

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

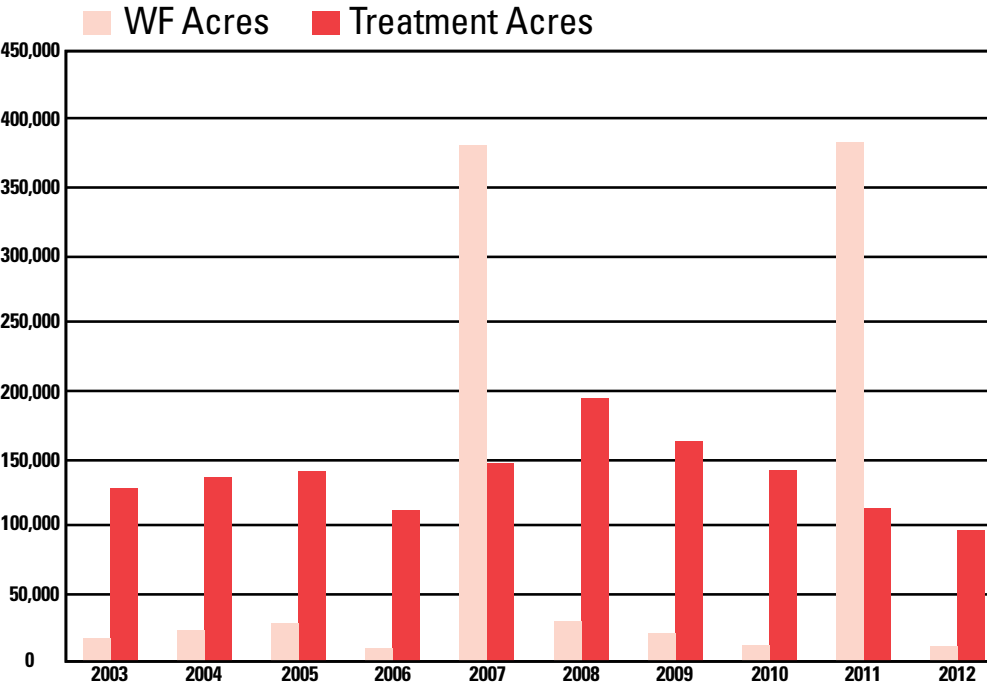
Southeast Region

Fire Division Report FY2012

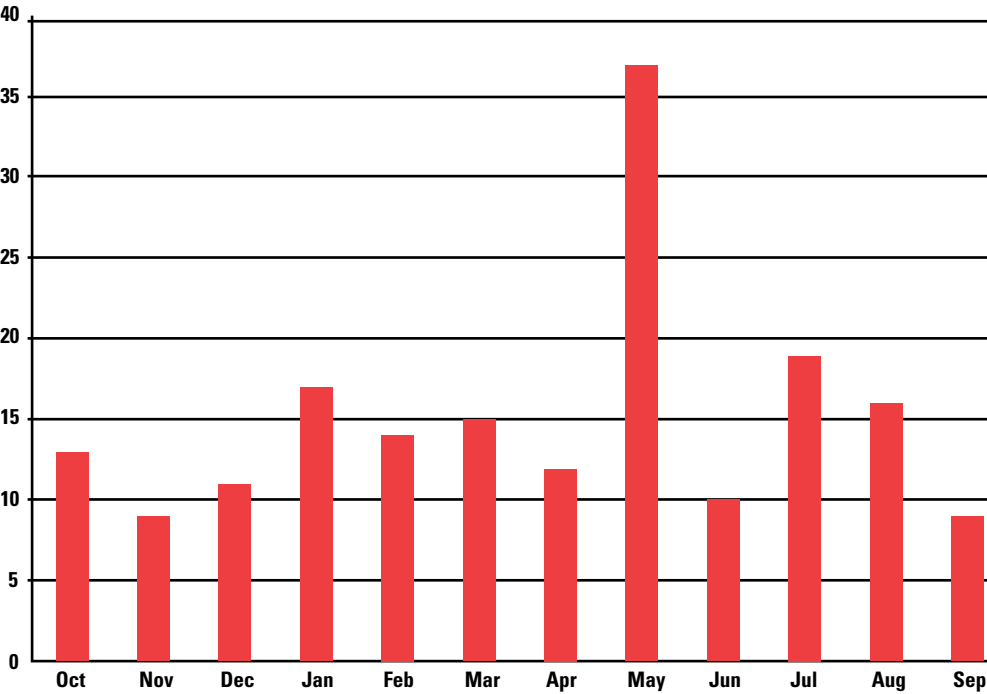


Introduction

Region 4 Wildlife and Treatment Acres on FWS Lands



Region 4 Wildfire Starts



Fiscal Year 2012
Fire Reports by Refuge

Refuge name	Fires
Alligator River NWR	7
Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee NWR	5
Bayou Savage NWR	8
Big Branch NWR	6
Bogue Chitto NWR	1
Cabo Rojo NWR	5
Cache River NWR	1
Cameron Prairie NWR	2
Cape Romain NWR	1
Carolina Sandhills NWR	4
Culebra NWR	1
Eufaula NWR	1
Felsenthal NWR	8
Florida Panther NWR	6
Grand Bay NWR	9
J.N. “Ding” Darling NWR	1
Lacassine NWR	2
Laguna Cartagena NWR	1
Lake Wales Ridge NWR	2
Lake Woodruff NWR	2
Lower Suwannee NWR	10
Mackay Island NWR	4
Mandalay NWR 1	1
Merritt Island NWR	18
Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR	20
National Key Deer NWR	6
Okefenokee NWR	5
Overflow NWR	1
Pea Island NWR	1
Pelican Island NWR	1
Piedmont NWR	1
Pocosin Lakes NWR	3
Sabine NWR	3
Sam D. Hamilton Noxubee NWR	1
Santee NWR	1
Savannah-Pinckney NWR	1
South Arkansas Refuges Complex	2
St. Johns NWR	10
St. Marks NWR	8
St. Vincent NWR	2
Wassaw NWR	1
White River NWR	1



From the Chief



This year has been full of challenges, success and change. I am extremely humbled and honored to be your Chief of the Southeast Region Division of Fire Management. I will work hard to maintain and improve the outstanding fire program that each and every one of you has committed to.

We continue to accomplish our goals and for Fiscal Year 2012 they were vast. We had an outstanding Safety record with no reported accidents or lost time injuries, which highlights the exceptional effort you dedicate to safety. Our wildfire activity was down this year in number of fires and acres, even though Florida had the potential to burn like 1998. Our prescribed fire program continued to achieve excellent results in lieu of a reduced fire workforce and funding.

Last year we acknowledged the challenges ahead. This year we dealt with them. Our fire budget was reduced by 11% in FY12, following a similar reduction in FY 11. This budget reality has shifted our focus to maintaining an adequately funded fire workforce. We will continue to work collaboratively with other FWS programs to provide the qualified specialists to get the job done for the resource.

I want to recognize two very important members of our Regional Staff who have moved on. Glen Stratton, Regional Fuels Specialist, moved to Region 5 FWS as their Chief, Regional Fire Management Coordinator (RFMC), and Bob Eaton, our Chief, RFMC moved to Boise, Idaho as Deputy Chief, Branch of Fire Management. Collectively we lost roughly 60 years of experience which will be greatly missed. We wish Glen and Bob the very best!

As budgets decrease and demands from the public on our natural resources increase, we realize that to be successful, we have to build and enhance “relationships” with our Federal, State, and Local partners to address the tough issues and do the right thing for the resource. This narrative will illustrate some of these challenges that we face and will continue to face over the upcoming years.

I hope you appreciate this snapshot of the challenges our fire organization faced and the wonderful accomplishments we have achieved around the region, from the coastal region, to the piedmont, and the hills of the Southern Appalachian mountains.

District 1

Year Overview

FY12 has been a transitional year in District 1. The beginning of November brought a new Prescribed Fire Specialist on board at Alligator River NWR, and December 2011 introduced a new FMO to Pocosin Lakes NWR.The filling of vacancies took time away from standard day-to-day preparedness and pre-suppression operations across the District. Additional challenges were presented throughout FY12 in the aftermath of Hurricane Irene’s passage in August 2011. The storm surge from Irene created an extended period of salt-laden water intrusion on the front-line forests across District 1 resulted in significant forest mortality near the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds, as well as along the extensive system of canals that occur across the District. This stress made it necessary to pause prescribed fire treatments on several refuges until the extent of mortality could be assessed. This process continues.

The impacts of Hurricane Irene were considered along with the Fall 2010 District 1 Fire Management Review in prompting Refuge Management ro request a a revision of Alligator River and Pea Island NWRs’ Fire Management Plan. This revision follows the review team’s direction for the these Refuges to shift from calendar based fire return intervals to ones based on hazardous fuel accumulations and habitat trigger points based on desired habitat conditions. Once the Refuge Habitat Management Plans are completed, the new plan will hopefully help improve attempts to adaptatively manage the coastal interface and its habitats in response habitat needs in an environment prone to to sea level rise and climate change related stresses.



NC-CDR CI South FY12 Treatment: Joint jurisdictional prescribed fire on Cedar Island NWR and Cherry Point Marine Corps Atlantic Outlying Land Field in March 2012, credit USFWS.

Wildfire

2011 was a drought year with most of the rainfall occurring in a 10 week period during the late summer and early fall. Lingering dryness persisted into winter with November, December and January receiving less than half the normal amount of rainfall. February and March, however, received near normal rainfall which moderated the potential for extreme dryness and correspondingly high fire danger, although Pocosin Lakes NWR remained drier than Alligator River NWR. Heavier than normal amounts of rainfall fell across the District in May 2012 which prevented a late spring fire season and additional rainfall in July and August mitigated the potential for another summertime wildfire season as occurred in 2011. District 1 did not incur conditions that warranted severity funding needs in 2012; however, several days in April short term severity (PER4) were needed for extended standby for initial attack.

