



# FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY



## M E M O R A N D U M

**TO:** Chairman and Members  
Park Authority Board

**VIA:** Kirk W. Kincannon, Director

**FROM:** Cindy Walsh, Director  
Resource Management Division

**DATE:** September 17, 2014

### *Agenda*

**Resource Management Committee  
Tuesday, September 23, 2014 – 5:45 p.m.**

**Boardroom – Herrity Building**

**Chairman: Frank S. Vajda**

**Vice Chair: Anthony J. Vellucci**

**Members: Edward R. Batten, Sr., Mary Cortina Ken Quincy**

1. Prescribed Burns (with presentation) – Information\*

\*Enclosures



If accommodations and/or alternative formats are needed, please call (703) 324-8563. TTY (703) 803-3354

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Board Agenda Item  
October 8, 2014

## **INFORMATION**

### Prescribed Burn Plan for Winter 2014-2015 (Sully and Lee Districts)

From November 2014 through June 2015, Park Authority staff, in partnership with the Virginia Department of Forestry and Fairfax County Fire and Rescue, are planning to conduct prescribed (controlled) burns at:

- Ellanor C. Lawrence Park (Attachment 1)
- Poplar Ford Park (Attachment 2)
- Huntley Meadows Park (Attachment 3)
- Elklick Preserve (Attachment 4)

The burns are intended to reduce non-native invasive plant species, remove accumulated dead material (duff and woody debris) that inhibits native plant establishment, reduce wildfire risk, and promote healthy native meadows and forests to support various types of wildlife.

Prescribed burns are intended to be part of an ongoing natural resource management program to preserve and enhance healthy meadow and forest complexes on parkland. Twenty-eight prescribed meadow burns and two forest burns were successfully conducted in prior years at Riverbend (1998), Ellanor C. Lawrence Park (1999, 2008, 2012, and 2013), Huntley Meadows (2007, 2009, 2011, 2012, and 2013), Laurel Hill (2012), and Elklick Preserve (2006-2009, 2011, 2012, and 2013). One unsuccessful burn was attempted at Poplar Ford (2014) due to weather conditions.

The agency will also build capacity for this ongoing resource management activity by certifying several staff as Certified Prescribed Burn Managers in September 2014. The Virginia Department of Forestry conducts a 3-day training annually. The Park Authority benefits from certifying multiple individuals to provide redundancy and expertise for these activities.

Prescribed burns are conducted regularly throughout Virginia and across the United States and are considered the single best way to preserve and enhance fire adapted ecosystems. Whether a burn occurs is heavily dependant on weather (wind, humidity, and precipitation), site conditions (damp ground conditions), sufficient staff, and equipment support.

Burns will be conducted in accordance with all applicable state and county laws and ordinances. Permits will be obtained from the Fairfax County Fire Marshal's Office.

Board Agenda Item  
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Burns will be conducted in coordination with the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) and Fairfax County Fire and Rescue, and both agencies will be notified prior to each burn.

Park neighbors will only be notified by letter if their property is within sight of the burn area and/or they are likely to observe smoke from the burn in accordance with the Prescribed Burn Neighbor Notification Decision Criteria (Attachment 5). Neighbor notification letters will be similar to those sent in previous years (Attachment 6). A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document has been drafted to help with public outreach (Attachment 7).

Unless otherwise directed, staff will proceed with the prescribed burn program as planned.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Fairfax County Fire Marshal permitting fees will be up to \$1,000 (\$125 for each site).

