

The National Fire Plan

Tradition Housing Development and the Gopher Frog

Mississippi

2002



Glen's Pond in the De Soto Ranger District of the Delta National Forest near Saucier, Missa., is home to an unusual ongoing National Fire Plan-funded project, which involves a federally endangered species called the Mississippi dusky gopher frog. The pond happens to be its only known habitat. The area is also home to the Mississippi gopher tortoise, a threatened species that builds the holes that the frogs live in.



Crewmembers protect a drift fence encircling the frog pond.

Jerry L. Litton/Lightscribe Photography

The frog pond area has been subject to prescribed fires for hazardous fuels reduction since the 1960s, according to Fire Management Officer Jay Boykin. The area, which has a history of wildland fires, develops thick, dangerous fuels when left without intervention. It is also a wildland-urban interface area, with a rural community nearby.

Since the inception of the National Fire Plan, the 591 acres directly around the pond were burned in early April 2001, the 258 acres west of the pond were burned in February 2002, and the pond basin itself was burned in early May 2002.

Currently, the pond area—the 1082 acres considered to be the frog's habitat—gets treatment with prescribed burning every two years, according to Boykin. The area inside a 3-foot-high aluminum fence is only burned when the pond is completely dry. The forest usually uses mechanical means as well as prescribed fire to do fuel treatments, but does not do so in this case.

“We can't use any mechanical or heavy equipment in that area because we might run over or squish a frog,” Boykin said. “We don't use engines or tractor plows, which is our normal way of doing business.” Also, they have to stay on the trails, and only use water, not foam, to prevent damage to the frogs.

A new housing development, to be called Traditions, which is being built next to Glen's Pond, has complicated fuels management in the area even further.

Traditions is the largest planned development in Mississippi. It will be a 4,600-acre community with up to 15,000 dwelling units and is adjacent to the Glen's Pond area. It will change the area from a rural one to one that is heavily populated.

The Forest is making efforts to educate the developers and prospective community residents about the need for prescribed burning in the area. It is also working closely with the Traditions' developers on an easement for occasional smoke and noise intrusions due to prescribed burning. The developer is also working with the Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service to move the threatened gopher tortoise from a tract being developed for road access into the gopher frog pond area.