There were 14 wildfire reponses in District 1 for a total of 173 acres. The Deep Creek Fire at Alligator River NWR in July was the largest wildfire on refuge lands at 134 acres. The fire occurred just south of the 2011 Pains Bay Fire. Timely suppression actions prevented the fire from burning out of the marsh into the surrounding woodlands where it would have involved heavy fuels and matted hurricane debris.

Fuels Management

District staff conducted 17 prescribed burn treatments across the District, completing 3,566 acres. These burns occurred on Alligator River, Cedar Island and Mackay Island NWRs. Additionally, the District completed 72 mechanical treatments on an another 1,371 acres. Much of this work was directed towards fireline maintenance and WUI protection. As part of the Pains Bay Fire BAR Plan, 289 acres of invasive phragmites were aerially sprayed with a helicopter.

These results represent one of the lowest totals of burns and acres in a year for District 1. Burning on organic soils is always a challenge, especially during and immediately following drought years; however, we attribute this decrease primarily to the methodology and timing in how the funding and targeted projects were allocated. Refuges were given direction to hold up on spending funds on prescribed burning until March 2012, well after the burn season had ended and fire season had begun. Most of the projects accomplished were done so with little or no overtime costs and no aircraft costs. It is hoped that future funding and flexibility can be restored to the Refuges so that both the numbers of burns as well as the total acres treated can return to the averages achieved during the previous decade.

Equipment upgrades continue across the District. Pocosin Lakes NWR acquired two and Alligator River NWR received one new flextrack tractor for use in initial attack. In addition, a second flextrack was ordered at the end of the fiscal year for Alligator River NWR. Although it will be initial attack capable, this tractor will primarily support mop-up operations. These specialized pieces of equipment are the only method of pulling a fire plow across the notoriously soft soils found in the pocosins of eastern North Carolina. Bulldozers and other metal-tracked equipment break through the root mats that comprise the soil surface here, which causes them to become mired in the muck prevalent below. The four flextracks are replacing equipment in excess of 15 years old.

District Staff Assignments

Twenty-seven firefighters, including both FWS District 1 personnel and AD’s, were mobilized on fire assignments across the Nation. Two persons were committed to support a Type 3 team mobilization in Atlanta to support any potential response to impacts resulting from Hurricane Isaac (Aug/Sept 2012). Personnel were detailed on severity assignments in Arkansas and Nebraska , at Okefenokee NWR and on the southern Louisiana Refuges. Additionally, the dispatch center at Alligator River NWR coordinated flight following in support of 208 hours of flights and elevated preparedness response for 120 days at Preparedness Level-3, 35 days at PL-4 and 17 days at PL-5.

The annual safety refresher for firefighters was attended by over 40 Fish and Wildlife employees, as well as over 30 additional personnel representing cooperating agencies. Thirty-three firefighters took the pack test, qualifying 27 as a fitness level of arduous and another 6 as moderate.

Training

Employee	Training Taken	Instructor Experience	Taskbooks Initiated	Taskbooks Completed
Bert Plante	M-581, RX-410, WIMS	RT-130	RxB2	
Ed Christopher	M-581, Airboat, MOCC, Supv Trng 1	S-290	RxB2	
Donnie Harris		RT-130		EQPM
Kelley VanDruten	I-Suite, S-131, M-410 (Equiv.)	RT-130		
Cory Waters	L380, WFDDS,M581		AOBM	
Matt Howle	Instructor Trng			FFT1, FALB
Melvin Walston	Instr., Train-the-Trainer, MOCC, Hvy. Equip.			
Amy Midgett				RADO
Lisa Borel				CT5, FFT1
Tom Crews	L-580	RT-130		

Staffing Changes

The District Prescribed Fire Specialist position was vacant from October 2010 through November 2011 when Bert Plante was appointed. He has made a good start at getting the hazardous fuels program back on track.

Ed Christopher was appointed to the vacant FMO position at Pocosin Lakes NWR, arriving at the beginning of December 2011, and has the fire program at Pocosin Lakes NWR up and running once again.

Anthony Davis and Kenney Powell moved from Forestry Technician postions to FFEO (Fire Fighter Equipment Operator) positions at Pocosin Lakes NWR, creating two fire position vacancies.

In September 2012, Forestry Technician Jordan Black left Mackay Island NWR for a fire position with the Great Smokey’s National Park’s Rx Fire Module. The vacancies at Pocosin Lakes NWR impacted the ability for this refuge to assist in Rx burning on and off station as well as to complete its huge program of work on that station. The loss of Jordan as the only fire employee at Mackay Island will place a demand on ARNWR and PLNWR fire crews to assist in the fuels management workload on this satellite station over the next year.

District 2

Year Overview

District 2 spans 13 refuges in South Carolina, Coastal Georgia, and includes Pee Dee NWR in North Carolina. Once again the district had a productive year of accomplishments through lean fiscal times by working together with the refuge staff and partners. During late winter 2011 and early spring 2012 the long term drought worsened across the district and shut down burning at many locations as the KBDI (Keetch Byram Drought Index exceeded 500. By mid-summer tropical moisture had given the area much needed relief and set up good conditions for fall burning.

A fire regime and hydrology study by the Univesity of Florida was started last year on Wassaw NWR, but expanded this year to include Blackbeard Island NWR. Final results are still pending, but it appears that pine dominated portions of these islands developed under frequent regimes very similar to inland pine habitats with frequent fire regimes, or frequent low intensity fires. Portions of the islands dominated by live oak and traditional maritime forests burned with far less frequency.

Wildfire

The district had a relatively slow year for wildfire response with eight wildfires spread across five of the 13 district stations. Carolina Sandhills NWR had the most wildfires as well as the largest wildfire at 180 acres. The large fire was Rattlesnake Branch which was a natural start in late May 2012. Thanks to an active prescribed fire program, this growing season fire was easily managed and accomplished far more benefit to resources than harm. Due to moderate fire behavior in light fuels, the fire was allowed to back for three days and did a great job of treating the fuels in the unit, similar to a prescribed fire fuels treatment. Lightning accounted for most of the wildfires with the summer months most active for thunderstorms as well as fire starts from lightning.



Savannah NWR fire staff takes advantage of near historic dry conditions in the East Marsh Unit to reintroduce fire into a portion of the refuge that had not been burned in well over ten years, by USFWS/Greg Askins.

Two island fires tested the logistic strengths of the crew, one at Cape Romain NWR and a second at Wassaw NWR. Both fires were less than 10 acres, but even small fires become complicated when access is limited by boat only. The Wassaw NWR fire involved private trust lands with a threat to private homes on the island, but the fire was contained and controlled a safe distance from the private residences.

Fuels Management

The fuels program accomplished 13,664 acres treated so far this FY with some fall 2012 burning still planned. District-wide, well over 50 burn units were treated. Carolina Sandhills NWR accounted for the lions' share of the treated acres with 9,500 acres treated in FY12 to date. Burning at Carolina Sandhills NWR has become close to a year around proposition with burns beginning last fall and some still in the works this fall. The refuge is working towards more growing season burning. Shallow sandy soils dry quickly after rain events, so recent rains are often the most critical component of finding the right burning window. Extending the season has allowed us to maintian accomplishments even as budgets are in decline, giving us more days of potential burning opporunities. There is also a secondary habitat benefit in diversifying seasonalty of burns. Growing season burns offer a diversity of habitat response beyond the typical winter burn and better mimic the natural fire season.

The potential to kill mature longleaf is greater in the growing season however, results so far have shown a positive response by longleaf and will likely continue in the future.

The above mentions of fall burning made sense at the time I wrote this, and were mostly in FY12. For clarity, you could drop mention of ongoing fall burns and just keep the numbers as they appear. The mention of year around burning in the next question is simply doing more treatments outside the more traditional season (spring). Most of our individual treatments are complete in less than a week.

Carolina Sandhills NWR was able to host the Okefenokee NWR helicopter for almost a month in the spring as much of South Georgia and Florida was too dry to burn. The helicopter helped to boost acres and target burn units that could not have been completed by hand burning alone.

Burning on the coastal refuges continues with close to 3,000 acres treated of freshwater impoundments burned at ACE Basin and Savannah NWR's. For the second year, Savannah NWR continues to add acres to the East Marsh Unit which had not been burned in well over 20 years. Acres on Blackbeard Island NWR were treated this year with a well timed burn of the Toar Savanah area. Santee NWR also had a strong year of accomplishments and seved as the host station for a crew from PFTC.

District Staff Assignments

■ 3,000 acres treated, they just happened to be freshwater impoundments.

■ Blackbeard was well timed regarding weather conditions. The area was very dry all winter, then we were able to follow up a significant rain event with a burn just prior to green-up when conditions were ideal.

■ Santee treatments totaled 468 acres.

As the fuels program slowed with spring green-up we were able to allow staff several off-district assignments. Engines and aviation resources were dispatched to assist the Forest Service in NC for the Dad Fire on the Croatan NF. Equipment operators were assigned to the County Line fire on the Osceola NF. Overhead from the district responded to the Easter Complex in Virginia. Crew members were sent to assist refuges in severity both in Florida and Oklahoma. Bert Wyatt returned for a tour with the Jackson IHC on assignment in Arizona, New Mexico, and Idaho. Keith Penrose joined the Pacific NW Team 3 for assignments in Oregon, and Washington this summer. This activity allowed for the completion of several taskbooks and reinforced operational skills for our staff.

In addition to wildfire details, Keith Penrose was a team member for the Golden Isles Prevention team along the Georgia coast. The team included many state, federal, and local partners and Keith was the lead in establishing the community of Belvedeere (just outside Harris Neck NWR) as a nationally recognized Firewise community. The work the team did will have far reaching impacts in local communities in preparing for wildfires.

