

Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Florida Keys National
Wildlife Refuge Complex
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Info Bulletin



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Pine Rockland Restoration on Big Pine and No Name Keys

The National Key Deer Refuge is currently working with the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Coastal Program and other partners to manage and restore the imperiled pine rockland ecosystem. Pine rocklands only occur in Miami-Dade and Monroe Counties and, outside of Everglades National Park, only about 2% of its original distribution remains. Consequently, over 20 species that are partially or wholly dependent on pine rocklands are federally listed as threatened or endangered. Much of Big Pine Key and some of the surrounding keys is comprised of pine rocklands. It is a fire-adapted ecosystem that has a sparse canopy of Florida slash pine and a diverse understory.

Fire is the natural way that pine rocklands maintained their biological diversity as it would limit overgrowth of palms and hardwoods that would shade ground cover plants. Without natural fire occurring as frequently as it did historically, we are working to manage the rocklands in ways that prepare areas for safe prescribed fires and/or maintain the ecosystem where fire may be difficult or dangerous. We do this by reducing the number and height of palms and hardwoods (which tend to burn hot and high damaging the pine canopy or killing the pines) to promote a robust grassy and herbaceous ground cover.

You may see areas of our pine rocklands where we are treating invasive plants and overabundant hardwoods and palms. The way we treat depends on how much overgrowth has occurred. In areas where palms and hardwoods are relatively dense, that may be mechanical treatment. In areas where palms and hardwoods are starting to become more abundant, that may be herbicide. In either case, treatment is carefully applied to maintain the appropriate balance of vegetation. It is most efficient and cost-effective to treat earlier which also mimics more frequent fires which occurred historically. All of this is done to maintain balance in the ecosystem, help pine rocklands be more resilient and healthier, and improve habitat for the many species that it supports.

For more information, please contact Kevin Kalasz at 772-205-7140 or kevin_kalasz@fws.gov, and follow Refuge updates on our Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/floridakeysrefuges>

The National Wildlife Refuge System protects wildlife and wildlife habitat on more than 150 million acres of land and water from the Caribbean to the Pacific, Maine to Alaska. Refuges also improve human health, provide outdoor recreation, and support local economies. *Visit our home page at <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/>.*

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov/>.

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