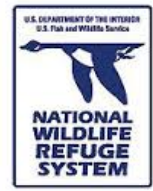


Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Florida Keys National
Wildlife Refuge Complex
28950 Watson Blvd.
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News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Contact: Andrew Townsend, 305-395-1573, andrew_townsend@fws.gov
November 5, 2019 Or Greg Suszek, 239-877-9545, greg_suszek@fws.gov

Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges Complex Prescribed Burn Wrap Up and Planned Guided Walks (Tue. Nov. 12)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conducted a prescribed burn last week within the National Key Deer Refuge on Big Pine Key. The burn unit was on northern Big Pine Key, north and west of Blue Hole along Key Deer Blvd. There may be the smell of smoke in the burn area and beyond for approximately the next week. The site is still being monitored for any hotspots. Blue Hole and the Mannillo Nature Trail are now open the usual hours of operation- dawn to dusk. We will open the Watson Nature Trail as soon as possible.

The community has expressed interest in the National Key Deer Refuge hosting guided walks through the burn unit. We'll be offering two of these next Tuesday, Nov. 12. There is one scheduled at 9-10 am and the other one in the evening (4:30-5:30 pm). There is no registration required. We'll be there to answer your questions regarding prescribed burns as we walk and look around. We'll meet out at the Nature Trails parking area, north of Blue Hole along Key Deer Blvd. Wear sturdy shoes, bring water, and dress for a short hike. These walks are free and appropriate for all ages.

Prescribed burns in the Florida Keys Refuges are implemented by a highly qualified and trained staff of interagency professional fire specialists. The primary reasons for conducting these burns are to remove the over accumulation of vegetation acting as fire fuel along our urban-wildland interface to protect our community private property and residents, and for ecological purposes aimed at emulating natural fire in the pine rockland habitat. This activity creates a defensible space between refuge lands and private property to prevent or reduce the threat of wildfires. Prescribed burns reduce excessive natural fire fuel build-up, thereby reducing the chance of unwanted severe wildfires. Restoration and maintenance of the fire-dependent pine rockland habitat is essential for a healthy ecosystem. Prescribed burns are important for the continued survival of local species such as the federally endangered Key deer, the Bartram's hairstreak butterfly and the butterfly's host plant, pineland croton, which has evolved to be dependent upon fire. Mechanized methods have also been used to strengthen fire breaks, as well as to mimic fire and restore pineland croton habitat in areas that are too overgrown or too close to private property to safely conduct prescribed fire activities.

For more information, please contact Andrew Townsend at 305-395-1573 or Greg Suszek at 239-877-9545 and follow Refuge updates on our website and Facebook page:

http://www.fws.gov/refuge/National_Key_Deer_Refuge/About_the_Complex.html

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