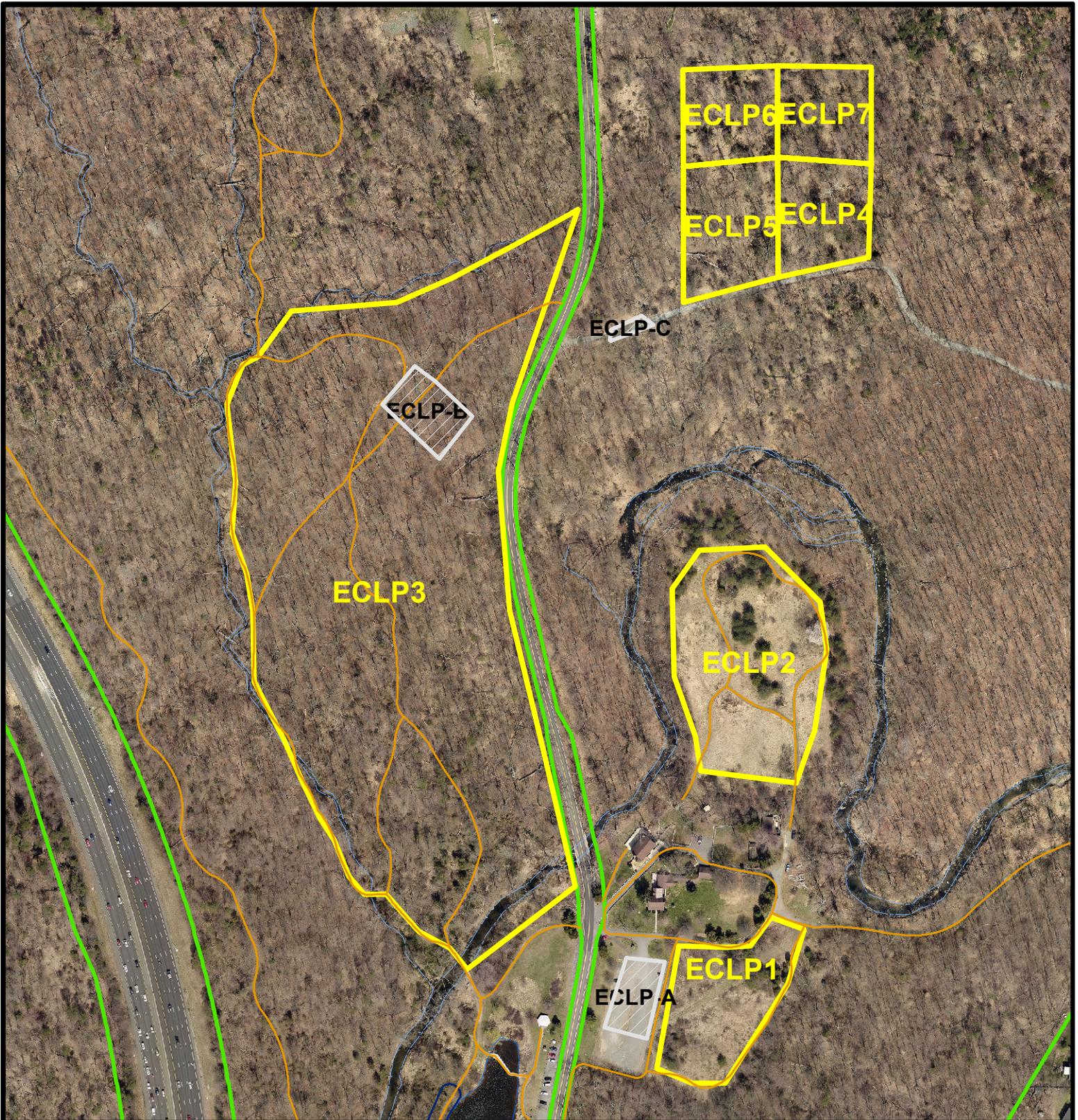
ENCLOSED DOCUMENTS:

- Attachment 1: Map of Ellanor C. Lawrence Park Burn Units
- Attachment 2: Map of Poplar Ford Burn Units
- Attachment 3: Map of Huntley Meadows Burn Units
- Attachment 4: Map of Elklick Preserve Burn Units
- Attachment 5: Neighbor Notification Decision Criteria
- Attachment 6: Neighbor Letter (sample)
- Attachment 7: Prescribed Burn Questions and Answers

STAFF:

Kirk W. Kincannon, Director  
Cindy Messinger, Deputy Director/CFO  
Sara Baldwin, Deputy Director/COO  
Cindy Walsh, Director, Resource Management Division  
Todd Johnson, Director, Park Operations Division  
Barbara Nugent, Director, Park Services Division  
Judy Pedersen, Public Information Officer  
John Stokely, Manager, Natural Resource Management and Protection Branch

# Attachment 1 - Ellanor C. Lawrence Park Burn Units



## Legend

-  Prescribed Burn Units
-  Staging Areas
-  FCPA Trails
-  Stream
-  Park Boundary

