



TOUCHSTONES



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Wildfire and Recovery

By Ramesh Buch, Program Supervisor

We have been very fortunate (knock hard on wood) that we have not experienced devastating and dangerous wildfires on ACF property of years past. You may recall the wildfire season in 1998. One of the strongest El Nino events ever recorded caused record rainfall across Florida during the winter of 1997-1998, causing flooding and rampant growth of vegetation. There also were hard freezes during the winter, causing an increase in the proportion of dead vegetation (think; fuel) in north and central Florida. Drought conditions associated with the rebound La Nina cycle began in late March 1998 and continued through July, combined with a record heat wave during May and June of 1998. The first fires began in late April and May in north Florida, and numerous wildland-urban interface fires were burning in early June. From June 19-22 and again from June 30-July 2, 1998, more than 80 new wildfires were starting each day, the vast majority of them caused by dry lightning.

The combination of heavy living and dead fuels with accumulated fuels from years past, a lack of preventative prescribed burning led to several months of widespread, damaging wildfires, especially in Flagler, St. Johns, Volusia, and Brevard Counties. Alachua County did not escape with the massive wildfire near Waldo. In the six weeks from June 1 to July 22, a total of eight fire complexes burned in north and central Florida, with a total of 2,282 new wildfires started and 499,477 acres burned. With firefighters from all over the country, the 1998 Florida wildfires may have been the largest wildland-urban interface wildfire campaign in U.S. history to that date. (Source: Report of the Governor's Wildfire Response and Mitigation Review Committee, 1998).

We did experience a recent wildfire at our Northeast Flatwoods Preserve. It started on May 25, 2012 and burned the entire 103-acre southwest quadrant of the Preserve. The wildfire then burned properties to the south and west for a total of 2,088 acres burned. Preserve Site Manager Kelly McPherson had penned an article (page 3) about how the land recovers from such a jarring impact. Of course, the more isolated and fragmented the site is, the more complex, more difficult, and more fraught with potential to go wrong is the recovery from that impact. But with time and patience, the land recovers. Lives and personal property may not.

Table of Contents

ACF Dashboard	1
Wildfire and Recovery	1
A Great Time of Year for a Walk	2
Get outside	3
After the Fire	3
View from the Fire Tower	4



Fall comes to Cofrin Nature Park, a joint project between ACF, the City of Gainesville and the State of Florida

ACF Dashboard

Acquisition List protected:	22,407
With Direct ACF funding:	18,730
Remaining on List:	27,809
Under contract:	544
Value of land protected:	\$ 98,509,980
County share:	\$ 37,339,730
Partner share:	\$ 61,170,250
Managed by County:	10,686
Managed by Partners:	8,045
Acreage open now:	12,551
To be opened in next 5 years*:	4,692
*Guided group tours can be arranged	

This is an electronic newsletter distributed to anyone interested in following the Alachua County Forever Program. To be added to the distribution list, please click [here](#).
The information in this Newsletter is available in alternate formats upon request. Back issues are available on our [website](#).

"What is the extinction of the Condor, to a child who has never known a wren?" – Robert Michael Pyle.

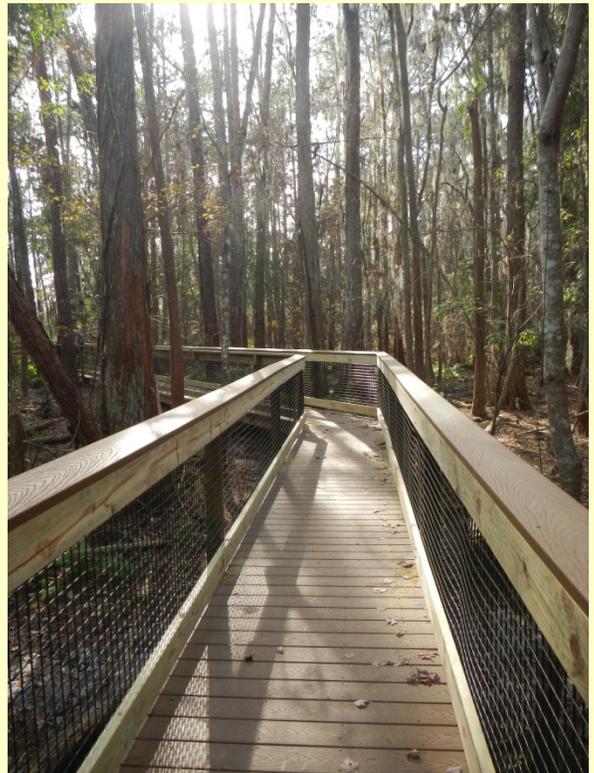
A Great Time of Year for a Walk

By Ramesh Buch, Program Supervisor

Just a few pictures to encourage you to go out and enjoy these special natural areas.

