



## National Fire Plan

### South Florida RxFire Helps Stop Wildfire

#### Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge

A prescribed burn in June 2004 on 7,000 acres of the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge has been credited with halting the spread of a 4,000-acre wildfire ignited by lightning later in the summer. Staff from the Southeast Regional Fire Management Branch as well as six Florida refuges and one fish hatchery participated in the prescribed burn.

Only 80 acres of the 147,392-acre refuge in Palm Beach County were burned by the wildfire, in an area that's part of the northern Everglades and contains slough habitat that is home to more than 257 bird species – including the endangered Everglades snail kite and wood stork.



Jeffrey Schardt was the incident commander for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. When the fire advanced to the area where the prescribed burn was done, it fizzled out. "If the prescribed burn had not been in that location," he said, "the wildfire had the potential to travel through the entire refuge." The wildfire burned parts of the refuge's levees, but stopped a half-mile short of the refuge's pump station.

Refuge Manager Mark Musaus said he plans prescribed burns on 10,000 to 15,000 acres of the refuge in 2005 to control invasive weeds. "Prescribed burns have many benefits," he said. "A properly managed fire is a tool for removing flammable vegetation and creating openings and lush new vegetation, which reduces what can be ignited by lightning or advancing wildfire."



Prescribed fire is a tool often used by the FWS. Since October 2003, the agency's Southeast Region has accomplished 324 prescribed burns on 130,670 acres.