

Emergency Fuel Load Reductions in Florida

In early November, BLM's Jackson, Mississippi Hotshot crew spent three days performing emergency fuel reduction work to mitigate increased fire danger from trees toppled during recent hurricanes at Jupiter Inlet in northern Palm Beach County, Florida. They felled hundreds of aged sand pine trees snapped or severely damaged by Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne.

Almost 90 percent of the aging sand pine forest that had for decades dominated the Jupiter Inlet Natural Area was killed by sustained winds over 100 miles per hour that buffeted this coastal community twice during September 2004. The Jackson Hotshot sawyers dismantled the skewed piles of felled trees to hasten their decomposition and reduce the fuel threat. Contracted crews removed 17 and one-half tons of the heaviest fuels from the northern and southern edges of the site to provide an additional fire break in this urban area.

In Lathrop Bayou, Florida, Jackson Hotshot sawyers turned the clock back 15 years with three additional days of intense work. The crew fanned out across the island cutting thousands of young slash pine in a historically open longleaf pine stand. The thinning reduced the fuel loads in the vicinity of old longleaf pines, which will help protect them as the prescribed burns rotate into the hotter growing season burns needed to reduce the dense shrub understory.

The newly opened stands revealed some of the largest pine on the island, including one 20 and one-half inch diameter longleaf that almost doubles the size of the many of the current red-cockaded woodpecker cavity trees. The crew left the few young longleaf pines that had regenerated without the benefit of periodic burns. Additional longleaf regeneration is expected now that fire has been reintroduced to the island.

The island's second prescribed burn is scheduled for March 2005.



Hotshot sawyer at Lathrop Bayou working to reduce fuels.



Trees at Jupiter Inlet Natural Area show damage from Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne. Jackson Hotshots did emergency fuel reductions to mitigate potential fire danger from toppled trees.

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