

Lake Okeechobee Cattail Treatment Prioritization 2020-2021

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Background:

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is looking for input on treating cattail (*Typha*) on Lake Okeechobee during the upcoming year. Due to funding, a maximum of 850 acres would be treated in either October 2020 or May/June 2021. Additional acres could be treated if additional funding became available. Clearcast (imazamox) would be used at a maximum rate of 32 oz/acre so that any bulrush, spikerush and willow within the treatment areas would remain unharmed. A helicopter would be used to do the treatment.

The purpose of this document is to solicit feedback on preferred areas to work, or areas preferred to not work (or postpone to future years). Any comments on treatment size or timing would also be great. We would like to hear any additional concerns.

Overview of Polygons:

Aerial mapping in June 2020 showed five main areas with extremely dense, monotypic stands of cattail within the lake. They are shown in light green on the map. While there are other areas that are thick and large, these were the most extreme. Over 3,100 acres were mapped for potential treatment, although only a maximum of 850 acres are currently targeted for treatment. Some of these areas were more monotypic than others, and likely some of the polygons would be reduced to only treat areas that were the densest cattail. Polygons from treatments since 2015 are also included on the map as reference.

Site A: Surrounding Tin House Slough – East side is 260 acres and probably thickest. West side is 210 acres and much patchier. It may be trickier to treat the west side without getting a lot of other native species susceptible to imazamox (pickerelweed, arrowhead, and smartweed). Recommendation would be to treat the thicker east side. Used quite heavily by wading birds when water levels are right and the area is opened up. Also used to be some rookeries in the willows.

Site B: Northeast of Indian Prairie, adjacent to the berm along the canal. Small area (32 acres) and easily could be tacked onto a nearby treatment.

Site C: Between 2018 Dyess and 2019 Indian Prairie treatments, adjacent to a large willow stand (1,341 acres). Some of the edge was last treated in 2015 with some of the area treated in 2016. Could provide great foraging area for any snail kites or wading birds nesting in the willow head. Would likely remove the most northern portion of this area from treatment since it was a bit patchier there and reduce the acreage.

Site D: 552 acres in Moonshine Bay. This area is a super thick monoculture, and this is the northeast side of the Moonshine treatment/burn that was completed in 2015. This area had record snail kite nesting during that year and many wading birds. The yellow polygon on the west was treated in 2017, but the northeast side was not treated and is now completely grown in. We know this was fantastic for snail kites if water levels are right, and we should continue to maintain this area. This area historically contained large

areas of spikerush (was called the “Hayfields” by anglers), and, if spikerush does not return on its own in the near future, spikerush may be planted.

Site E: 759 acres on the South side, near Belle Glade. This area was also super thick. Unsure when this area was last treated. Other than the Moonshine area, it had some of the largest/densest monoculture seen on the lake. Treatment area could even be reduced to half the size so treatments in the area can be staggered between years.

Other Possible Mapping Areas: Other sites, which were not surveyed in June, could be surveyed and mapped by airboat if there is interest in a particular area. Examples include areas near Cody’s Cove, Gourd Island, 1st Point Connector, etc. Please refer to the second map for examples. Please add or suggest areas you would like considered for future mapping and/or treatments and email to Alyssa.Jordan@myfwc.com

Timing:

The past two years’ treatments have been in October. Previous years’ treatments have been in May/June.

Fall:

Pros: Prescribed burns are preferred and most suitable (from a weather perspective) in the winter/spring when water levels are low, allowing greater consumption of stem biomass. This timing also allows a larger area than the treatment area to potentially burn during low water levels.

