



Large smoke column during intense burning



Extreme fire behavior



The fire continued to burn during the night



The fire burned in a mosaic pattern

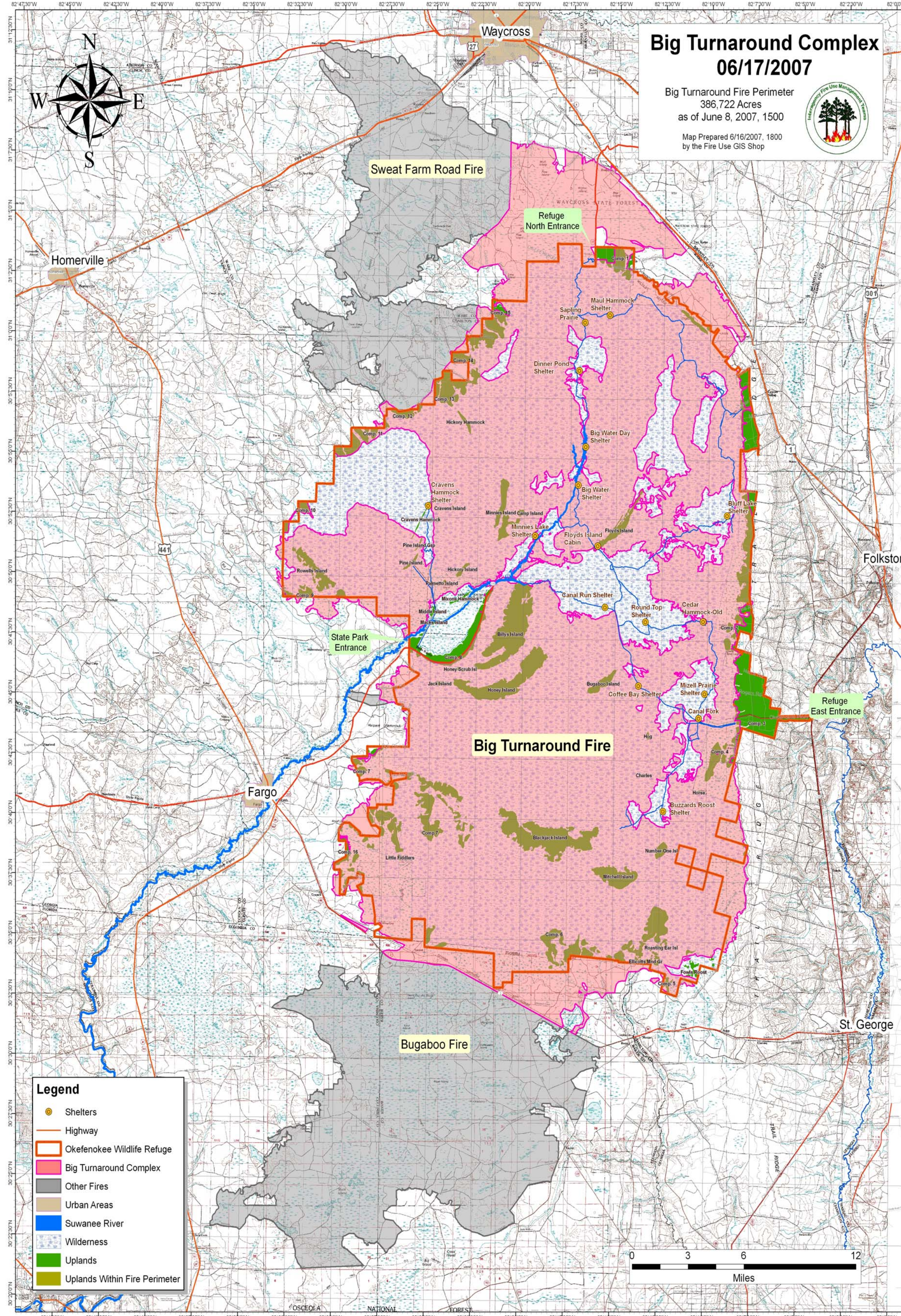


Fire moving through the swamp

The Big Turnaround Complex

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge

4/16/07 – 6/20/07



Lower intensity fire burning understory of upland pine stand



Regrowth of understory vegetation several weeks after fire



Longleaf pine seedling, a fire adapted species survived the fire



Extinguishing the fire in the swamp



Numerous hose lays on boardwalk

An Historic Fire Event

Fire crews have been working since April 16th to contain one of the largest wildfires east of the Mississippi, which burned portions of five counties in southern Georgia and northern Florida. The Big Turnaround Fire Complex burned a patchwork of shrubs, pine forest and grasslands within a perimeter of 386,722 acres, including nearly seventy-five percent of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Prolonged drought conditions set the stage for this major wildfire event. Impacts to adjacent commercial forest and private lands were unwanted, yet fires within the Okefenokee NWR are considered a natural part of this complex ecosystem.

Frequent wildfires play an important role in creating and maintaining Okefenokee's unique ecosystem. Some species of plants such as the Longleaf pine require fire for growth and to reduce competition. Fire also opens up the upland forests, improving conditions for wildlife species such as the endangered Red-cockaded woodpecker, the Gopher tortoise, and the Indigo snake. Disruption of the naturally occurring fire regime has resulted in major changes in upland and wetland habitats in the Okefenokee ecosystem. Even with wildland fire, the landscape has become so fragmented that refuge staff must use prescribed fire to restore the health of many of Okefenokee's habitats.