

Each year, Islanders unintentionally destroy the nests of our most familiar duck species, the black duck. Our marshes and the wildlife species associated with them face the danger of destruction every spring from fire. The previous year's plant foliage, especially cattail and low shrubs, provide vital cover for many nesting waterfowl, songbirds, and small mammals. Fire at this time of year destroys this important cover as well as nests and eggs of early nesters such as black ducks and pintails. These species may be establishing their nests even as the snow is melting. Songbirds nesting in bush, shrubs, or grasses will also have nests destroyed when fire passes through the marsh.



Spring on Prince Edward Island has traditionally been marked by smoke from grass and brush fires set by landowners to rid the ground of dead vegetation. It is now known that repeated burning of vegetation reduces organic material. Whether it destroys the seeds of unwanted vegetation as is commonly believed is debated. It does provide seed beds for plants requiring exposed soil or minimal litter levels, e.g. early succession woody plants. This

trait thus defeats the purpose for which many people burn.

Each year, many people concerned with habitat improvement and protection spend considerable resources on marshlands. Marshes are very productive areas which provide vital habitat for food and supplies for many species of wildlife and commercial fish. Marsh burning is particularly destructive to birds nesting on the ground or in low vegetation. Black ducks nesting early in the spring are often more productive, producing larger broods than birds nesting later in the spring. Unfortunately, these early nesting birds are at a greater risk from unwisely set fires. Quality wetland habitat is already under pressure from infilling and siltation. Marsh burning and the burning of cover near marshes in spring is just one more unnecessary practice which limits wildlife production.

Blueberry producers who use fire to manage blueberries should take necessary precautions to prevent fires from spreading to nearby marshes. Anyone knowing of marshes being deliberately burned should contact their local conservation officer of the Department of Environmental Resources.

*Editor's Note:* The Fire Prevention Act of Prince Edward Island requires all individuals conducting controlled burns in or near dry vegetable matter to have a burning permit between March 15th and December 1st inclusive. These permits may be obtained at you local Forestry District Office and they restrict the conditions under which a fire may be conducted. A revision to this legislation is currently before the Legislative Assembly.