



Open Understory

Timucuan Ecological Park and Preserve Conducts Successful First-Entry Prescribed Burn

*Timucuan Ecological Park and Preserve
Jacksonville, Florida---*

Established in 1988, this 46,000-acre preserve protects vast forest, water, and salt marsh areas, as well as several unique cultural sites. Operated under a partnership agreement between the National Park Service (NPS), the Florida State Park System, the City of Jacksonville, and more than 300 private landowners, the Preserve is a mosaic of significant natural, cultural, and recreational resources.

The Cedar Point area has probably seen thousands of years of human impact. The original long-leaf pine forest was replaced by a fast-growing slash pine plantation, and after the area was sold to the park in 1996 an almost impenetrable understory of saw palmetto, felder bush, wax myrtle, oak, and other hardwoods gradually choked out the slower-growing pines. The area has been mechanically cleared but has likely not been burned for decades.

However, frequent past human uses included fire on a regular basis, says fire ecologist Richard Bryant, and it's something that the NPS has aspired to do since it was purchased. "The ultimate goal is to replant the long-leaf pines," says Bryant "And there's no way to do that except with fire. By clearing the understory and giving the sun-loving pines a chance to grow, we can restore the original forest's characteristics." Bryant expects that fire will have to be introduced into the ecosystem at least two or three times before replanting can occur.

After over-dry conditions postponed the original burn planned for February 2009, the plot was set alight for the first time on July 17th. Due to the density and potential volatility of the vegetation, ignition was done primarily from the air. Burn boss Dave Loveland was quick to point out that the implementation of this treatment required the support of numerous parks, stating: "The fact that personnel from a number of distant Park Service units can come together and successfully conduct this prescribed fire is a testament to the highly trained, competent fire staff we have here in the Southeast Region. Further credit should also go to their home units, who willingly make these resources available not only for this treatment but almost every time I call." (See *Timucuan*, page 2)



Above: Fire crews carefully monitor the burn from a safe containment line. Although most ignitions were done from the air, having qualified firefighters on the ground helps keep the prescribed burn safe and effective.

Inset: As in all prescribed burns, smoke dispersal in Timucuan was carefully considered. Westerly winds helped disperse the smoke over the ocean, minimizing impacts to community members and recreational values.

Focus on Wildfire

The Deep Fire,

Florida,
18 miles north of
Everglades City.

Size: 30,005 acres

Start date: 4/22/2009

Containment date:
6/1/2009

Cause: Lightning

Summary: Dry fuels and extended drought contributed to the rapid spread and severity of the fire. With much of the fire's perimeter in Big Cypress National Preserve, strategies including using existing roads and boundaries and air resources to control the spread of the fire. Significant concerns included smoke on the roadways, and road closures were put into place due to safety issues.

Welcome Liz Struhar! Regional Office Fills Fire Planner Position

The Southeast Regional Fire Management Office is pleased to announce the selection of Martha Elizabeth "Liz" Struhar to the position of Regional Fire Planner. Struhar has worked in the NPS Southeast Regional Office as a GIS specialist and served as fire effects monitor at Everglades National Park. Struhar started her Park Service career as a Student Conservation Association intern at Big Cypress National Preserve. She holds a Master of Science in Environmental Studies from Florida International University.

(Cont. from page 1) During the prescribed burn, personnel were alerted to a fast moving severe thunderstorm approaching the burn unit. When the front hit, fire personnel were in a position to react quickly to a small spot fire resulting from the high winds. Despite the heavy rains, firing operations resumed later in the afternoon resulting in a mosaic of burned and unburned fuels within the treatment area.



The Cedar Point prescribed burn was managed by the Great Smoky Mountains Fire Use Module, led by Dave Loveland, and fire staff from Everglades NP, Kings Mountain NBP, the Southern Appalachian Fire Effects Team, Timucuan E&HP, and air and ground resources from the Okefenokee NWR. Above, Mark Mendonca (GRSM) and Robert Trincado (EVER) check weather conditions before morning briefing.

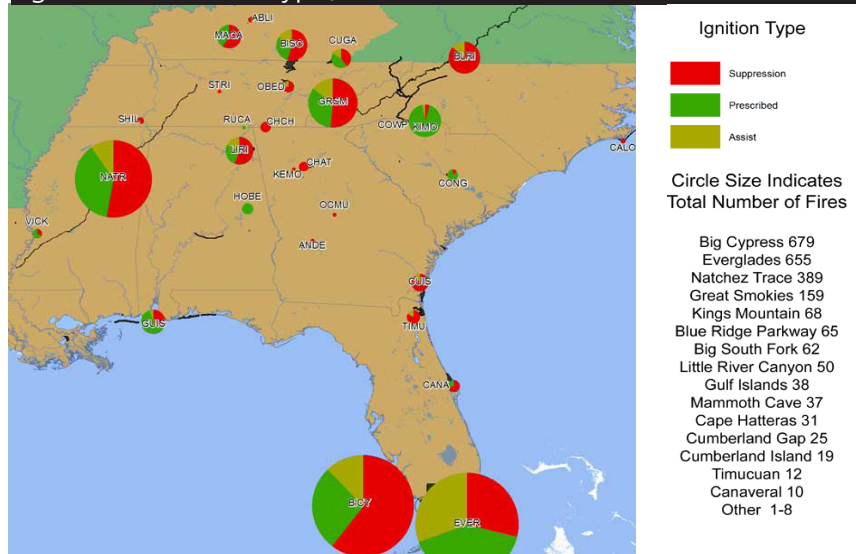
Fire History in the Southeast Region

For over 10,000 years fire has had an enormous effect on the Southern landscape. Evidence of this vast and varied history is found in the vegetation and in the personal accounts of people; those who came to the New World prior to the 17th century as well as those who still live in the region-- and continue to use fire.

Prior to the 19th century, low-intensity fires were promoted largely to improve hunting through trapping techniques and better game visibility, for agriculture, and to improve seed germination. During the industrialization period (1850's to 1900), loggers and cattle ranchers sometimes set large, stand-replacing burns to clear the landscape of heavy brush in order to plant and maintain pine plantations and to encourage new grass for their stock. It wasn't until the early 1920's that federal lands policies began to favor large-scale fire suppression. But fire plays a critical role in the management of the south's public lands, and an increasing number of land management agencies are using fire to restore ecosystems and to protect communities. More than ever, fires are being set under carefully planned conditions to help mimic traditional and natural fire regimes.

For the past 50 years, the National Park Service has been a leader in putting fire back on the ground. Frequent lightning strikes and vegetation types help determine how often burns need to be

Ignition Total and Type, 1999-2008



The graph above shows the total number of fires in various parks, along with the management action associated with each.

accomplished, and fire personnel in the region keep busy trying to accomplish project burning during windows when weather and staff levels are conducive to safe burning.