



### Prescribed Burn Helps Rare Plant Survive

A fire crew from Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge in November 2005 traveled to Soldiers Delight Natural Environment Area northwest of Baltimore to help the state of Maryland restore habitat for the endangered sandplain gerardia and preserve the opportunity for visitors to see this rare plant in the wild.

The crew worked with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources lighting and managing a prescribed burn at Soldiers Delight for the pink-flowered member of the figwort family, which has been federally protected throughout its range in the northeast United States since 1988. The state is restoring the unique serpentine grassland using a combination of mechanical thinning to push back the encroaching Virginia Pines and prescribed burning. Serpentine soils are rocky areas that contain unusually large amounts of magnesium and iron. Plants that thrive in such soils have adapted to them, and usually cannot compete with other vegetation.



The state and federal fire crews burned 42 acres of grasslands, and were assisted by Maryland Conservation Corps, Maryland Natural Heritage Program, The Nature Conservancy, and members from the local county fire department.

“The partnership that has developed over the past several years between the (Blackwater) burn crew and the Natural Heritage Program has worked extremely well from our perspective,” said Glenn Therres, Associate Director of Wildlife and Heritage Service for the Maryland DNR, who watched as the fire was ignited and managed. “We should be proud of our efforts to restore this ecosystem.”

*Sandplain gerardia*  
Photo credit: Alfred R. Schotz

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