



**National Park Service
Fire Ecology Annual Report
Calendar Year 2005**

Summary

The calendar year 2005 was a year of change for Big Cypress National Preserve. We began the year without a Fire Management Officer, Prescribed Fire Specialist, and two monitor positions. The prescribed fire staff included two GS-7 technicians who spent most of January and February working on Fire Program Analysis (FPA). Since both technicians did not have any formal training on FPA, many meetings were attended to get acquainted with the FPA database. The two vacant monitor positions were filled in May and August, with the Prescribed Fire Specialist starting in July.

Only two prescribed burns were accomplished in 2005, for a total of 4,244 acres. Immediate post-burn data were collected on one fire effects plot, and 34 visits were made to the photo points. Since Big Cypress was put on hold from prescribed burning, staff was available to help the Panther Wildlife Refuge and Everglades National Park with their prescribed burns and wildfires. There were numerous preserve shutdowns this year due to hurricanes, and staff was available for hurricane recovery assignments to the Gulf Coast for Hurricane Katrina and Rita. Hurricane Wilma, here in South Florida, required a good deal of clean-up, which occupied much of the month of November. A Fire Effects meeting between Big Cypress National Preserve, Everglades National Park, and the Panther Wildlife Refuge was rescheduled three times due to Hurricane details. It has yet to be rescheduled, but will most likely occur within the first couple months of 2006.

Table 1. Management Objectives and Monitoring Results 2005

No monitoring results at this time.

Table 2. Fire Effects Plot Workload 2005

Park	Monitoring Unit	Type of Plot (FMH, photo point, other)	Pre-burn	Immed. Post	Postburn (1-20 yrs)	Total Plots
Big Cypress NP	Prairie	FMH grass plot	0	0	0	19
Big Cypress NP	Slash Pine	FMH Forest plot	0	1	0	13
Big Cypress NP	Slash Pine/palmetto	Photo point	3	6	11	25
Big Cypress NP	Prairie	Photo point	0	4	2	22
Big Cypress NP	Cypress Prairie	Photo point	1	0	1	8
Big Cypress NP	Mechanical Treatment	Photo point	0	3	3	4
Total			4	14	17	91

Table 3. Fire Ecology Staffing 2005

Monitor	Starting Date	Ending Date	# of Pay Periods	Training and Development
Jennifer McCormick	1/1/05	12/31/05	26	S-234, S-390, WIMS/NFDRS, CPR/AED training, 2 Hurricane Assignments, FPA meetings
Brianne Davidson	8/7/05	12/31/05	10	2 Hurricane Assignments
Eric Neiswanger	5/29/05	12/31/05	15	ATV training, CPR/AED, 3 Hurricane Assignments

Table 4. Prescribe Fire Specialist Accomplishments/Focus Area

Category	Percent Time	Accomplishments/Focus Areas
General Planning	25%	Rewrote 2 burn plans – have 9 more to go, contributed to final section 7 consultation for FMP
Monitoring Plans	<5%	Reviewed monitoring plan, will rewrite in FY06
Presentations	5%	Attended and presented at Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow meeting
NPS Meetings/ Task Groups		No NPS meetings - will reschedule South Florida Fire Effects meeting for early FY06
Interagency Work	10%	Responded to LANDFIRE data requests, Assisted with FPA analysis
Fire Assignments and Fuels Projects	1 assignment	LTAN (t) assignment to Atlanta to assist with fire danger assessment following hurricane Katrina
Research		Cooperated with Gary Slater (blue bird researcher) will be establishing plots within potential burn areas

Category	Percent Time	Accomplishments/Focus Areas
Data Management and Conversion		Monitors moving all digital photo point images to PowerPoint for ease of comparison
Data Analysis		No Data Analysis at this time
Supervision/Admin	25%	Lost two key individuals in RX positions, will fill vacancies in FY06, time spent learning NPS policy (Fire, Admin. Personnel etc.)
Training & Professional Development		Assisted with instruction of S271 and PLDO training
Miscellaneous	15%	- Learning Big Cypress equipment (buggies, engines) - Flying Preserve to learn landscape for burn planning - GIS Map production for burn plans

