Long-term fire research at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge

D.L. Birch, C. Leonard, C. Flores

Historically, fire has been used in marsh and wetland areas to facilitate the trapping of fur bearing animals, to reduce the risk of loss of human life and property due to wildfires, and to stimulate the growth of vegetation beneficial to waterfowl and other wildlife. In 1998, we initiated a fire evaluation study on Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge to compare the above-ground vegetative response of fire rotations and fire exclusion at 6 tidal marsh areas. In 2004, the study was expanded to include 2 additional study areas (N=8) and to include both below-ground and above-ground response to various fire rotations. We will present preliminary results on 3 fire rotations including annual burns, 3-5 year burns, 7-10 year burns, and control areas with no burns. In addition, we will discuss the logistical considerations of such a large-scale, long-term fire research project in the eastern United States wetland areas.