



**Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve  
300 Tower Road  
Naples, Florida 34113-8059**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
January 10, 2012

**CONTACT:** Renee Wilson  
239/417-6310

**PRESCRIBED BURNS PLANNED FOR SHELL ISLAND, KEY ISLAND**  
**-- Weather permitting, burning will take place Jan. 11-16 --**

**Naples, FL** – Resource management staff at Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (RBNERR) have released plans for their first prescribed burns in 2012. Weather permitting, prescribed fires will commence around 9 a.m. Wednesday, Jan. 11 through Jan. 16 along Shell Island Road, near Hall Bay, and on Key (Keewaydin) Island along the Intra-coastal Waterway in southern Collier County.

Residents of adjacent areas will see and possibly smell smoke from the fire, and fire activities may temporarily inconvenience boaters in the area as well as motorists along Shell Island Road. Fire personnel will contact visitors in the area to ensure their safety while traveling near activity areas and will carefully monitor the fire throughout the day until it extinguishes.

“The main purpose of this burn will be to reduce fuel loads and manage wildlife habitat,” said RBNERR Resource Management Coordinator Jeff Carter. According to Carter, a major portion of Collier County is comprised of plants that are dependent on fire to maintain species composition and diversity. These species are the same species that are prone to lightning-strike wildfires, and the controlled reduction of those fuels will prevent catastrophic wildfire damage. Fire-dependent plants include the South Florida slash pine, gallberry, saw palmetto and scrub oaks.

Reasons why prescribed fire is used as a management tool in natural areas include:

- ◆ Reduction of fuel load to decrease threat of wildfires.
- ◆ Forage for wildlife – burning substantially benefits wildlife by stimulating food and seed production and opening areas for feeding and travel.
- ◆ Ecosystem diversity – fire breaks down complex organic molecules allowing nutrients to be recycled. Fire changes both the composition and density of the forest.
- ◆ Endangered and threatened species – habitat preferences of several endangered species, including the Florida panther, gopher tortoise, indigo snake and red-cockaded woodpecker, are enhanced by fire.
- ◆ Invasive plant control efforts – minimizing impacts to native species while reducing coverage of invasive species.

Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve encompasses 110,000 acres between Naples and Everglades National Park that are managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas in cooperation with the NOAA. It serves as an outdoor classroom and laboratory for students and scientists from around the world.

# # #