0 200 400 800 Feet

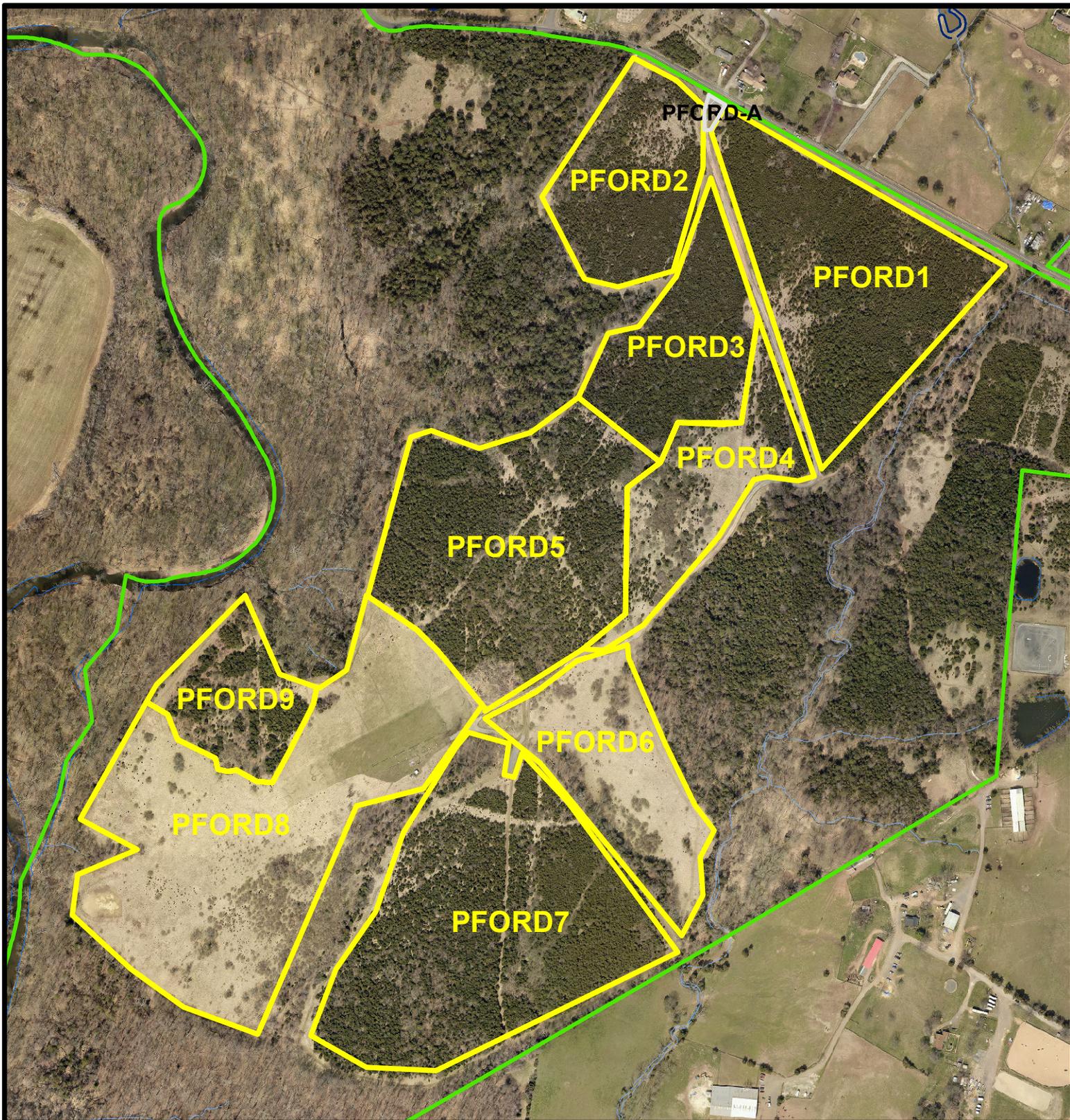


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**Fairfax County Park Authority**  
RMD- NRMP Branch  
August 2014



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# Attachment 2 - Poplar Ford Park Burn Units



## Legend

-  Prescribed Burn Units
-  Staging Areas
-  FCPA Trails
-  Stream
-  Park Boundary

0 295 590 1,180 Feet



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August 2014



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# Attachment 3 - Huntley Meadows Park Burn Units



## Legend

-  Prescribed Burn Units
-  Staging Areas
-  FCPA Trails
-  Stream
-  Park Boundary