Training

Employee	Training Taken	Instructor Experience	Taskbooks Initiated	Taskbooks Completed
Greg Askins	RT130, RT212			
Charles Johnson	S200, RT130, RT212		STEQ	ICT4
Andy Heisey	L380, RT130		HEQB	ICT4
Adam McCullough	S200, L380, RT130			HEQB
Randy McLain	S330, RT130			
Dave Pafford	RT130			
Mark Parker	RT130	RT130		
Keith Penrose	WFDSS, RT130	RT130		PETM
Matt Sutkowski	S200, A110, RT130, RT212		ICT4	HMGB
Jan Tripp	RT300F, RT130, RT212	RT130		
Bert Wyatt	RT130, RT212	RT212	CRWB	FALB
Rob Wood	WFDSS, RT130, RT212	RT130 RT212		

Savannah NWR also sent two crew members to Wichita Mountains NWR in Oklahoma to assist in a large scale saw project as part of a Burned Area Rehabilitation Project. Rob Wood was identified as the IMT3 trainee for Hurricane Isaac, and positioned with other team members in Atlanta in preparation for the storm. Thankfully there was never a need to engage a full response.

Training participation this year was reduced from more active years in the past due largely to funding shortfalls. We did take advantage of local training opportunities and were able to complete several taskbooks through trainee assignments both on and off the District. The last two to three years of taskbook completions have strengthened the depth of the program and allowed us to better manage fire response locally.

The Ready Reserve program came through again this year and we were able to offer several classes to local fire

departments, refuge staff, and partners. Classes offered through the Ready Reserve Program were S130/190, S200, and S215. Ready Reserve training has been going strong for over five years now, and has created a strong working relationship with local fire departments. Refuges have also benefited from having a well qualified AD pool of emergency fire fighters that help reach the local community with the Firewise message and the refuge mission.

Staffing Changes

This year saw few changes in district staffing. Savannah did lose the fire administrative assistant position (David Boyd). All other permanent staff were retained, and three of the four seasonals returned. As noted above, the retention of staff in recent years has allowed us to develop qualifications and give us more flexibility in fire response. Congratulations went out to one member of the seasonal crew, Matt Kampf, as he was selected for a permanent position at Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma.

District 3

Year Overview

2012 started with the continued management of the Honey Prairie Fire. Although fire activity had decreased significantly, Okefenokee NWR had not received any tropical storm moisture during the 2011 season. Okefenokee continued to have a rainfall deficit of 6” from 2011 added to the 15” deficit from 2010. The final litmus test came with the start of the County Line Fire on the Osceola National Forest in April 2012. With no evidence of fire activity during this time the decision was made to call the Honey Prairie Fire out on April 16th, 2012, 348 days after its start. The Okefenokee NWR would like to thank everyone for their support during this fire event. Although the Honey Prairie Fire continued, much of the district was able to get back on track with prescribed burning with somewhat improved weather conditions. Reggie Forcine received the Regional Prescribed Fire Award and Terri Jenkins received the Regional Fire Management Outreach Award...Congratulations to Reggie and Terri we are all extremely proud of your accomplishments.

Wildfire

Outside of the Honey Prairie Fire the district had a relatively quiet year in wildfire suppression. Piedmont NWR had one wildfire for 0.1 acres. Wheeler NWR had one wildfire for 3 acres. Okefenokee NWR had two wildfires for 99.1 acres and assisted our cooperators on an additional five fires the largest of which was the County Line Fire that occurred on the Osceola National Forest and burned nearly 40,000 acres and continued to threaten the refuge throughout its duration.



2012 Okefenokee NWR Fire Crew (left to right): Cory Bryant, Robert Alonso, Howard McCullough, Rocky Chesser, Tommy Crews, Brantley Boatright, Sarah Sorenson, Fed Privett, Reggie Forcine, Mike Housh, Terri Jenkins.

Wildfires

	Refuge Wildfires		Threat Fires		Support Actions
Station	#	Acres	#	Acres	#
Chattahoochee NFH					1
Okefenokee*	2	99.1	2	25.1	7
Piedmont	1	0.1			11
Wheeler	1	3			
* Does not include Honey Prairie Fire (Reported in FY 2011)					

Fuels Management

Station	# Treatments	Dormant	Growing	Total
Eufaula	2	0	622	622
Okefenokee	16	376	4,847	5,223
Piedmont	23	3,032	7,014	10,046

Fuels Management

As previously mentioned the district had a fairly active prescribed fire season. 15,891 acres were treated within the district on three stations in FY12. Unfortunately we were unable to accomplish any prescribed burns at Mt. Longleaf or Cahaba NWR’s due to drought conditions with KBDI values approaching 700. In addition, we were able to assist many of our partners including: TNC, Osceola NF and Lake Woodruff NWR. Piedmont NWR continued their fire effects monitoring program by completing 17 Fire Monitoring Plots as pre- or post-burn visits.

District Staff Assignments

District 3 Fire Management Staff assisted in many wildfire and storm responses in FY12 and completed or worked on several Position Task Books. A summary of this activity is located in the Table at right.

Training

In addition to the Annual, Fire and Saw Refresher Training and Pack Tests the following training was delivered or received by District Fire Management Staff.

Staffing Changes

Forestry Technician Sarah Sorenson accepted a position at the Cookeville Ecological Services Office. She reported for duty in June 2012. Sarah was instrumental in the Fuel Moisture Sampling Program at Okefenokee NWR and will be sorely missed. We wish Sarah all the best in her new position.

District Staff Assignments

Employee	Incident Type	Position	State(s)
Robert Alonso	WF	FFT1	OR
Tommy Crews	Oil Spill	READ	AL
Brantley Boatright	WF	EDSD	FL
Reggie Forcine	WF	HEB1	AZ
Nathan Herron	WF	ENGB/HECM	FL/NC
Mike Housh	Hurricane	ICT3	GA
Terri Jenkins	Hurricane	SCKN(T)	GA
John Mason	WF	HMGB	FL/AL
Toby Price	WF	TPOP/ENGB(T) HECM/ABRO(T)	FL/VA
Fed Privett	WF	HECM	MT
Jake Tuttle	WF	SECM	NM

Training

Employee	Training Taken	Instructor Experience	Taskbooks Initiated	Taskbooks Completed
Robert Alonso	S-230, S-231, Engine Academy, S-211, I-200, S-234, L-280, S-215	RT-130, S-130, S-190	ENGB, FIRB	ENOP, FALB
Tommy Crews	S-230, S-231, Engine Academy, S-211, S-271, S-131		FALB	
Brantley Boatright	S-349			
Rocky Chesser	S-339			
Reggie Forcine	S-339	S-230, S-231, RT-130		
Mindy Gautreaux	Agency Administrators Workshop			
Nathan Herron	S-330	S-230, S-231		
Mike Housh	RT-372, S-349	S-230, S-231, S-130, S-190, L-180	OSC2	
Terri Jenkins	S-248, P-310, S-349	S-130, S-190, L-180, I-100	SCKN	PETM
John Mason	RT-372, A-219			
Toby Price	S-230, S-231, S-215, ATV Operations			
Fed Privett	S-231, I-300			
Matt Smith	S-230, S-231			ENOP
Wayne Smith				FALA
Sarah Sorenson	S-230, S-231, Engine Academy, S-211, S-390	S-130, S-190, RT-212		
Kelly Taylor	S-230, S-231		ENGB	
Jake Tuttle	Local Fire Management Leadership			

District 4

Year Overview

FY12 was a different year for the Northern Gulf Coast of Florida in terms of climate. The end of 2011 and the first six months of 2012 were characterized by exceptional drought. In June, following the drought, it seemed as if the flood gates opened with Tropical Storm Debby producing a wet latter half of the year. At Lower Suwannee NWR for example, less than six inches of rain fell in the area for the first half of the year, and over 30 inches of rain fell in July, August, and September. On the North Florida Complex, less than 12 inches of rain fell in the area for the first five months of the year. On June 25 and 26, Tropical Storm Debby dropped between 24 and 26 inches of rain on St Marks National Wildlife Refuge. Since then, the precipitation has continued and by the end of September, St Marks National Wildlife Refuge has received over 50 inches of rain.

The first part of the year was active with wildfires throughout the Southeast and especially in the state of Florida. Fire crews went on multiple assignments in Florida during this part of the year. Following the limited rain events prescribed fires treatments were accomplished. Then the rains came, this slowed the wildfire activity, but did not help with the prescribed fire treatments. Prescribed fire treatments were only possible after the few clear “drying days”.

Other significant fire management program activities included a 40 day Severity period at Lower Suwannee NWR for the months of May - June, the inception of a Wildfire Protection Task Force with the local Levy County government and other cooperators, several fire trainings hosted in the District, including basic fire training and S-200.

Wildfire

Wildfire activity on the North Florida Complex (St. Marks and St. Vincent NWRs) was low with only one wildfire on refuge lands and five threat wildfires.



The North Florida Refuge Complex fire crew prescribed burning at night along the beach/forest line on St Vincent National Wildlife Refuge. The rings of fire are from spot firing using a drip torch. The little spots of fire are growing together. This firing technique keeps the heat from the fire low due to high night time humidity and proximity of spots to each other.

Multiple support actions included help to the US Forest Service, Apalachicola NF and the Florida Forest Service.

Ten wildfires were suppressed on the Lower Suwannee NWR or adjacent property by the Lower Suwannee NWR fire crew in FY12. Only one was on refuge owned lands for 9.0 acres (The Four Eagles Fire on the Shell Mound Unit).

The additional nine fires (168.8 acres) were “threat” fires on adjacent land that refuge fire crew managed in cooperation with state FFS (Florida Forest Service) fire crews. By request, several of these fires were managed exclusively by refuge fire crew from Initial Attack through the mop-up and monitoring phase of the fire due to state resources being overextended with other large ongoing fires in the area. The most significant of these was a 28 acre Moody Grade Fire in May that burned in a young pine plantation. This fire was contained by refuge heavy equipment and engines, but considering location and fuels had potential to exceed several hundred or even thousands of acres of private and refuge lands with significant threats to hunt camps and other structures.

Also significant was the suppression of the CR 345 Fire that burned to within 50’ of an occupied residence before being contained by FWS fire crews. The Refuge fire crew also gave considerable assistance on wildfires away from the station as described in the table below. (NOTE: where is this table?)

Fuels Management

The North Florida Refuge Complex experienced an average year for conducting prescribed fire treatments. Thirty burn units were treated, for a total of 14,511 acres. Daily acres treated ranged from two acres per day to a one day total of 7,256 acres using aerial ignition.

