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LAUREN BILLODEAUX

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge


SCOTT HEREFORD

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge

SAMI GRAY

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge

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THE RESPONSE OF NESTING MISSISSIPPI SANDHILL CRANES TO GROWING SEASON PRESCRIBED FIRES

LAUREN BILLODEAUX, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge, Gautier, MS 36553, USA

SCOTT HEREFORD, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge, Gautier, MS 36553, USA

SAMI GRAY, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge, Gautier, MS 36553, USA

Abstract: Prescribed burning is the most natural and cost effective method of restoring and maintaining the coastal longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) savannah ecosystem that provides feeding and nesting areas for the critically endangered Mississippi sandhill crane (MSC, *Grus canadensis pulla*). Though growing season burns have shown the greatest results in controlling encroaching shrubs and pines as compared to dormant season burns, burning in the spring and early summer has the potential to disrupt the nesting activities of the MSC population. In order to address both the short and long term needs of this crane population, we make every effort to burn during the growing season on the MSC National Wildlife Refuge while taking precautions to protect our nesting cranes. We evaluate factors such as distance to nest, noise disturbance, smoke, age of nest, and usual disturbance of nesting pair before striking the match. In the past few years we have learned lessons on the tolerance levels of the nesting MSCs and the possibilities for habitat management when biologists and fire managers work together for a common result.

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Key words: *Grus canadensis pulla*, Mississippi sandhill crane, prescribed burning, response.