0 380 760 1,520 Feet

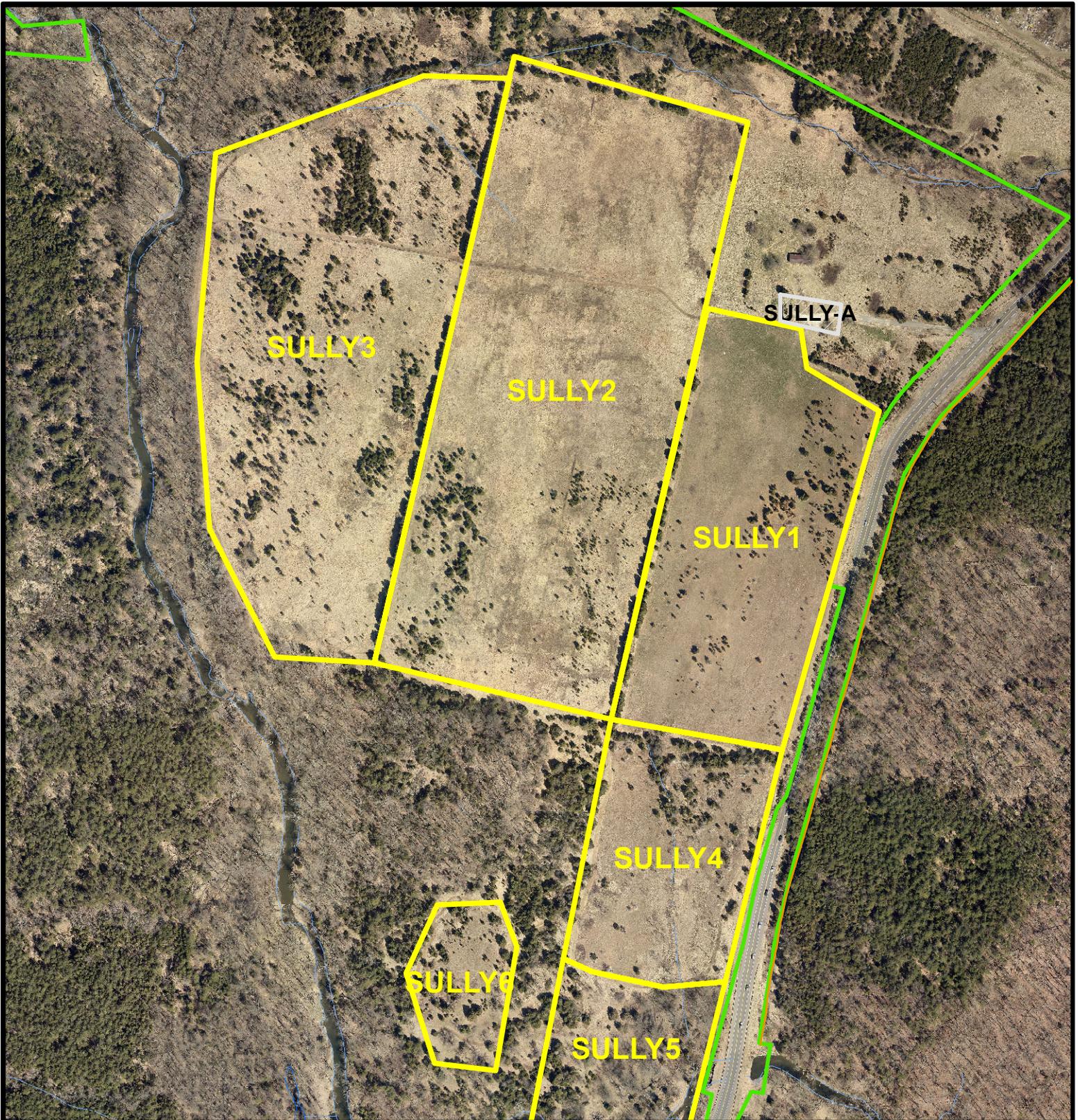


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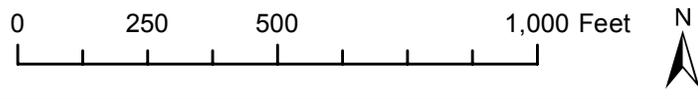
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# Attachment 4 - Elklick Preserve Burn Units



**Legend**

-  Prescribed Burn Units
-  Staging Areas
-  FCPA Trails
-  Stream
-  Park Boundary



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# FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

## Prescribed Burn Neighbor Notification Decision Criteria

### Background

Fairfax County Park Authority staff conducts periodic prescribed burns at selected park locations annually. When the prescribed burn program began in 2005, staff drafted letters to send to all neighbors adjacent to parks where burns were to be conducted. However, the staff time required to prepare and mail the letters combined with the time allowed for letters to reach residents can be significant, can delay burns resulting in missed opportunities. In addition, many of these letters go to homes that are far removed from the actual burn site, so the letters often provide no discernable benefit in communicating with park neighbors and have created confusion in a few instances.

Beginning in late 2010, staff no longer automatically mails letters to park neighbors notifying them of planned prescribed burns. In order to determine when it may or may not be appropriate for staff to send notification letters to park neighbors prior to conducting prescribed burns, staff will use the criteria below.

Staff **WILL** send notification letters to park neighbors if:

- There is an occupied building on the neighbor's property within 1,000 feet of the burn site.
- The burn site is visible from an occupied building, roadway or driveway on the neighbor's property.
- During preparation of the state required burn prescription it is determined that the neighbor's property is down-wind of the burn site and may experience smoke at or near ground level.

Staff **MAY** send notification letters or contact local residents through electronic communications if:

- During preparation of the state required burn prescription it is determined that heavy smoke may be visible from the neighbor's property.
- There is a heavily traveled roadway within site of the burn area servicing the home or community.

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# FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

December 2, 2014

Subject: Meadow Management West of Pleasant Valley Road

Dear Park Neighbor:

You are receiving this letter because you live near Fairfax County Park Authority's Elklick Preserve. This natural area is unique in Fairfax County for its size and diversity of habitats. A portion of this park located west of Pleasant Valley Road about one half mile south of Braddock Road contains a large meadow complex. As part of a long-term plan to properly maintain this thriving meadow complex, the Park Authority is planning to conduct a controlled burn of about 22 acres between early February and mid March. It is anticipated that some portion of this meadow complex may be burned every year.

The meadow complex hosts significant natural resources to include at least one state threatened plant species and several rare animal species. In meadow ecosystems, fire is the single best method for promoting good quality native habitat, limiting or eliminating invasive plant species and reducing the risk of unplanned fires. This meadow complex is well removed from homes and businesses, and a controlled burn should have little to no impact on the park neighbors.

The controlled burn will be conducted in coordination with the Fairfax County Fire Marshal's Office, Fairfax County Fire and Rescue and the Virginia Department of Forestry. Hundreds of controlled burns occur every year throughout the state of Virginia and thousands throughout the United States. The burn will be conducted on a weekday in the morning or afternoon and geared to avoid peak traffic times. Controlled burns can only be conducted if site and weather conditions fall within tight state guidelines.

If you have any questions about this letter or the planned controlled burn, please call me at 703-324-8555.