As of August 31, the fire crew on Lower Suwannee NWR conducted nine burns on the station in FY12 for 1,154.5 acres. All burns were implemented with ground ignition; two planned aerial ignition burns were not completed as conditions were so dry that the refuge was out of burning prescription from January thru mid-June. The burn acreage total was considerably less than the past few years. In addition, 11 mechanical treatments were completed for 47 acres, primarily maintenance and clearing of refuge firelines and boundaries, as well as site preparation for planting and restoration projects.

District Staff Assignments

The continued heavy wildfire load across the Southern Area in FY11 – early FY12 led to some opportunities for fire crew to travel to assist with wildfire suppression efforts away from the home unit. Pelt, Lord, Rye, and Pollard completed wildfire response details in late 2011 to Southeast Texas. Farmer, Pelt, DiMaggio, Hinckley, Smith, Pippin, and Pollard participated on several assignments on wildfires at Merritt Island NWR from February thru July 2012. Lord, Pollard, Farmer, Solodovnick and DiMaggio participated on details on the County Line Fire at Osceola NF. Despite being available thru ROSS, and a National PL 4 for much of the summer, refuge fire crew have had limited opportunity for additional western assignments in the later months of the year. One engine crew consisting of Pelt, Pollard, and Smith was sent to Montana and Wyoming late in the season.

LEO Garrison completed wildfire assignments as SEC1 to Virginia’s Shenandoah NP and Wyoming’s Bridger-Teton NF. LEOs Moody and Godwin completed a wildfire assignment as SEC1 to Idaho’s Boise NF. Firefighter/LEO Lord also completed a wildfire assignment as SEC1 to Idaho’s Salmon/Challis NF.

Training Opportunities

Training opportunities were limited in FY12 with travel restrictions and limited fire program budgets. Lower Suwannee NWR fire crew did, however, participate in a few priority trainings to strengthen and maintain fireline qualifications. A few task books were completed this year, due to the opportunity for fire crew to complete numerous training assignments. Standard fireline refresher training was provided to all carded fire crew at Lower Suwannee NWR, as well as the Chassahowitzka and Egmont Key NWRs in Fire District 4. See the above Table for details.

Training

Employee	Training Taken	Instructor Experience	Taskbooks Initiated	Taskbooks Completed
Greg Titus		S-200, M-581		
Jennifer Hinckley	D-110	M-581, S-248		FEMO
Joey Lord		S-200		
Bart Rye		S-200		
Willie Lindsey	S-200			
Trixie Smith	S-200, S-330, IS-200			
Travis Pollard	S-200, S-230, S-231			
Brian Pippin	S-200, S-330			HECM
Anthony DiMaggio	S-200, PLDO, S-390	Saw refresher, SA Engine Academy	HECM	ICT4
Jamie Farmer	M-581, S-330	Saw refresher		TFLD
George Pelt	S-200, PLDO		ICT4	
Jaclyn Solodovnick	S-200, PLDO	SA Engine Academy		GISS
Victor Doig	S-339	RX-341, PLDO, S-200	DIVS	
Pamela Garrison	S-130, S-190, I-100		SEC1	

Staffing Changes

The North Florida Refuge Complex staff remained consistent throughout FY12. The crew includes District Fire Management Officer Greg Titus, Prescribed Fire Specialist Jennifer Hinckley, Prescribed Fire Tech/LEO Joey Lord, Engineering Equipment Operator Willie Lindsey, Lead Forestry Tech Bart Rye, and Forestry Techs Dale Shiver, Trixie Smith, Travis Pollard, and Brian Pippin. Also participating in the fire program were Wildlife Biologist Mike Keys, Refuge Ranger/LEO David Moody, Wildlife Tech Bradley Smith and Supervisory Refuge Ranger Robin Will.

After years of stability there were fire crew staff changes at Lower Suwannee NWR. The fire crew currently consists of Fire Management Officer Vic Doig, Lead Forestry Tech Jamie Farmer, Forestry Techs Jaclyn Solodovnick and Anthony DiMaggio, and fire equipment operator George Pelt. Jamie Farmer will be leaving in September to assume FMO responsibilities at Southwest Louisiana NWRs Complex. Lower Suwannee did hire two new collateral fire crew members: Deputy Refuge Manager Larry Woodward and new refuge LEO Pamela Garrison. Other fire crew in D4 includes Boyd Blihovde, Deputy Refuge Manager at Chassahowitzka NWR.

District 5

Year Overview

District 5 Fire Management personnel assisted with many outreach programs throughout the year. The following were some of the major events:

Loxahatchee hosted the Prescribed Fire Training Center on multiple burn days in 2012.

The Fire program did a presentation for the League of Latin American Citizens group at Merritt Island NWR in June 2012.

Jon Wallace the Prescribed Fire Specialist at Loxahatchee also was featured in a 13 minute educational video by the National Park Service. This film, produced by Everglades National Park, documented a Type 1 prescribed burn conducted in the park, and covered topics such as prescribed fire planning, implementation and fire ecology in the Everglades ecosystem.

Wildfire

Fire management personnel responded to 41 wildfires in the District for approximately 7,897 acres. The breakdown for the fires and refuges are as follows:

- 18 fires for 2,542 acres in Merritt Island NWR response zone.
- 13 fires for 2,579 acres in St. Johns NWR response zone.
- Two fires for 1,425 in Lake Woodruff NWR response zone.
- Five fires for 54 acres in Loxahatchee NWR response zone.
- One fire for 981 acres in Everglades Headwaters NWR response zone.
- Two fires for 16 acres in Lake Wales Ridge NWR response zone.
- One fire for 300 acres at Canaveral National Seashore (Suppressed by Merritt Island NWR under Agreement).



Firefighters watch the fire activity during a prescribed burn in July 2012 on Merritt Island NWR.

District 5 applied for and received severity funding this spring. The District had severity funding for approximately one month. We had crews from as far away as Arizona with four different agencies assisting us with fires this year. This provided an excellent opportunity for personnel to work on task books and get experience in a fuel type they had not previously experienced. Several fire personnel completed task books on their assignments in District 5 this year from Helicopter Managers to Task Force Leaders.

Fuels Management

The district had 29 treatments for 29,274 acres in this fiscal year.

Loxahatchee completed two burn units for slightly over 3,500 acres, during the summer burn season, which is traditionally the time when most acres are accomplished the refuge received 43 inches of rain.

Merritt Island NWR completed 12 burns for 16,474 acres this year on Merritt Island NWR and one burn for 100 acres on St. Johns NWR.

District 5 fire personnel also completed one burn for 1,100 acres on Canaveral National Seashore. This was a cooperative effort between the National Park Service the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Lake Woodruff NWR completed 14 burns this year for a total of 8,200 acres.

District Staff Assignments

Fire management personnel were involved in several off district detail assignments this year.

Paul Koch assisted Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas with several prescribed fires.

Joe Sharbaugh responded to Florida Panther NWR for the Round Two Fire and participated in a three week fire assignment to Nevada with Bridgeport Helitack this year.

Ryan Sharpe spent five weeks with Bridgeport Helitack and participated in a two week assignment on a hand crew to Washington.

Chris Wright responded to the Round Two Fire at Florida Panther NWR and participated in a two week detail to Wichita Mountains NWR for severity this year.

Ryan Roche responded to the Round Two Fire at Florida Panther, participated in a two week detail to Washington at Turnbull NWR, and had several trips within the district to assist fire operations.

Dave Moran participated in a two week fire assignment with Bridgeport helitack in Nevada this year.

Grant Gifford participated in a 30 day detail to the Mid Plains hand crew out of Kansas, a 14 day detail to Wichita Mountains NWR for severity, a 14 day fire assignment to Idaho, as well as participated on multiple trips within Florida to assist with wildfire and prescribed fires.

Michael Good responded to the Round Two Fire as Operations on the Florida Type 3 Team. He also responded to Hurricane Isaac as Logistics.

Jon Wallace serves as a primary Division Supervisor on the Southern Area Type 1 “Blue Team” and as a back-up Fire Behavior Analyst for the other two southern teams. He participated in a 14 day detail to the Easter Complex as a Division Supervisor/FBAN, a seven day FBAN assignment to the Dad fire in North Carolina, an FBAN/OSC2(t) assignment to the Point2 Fire in Virginia, a seven day assignment to the Deer Hammock fire as an OSC2(t), a 14 day assignment to the Trinity Ridge West fire in Idaho as an FBAN/LTAN, a 120 Day detail to the Boise office as a fuel specialist, and multiple trips within Florida to support FWS wildfires and prescribed fires. He is currently participating on a 120 day detail as the Deputy Regional fuels specialist for the US Forest Service southern region.

Patrick Pearson serves as a primary Operations Branch Director on the Southern Area Type 1 “Blue Team”. He also responded as a Type 3 Incident Commander to the Round Two Fire and participated on a 14 day assignment to Oklahoma for severity. He also assisted District 6 with a Type 1 Prescribed Burn at Ding Darling NWR.

In addition to the full time fire staff within the complex, several collateral and SCEP students gained valuable experience both here on the District and on fire assignments off district.

Training

Employee	Training Taken	Instructor Experience	Taskbooks Initiated	Taskbooks Completed
Michael Good			RXB1, DIVS	
Dave Moran			ICT4	
Cynthia Branham	WIMS		IADP	
Joe Sharbaugh	RX 301 and 341, S-330		RXB2 and TFLD	
Jessica Vincent				ENGB
Ryan Sharpe	FWS ATVO	FWS ATVO		TFLD, RXB2
Grant Gifford				HECM
Jon Wallace		S491, M581, LFML		

Training

Several district personnel completed task books this year.

Jessica Vincent completed her Engine Boss Task Book.

Ryan Sharpe completed both his Task Force Leader and his Type 2 Burn Boss Task Books this year.

Grant Gifford completed his task book for Helicopter Manager this year.

In addition to taking training this year several personnel assisted with instructing trainings within Florida and the Southeast Region.

Jon Wallace presented at several classes throughout the southern region including S491 Intermediate Fire Danger, M581 Fire Program Management, and LFML Fire Program Management for Line Officers. He was also a featured presenter at the 2012 INTECOL International Wetlands Conference.

