



News Release

For more information, contact:

Sharon Dolliver

478.751.3535

dolliver@gfc.state.ga.us

gatrees.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE...JULY 9, 2008

GEORGIA FORESTRY CREWS TAME CUMBERLAND WILDFIRE

Georgia Forestry Commission personnel are helping bring a 17-day firefighting operation to a close on Cumberland Island. They are part of a national, specially trained incident management team overseeing crews who have battled lightning-sparked blazes since June 22.

"Our Global Positioning Satellite reports 2,551 acres were burned," said Daniel Westcot, GFC Public Information Officer. "Fortunately, no one was injured and no structures were impacted." Westcot said emergency crews will remain on the island until the end of this week, securing fire containment lines, ensuring all embers are extinguished, and removing landscape hazards. Evacuated residents are now permitted to return to the island via air and water, as the main roads remain closed to traffic.

Cumberland Island is 18 miles long and three miles wide at its widest point, with a total land size of 39,000 acres. The burned acreage on the northern part of the island is classified as "maritime forest." It contains a native mix of wetlands and vegetation, including live oak and other hardwoods, along with loblolly, slash and longleaf pines.

"The fire had no significant impact on wildlife," said Westcot, "and the Cumberland Island horses left the area and were not affected." Westcot said the lightning-sparked fire is a "natural process" that is "beneficial to the area's forest ecology." Among other benefits, fire is known to control insects and disease, improve wildlife habitat, and help manage competing vegetation.

Several agencies worked together to fight the fire in a unified "Type 2" National Incident Management Team. Cooperators with the Georgia Forestry Commission included the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Georgia National Guard, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge, and hand crews from Puerto Rico, Kentucky, Arkansas and Oklahoma.