Sincerely,

John Stokely  
Manager, Natural Resource Management and Protection Branch

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# FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

## Prescribed Burn – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

**Question:** What is a prescribed burn?

**Answer:** Prescribed burns are controlled burns conducted according a prescription just like a doctor's prescription for medicine. The prescription is written to promote the health of an ecosystem just like a doctor writes a prescription to promote human health.

**Question:** Why is fire beneficial to an ecosystem?

**Answer:** Most ecosystems in our region are fire adapted – they evolved with fire as part of the lifecycle of the plants that are the backbone of the ecosystem. Burning promotes plant health and seed germination, removes build-up of fuels that can lead to unplanned fires, and may inhibit non-native invasive plant species which are not adapted to fire.

**Question:** Aren't animals hurt by the burning?

**Answer:** Large animals and birds will leave the area before the burn begins because of the presence of humans and equipment. Cold-blooded animals like turtles and snakes are sleeping for the winter below ground and won't be harmed. Small mammals like meadow voles and mice that live in the field evolved with fire and stay low and move as much as possible. Some may be harmed, but far fewer will be harmed than if you mowed the field with heavy tractor mowers. Ultimately, the healthier meadow promoted by the fire will support more animals.

**Question:** How is burning a meadow better than mowing it?

**Answer:** Besides potentially harming fewer animals, burning removes much more of the old plant material, or duff. This allows seeds to get to the soil, and the soil to properly heat and cool which promotes seed germination. The burned duff also provides important nutrients to help plants grow. Burning may also directly harm non-native plant species which did not evolve with fire as part of their life cycle. Mowing simply chops the material up in place, so it stays there still preventing seeds from getting to the ground, insulating the soil and providing few nutrients. This insulating duff layer may benefit invasive plant species.

**Question:** Isn't burning dangerous?

**Answer:** Controlled burns are just that – Controlled! The burn is carefully planned through the prescription and coordinated with the State Department of Forestry, and County Fire and Police Departments.

Special permits are obtained from the County Health Department and Fire Marshall's Office. Neighbors are notified, and the site carefully prepared to prevent the fire from getting out of control. The burn is conducted and overseen by specially trained staff that has the proper equipment to contain and guide the burn according to the plan.

**Question:** Won't there be a lot of smoke?

**Answer:** Smoke is the part that will affect people the most. In fact, the Smoke Plan is one of the most important parts of the burn prescription. It accounts for wind direction and speed. The burn can only be conducted if all weather conditions cooperate so that the smoke will lift and leave the area properly and have minimal effect on homes, businesses, airports, schools or other sensitive locations. The burn will be conducted in the middle of the day and during a weekday to ensure maximum smoke removal and minimal impact on people.

**Question:** Will you burn all of the time?

**Answer:** No. Meadow burns are usually done in the late winter while the fuels are dry, after the animals have gotten to eat most of the seeds and before spring green-up occurs. You only burn a field every two or three years. This allows plants to grow and mature and minimizes disruption to animals. However, you may burn an adjacent field the next year. This gives your meadow a patchwork pattern that provides the most wildlife benefit.

**Question:** What will the meadow look like after the burn?

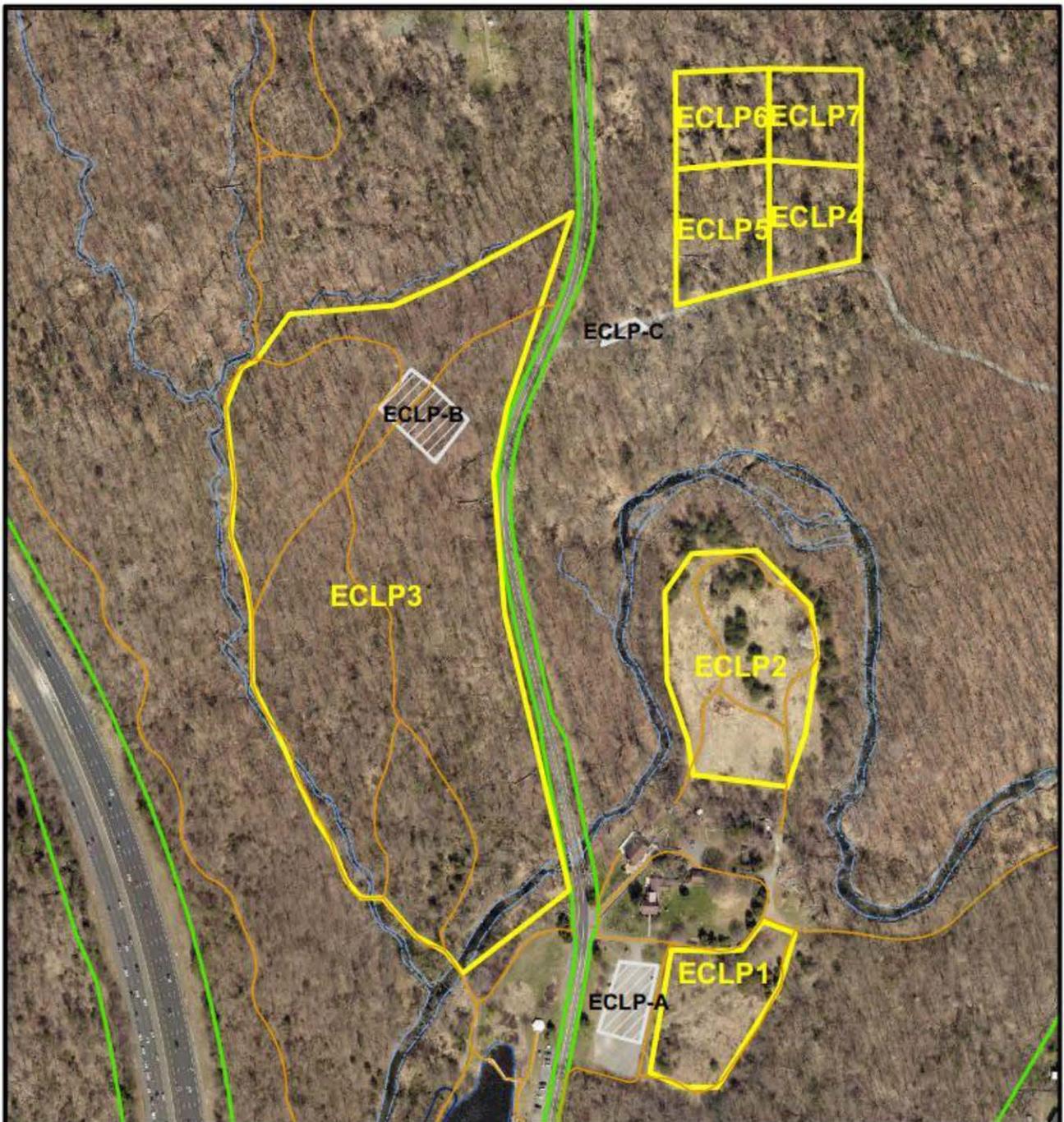
**Answer:** The area will appear black and gray from the burnt plant material. This will slowly fade with rain and weathering and then disappear during the spring and summer as the field "greens-up" with new plant growth. The goal is to develop a more diverse meadow system of native grasses and wildflowers.

