

Suppressing the Whalebone Fire at Cape Hatteras NS Cape Hatteras National Seashore, North Carolina National Fire Plan – Firefighting

The Whalebone Fire was reported at 2 acres on Sunday, August 13, burning into the Roanoke Sound just south of Whalebone Junction in Nags Head, NC. The area vegetation of dense pine, shrub and overgrown marsh fuels exhibited intense flames and torching that could be seen from the nearby Nags Head Causeway.

NPS Chief Ranger Norah Martinez stated that “With predicted strong southwest winds it was necessary to aggressively suppress the fire as soon as possible and protect the highways, businesses and residences outside the park boundary.”



Whalebone Fire at Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

The Whalebone Fire was declared contained at 12 acres at noon on August 16 by NPS officials. Spot fires on Monday and Tuesday crossed the line and burned four additional acres. The extremely dry conditions and strong breezes presented challenges to firefighters in controlling the fire and produced a large amount of smoke visible from miles away.

National Park Service officials called in park firefighters along with additional firefighters and equipment from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the North Carolina State Forest Service. In addition to maintaining containment as a primary objective, their secondary objective was to suppress the fires burning in the dense shrub thickets and patches of unburned areas inside the interior sections of the fire that could blaze up and spot across the established lines.

According to Eric Meekins, Firefighter Equipment Operator for Alligator National Wildlife Refuge, the crews were able to channel the spot fires through a series of maneuvers and tie the fire line back into the original fire. NPS and FWS firefighters crawled through dense poison ivy and briar infested shrub to suppress pockets of ground fire scattered throughout the 12-acre burned area.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fire tractors helped contain the fire and the Nags Head Fire Department provided contingency support for the fire in the event that it escaped and threatened structures.

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