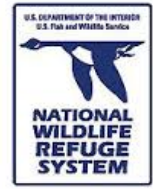


Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Florida Keys National
Wildlife Refuge Complex
28950 Watson Blvd.
Big Pine Key, FL 33043

News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Contact: Andrew Townsend, 305-395-1573, andrew_townsend@fws.gov
October 22, 2019 Or Greg Suszek, 239-877-9545, greg_suszek@fws.gov

Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuges Complex Plans to Conduct Prescribed Burn(s) on Big Pine Key Next Week (October 28 – November 1)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service plans to conduct prescribed burns on one or more locations within the National Key Deer Refuge on Big Pine Key next week, October 28 – November 1, when and if weather conditions permit. 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.

Community updates, up to and including when actual prescribed burn dates are proposed and when a burn actually occurs, will be announced on our Facebook page and via roadside advisory signs. Visitors and residents can find maps of proposed prescribed burn units at our website <http://www.fws.gov/nationalkeydeer/>.

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

<https://www.facebook.com/floridakeysrefuges>

The National Wildlife Refuge System protects wildlife and wildlife habitat on more than 150 million acres of land and water from the Caribbean to the Pacific, Maine to Alaska. Refuges also improve human health, provide outdoor recreation, and support local economies. *Visit our home page at <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/>.*

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/>.