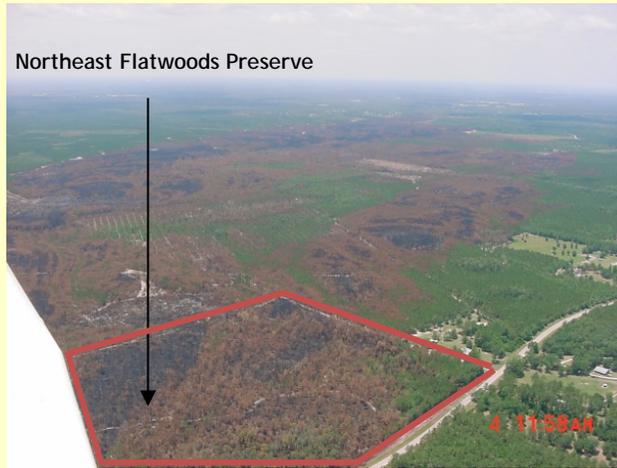


Clockwise from top left: the north-south levee at Barr Hammock - Levy Prairie; the bridge at Cofrin Nature Park; New boardwalk at Lake Alto North; Waterfall at Mill Creek Preserve; Phaon Crescent Butterfly ([Phyciodes phaon](#)) at Mill Creek Preserve.



After the Fire

By Kelly McPherson, Sr. Environmental Specialist



Aerial of the wildfire burn scar, view to the southwest

On a windy, dry weekend in May of 2012, a wildfire started at the corner of CR 225 and CR 1475. The fire burned over 2,088 acres north Waldo as northeast winds swept it almost to the Gatornationals site. The entire southwestern portion of Northeast Flatwoods Preserve (103 acres) burned in the fire. Much of the fire was extremely intense and the effects of the fire were severe. Nearly all of the pines in a seventy-acre area within the preserve were killed by the fire, the root mat was burned to mineral soil in many locations and fire traveled across all of the cypress wetlands, again consuming the peat-like mat and top-killing cypress trees. Alachua County quickly initiated a salvage timber sale in order to further management goals and to salvage value from the burned pine timber. Removal of thousands of dead pine stems made the site easier and safer to burn in the future, a key part of its ecological restoration. The funds generated by the salvage timber harvest funded much of the post-fire restoration of the site.

Over a year went by after the harvest before the site was ready to be prepared for replanting. In the meantime, opportunistic herbs and grass-like plants colonized the burned out patches on the ground, cypress trees that survived the fire started re-sprouting from their bases and crowns, and ecologically valuable grasses that had hung on for years under the dense shrub canopy enjoyed increased light, grew, flowered and produced seed. Wood ducks moved into the previously shrub-choked cypress ponds and cricket frogs and southern chorus frogs continue to croak their songs. The site was mowed this past fall (with a really tough mower) to reduce the above ground competition for the plants to be planted, a mixture of slash and longleaf pine and wiregrass, but allowed the native grasses to survive the planting preparation. As an added bonus, the mowing spread grass seeds of the happy grasses throughout the site. The planters completed the planting in February – later than normal planting time, but put off due to the wet winter.

Now we watch. Fire will be reintroduced to the site in 2 to 3 years. Staff will monitor the site and all can enjoy watching the trees grow.



Immediately after the wildfire



One and a half years later



Carnivorous pitcher plants, after the fire



New pine seedlings, planted in the burn scar

Get outside

Take a hike with one of our partners.

Date	Location	Event	Contact
April 5, 2014	Balu Forest	Monthly Hike	FTA
April 19, 2014	Barr Hammock	Gainesville Birding and Nature Festival Birding Hike	GEC/CTF
May 3, 2014	Barr Hammock	Monthly Hike	FTA

Contacts:

CTF – Conservation Trust for Florida

www.conserveflorida.org

Busy Shires- Byerly, busy@conserveflorida.org

FTA-Florida Trail Association

<http://www.floridatrail.org/about-us/chapters/floridacrackers/>

Mitch Sapp, mesapp1941@gmail.com

GEC – Gainesville EcoTours

www.gainesvilleecotours.com

Terri Mashour, terri@gainesvilleecotours.com

View from the Fire Tower

An occasional series on Prescribed Fire and Wildfire

By David Hoyt, Sr. Environmental Specialist, Prescribed Burn Coordinator

It is time to start the prescribed burn this cold winter morning in January. All of our crew and equipment are in place. We have seven of our own staff from Environmental Protection (ACEPD), a person from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and two people from the Florida Forest Service (FFS). We have three brush trucks, two UTVs with water tanks and the FFS Bulldozer with a fireplow. We've restocked and staged the supply trailer. We've spent the last couple days studying the weather forecasts and writing specific plans for today's burn. Everyone has maps to find their way around the unit and we have briefed, gone over firing plans, fuel descriptions and objectives for what we hope will result from this burn. We've discussed radio communications. I've received an authorization from the Florida Forest Service. We've notified our preserve neighbors, Alachua County officials, 911 dispatchers, and fire stations in close proximity. We've placed smoke signs along the highways. This fall we plowed firelines around the burn units.

We need a light northwest wind with low humidity to burn here today. Two crew members have finished taking the weather readings with instruments pulled from a red canvas bag. They transmit their findings of temperature, humidity, fuel moisture, wind speed and direction over the radio to the rest of the crews. Their report is close to what the National Weather Service forecast predicted. I give the word to begin a test fire. A lighter is used to ignite a drip torch, a tool we use to set the fire. We are starting at the corner furthest down wind. The fire is lit along both outside lines a short distance into the wind. The fire crackles to life, small curls of white smoke float upwards into the tree tops. The fire begins to spread slowly into the wind as it will throughout the burn. Birds watch from their perches in the distance. Today it's the yellow-rumped warblers keeping a lookout for grasshoppers and other insects that fly away from the slow spread of the fire. It's an easy meal. The other animals disappeared when we arrived. Deer and other larger creatures left quickly. Smaller creatures like turtles, snakes and mice descended into burrows and other holes where they would be safe from the fire.

The electronic bark of our radios is heard back and forth across the burn as our crews communicate to continue igniting fire up each side of the burn while the fire continues to spread in a controlled manner across the interior. The flames are low and smoke is light. It's been eight days since a big rain; the soil is still wet enough so the fire will go out quickly after it burns across the top of the ground litter consisting mostly of pine needles, leaves and sticks. It won't burn down into the organic matter underneath which would create more smoke on the nearby roads and damage tree roots.

From our fireline I look back over my shoulder into another area that we burned last year. The trees, bushes and grasses are healthy and producing forage, mast, berries and seeds for animals to eat. From the cover provided there a wood thrush flies to the fireline to intercept a scurrying black beetle. This area that we burned last year is safer from wildfires that can happen when things get dry. A lightning strike or careless cigarette won't burn near as readily since we removed much of the fuels by burning it in mild conditions, much like today's. The wildfire would creep much more slowly and could more easily be put out, making it safer for the row of neighboring homes right across the street.

The day has passed quickly and as evening approaches all of the area we wanted to burn today is blackened. After we have mopped up by putting out flames and smoke from near the edges of the burn, we meet for a debriefing. We discuss how well we met our objectives, what went right, and how we can improve next time. We do a final check around the burned area. There is a little smoke left. The northwest wind we planned on continues to carry it away from the roads and people's houses. The birds are already flying into the burned area, hunting for bugs. As our crews drive away I know that soon tonight, deer, raccoons and other animals will stealthily move into the burned area to feast on the roasted vegetation. Tomorrow as the sun comes up the squirrels will join them. We'll be back again tomorrow also, to check for additional mop up that might need to be done.

In about two weeks I'll return and see emerging from the blackened ground, the tender, bright green sprouts of grasses and shrubs that attract many foraging animals and insects. I won't be looking there for long, though; I'll be scouting the next area we have planned for a burn.



Scenes from a Prescribed Burn.
Top: Pre-burn briefing, weather, covering goals and safety; Middle: "Stringing fire"; Bottom: fire front consuming the fine fuels; Left: almost done; leaving the land refreshed ready for renewal

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We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

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Burrowing Owl.
([Athene cunicularia floridana](#)).
Photo courtesy Michael Drummond

Alachua County Commission

Lee Pinkoson, Chair
Susan Baird, Vice-Chair
Mike Byerly
Charles "Chuck" Chestnut IV
Robert "Hutch" Hutchinson

Administration

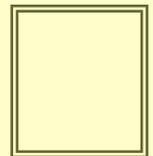
Betty M. Baker, County Manager

Chris Bird,
Environmental Protection Dept. Director

ALACHUA COUNTY FOREVER MISSION

Approved in November 2000 by the voters, to acquire, improve and manage the county's environmentally sensitive lands to protect water resources, wildlife habitats and natural areas suitable for resource-based recreation.

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Customer Name
Street Address
City, ST ZIP Code