Ryan Sharpe has taken the training and is now one of the Regional ATV instructors.

Committees

Jon Wallace continues to serve as the FWS National Representative to the HFPAS modeling process, and the FWS National Representative and Vice Chair to the NWCG Fire Danger Committee.

Grant Gifford is now a member of a sub-committee to the National Fire and Operations Safety Team assigned to look at engine standards for the FWS.

Staffing Changes

Rob Vernachio accepted a position with Balcones Canyonlands NWR in Texas.

Jessica Vincent accepted a position with the U.S. Forest Service on the Ocala National Forest.

Jay Mickey has accepted the Assistant Fire Management Officer position at Merritt Island NWR and will be reporting in Mid-October.

District 6



The group of USFWS firefighters from all over the state of Florida to assist with the burns at J.N. “Ding” Darling NWR in March 2012.

Year Overview

In FY 2012, District 6 accomplished significant gains in interagency collaboration with several District wide cooperators. For example, at Ten Thousand Islands NWR we were able to successfully implement the first prescribed burn on the refuge, reducing hazardous fuels and protecting the community of Port of the Isles from unwanted wildfire. This achievement was made possible with the support of the Ochopee-Everglades City Fire and Rescue, a local Fire Department that borders the Ten Thousand Islands NWR.

Another achievement was the introduction of two Type 1 Prescribed Burns at the JN “Ding” Darling NWR “Botanical Site”. These first entry hazardous fuel reduction treatments were high in complexity due to the time of year with Spring Break visitation, close proximity to private residences and business as well as the only road leading on or off the island of Sanibel-Captiva. Extensive planning between refuge staff, Sanibel Police Department, Sanibel Fire and Rescue, Florida Forest Service as well as multiple public and cooperator meetings created the foundation for successful implementation.

Florida Panther NWR was able to accomplish six prescribed burns totaling 4,079 acres with the alliance between our neighboring Districts and interagency partners. Two of these prescribed burns were facilitated with a training module from the National Prescribed Fire Training Center (PFTC). This was the first year to host PFTC since 2008.

Additional achievements are the completed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the US Forest Service “El Yunque National Forest”, National Park Service “San Juan National Historic Sites”, The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, “Caribbean Islands NWR Complex” and the Common Wealth of Puerto Rico.

This has been a work in progress for several years and was finalized in 2012. We are currently finishing up the MOU with Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve and hope to have it completed by the end of the year.

With collective efforts between the Florida District FMO’s, a concept of having a Florida Interagency TYPE 3 Team was carried forward and implemented. This Team consists of available qualified overhead personnel from Florida refuges as well as neighboring agencies, to safely and cost effectively manage a wildfire or all-risk incidents at a Type 3 Organizational Level. These incidents will present numerous opportunities for training while providing quick and efficient response to provide management support to refuges in Florida for unwanted wildfire. This year several fires were managed at the Type 3 level utilizing our newly established T3 Team in Florida with support from FWS Fire Management Districts 4, 5 and 6, Everglades National Park, Big Cypress National Preserve, Florida Forest Service and the Golden Gate Fire Department. We look forward to formalizing the Team in FY13.

Our goals for District 6 are to continue to work towards strengthening relationships with our interagency cooperators and to become a more efficient and streamlined program with an “eyes forward” approach. The end product will result in stronger cooperation within our fire management community to ensure that we can safely manage all operations at the most efficient means possible.

Wildfire

■ Florida Panther NWR: 1 natural out, 0.10 acre FY12

■ Florida Panther NWR: 1 wildfire 765 acre FY12

■ Florida Panther NWR: extended severity FY12

■ Florida Panther NWR: 3 False alarms, FY12

■ J.N. “Ding” Darling NWR: extended severity FY12

■ National Key Deer Refuge: 5 responses, total 0.5 acres FY12

■ National Key Deer Refuge: Installation of Interagency fire severity sign

■ Caribbean Complex: 10 responses, total 469 acres FY12

Fuels Management

■ Florida Panther NWR: 6 burns, 4,079 acres

■ Ten Thousand Island NWR: 1 burn, 3,000 acres

■ J.N. “Ding” Darling NWR: 354 acres

■ National Key Deer Refuge: Conducted multiple public outreach events (“2012 Prescribed Fire Season Open House” and several radio announcements) with surrounding communities of Big Pine Key in preparation for prescribed burns.

Prescribed Fire Assists

■ Merritt Island NWR

■ Aransas NWR

■ Everglades NPS

■ Big Cypress NPS

■ Canaveral National Sea Shore NPS

■ Picayune State Forest

■ Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Wildfire Assists

■ Merritt Island NWR

■ Everglades NPS

■ Big Cypress NPS

■ Picayune State Forest

All-Risk Assists

■ Hurricane Isaac. Collier County Emergency Management in conjunction with Florida Panther NWR conducted several pre-planning meetings in preparation for emergency response.

■ National Key Deer participated in all hazard cross training with USGS, US Navy, State, County, and local cooperators.

New Equipment

■ 1 Tahoe (DFMO)

District Staff Assignments

The district supported the local and national interagency fire community with multiple fire and law enforcement staff.

■ Southern Area Blue IMT on two Assignments (Virginia and Idaho).

■ Supported George Washington and Jefferson NF Virginia

Training

Employee	Training Taken	Instructor Experience	Taskbooks Initiated	Taskbooks Completed
Cass Palmer	RT 130, 1st Aid/CPR	RT 130, S-330, S-200	RXB1	
Robert Trincado	RT 130, 1st Aid/CPR L-580, M-581	S-330, S-200	RXB1, SOFR	
Greg Suszek	RT 130, 1st Aid/CPR	RT 130, S-330 S-200		
Dana Cohen	RT-131, S-339, I-400, RT-212, 1st Aid/CPR	RX-341, RX-301		RXB2
Jay Mickey	RT-130, RT 372 1st Aid/CPR	RT-130, S-330 S-200	RXB1	DIVS
James Padilla	Heavy Equip & ATV/ UTV Instructor Recertification	RT-130, S-130/190 Heavy Equip. Course, ATV/UTV Safety Course		
Paul Ryan	RT 130, RX 341, RX 301			RXB2
Wesley O'Connor	RT-130, 1st Aid/CPR		FIRB	
Paul (PJ) Stevko	RT-130, S-200, S-330 1st Aid/CPR			ICT4
Bobby Schat	RT 130	RT 130		
Martin Ramos	RT-130/Redding IHC Detail			

*Martin Ramos stationed at Vieques NWR was selected for the Redding Hot Shots “Leadership and Training” program. This six month interagency program provides an opportunity to observe and evaluate various levels of performance among peers with an on the job training platform with wildfire situations. This increases self-confidence and leadership abilities, important qualities with which Martin will bring back to his home District.

■ We supported PFTC with a Field Coordinator this year.

■ S-200 Initial Attack Incident Commander

■ We assisted Merritt Island NWR with two wildfires and severity.

■ ATV / UTV Safety Course

■ Redding Hot Shots, Training Detail-western fire season

■ Heavy Equipment Course at the Caribbean Complex

Staffing Changes
Departures:
Brian Bagozzi - Forestry Technician
Ashlee Sams - Intern

New Arrivals:
Bobby Schat - Forestry Technician

Training Hosted – District wide:
■ District Six Line Officer workshop

■ RT-130

■ S-130 / S-190

■ S-330 Strike Team / Task Force Leader

District 7

Year Overview

Gulf Coast Complex (Mississippi Sandhill Crane, Grand Bay, Bon Secour), SE Louisiana Complex (Big Branch, Bayou Sauvage, Bogue Chitto), SW Louisiana Complex (Sabine, Cameron Prairie, Lacassine), South Arkansas/North Louisiana (Felsenthal, D’Arbonne, Overflow, Ouachita), and Sam D. Hamilton Noxubee NWR.

FY12 provided a relatively mild break from the series of catastrophes that have characterized recent years. The coastal drought was finally reversed this spring, just about the time the District wildfire season would normally go into high gear. The main areas of wildfire concern this year were SW Louisiana, with a couple of large marsh fires, and south Arkansas which remained gripped in the drought that affected the central US. Felsenthal NWR reported KBDI above 700 for much of the year, and was preparing a Severity Request when Hurricane Isaac brought five to seven inches of rain to the area in late August. The same storm dropped 15-20 inches along the LA-MS-AL Gulf Coast and caused significant flooding, but FWS lands escaped serious damage.

In September 2012, a Regional Team completed the Fire Management Review for the Gulf Coast Complex. Several commendations were given to Refuge fire staff. Findings reflected the exceptional work accomplished from years of collaboration and cooperation with local emergency response agencies.

Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR is taking a leading role in finding innovative and proactive solutions to a looming problem with interagency radio communications, as local cooperators move to different portions of the narrowband spectrum and shift from analog to digital equipment. For more on this topic, see the ‘Honors, Awards, Committees’ section below.



A firefighter watches the edge of a prescribed burn as evening approaches on a prescribed fire at Mississippi Sandhill Crane.

The Noxubee NWR officially was renamed Sam D. Hamilton Noxubee NWR in honor of the Fish and Wildlife Service’s former Director. The late Sam D. Hamilton started his career in conservation on the Noxubee NWR with the Youth Conservation Corps in 1971. Refuge fire staff put a lot of time and work into preparing for the event that went off very well.

Wildfire

Southeast Louisiana Refuges had a total of 12 wildfires for 1004 acres. Of note was the Geronimeaux fire on 12/15/11; it started when an adjacent landowner burned debris piles from hurricane Katrina, one of which included propane tanks. There was a Boiling Liquid Expanding Vapor Explosion (BLEVE), hurling embers onto Big Branch Marsh NWR and ignited a 23 acre fire. Slidell Fire District #1, Louisiana Department of Forestry, and Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR fire staff assisted with suppression efforts.

South Arkansas and North Louisiana spent most of the summer under drought conditions along with the rest of the central US. Fire danger indices for the area hovered around severity conditions. Felsenthal NWR personnel responded to four wildfires for 76 acres on refuge, and three threat fires for 102 acres. No wildfires were reported on or threatening other refuges throughout the two refuge complexes.