Fairfax County Park Authority  
Prescribed Burn  
Locations FY2015

Ellanor C. Lawrence  
Poplar Ford  
Huntley Meadows  
Elklick Preserve

Presented to the Fairfax County Park  
Authority Board  
Resource Management Committee  
September 23, 2014

# Attachment 1 - Ellanor C. Lawrence Park Burn Units



## Legend

-  Prescribed Burn Units
-  Staging Areas
-  FCPA Trails
-  Stream
-  Park Boundary

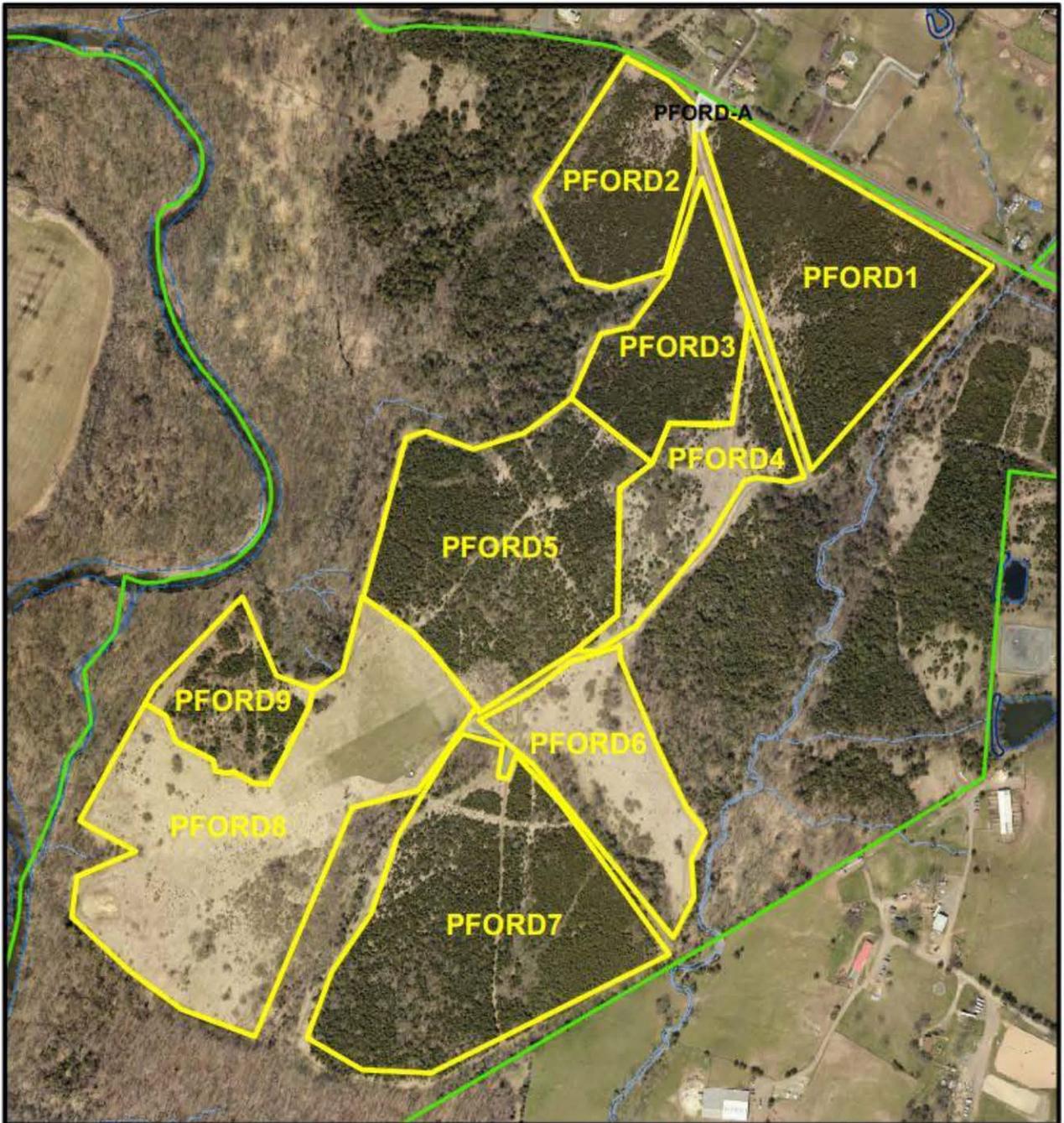
0 200 400 800 Feet



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# Attachment 2 - Poplar Ford Park Burn Units



## Legend

- Prescribed Burn Units
- Staging Areas
- FCPA Trails
- Stream
- Park Boundary

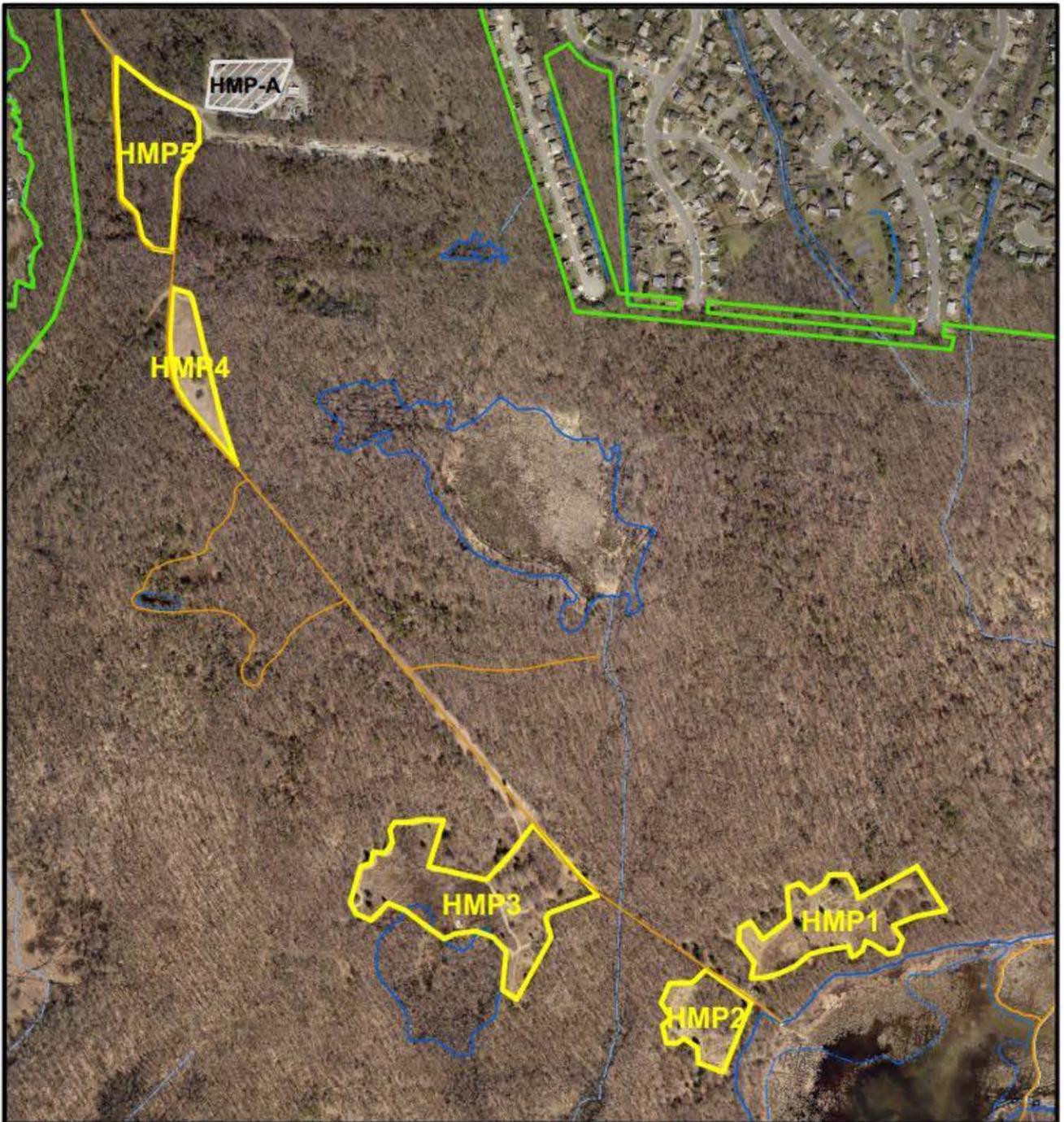
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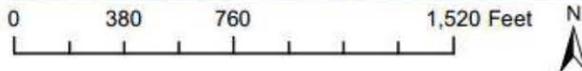


