



National Fire Plan

RxFire Protects Homes and Endangered Species from Wildland Fire

Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge - Minnesota

In early 2004 employees at Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge in western Minnesota burned off 35 acres of vegetation along the refuge's northern boundary to remove hazardous fuels and enhance habitat for the state-endangered ball cactus. But at the time they didn't realize just what kind of service they were providing for the town next door.

Only a few months after the prescribed burn, a lightning strike ignited a fire, burning through the refuge's tall-grass prairie and threatening the nearby community of Ortonville. But the prescribed burn area, originally intended to enhance cactus habitat and rid the area of excess fuel buildup, ended up providing a barrier to keep the main body of the 344-acre wildfire from jumping to private land. It also served as a safe anchor point from which firefighters could contain the wildfire. Had the flames spread into Ortonville, they would likely have burned several homes and farms.



Though the size of the fire was relatively small, conditions were extremely difficult for firefighters, whose efforts were hampered by high winds, rough terrain, and the possibility of a tornado in the area.

Employees from the Bellingham, Odessa, and Ortonville volunteer fire departments assisted the refuge firefighters. The Odessa and Ortonville departments helped fight the fire using equipment purchased with grant money from the federally administered Rural Fire Assistance grants program.