



SAVANNAH NWR • PINKNEY ISLAND NWR • WASSAW NWR • HARRIS NECK NWR • BLACKBEARD ISLAND NWR • TYBEE NWR • WOLF ISLAND NWR

[Friends Website](#)

[US F&WS](#)

[Kingfisher Pond Discovery Center](#)

[Donate to the Friends](#)



Lightning Sparks a Fire on Blackbeard Fortunately Does More Good Than Harm

Ben Goggins

Firefighters from the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex flew into action to monitor a fire that broke out in the wilderness area of the Blackbeard Island Refuge on the afternoon of July 21. Sparked by lightning strikes, smoke from the fire was spotted July 22 by a student intern with the loggerhead sea turtle project.



When the firefighters arrived, they determined that the fire, designated the Buckwheat Fire, had burned about 11 acres and was about a half mile from the South Beach Road. Given the weather forecast and the current conditions, and given that the fire was minimally creeping and smoldering, it was decided that the response at that point would be careful monitoring.

Over the next two weeks, dampened by occasional rain, the fire continued smoldering and was contained by the beach on its east, dunes on its south, and the lack of fuel on its west, where a 2014 fire had already eliminated most underbrush.



On August 4 however the wind whipped up and brought new life to the northeast corner of the fire where there was plenty of pine fuel. As the fire reached about a quarter mile from the South Beach Road, the crew did a controlled burn out

of the remaining fuel between the road and the fire. This prevented the fire from spreading out of the wilderness area.

The fire was declared totally out on August 27, having burned an area of 336 acres. Prescribed Fire Specialist Greg Askins, who has 25 years' experience, and who served as the Incident Commander at times during the fire's monitoring and containment, said that in this case the fire appears to have done more good than harm.



It served to eliminate a years-long build-up of hazardous fuel, thus preventing future catastrophic wildfires. This fire served to actually improve the habitat, allowing new growth of grasses and shrubs, which will provide a more nutritious, higher quality browse for deer and other wildlife.

From two to five Fish and Wildlife Services firefighters remained on the island during the fire's life, doing what was necessary to watch over and protect this special part of the Savannah Refuge Complex. Their work is critical to the vitality of Blackbeard's 2,100 acres of maritime forest of pines, live oaks, and magnolias and the fauna it supports.



Photos by Prescribed Fire Specialist Greg Askins