# Attachment 3 - Huntley Meadows Park Burn Units



## Legend

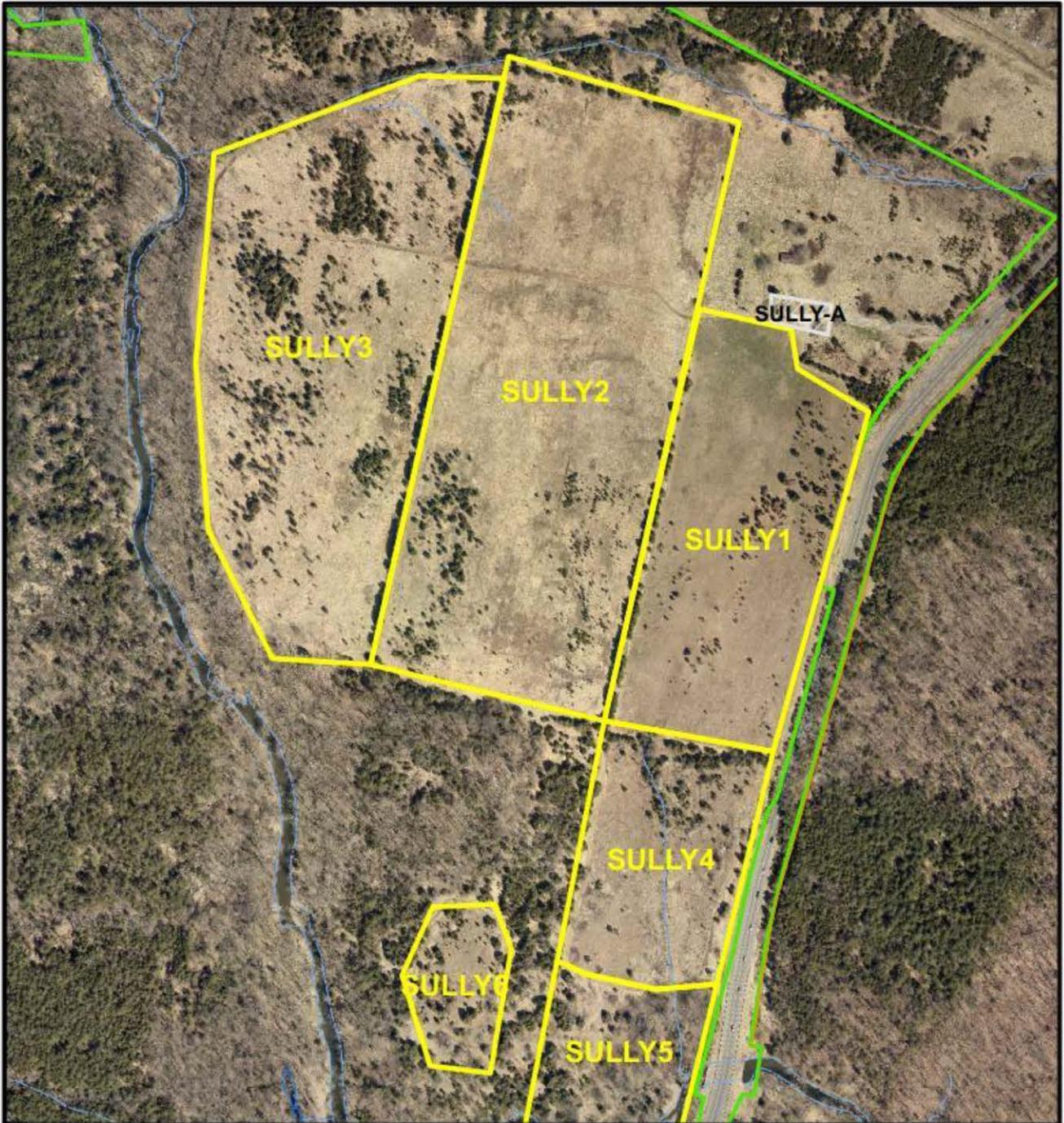
-  Prescribed Burn Units
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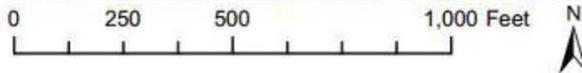


# Attachment 4 - Elklick Preserve Burn Units



## Legend

-  Prescribed Burn Units
-  Staging Areas
-  FCPA Trails
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August 2014





**Fire Effects:  
Pre-treatment**





Fire Effects:  
Firing Operations





Fire Effects:  
Post-treatment

