



## National Fire Plan

### **Burning 5,000 Acres of Marsh Returns Habitat to Nesting Waterfowl**

CALIFORNIA - Fire managers from the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Tulelake, California burned more than 5,000 acres of marsh in February 2005, renewing waterfowl habitat, reducing wildfire risk to nearby communities, and providing a bit of entertainment for highway travelers.

Choked with overgrown native hardstem bulrush, a number of marsh units at Tule Lake and Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuges require periodic prescribed fire to reclaim essential nesting areas for waterfowl such as pintail, mallard, gadwall and canvasback. The inaccessible marsh was ignited using a helicopter and trained refuge firefighters. Refuge personnel also conducted ground control, ensuring that the fires remained within prescribed boundaries. The end result was twofold: wildfire risk reduction and habitat renewal.

The use of prescribed fire and wildland fire on national wildlife refuges helps meet refuge goals and ensures healthier, more productive landscapes, as well as safer communities for both people and wildlife. Burnable acres on refuges and other Service lands are classified in terms of the degree of departure from their natural condition, Condition Class I being the most natural and least likely to cause a damaging fire with loss to ecosystem components, Class III being the least natural, and Class II being in the middle. Approximately 60 percent of the acreage burned on Service lands this year has been Class II and III. At Klamath Marsh, regular maintenance burning of Class I lands keeps them from becoming Classes II and III lands.

The prescribed fires at Klamath Marsh were a big hit with travelers on California Highway 161, who stopped at a roadside turnout and along established refuge tour routes to view the flames. Their questions created an opportunity for refuge firefighters to teach them about the benefits of prescribed fire. Once people understood that the fire was intended to clear hazardous fuels from waterfowl habitat areas and improve conditions, they expressed support for the refuge's management policies and objectives.

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