SW Louisiana had five fires for 2896 acres, including the 2390-acre Backridge 12 fire.

Gulf Coast Complex responded to a total of 37 fires. 13 of these were on FWS land for 14 acres, there were 16 threat fires for 29 acres, and eight support actions.

Refuge	Fires	Acres
Sabine	3	2,625
Lacassine	1	263
Cameron Prairie	1	8
Bogue Chitto	1	1
Big Branch	3	143
Bayou Sauvage	6	261
Mandalay	2	600
Felsenthal	7	178
Gulf Coast Complex	37	141

Fuels Management

The Gulf Coast Complex completed 19 prescribed burns for 4,961 acres. The Refuge succeeded in re-establishing fire in the Fontainebleau trail units (40ac) and Grand Bay NWR (115ac) after 6-10 years of fire exclusion. Several key firelines were re-established at Grand Bay NWR to complete the burn.

Prescribed Fire Specialist Scott Saucier, has developed some interagency partnerships that will facilitate prescribed burning and habitat restoration. He met with TNC to develop a cooperative approach to restoration work across boundaries. He also began discussions with TNC to share a burn crew for FY13. And he expanded the FWS relationship with the Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve to utilize their grant monies to begin construction on firelines at the Grand Bay NWR. This will result in 2.8 miles of new fire line, four staging areas and multiple crossings. Target date for completion is the end of this calendar year so we can begin burning in FY13.

With the assistance of the National Park Service’s Jean Lafitte Unit, The Nature Conservancy, Collateral Duty personnel, and A/D personnel, SE Louisiana Refuges completed four prescribed burns for 322 acres at Big Branch Marsh NWR. Fire Effects Monitoring continued for prescribed burns conducted both in prior FY’s and in FY12.

The prescribed fire season began very slowly at Sam D. Hamilton Noxubee NWR. Wet conditions persisted from January through mid-March, when dry weather finally arrived along with a very early green-up. The majority of the 5,900 acres burned this past year were growing season burns. The Refuge also completed 30 acres of mechanical treatments and 25 acres of herbicide treatments. The Refuge hosted a crew of seven AmeriCorps students that assisted with prescribed burning and other work projects.

South Arkansas and North Louisiana complexes combined for 11 prescribed burns and 2747 acres.

Due to a combination of wet weather during the fall season, and avian nesting during the spring, SW Louisiana was unable to implement any prescribed burns during FY12.

Refuge	Rx Burns	Acres
MS Sandhill Crane	17	4846
Grand Bay	2	115
Bogue Chitto	5	322
Big Branch Marsh	4	515
South Arkansas	6	2205
North Louisiana	5	542
Noxubee	25	5900

District Staff Assignments

The decrease in local wildfire activity gave District 7 personnel an opportunity for regional and national assignments this year. 46 responders served a total of 1123 days on 92 assignments in 18 states. Nine taskbooks were completed.

SW Louisiana: Larry “Gator” Smith served as DIVS on wildfires in Virginia for a total of 11 Days with the Type I Southern Area Red Team. Jon King served as HMGB for two Details on Ocala NF, and two details as a FFT2 on a hand crew in Virginia. Shaun Martinet served as FFT2 for two details on wildfires in Virginia and one detail to Oklahoma/ Arkansas as ENOP. Brian Donnelly served as FFT1 for two details on Virginia wildfires, one detail to Florida as HECM (T), one detail to Nevada/Oregon as HECM, one detail to Washington as HECM. Brian Donnelly and Shaun Martinet also went to Oklahoma on a chainsaw detail.

SE Louisiana: The fire staff assisted with the County Line Fire on the Osceola NF (Florida) and Miller Homestead Fire (Oregon). Staff also assisted Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR with a few prescribed burns.

Felsenthal (South Arkansas and North Louisiana): Gypsy Hanks served as GIS Specialist on eastern Oklahoma wildfires for 14 days. John Tarver served as SEC1 on New Mexico, Forest Service Severity for 14 days.

Sam D. Hamilton Noxubee NWR: Refuge fire personnel assisted with wildfires off the refuge this past year. Chad Fondren and Justin Boysen worked with the Jackson Hot shots in Arkansas for two weeks and Chad Fondren worked with the Hot Shots in Idaho. Paul Reynolds worked with the Type I Southern Area Red Team on fires in Virginia and Texas.

Gulf Coast Complex: April 29-May 8, Tony Wilder led the Southern Area Type I Red Team to suppress 25,000 acre Livermore Ranch Fire in Fort Davis, Texas. Successfully kept fire out of community of Davis Mountain Resort and citizens responded with full page ads in local papers thanking the Red Team for their work.

June 28th –July 8th, Tony Wilder led Southern Area Type I Red Team to Shenandoah NP to suppress the Neighbor Mountain. Fire. Lightning started this 2,100 acre fire within the Park. A rare straight line wind event (derecho) occurred during this fire causing rapid fire spread and many trees to fall along the entire Atlantic Seaboard. The result was that several fire crews were trapped on roads inside their buses along with other motorists, and the Incident Camp Post was left without electrical power for two days.

Brad Bailey, James Bates, John Bell, Jeff ‘Bunk’ Twiss, Mike Krebs, Rebecca Goosman and AD’s Burnice Shows, Jodey Hall and Grant Lovato supported off station fire assignments in Florida, Tennessee, Virginia, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Nevada, Idaho, Louisiana, and California.

Josh Havird completed a six-month training assignment with the Redmond Hotshots. Bert Rager was assigned to the Redmond Hotshots for one month, and completed his FIRB taskbook.

District 7 continued

Bon Secour NWR and Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR assisted with Search & Rescue after the crash of a USCG helicopter in Mobile Bay.

Other Locations in District 7: Tracy Bush (Daphne Alabama ES), two-week Computer Specialist assignment at Pacific NW GACC; Chris Murphy (Wolf Creek Kentucky NFH), several FFT2 assignments with Daniel Boone NF; Toddy Wooten (Clarks River Kentucky NWR), two-week DOZB assignment in Florida. Dexter Soileau and Brett Wehrle (Lake Ophelia Louisiana NWR), several SEC1 assignments in California, Iaho, New Mexico, Texas; Sarah Sorenson (Cookeville Tennessee ES), ENGB-T assignment in Minnesota; Eddie Harsh (White River Arkansas NWR), Tractor-Plow Operator assignment at Felsenthal NWR.

Training

Sami Gray coordinated two sessions of Basic Firefighter Training and one S-215 for the Jackson County Volunteer Fire Departments. Contractor Bob Panko and Risky Business instructed the courses; Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR hosted the field operations.

See chart on next page.

Honors, Awards, Committees

Tony Wilder offered his experience and expertise in interagency coordination to several regional organizations this year. He participated in emergency response planning meetings for the Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, and for the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The City of New Orleans requested Tony’s advice on tactics, strategies, interagency coordination, and implementation of ICS during a long duration peat fire within the city limits. And he was selected to lead an interagency fire management review of the program at Eglin Air Force Base. This is the largest fire management program of all military bases in the country.

They have been selected as the Center of Fire Management Excellence for the U.S. Air Force and will use this review as a template to carry the program to other bases.

The Fourth Annual Cooperators Meeting at Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR took place in early FY12 and was attended by 50 individuals representing 28 agencies and organizational units. The meeting has evolved into a multi-disciplinary event, with participants such as EMS, Department of Transportation, and Law Enforcement, in addition to Fire Management. Guest Speaker, SACC Meteorologist Kevin Scasny presented some remarkable results of his analyses of fire weather trends over the past several centuries, along with an astonishing glimpse of what we can expect for the next twenty years.

A significant potential barrier to interagency radio communications in Jackson County surfaced at this year’s meeting. Since then, Mississippi Sandhill Crane Wildland Fire Specialist Brad Bailey has taken a leading role in developing a plan to bridge communications between county and state cooperators as new systems (MSWIN) go into place in Jackson County and across the state of Mississippi. Over the past year numerous meetings have taken place and new MOU’s have been signed with cooperators. A communications scenario is scheduled for September 27, to test the new MSWIN radio system. Meetings are also taking place with Baldwin County, Alabama to bridge communications there with the local fire departments.

At the Regional FMO meeting in early FY12, Jeff “Bunk” Twiss of Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR was presented the first annual award for “Excellence in WIMS R-to-O Conversion”. This award promotes awareness of the critical role of field stations in providing timely, accurate data essential for the high quality products we expect from SACC Predictive Services.

Staffing Changes

Felsenthal NWR: Matthew Johnson was reassigned in July from Fire Management Officer at Southwest Louisiana National Wildlife Refuge Complex to Fire Management Specialist at South Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

SW Louisiana NWRs: Jamie Farmer was selected as the new FMO and reported in September 2012.

SE Louisiana NWRs: The FMO position and a Senior Firefighter position were vacated. Neither position has been refilled since its vacancy. The equipment operator position that was vacated last year was filled in January 2012 by Glenn Catoe.

Sam D. Hamilton Noxubee NWR: Two fire employees moved on to other positions this past year, Dillon McInnis and T.J. Prisock. Both left the FWS to work in the private logging business. Neither position has been refilled since its vacancy.

Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR: John Bell was hired in a GS-04 Forestry Technician-Firefighter position this year. Two employees celebrated momentous life events this year: Bert Rager III was married; Tony Wilder welcomed his first grandson.

