

The J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) **will be implementing a prescribed burn of the Bailey Tract** on Sanibel Island this Thursday August 8.

The Southern Florida/Caribbean Fire District of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be conducting the prescribed burn with the assistance of the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation, the City of Sanibel, and the Sanibel Fire Rescue District. The purpose of this prescribed burn is to reduce the likelihood of catastrophic wildfires and enhance wildlife habitat by reducing the spread of invasive woody vegetation and restoring the natural ecology of the area.

Based on current weather forecasts, the Refuge and our partners are planning for this prescribed burn to take place on **Thursday, August 8**. Note: If weather conditions are not favorable the morning of the burn, then it will be postponed until the next favorable opportunity.

During the controlled burn operations, residents and visitors are encouraged to:

- **close their windows,**
- **cover pools,**
- **move cars and furniture indoors,**
- **stay indoors to minimize the impacts from smoke,**
- **visit the east or west ends of Sanibel Island**

Note: Smoke and ash associated with a prescribed burn cannot be prevented.

On the day when a prescribed burn will take place, portions of the refuge will be closed to public access. Please abide by all signs, road closures, and instructions about closed areas provided by law enforcement and fire personnel. Access into the burn unit will be strictly prohibited during the prescribed fire operation.

After the prescribed burn has been completed, there may be occasional smoke seen from the burned area for several days. Refuge personnel will monitor the burned area and adjacent roads, day and night, taking all precautions and maintaining readiness to minimize fire activity and smoke impacts to the public.

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. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

Why do we burn? Carefully planning and conducting managed burns can prevent the likelihood of catastrophic wildfires and help preserve the natural ecology of the area. This technique called "prescribed fire" will reduce the amount of dried vegetation or "fuel". Fire managers evaluate environmental conditions such as temperature, relative humidity, recent rainfall, wind speed and direction, soil moisture, fuel conditions, in order to determine the type of burn that can be conducted. Following a predefined 'prescription' allows fire management officers to establish the desired fire behavior (intensity, flame length, direction of fire spread and smoke). These prescribed fires are planned and carefully conducted by well-trained and experienced wildland firefighters operating under strict conditions, known as prescriptions. These prescriptions dictate the number of qualified firefighters needed to conduct the burn as well as the types and number of equipment required to safely complete the burn. Smoke is another concern, therefore plans call for specific wind conditions to minimize smoke impacts to roads and communities. A prescribed fire will not be conducted if the prescription cannot be met, i.e., if the proper wind conditions and relative humidity are not present on the day of the planned burn, the burn will not be conducted.

Prescribed fire burn plans have been approved by regional fire experts from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and authorization will be obtained from the State of Florida immediately prior to conducting prescribed burns. The Refuge will implement prescribed burning as soon as the proper conditions are present. USFWS firefighters from the Southern Florida/Caribbean Fire District and other agency partners, including the National Park Service and Florida Forest Service, will be conducting the burns. Prescribed burns are planned so they minimize impacts on people and wildlife. Units are burned in small blocks to minimize smoke impacts. "The Refuge is committed to the safety of our neighbors. These burns are being conducted to reduce hazardous fuels adjacent to private lands which may pose a wildfire threat. These prescribed burns will also restore marsh and grassland areas, control invasive woody vegetation, and increase the diversity of native plants and wildlife" states Refuge Manager Paul Tritaik.

Prescribed burns have been conducted for many years at J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge and have demonstrated to be a cost-effective tool for reducing the risk of serious wildfires. Due to difficulties in predicting weather, the Refuge is not able to notify the public of the exact day the prescribed burn will be conducted. However, landowners adjacent to the burn areas and local fire departments will be notified as soon as conditions warrant the scheduling of a burn (usually with 24-48 hours advanced notice).

Who helps us? What should To address safety and wildland fire issues on Sanibel, the City of Sanibel, the Sanibel Fire and Rescue District, the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation, and the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge formed the “Sanibel Firewise Task Force”.

Reminders to Homeowners: As a homeowner, there are many things that you can do to reduce the wildfire risk around your home. Suggestions include: trimming dead palm fronds from trees; trimming any tall grasses near the home; pruning large, leafy hardwood trees so the lowest branches are 6 to 10 feet high; removing combustible materials such as gasoline containers, firewood, and building supplies from being stored under or around the home; and keeping mulch and other landscaping material well watered.

Fire is a natural part of Florida’s ecosystem, historically set by lightning. Because of this history of periodic fires, many of Florida’s natural communities are adapted to burning. “Many plants and animals are dependent on and benefit from fire. Without fire, native plants and animals have a much harder time surviving in these habitats.” said Refuge Manager Paul Tritaik. Fire removes dead vegetation, promotes new growth of native vegetation and suppresses exotic plants. In the absence of fire, many plant communities are displaced by dense woody vegetation, which can reduce plant diversity and eliminate foraging opportunities for several of the island’s wildlife. Species such as the gopher tortoise, Eastern indigo snake, and the Sanibel rice rat all depend on a fire-maintained ecosystem.

Questions about the prescribed burns can be directed to the Refuge office at (239) 472-1100 x237. Public Information Officer Westland will be available on the day of the burn, located outside at the Bailey General Store. Cell 239/ 940-0169