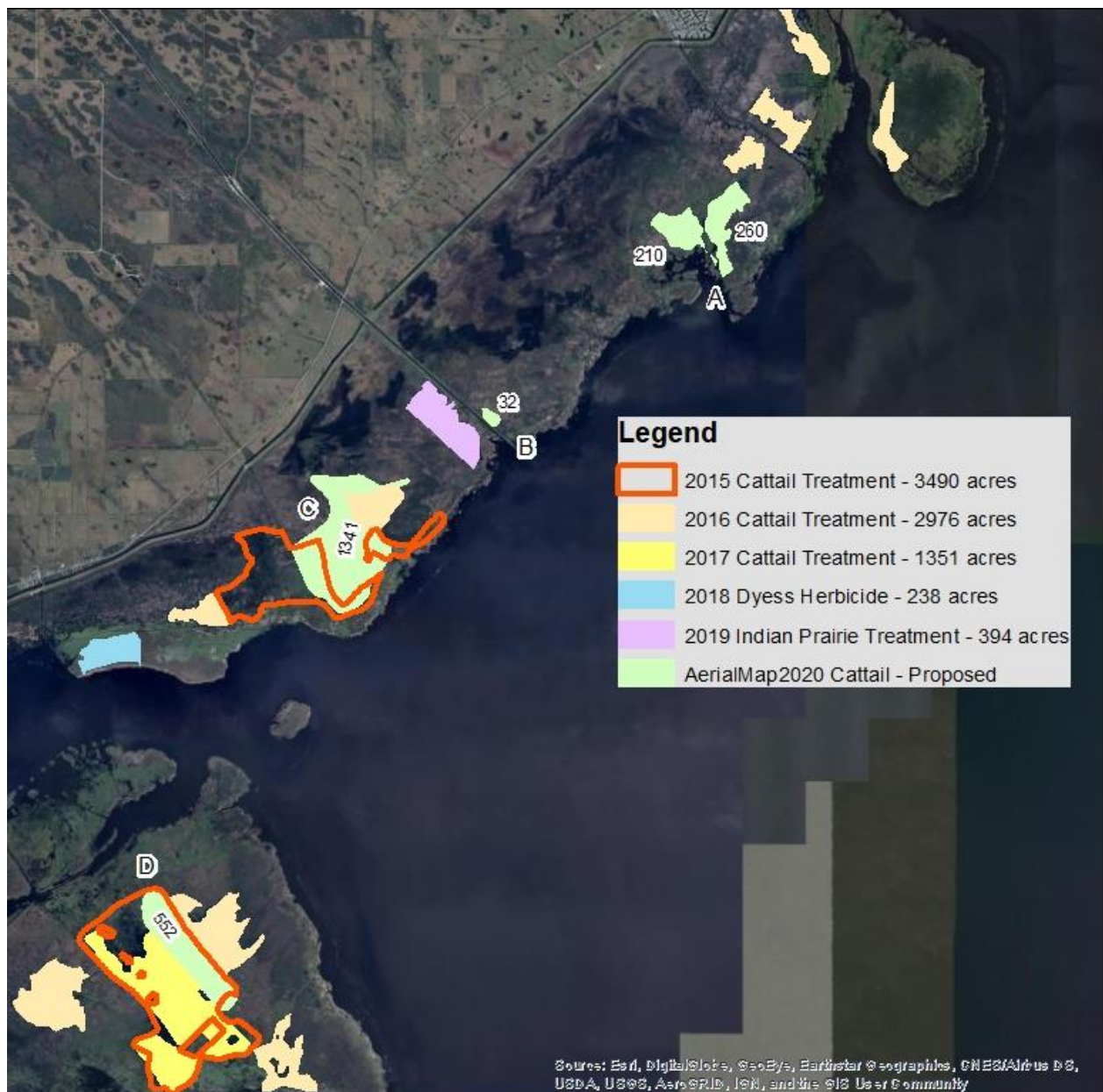
Cons: During higher water levels in the fall, less contact of herbicide with cattail, and potentially lower control rate. There are also more people on the lake when herbicide treatments are going on, with potentially more conflict.

Spring:

Pros: Water levels are low during spring treatments, allowing maximum coverage of herbicide on cattail and better control. Longer period of time (fall to early winter) to burn if burn permits are denied early on. Less people on the lake during herbicide treatment, reducing conflicts.

Cons: Prescribed burn would likely occur October-December following treatment, when water levels are high, so less of the cattail stem is consumed. Possible need to modify proposed treatment areas affected by nesting kites and wading/marsh birds (no treatments will occur without consultation with Tyler Beck and the USFWS to avoid negative effects and ensure maximum benefit to kites).

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