

Successful Use of Prescribed Fire Helps to Protect Interpretive Center from Wildfire

Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, Indiana

National Fire Plan – Hazard Fuels Reduction

On Friday May 6, 2005 Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore experienced an onslaught of wildland fires. In all, the Lakeshore fire staff dealt with eight fires, all of which were apparently caused by passing trains traversing the southern edge of Lake Michigan, passing through the National Lakeshore. Even though all of these fires were suppressed without any serious long-term damage to the natural resource, one fire in particular, the Doug Center 1 Fire, posed an immediate threat to the Paul H. Douglas Interpretive Center. The interpretive center is a two million dollar facility used jointly by the Lakeshore's Interpretive staff, as well as the Lake County Solid Waste Management District. The Doug Center 1 fire was one of three fires which occurred that day in the Miller Woods portion of the park, and was contained at twelve acres. Miller Woods lies within the National Lakeshore and is a pristine example of Oak-Savanna habitat.



Doug Center Prescribed Fire completed in April 2005 to protect the Paul H. Douglas Center. Photo by Paul Mancuso.



Map of the Doug Center #1 Wildfire.

Just one month prior, the fire program at the National Lakeshore had successfully completed an 8.5 acre prescribed fire surrounding the Paul H. Douglas Center. This prescribed fire project is scheduled periodically and conducted by the National Lakeshore to reduce the fuel buildup surrounding this facility to protect it from a catastrophic wildland fire destroying the facility. The fact that this unit had been successfully burned in April was the primary reason that the Doug Center 1 Fire did not burn up to the Paul H. Douglas Center. The eastern flank of the wildfire burned right up to and was stopped by the previously burned Douglas Center prescribed fire area. (In 2001, the Bingo Fire, another wildland fire, had burned a short portion of boardwalk along a trail in this same location.)

The success of this prescribed fire in stopping a wildland fire from impacting the Paul H. Douglas Center is definitely a success story for the fire program at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, as well as for the National Park Service and Department of the Interior.

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