Table 5. Fire Effect Crew Accomplishments

Category	Percent Time	Notes
FMH plots	>5%	Estimated amount of time spent collecting plot data; includes any preparation time.
Mechanical Treatment plots	5%	Lead Monitor assisted gyro-tracking when needed and took photo point pictures of mechanical treatments.
CBI plots	0	Estimated amount of time spent collecting plot data; includes any preparation time.
Other plot work	15%	Photo points
Fire Assignments and Fuels Projects	15%	- Monitors worked on 2 prescribed burns for a total of 3 shifts - Lead Monitor assisted cooperators on Rx burn for 1 shift and on wildfires for 4 shifts - Lead monitor spent 33 shifts on hurricane assignments, and the other 2 monitors spent 65 shifts on hurricane assignments.
Data Entry	25%	Fire Reports, fire mapping, GIS, and weather data management
Data Management and Conversion	0	Estimated amount of time to convert FMH data to FEAT and to manage monitoring data; includes preparing species lists, error checking, learning conversion program, etc.
Data Analysis	0	This can be a very low number or zero.
Supervision/Admin	10%	Lead Monitor hired and supervised two monitors
Training & Professional Development	5%	All crew members had the annual refresher, Lead Monitor trained two new employees, S-234, S-390, WIMS/NFDRS, CPR/AED training, ATV training were taken, attended the Pine Rocklands meeting and Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow workshop at Everglades.
Miscellaneous	20%	- Lead monitor went to FPA meetings, entered FPA data, and GIS work for acreages. - Computer management/software installation - Vehicle/buggy/office maintenance - Physical Fitness Training- 1 Hour a day/per person - Weekly safety meetings - RAWS maintenance

Challenges in 2005

Big Cypress did not have a Fire Management Officer or Prescribed Fire Specialist for the first five months of the year. Kevin Walsh arrived as the Fire Management Officer in May and Kim Ernstrom began as Prescribed Fire Specialist in mid-July. Before these positions were filled, the Preserve Management did not authorize any prescribed burns. Kevin Walsh came down from the Regional Office in Atlanta to assist with one burn in February, and another burn was completed upon his arrival as Fire Management Officer in May. The month of June brought 22 inches of rain to the Preserve which literally dampened any opportunities to conduct prescribed burns during the summer season.

All burn plans were last reviewed and signed in 2002, therefore all plans must be updated and peer reviewed to be in compliance with RM-18. Kim Ernstrom (Prescribed Fire Specialist) is currently working on these updates. The Preserve Fire Management Plan has been updated and is currently waiting review from the Fish and Wildlife Service. The section 7 consultation should be completed in the next 30 to 60 days. Prescribed burning will resume once one or more burn plans are approved by the Superintendent.

Optional question for the Prescribed Fire Specialist (Kim Ernstrom)

Over the next 6 to 12 months I anticipate my focus to be on revising and updating all of the burn plans that are currently in place. As these plans are completed, reviewed and approved, prescribed burns will be conducted to meet our target for FY06. The prescribed fire program currently has two GS-7 vacancies (Prescribed Fire Technician and Lead Fire Effects Monitor). I will be working toward filling these vacancies and training the selected individuals.

I have discussed with Everglades National Park and Panther National Wildlife Refuge the possibility of coordinating our fire effects monitoring efforts. We will plan a meeting to brief each other on the current status of our monitoring programs and will share ideas to enhance, simplify, revise and update our monitoring techniques and photo point protocols. I intend to review the Big Cypress Fire Effects Monitoring plan and revisit the use of the FMH plots that are currently installed. The plots have not been visited since they were installed about 5-6 years ago and it is unclear whether they can be located in the field. The biggest challenges facing our prescribed fire and fire effects program is employee retention. I am hopeful that we can recruit individuals for our current vacancies that are interested in focusing on the science and operational aspects of prescribed fire and fire ecology in south Florida and are interested in remaining in South Florida for 3-5 years.