

White Mountain National Forest

# Forest Service News Release

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### Prescribed Burn Planned

**Campton, New Hampshire** - The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) plans to conduct prescribed fire operations this spring at Hudson Farm on Trescott Road in Etna, New Hampshire. The USFS manages this property as part of the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF).

Prescribed fire is a management tool used to meet objectives such as habitat improvement and fuel reduction. This project’s primary goal is to promote habitat for grassland bird species declining throughout New England as abandoned hayfields return to a forested condition or are lost to development. Hudson Farm provides crucial nesting habitat for grassland birds on the WMNF. The focal species of USFS’ management of Hudson Farm, the bobolink, nests on bare soil hidden amongst the tall grasses. When Hudson Farm and other grassland openings are mowed as part of regular maintenance routines, the cut grasses, called thatch, are left behind and develop into a thick layer. While some thatch may be useful to birds, an excessively thick layer can be a barrier to bobolinks and other ground-nesting birds by preventing access to the bare soil they need for their nests. A thick thatch layer can also inhibit the growth of grasses and cause the plant community to change over time. The USFS plans to burn Hudson Farm every four years to remove the thatch layer and perpetuate the existing grassland habitat, thus providing bobolinks with access to the bare soil they need for their nests.

This management regime will also reduce the fuel load represented by the thatch and cured grasses from the previous year. Wildfires in New Hampshire are most common in the spring and fall when cured grasses and leaf litter are dry and become fuel. Prescribed burning works to protect the community from destructive wildfires by proactively managing the landscape.

The USFS anticipates conducting prescribed fire operations this spring when conditions are appropriate. Often the most desirable conditions for prescribed fire are difficult to forecast and can change quickly; therefore, pinpointing an exact date well in advance is not possible. USFS fire and fuel specialists will review weather and burn conditions to ensure successful and safe operations, including minimizing the dispersion of smoke to nearby communities. On the day of the fire, all trails traversing through Hudson Farm will be closed to promote safety. USFS personnel will be stationed on all hiking trails to ensure no hikers walk through the site during operations.

At a date to be determined after the fire, the USFS will host an informational field trip for the public. All are welcome to take a tour of Hudson Farm and learn more about why prescribed fire is used to manage grassland bird habitat on this property. For more information about this project, please contact Keith VanGorden at the Pemigewasset Ranger District, keith.d.vangorden@usda.gov .

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