

Largest Active Wildfire in the U.S. Grows on North Carolina Refuge

A wildfire in a Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in rural eastern North Carolina grew to nearly 40,000 acres as of June 11. Although several small communities in the area have been evacuated, no homes have been damaged and no major injuries have been reported. A national firefighting team is actively monitoring smoke impacts, which at times limits driving visibility on Highway 64 in eastern Virginia.

More than 400 firefighters from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the State of North Carolina, and other local and county agencies are battling intense fire activity in the brush as well as extensive residual ground fire in peat. Crews are using existing roads and flooding ditches along fuel breaks to contain the fire.

The Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge is temporarily closed due to the wildfire activity. For more specific and updated information, including maps and photographs, visit www.inciweb.org/incident/1293/.

Meanwhile, a wildfire ignited Monday, June 9, has spread to more than 1,000 acres on the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge straddling the Virginia/North Carolina state line. Fire teams are managing the fire from the ground and from helicopters. Smoke from the Pocosin and Great Dismal fires is affecting area communities, however, the nearest homes to the Great Dismal Swamp fire are more than three miles away.

The fire at Great Dismal Swamp started when a piece of heavy equipment operating on the refuge caught fire. It spread to five acres by Monday evening, and grew to 200 acres by nightfall Tuesday. The fire “jumped” South Ditch on the refuge Wednesday, and, despite a quick firefighting response, dry conditions on the ground fueled its rapid spread. The fire's progress had slowed as of Thursday morning.