Training

Employee	Training Taken	Instructor Experience	Taskbooks Initiated	Taskbooks Completed
Southwest Louisiana				
Larry “Gator” Smith		PLDO		
Jon King	HMGB Refresher			
Brian Donnelly			ICT4 & CRWB	ENGB
Shaun Martinet			ICT5	
Southeast Louisiana				
Chris LeRouge	M-581, ATV, RAWS	S-130/S-190		
Glenn Catoe	S130/S190, IA Dozer, S-212, Specialty Track/Heavy Equipment, ATV, MOCC			
Joel Edwards	ATV			
Christina Legleu	S-212			
Matthew McCollister	S-212			
South Arkansas, North Louisiana				
James Whitaker	S-130 / S-190			
Michael Budd	S-130 / S-190, IS700			
Noxubee				
Paul Reynolds	L-380, Heavy Equipment			
Chad Fondren				FIRB
Justin Boysen	Heavy Equipment			FFT1
Mississippi Sandhill Crane				
Recurring Training	Aviation: 16 responders completed 67 courses. Annual Refresher: 39 responders WCT: 61 responders. RT212: 13 responders.			
Brad Bailey	S-330, FW401, NSA03			
James Bates		FW401, NSA03		TFLD
John Bell	S-215, FW401, NSA03, I-100, IS-700			FFT1, FALA
Angie Dedrickson	Basic Firefighter			
Rebecca Goosman	FW401, NSA03, RT-9016		RT212	
Sami Gray		Coordinated 2 sessions of S-212 in district.		
Josh Havird	L-380, S-215, S-260			
Mike Krebs	FW401, NSA03		S212/RT212	
Dillon McInnis				FALA
Sonny Montague	Basic Firefighter			
Randall Platt	S-231		ENGB	FFT1-ICT5
Bert Rager III	FW401,NSA03, S-260		S212/RT212	
Scott Saucier	S-212, FW401,NSA03			
Burnice Shows	FW401,NSA03, RT-271, RT-9016			
Tony Wilder		L-580, M-581		
Other Locations				
Nathan Renick			EQPM, FALA	
Dexter Soileau			EQPM	
Sarah Sorenson			ENGB, HECM	



Regional Office

Year Overview Wildfire and All-Hazard

FY12 had promised to be a very active wildfire season. Florida and other areas of the region experienced conditions similar to those in 1998 but fortunate to all, the fire storms did not materialize. All three Florida districts were under approved severity packages and successfully suppressed many ignitions. Merritt Island’s past hazardous fuels treatments were integral in the suppression of a couple high potential fires on the refuge. Jennifer Hinckley and Jon Wallace documented this success story in a document that is currently being distributed to interagency partners and Service leadership.

Within the Southeast Region, we responded to 174 wildfires that burned 14,486 acres, of which 11,176 acres were on Service lands. In addition to the regional workload, Service personnel participated in western suppression efforts as single resources or members of Incident Management Teams (IMT).

The region has been fortunate again in regards to the All-Hazard arena. A Type 3 IMT led by Mike Housh and Rob Wood was formed to respond to any damages caused by Hurricane Isaac. Luckily, impacts were minimal and no operational resources were deployed.

Fuels Management

With continued reductions in hazardous fuels funding this year the total acres managed through prescribed fire treatments dropped below 100,000 for the first time since 2001. This fiscal year’s target for acreage treated as determined through the HFPAS process was 95% complete. While the HFPAS target was not met; Regional Refuge management is committed to using prescribed fire as a management tool and completed an additional 66,000 acres using other funds. These acres were accomplished in a safe and efficient manner, reduced hazardous fuel loading and helped to maintain the health of our fire dependent landscapes.

Glen Stratton and Janet Ertel worked with a team of refuge managers and refuge biologists to develop the Southeast Region Habitat Priorities for Fire Management Report which will be used as a decision tool to assist in prioritizing prescribed fire projects that benefit habitat management and hazardous fuels.

Wildland Urban Interface Mitigation

Two of the primary DOI WUI wildfire mitigation programs, The Rural Fire Assistance Program and the Ready Reserve Program, received no funding for FY2012. The region utilized \$14K of 2011 carryover of Ready Reserve funds which were distributed to the field. \$9K went to our Caribbean Refuges and \$5K went to Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR. The purpose of the Ready Reserve Program is to increase rural fire department wildland fire operations safety, effectiveness, and capacity by sponsoring local level training opportunities.

This year the region provided a steering committee member for the further development of the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment and the Southern Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal. The portal is a web based application of the program. This assessment is an interagency cooperative tool utilized at federal, state and local levels.

Field units continue to work with cooperators, predominantly the state fire protection/forestry agencies, in development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans. These are being developed on a wide array of spatial levels, from county wide, down to single small communities.

This year the Southeast Region treated approximately 65,964 acres of hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface.

Training and Qualifications

USFWS provided the chairperson for the Southern Area Training Working Team. Due to budget constraints, the team decided not to hold a 2012 Southern Area Advanced Academy. In lieu of the annual academy, FWS co-sponsored, along with the US Forest Service, National Park Service, and the Southern Group of State Foresters, the delivery of LFML, Local Fire Management Leadership and M-581, Fire Program Management. These two courses were delivered back to back in Jacksonville, FL in June. A wide variety of FWS employees from refuge managers and fire staff worked together to make these sessions a success.

We coordinate with the states in the fire and incident training arena on a variety of levels. Notable, is our involvement in the TN/KY Wildland Fire Academy. This year was the 10th annual session and our efforts were once again spearheaded by Mike Housh. Mike has served on the steering committee as the FWS representative since the academy inception 10 years ago. Over the years Mike has coordinated and led a wide variety of 200 and 300 level courses. This year FWS had 30 students and nine instructors participate in the effort. Thank you to Mike and all the others for another successful year.

This year a significant number of position task books were completed by service fire personnel in the field and at the regional office. The “interagency priority trainee dispatching process” developed by the Southern Area Training Working Team and implemented at the Southern Area Coordination Center (SACC) was continued and improved upon this year. This process is to better serve the agencies as a more robust trainee prioritization and rotation system. Although the process is still being honed, the number of trainees placed on assignment coupled with the volume of completed task books suggests the process is shaping to be an equitable and efficient dispatching tool.



The R4 Position Task Book administration process was updated this year to include the local agency administrator concurrence in both the initiation and certification aspects of the PTB along with final certification at the regional level. This process is intended to foster further communication and programmatic understanding between fire management staff and refuge leadership.

Emergency Stabilization (ES)

In FY 2012, one Emergency Stabilization plan was submitted (April 2012) for hazard tree removal along canoe trails following the Honey Prairie fire of the Okefenokee NWR (April 2011, containment date). Approximately 22 miles of hazardous tree removal treatment was proposed and approved to mitigate the threat of standing dead trees along the public canoe trails. A contract was obligated for the work and the project will be on-going in FY 2013. The work is to be completed by April 2013.

Burned Area Rehabilitation (BAR)

In FY2012, one on-going BAR plan for the Murphey Fire at Big Branch Marsh NWR (November 2010) was fully funded to monitor invasive species response to herbicide treatment and pine tree plantings that occurred in FY2011. Additional work in FY 2013 will include a prescribed fire treatment to release the planted pine seedlings and additional monitoring work of tree survival. The BAR work will be completed by end of FY 2013.

Two new wildfire BAR plans were submitted for funding in April 2012, one included invasive species treatment of Phragmites at Alligator River NWR following the Pains Bay Fire (Aug 2011). This work initially was proposed to spray 50 acres of phragmites but as a result of the summer detection flight, additional work is needed to include a total of 500 acres in FY2013. The initial 50 acres were treated in FY 2012 and an amended plan has been approved to include

the additional acreage for herbicide treatment in FY2013. The work for this BAR plan will continue through FY 2014.

A second initial BAR plan was submitted by the Okefenokee NWR following the Honey Prairie fire (April 2011) to include repairs to the burned refuge observational platforms, signs, kiosks and observational tower. While the BAR plan was approved in FY 2012, the work associated with burned repairs to the observational tower were funded with other sources. All other work on this plan is on-going and includes repairs to the Cane Pole Trail Observational Platform, and replacement of interpretive signs and kiosks. Since the development of the initial BAR plan additional BAR treatments have developed including longleaf pine seedling plantings in areas of the refuges deemed not to return by native seeding, and repairs to additional minor facilities including canoe trail shelters and toilets. A BAR plan amendment was submitted for this work and is approved for FY2013. This BAR plan work will continue through FY 2014.

In addition to on-going wildfire BAR plans, one new wildfire, the Round Two fire (Apr 2012) on the Florida Panther NWR was submitted for BAR funding. The plan was submitted and approved to treat the invasive cabbage palm tree seedlings in the burned area. Approximately 750 acres will be treated in FY 2013. This work will continue through April 2015. Additional future treatments include a prescribed fire in FY 2015.

Planning

Fire Management Planning Section, Phil Weston, accomplished the review of four revised Fire Management Plans, updated 65 FMPs, and conducted a Refuge Level Fire Management Review at Central Gulf Coast Complex. He collaborated with State and Federal partners on five State Interagency Cooperative Wildland Fire Management & Stafford Act Response Agreements (Georgia, Louisiana,

Mississippi, Virginia, and Puerto Rico), the Southern Geographic Area Agreement, The Nature Conservancy, State of Florida, and the US Air Force MOUs. He and Sue Wilder have been coordinating with the Natural Resource Division related to Comprehensive Conservation Plans and Habitat Management Plans.

Josh O’Connor served on the Fire Program Analysis (FPA) Support Working Team (SWT) representing the FWS. He also worked with the field to ensure that all reporting requirements for wildfires and hazardous fuels treatments were completed and correct. Josh also was a member with the Southeast Habitat Prioritization Team and the Southeast Regions Fire Management Work Force Planning Team.

Southeast Region Service personnel have been actively involved with the Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy efforts. Bob Eaton and Pete Kubiak have both served on the Regional Strategy Committee, Vince Carver severed on the Working Team and Jennifer Hinckley and Vince served on the Communications Committee. The Phase III document should be submitted to the National Strategic Committee very soon.

Budget

Southeast Region fire funding has reduced from \$13.6 million in FY09 to \$11.6 million in FY12—15% overall. We are beginning FY13 with our Continuing Resolution base on the President’s Budget, \$10.2 million dollars. Forecast for FY14 threatens an additional 30% reduction in hazardous fuels funding! We are in challenging times.

Even with the tightening budget, the Fire Management Program was able to distribute roughly \$2 million to the field for hazardous fuel reduction projects, equipment repair and replacement as well as general support dollars.

Regional Office

Salary savings and additional funding were used to prepay contracts for FY13 where appropriate, and contribute funding towards heavy equipment replacement.

