



Agencies Join Forces to Create Ecosystem Restoration Teams

The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy is a national collaborative effort to bring a broad cross-section of stakeholders together to address wildland fire management challenges. The Strategy directs wildland fire planning activities and has three primary goals: restore and maintain landscapes, develop Fire-Adapted Communities, and improve wildfire response.

Activity	Impact
# Ecosystem Restoration Teams formed in Florida since 1999	4
# acres Teams have helped burn to restore habitats (1999-2014)	800,000
% partner-assisted prescribed burns on Florida State Parks lands conducted	30
# acres restored with prescribed fire by Teams in 2013	124,000

In a unique partnership, the Florida Forest Service and The Nature Conservancy have joined forces as they use fire strike teams, currently referred to as Ecosystem Restoration Teams, to restore a variety of forest ecosystems and get fire back on the ground across the state of Florida.

The idea materialized to address difficulties in finding dedicated fire staff to carry out prescribed burns within limited windows of time. Fire program managers recognized that while the number of available burn days to carry out prescribed burning is limited, staffing need not be the limiting factor. More burning can be completed if more teams are available to conduct the burns when good burn days come around, thereby increasing the number of controlled burns accomplished within a region on any given optimal burn day.

Their work has expanded to assisting a variety of public and private landowners, including the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, the Department of Defense, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service, Florida State Parks, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Polk County, the University of Florida and many, many more landowners. The structure for the strike teams was set up with state wildlife and national wildfire grants so that any partner can request the assistance of a team at the drop of a hat. Often, the four-person team can split up, assisting multiple partners on the same day.

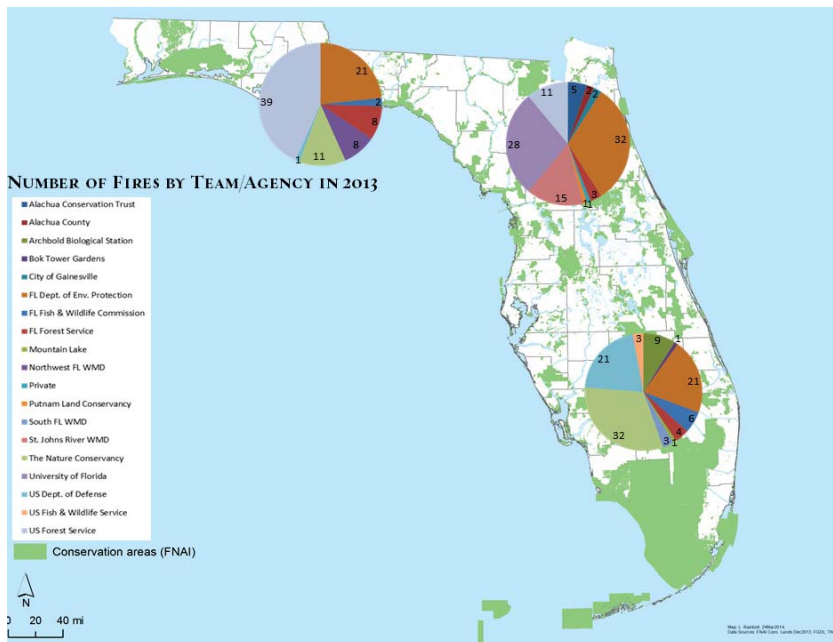
Since the very first Conservancy-led team was started in 1999 with primary funding from the USFWS targeting scrub-jay habitat, the Florida Chapter has created three additional teams located in different geographical regions of the state, through the financial support of state, federal, and private funding. Their work has shifted to a much broader scope of assisting public and private land managers with their fire and upland restoration needs. From 1999 to 2014, there were a total of over 800,000 acres of controlled burning implemented that the teams have either led or assisted with on 198 unique sites managed by over 40 agencies or private landowners.

Success stories highlight regional wildland fire accomplishments that support implementation of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy in the Southeast. The stories demonstrate how the Southeast is improving its "fire resiliency" through technology, education and outreach, forest management, collaboration, and more. Success stories also serve as a model for other communities to follow.

The priority habitats that the teams are focusing on are Sandhill, Scrub, Natural Pinelands, Dry Prairie, and Pine Rockland. On average, the Nature Conservancy Ecosystem Restoration teams conduct about 30% percent of all partner-assisted prescribed burns on Florida State Parks lands. In 2013 the teams helped restore over 150,000 acres (124,000 acres were managed with controlled burning alone) to support the creation of a more resilient landscape throughout Florida. This project has also led to an increase of ecological-themed controlled burning statewide, which is now roughly 25 to 35% of total controlled burning conducted in Florida each year. Dedicated ecosystem restoration teams are a proven tool that can be leveraged anywhere in the nation or even world to assist land managers with controlled burning or fire preparation, leading to an increase in acres successfully burned.



Ecosystem Restoration Team in the field. Credit: Florida Forest Service



Number Of Fires By Agency. Credit: Florida Forest Service



Aerial view of Seminole Ranch burn. Credit: Florida Forest Service

Contact: Zach Prusak, Fire Manager for Florida Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, zprusak@tnc.org

Partners: Florida Forest Service, the Nature Conservancy, US Forest Service, National Park Service, Department of Defense, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Florida State Parks



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