



### **Hats Off to Forecaster for Accurate Weather Warning**

MISSISSIPPI – It was a classic case of “you can’t believe everything you read.”

National Weather Service Fire weather forecaster Tim Destri recently helped the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service prevent a prescribed burn from turning into an unwanted wildfire at Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge, and he did it by not quite believing his computer weather models.

The Mississippi refuge sits squarely in an area of unpredictable weather patterns generated by Gulf Coast winds. Yet because the refuge contains flammable vegetation that needs routine burning in order to reduce wildfire risk to surrounding communities, fire professionals are always looking for opportunities to burn. They believed they’d found one on March 11. As it turns out, the prescribed fire could have escaped control lines because of unusual weather.

Carefully planned prescribed fire gives refuge managers the flexibility to burn under the right conditions, safely managing fire and smoke to benefit natural resources while keeping firefighters and the public safe. These actions help reduce the risk of devastating wildfires that can threaten people, communities, and plant and animal communities.

Refuge fire staff asked Destri to run computer models to help them predict fire behavior on the 538-acre burn. Fortunately, Destri didn’t just rely on what the computer said. He checked and re-checked actual weather observations throughout the morning, trying to predict relative humidity for an afternoon spot-forecast. His spot forecast? Don’t burn. When relative humidity dropped to an unprecedented 14 percent on the Mississippi Gulf Coast later in afternoon, refuge managers were glad they heeded the forecaster’s warning. The refuge fire staff ended up helping extinguish several unrelated wildland fires that day on lands near the refuge.

“We would like to commend...Tim Destri for his diligence in checking actual observations and not relying entirely on model data,” wrote refuge project leader Alan Schriver in a commendation letter to Destri’s supervisor. “And for his continued support throughout the morning as we came to a decision on whether to proceed with the burn.”

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