In preparations for future declining budgets, an interdisciplinary team was tasked to develop a workforce planning document to guide staffing decisions so that the region is in the best position possible to face the expected budgetary challenges. The plan is in its second revision, after incorporating comments from the field, and should be returned to the field for additional comments in early November.

Southern Area Coordination Center
Pat Boucher accepted a 7.5 month detail for implementation of Directive Emergency Management Policy Bulletin 2011-1. She developed a webinar that described how to add the regional all-hazard Point-of-Contacts (POC) in IQCS and ROSS. Subsequently, Pat developed and provided on-line training webinars for the POCs and other DOI Bureaus. As a part of this detail, Pat also collaborated with each GACC and the NWCG Change Management Board, to create the Identifiers needed for the Ecological Service, Fish Hatcheries, and Migratory Bird offices in all FWS regions.

SACC is working with a contractor to improved SACC's webpage. Results from the survey by the field and public in 2011 will be used to help determine the design and information to be identified for usage.

Region Staff Assignments

- Josh O'Connor, Fire Management Specialist, served as DIVS on the Southern Area Red Type 1 IMT on wildfires in Texas and was a member of the FWS Hurricane Isaac response IMT.
- Phillip Weston, Regional Fire Planner, served as Planning Section Chief on the Southern Area Type 2 IMT on wildfires in Florida.

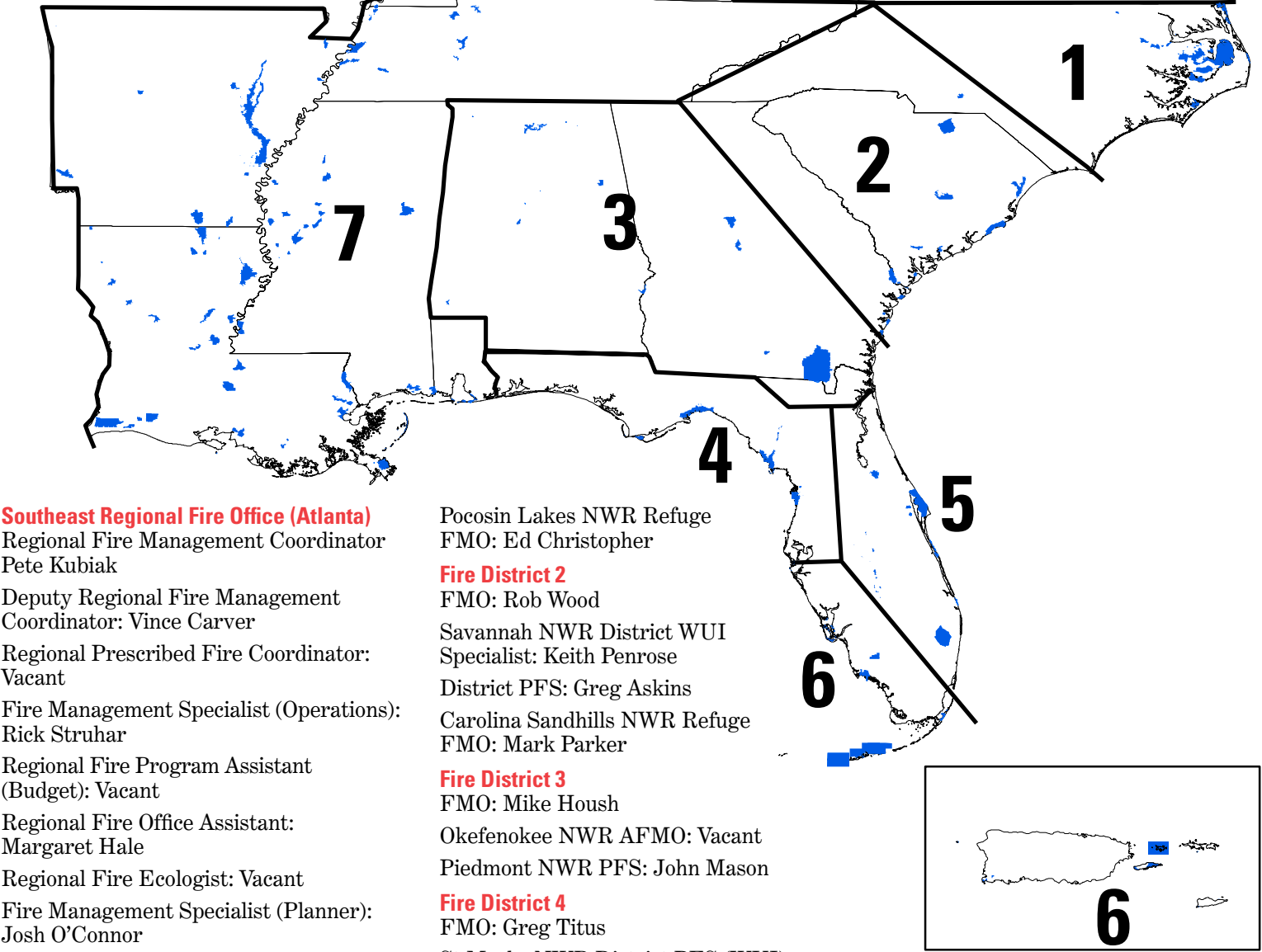
Training

Employee	Training Taken	Instructor Experience	Taskbooks Initiated	Taskbooks Completed
Josh O'Connor				
Rick Struhar	D-110 Dispatch Recorder			
Pete Kubiak	M-480	M-580, L-580 Shiloh Staff Ride, M-581		
Vince Carver		RX-410	SITL, SCKN	SCKN
Phil Weston		LFML		
Sue Wilder	L-580 Shiloh Staff Ride	PFTC's Fire Effects Monitoring, M-581		

- Pete Kubiak, Regional Chief, RFMC, served as Operations Section Chief (OSC2) on the Southern Area Type 2 IMT on wildfires in Florida and worked on the Hurricane Isaac Regional response.
- Vince Carver, DRFMC served as Situation Unit Leader (t) on the Southern Area Type 2 IMT on wildfires in Florida and worked on the Hurricane Isaac Regional response.
- Sue Wilder, Regional Fire Ecologist, served as Resource Unit Leader on the Southern Area Blue Type 1 IMT on wildfires in Virginia and Idaho.
- Pat Boucher, Assistant Area Coordinator, provided ROSS/ dispatching support to the FWS Hurricane Isaac response and received a temporary promotion to serve as Center Manager until December 3rd.
- Glen Stratton, Regional Prescribed Fire Specialist, accepted the position of Regional Fire Management Coordinator for Region 5 and moved to Hadley, MA.
- Pete Kubiak has been promoted from Deputy Regional Fire Management Coordinator to Regional Fire Management Coordinator.
- Vince Carver has been promoted from Regional Fire Ecologist to Deputy Regional Fire Management Coordinator.
- The Regional Prescribed Fire Specialist position is currently vacant and the duties of the position are being accomplished via detail opportunities for existing staff members.
- Sherri Matthews, Fire Budget Analyst has moved to Budget Analyst with the Division of Realty in the Regional Office.
- Bob Eaton, Chief Division of Fire Management Southeast Region, accepted the position of Deputy Chief, Branch of Fire Management and moved to Headquarters in Boise, ID.

Staffing Changes

Southeast Region Fire Managment Organization



Southeast Regional Fire Office (Atlanta)
Regional Fire Management Coordinator
Pete Kubiak

Deputy Regional Fire Management Coordinator: Vince Carver

Regional Prescribed Fire Coordinator: Vacant

Fire Management Specialist (Operations): Rick Struhar

Regional Fire Program Assistant (Budget): Vacant

Regional Fire Office Assistant: Margaret Hale

Regional Fire Ecologist: Vacant

Fire Management Specialist (Planner): Josh O'Connor

Fire Office Assistant: Vacant

Southern Area Coordination Center (SACC)
SACC Assistant Coordinator: Pat Boucher

SACC Meteorologist: Kevin Scasny

Tallahassee Regional Fire Office (TLH)
Prescribed Fire Training Center

Director: Mike Dueitt

Fire Planner: Phil Weston

Slidell Regional Fire Staff (SLI)
Regional Fire Ecologist: Sue Wilder

Fire District 1
FMO: Tom Crews

Alligator River NWR PFS: Bert Plante

District WUI Specialist: Kelley Van Druten

Pocosin Lakes NWR Refuge
FMO: Ed Christopher

Fire District 2
FMO: Rob Wood

Savannah NWR District WUI Specialist: Keith Penrose

District PFS: Greg Askins

Carolina Sandhills NWR Refuge
FMO: Mark Parker

Fire District 3
FMO: Mike Housh

Okefenokee NWR AFMO: Vacant

Piedmont NWR PFS: John Mason

Fire District 4
FMO: Greg Titus

St Marks NWR District PFS (WUI): Jennifer Hinckley

Lead Fire Tech: Joey Lord

Lower Suwannee NWR Refuge FMO: Victor Doig

Fire District 5
FMO: Patrick Pearson

Merritt Island NWR Regional Aviation Coordinator: Glen Cullingford

PFS (MIR): Michael Good

Wildland Fire Supervisory Officer: Vacant

ARM Loxahatchee NWR PFS (LXR): Jon Wallace

Fire District 6
FMO: Cass Palmer

PFS (FPR): Greg Suszek

Caribbean Islands NWR: James Padilla

National Key Deer NWR Fire Management Specialist: Dana Cohen

Fire District 7
FMO: Tony Wilder

Mississippi Sandhill Crane NWR AFMO: Sami Gray

District PFS: Scott Saucier

Southwest Louisiana Complex FMO: Jamie Farmer

Southeast Louisiana Complex FMO: Vacant

Noxubee NWR FMO: Paul Roberts

Felsenthal FMO: Matthew Johnson

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Division of Fire Management
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November 2012



Keeping Fire on Our Side

For thousands of years, humans have had an active partnership with fire. When respected and managed with care, fire can be a beneficial ally rather than an awesome opponent. Thoughtful preparation and action by public managers and private property owners can help keep fire's effects positive. Together, we can keep fire on our side.