasses to warm season grasses of local origin. Portions of the unit were dominated by brome grass, a sod forming grass which crowds out other plant species. This species provides little benefit to wildlife species.

The Timber Lake burn was conducted to reduce the invasion of woody vegetation into the seeded

native prairie and wetland basin. However, the burn was extinguished due to the high fuel moisture and lack of wind needed to accomplish our intended goal. *Todd Hauge, Windom WMD*

A Snowy End to the Fall Prescribed Fire Season at Fergus Falls Wetland Management District

The fall 2001 prescribed fire season came to a screeching halt due to a late November blizzard that blanketed much of western and northwestern Minnesota. It was a productive fall for the Fergus Falls WMD burn crew, as many needed burns were completed throughout the district. The weather allowed for burning through Nov. 20.

During our unusually warm fall, the district completed 15 burns totaling 1,120 acres, had two wild-fires totaling one acre and assisted the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources with one fire totaling 320 acres. During the 2001 calendar

year, 47 prescribed fires were completed for a total of 4,358 acres burned. (2001 fiscal year = 40 prescribed fires totaling 3,790 acres, 2002 fiscal year = 34 burns totaling 3,931 acres)

The unusually warm, dry weather resulted in many hot fires well into November. With the extra hot fire behavior, we were able to remove large numbers of trees on units where trees were invading the prairie. We completed some much needed burns at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center, especially around the buildings. We burned three sites to stimulate flea beetles released to control leafy spurge. Three sites were burned as part of the site preparation for native grass seeding. We burned inside three predator fences to stimulate nesting cover, and the rest of the burns were executed to reduce the duff layer and stimulate nesting cover. *Kevin Brennan, Fergus Falls WMD/PWLC*

Regional Cooperation, Team Effort Pays Off During Spring Burning Season

For thousands of years, late melting spring snows and cool rainy weather (like those experienced this year on the prairies) never stopped the natural process of fire from completing its important work of maintaining life on this once vast grassland ecosystem. Safety was never a concern to Mother Nature either. However, for today's resource managers, applying prescribed fire to mimic natural processes can pose some real challenges. Conducting these fires safely and efficiently while protecting the human landscape, can be tricky. To pull it off takes a team effort.

Personnel and equipment from within Region 3, and other regions and agencies, combined to conduct over 250 prescribed burns to treat about 61,000 acres of Region 3 wildlife habitat with prescribed fire.

These planned fire treatments will improve wildlife habitat for hundreds of species. In addition, these burns contribute to the hazardous fuels reduction and wildland urban interface goals of the National Fire Plan.

Sixteen Region 3 stations shared resources and equipment this spring. Other regions also contributed. Region 1 provided two firefighters, Region 2 provided seven firefighters and a prescribed fire module. Region 4 provided four firefighters with an engine. In addition, the National Park Service provided a six-person Fire Use Module from the Black Hills, and assisted with 10 burns over a 10 day period. This was the third year in a row that the Black Hills Module has assisted Region 3 efforts.

Why all of the cooperation? Today's resource managers have learned that to meet the challenges of a safe, effective prescribed fire program, enlisting the help and



- USFWS Photo Port Louisa NWR

It takes many trained individuals to manage a fire and ensure it is kept under control.

expertise of others is essential.

Earlier in the year, Region 3 fire personnel went on details to other stations and other regions to assist with prescribed fire. In return, other regions assist Region 3 during peak burning periods. This cooperation helps make the most of a short burn season, reduces the risk of escaped fire, fosters the transfer of information and experience and is the right way to do business.

Fragmentation, drainage, invasion by exotic plants and decades of fire suppression have imperiled the prairie pothole region. Today, fire is used for a variety of reasons, including to set back encroaching trees and shrubs, invigorate native prairie plant communities, reduce invasive exotic vegetation and recycling nutrients. Fire is one of the few tools managers have which mimics natural processes. It will take continued planning and cooperation to use it effectively and safely. The trick is in the teamwork.

Ron Cole, Big Stone NWR



- USFWS Photo Minnesota Valley NWR

Fire specialist from throughout the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as from other agencies, must work together to plan and execute successful prescribed burns. Most stations do not have enough equipment or trained staff to accomplish all the required burning without assistance.

Accomplishment Reports Received

The following prescribed fire and burn-related reports were processed by the Region 3 Accomplishment Reporting System for the fall 2001 and spring 2002 burning seasons. Employees can search reports using the Report Manager utility in the ARS.

Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge Successfully Completes Spring Prescribed Burning Season
Michelle McDowell, Union Slough NWR

Prescribed Burning at DeSoto Refuge Completed
Cindy Myer, DeSoto NWR

Patience Pays Burning Dividends for Litchfield WMD
Todd Luke, Litchfield WMD

Hamden Slough Refuge Completes Burning Season
Michael Murphy, Hamden Slough NWR

Spring Burning Successful on Port Louisa Refuge
Sally Jack, Port Louisa NWR

Prescribed Burning — It Was a Team Effort!
Chet McCarty, St. Croix WMD

Driftless Area Refuge Completes Prescribed Burn
Cathy Henry, UMRNW&FR-McGregor Dist.

Great River National Wildlife Refuge Completes a Successful Burn Season
Carolyn Gregory, Great River NWR

Big Oaks Refuge Completes 2002 Spring Prescribed Fire Season
Stephen Miller, Muscatatuck NWR

Prescribed Burning at Crab Orchard Refuge
Thomas Palmer, Crab Orchard NWR

Detroit Lakes Fire Staff Present Fire Training Courses
Les Peterson, Detroit Lakes WMD

Grassland Improvement Program at Horicon NWR is For the Birds
Diane Penttila, Horicon NWR

Rural Fire Districts Receive Federal Grant for Enhancements
Kevin Brennan, Fergus Falls WMD/PWLC

A Snowy End to the Fall Prescribed Fire Season at Fergus Falls WMD
Kevin Brennan, Fergus Falls WMD/PWLC

Agassiz NWR Fall Burns Nearly 5,000 Acres
Margaret Anderson, Agassiz NWR

Minnesota Valley NWR Prescribed Fire Program Burns 874 Acres
Tom Kerr, Minnesota Valley NWR

The Windom Wetland Management District Conducts Its First Fall Burns
Todd Hauge, Windom WMD

The Fall Burn Season Has Begun at Fergus Falls WMD
Kevin Brennan, Fergus Falls WMD/PWLC

Productivity of Grassland Birds on Big Oaks NWR
Teresa Vanosdol-Lewis, Big Oaks NWR

Agassiz NWR Fire Program Gets Boost With New Equipment
Margaret Anderson, Agassiz NWR

Federal Funds Heading to 34 Fire Departments in the Midwest
Chuck Traxler, External Affairs

Grassland Restoration Meeting Shows Numerous Techniques and Successes
Kevin Brennan, Fergus Falls WMD/PWLC

Prescribed Burning At DeSoto and Boyer Chute Refuges
Cindy Myer, Desoto NWR

Region Develops Rural Fire Assistance Program Website
Larry Dean, External Affairs

Minnesota Valley Recruits Fire Management Specialist
Dawn Newbrough, Minnesota Valley NWR

Litchfield Wetland Management District Burns 3,065 Acres to Improve Habitat
Todd Luke, Litchfield WMD

Recruitment Efforts for Regional Fire Positions
Tom Worthington, Refuges&Wildlife

Muscatatuck NWR Annual Prescribed Burns Completed
Susan Knowles, Muscatatuck NWR

Busko WPA Burned to Prepare Seed Bed
Kevin Brennan, Fergus Falls WMD/PWLC

Spring Prescribed Fire Season Completed at Fergus Falls WMD
Kevin Brennan, Fergus Falls WMD/PWLC

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Agassiz NWR Fire Management Plan Approved

Margaret Anderson, Agassiz NWR

Regional Cooperation, Team Effort Pays Off During Spring Burning Season

Ron Cole, Big Stone NWR

The Windom Wetland Management District completes its 2001 Prescribed Burning Program.

Todd Hauge, Windom WMD

Prescribed Burns at Port Louisa NWR

Sally Jack, Port Louisa NWR

Prescribed Fire Activities at Union Slough NWR

Rod Hansen, Union Slough NWR

Big Oaks NWR Completes Six Controlled Burns Totaling 3,700 Acres

Stephen Miller, Muscatatuck NWR

Two Rivers Refuge Completes Successful Prescribed Burning Season

Russell Engelke, Mark Twain NWR-Brussels Dist.

Prescribed Fires at Crab Orchard NWR

Judy Pharris, Crab Orchard NWR



- USFWS Photo Necedah NWR

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