



## Park Employee for a Day Geocache #4



### Who You Are

As the Fire Management Officer of Everglades National Park, you're often in the hot seat! You oversee all operations related to fire, including recruiting and training personnel, managing an active aviation program, planning prescribed burns, and managing unplanned wildfires. And most importantly, you must ensure that all operations are conducted safely. And consider this: south Florida is *the* lightning strike capital of North America, and the 'Glades are built to burn!

### The Issue

In 2012, a summer lightning strike ignited a wildfire in this area. Wildfires are not unusual in the prairies around you. The grasses and other vegetation found here burn easily—especially following the lengthy dry season. Occasional fires are necessary for the survival of these prairies, as they help limit the growth of forest species.

But the prairies around you also harbor an important population of Cape Sable Seaside Sparrows. This tiny bird is found nowhere else on earth, except Everglades National Park. Only a few thousand individuals remain, and the survival of most was imperiled by this particular fire.



The Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow is one of the most critically endangered birds in North America.  
NPS Photo by Lori Oberhofer

### The Hard Decision

Park personnel do not always attempt to put out unplanned wildfires in the park. Usually, fires that do not threaten human safety or historic structures are monitored closely but allowed to burn. It is widely recognized that fire is important for the long-term health of the Everglades ecosystem.

This fire, however, is burning dangerously close to an important subpopulation of endangered Cape Sable Seaside Sparrows. The number of birds in peril may constitute as much as 80% of the known population. If the fire is not suppressed, an unknown number of these birds may be killed. But—if the fire is allowed to persist—the resulting burn could provide ideal habitat for surviving sparrows for many years to come. Do you put your firefighters at risk in a costly attempt to put out the flames, or do you cross your fingers and hope for the best? Think carefully! Whatever decision you make may help seal the fate of these critically imperiled birds forever.



What's the best course of action: attempting to put out the flames or just watching from a distance?  
NPS Photos

When you log your find, be sure to tell us:

**What would YOU have done about the wildfire raging in the prairie?**



And then, if you're curious... here's how the park actually handled this fire!