

FALL 2017

The Official Publication of the Forest Fire Wardens  
protecting Penn's Woods from wildfires.



# The Forest Fire Warden News

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources Bureau of Forestry

## Role of a Forest Fire Warden

This past June, I had the pleasure of attending another rendition of Warden's Weekend. One common theme that emerged from my interactions with the attendees over the weekend was that many of you genuinely want to do a good job and contribute to the organization. To successfully contribute to any organization, organizational members need to have a good understanding of their role within the group.

All Forest Fire Wardens in Pennsylvania are officially-recognized agents of the Commonwealth who have specifically legislated powers and duties that originated from legislation passed in 1915. These laws established a system comprised of three types of wardens:

Local Forest Fire Wardens, District Forest Fire Wardens, and a Chief Forest Fire Warden.

Not only have these laws stood relatively unchanged for the past 102 years, but the system that was established then is still working today.

The forest fire warden program is a bottom-up system. Local wardens are empowered and have the duty to respond to, extinguish, investigate, and report all wildfires that come to their knowledge. District Fire Wardens provide guidance, direction, organization, and most importantly assistance to the local wardens. As Chief Forest Fire Warden, my main job is to assure a reasonable protection to the Commonwealth from wildfires and to supervise and manage the forest fire wardens.

Local Forest Fire Wardens have a network in place to give them guidance, support, direction, and assistance whenever it is needed. Each district warden has one or more full-time fire staff whose job it is to conduct the day-to-day responsibilities associated with carrying-out these duties. Please take advantage of this available assistance and communicate frequently with the fire staff assigned to your local area.

For your reference, a detailed listing of the powers and duties of Pennsylvania Forest Fire Wardens has been included in this newsletter. I would encourage you to keep this listing and review it whenever necessary.

Michael D. Kern, Chief Forest Fire Warden



### *Division of Forest Fire Protection Personnel*

Mike Kern  
*Chief Forest Fire Warden*

Charlie Choplick  
*Logistics and Finance  
Section Chief*

Matt Reed  
*Operations and Planning  
Section Chief*

Levi Gelnett  
*Wildfire Operations  
Specialist*

Jason Williams  
*Aircraft Operations and  
Safety Specialist*

Todd Breininger  
*Prescribed Fire  
Specialist*

Brian Pfister  
*Wildfire Prevention Specialist*

Chad Northcraft  
*Fire Operations Forester  
East*

Joe Miller  
*Fire Operations Forester  
West*

Terry Smith  
*Special Investigator*

Rick Temple  
*Fire Cache Manager*

Diane Schmidt  
*Administrative Assistant*

Katie Thomas  
*Fire Operations Technician  
East*

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## Remembering the Forgotten

As we are all aware, wildland firefighting is an inherently dangerous endeavor. This became reality on Saturday, November 14, 1964 when the 30-year-old George J. Kirn fell approximately 300 feet off a rock ledge on Little Wilkes Barre Mountain in Newport Township, Luzerne County. Kirn was the fire Chief at Fairview Township Fire Company in Mountain Top, Pa. Like much of Newport Twp, Little Wilkes Barre Mountain was riddled with steep rock outcroppings and openings in the ground from the extensive deep coal mining activity that occurred throughout the area. On this fateful day, Fairview Township Fire Company was dispatched to assist with a forest fire in neighboring Newport Twp.



Photo: Wilkes-Barre Times-Leader November 16, 1964

The call came in a half an hour before the end of Kirn's shift at the Foster Wheeler plant. Having worked a full shift at the plant, George met up with the rest of his crew on top of the mountain and began battling the blaze through the night. As the night wore on, tragedy suddenly struck when George fell 300 feet. Many factors are to blame for his death; the poorly lit headlamp, the fact that he worked an entire shift at the Foster Wheeler plant prior to responding to the fire, and that he was in country not seen in daylight. Whatever the case may be, most of us can relate to George J. Kirn's situation. We have all responded to wildfires late at night, on little rest, in country not seen in daylight. Unfortunately, Mr. Kirn made a tragic mistake that night. George J. Kirn was the Fire Chief for Fairview Township Fire Company, but more importantly, he was a devoted husband and a loving father to two sons, ages 4 & 6.

Wildland firefighting now isn't that much different than wildland firefighting back in the 1960's. The biggest difference is safety. We have learned from the mistakes and deaths of many others in the past. It is now time for us to become proactive, rather than reactive. For instance, near misses tend to be played off as nothing important and forgotten about as quickly as they occur, but pay attention to them. Discussing near misses with

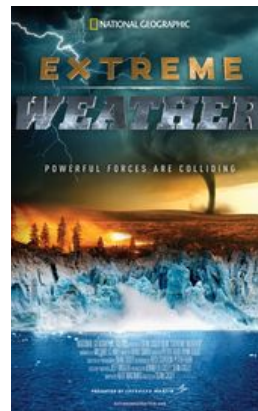
those around you will not only help you avoid another near miss or injury, but it could prevent a fellow firefighter from being injured. Knowing the 10 standard firefighting orders and 18 watch out situations is important, but being able to recognize them could save your life and those around you.

Chris Layaou, Fire Forester, Pinchot Forest District

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## Extreme Weather ... Including Wildfires ... Featured in Film and Activity Day

On April 1, 2017, forestry personnel from the Cornplanter Forest District #14 participated in a family-friendly activity day highlighting "extreme weather" at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center (TREC) at Presque Isle State Park in Erie, PA. The day of activities included: behind the scene tours of the TREC's Aqualab; making a 'tornado in a jar'; tours of the JET 24 storm chaser vehicle and visits with Smokey Bear. Playing at the Big Green Screen theatre was the "Extreme Weather" film which highlights wildfires among other weather phenomenon. There were over 350 visitors at the event, 76 of which viewed the film. Showings for the movie started on April 1<sup>st</sup> and will run into the fall season. To highlight the wildfire portion of the film and in addition to the Smokey appearance, the District provided a collection of wildland firefighting gear and equipment which was on display at TREC during March, April and May.





In the summer of 2016 the planning process started to develop a Wildfire Prevention Poster photo shoot in District 14, the Cornplanter Forest District. The Wildfire Prevention Action Team (WPAT) reaches out to different forest districts throughout the Commonwealth each year to create a poster specific to that district. The prevention message then has a local flavor, and local youth are represented in the posters.

The WPAT utilizes local scout troops, sports teams, or civic organizations to display in the posters. In District 14, the perfect fit was the Forest County Soccer Team, the “Forest Fires”, along with a local Boy Scout



Troop; the photo shoot was slated for September 2016. Over 30 local soccer players from both the boys and girls team joined Smokey on the Tionesta soccer field the day of the photo shoot. After the soccer team photos were completed we headed to Oil Creek State Park to take photos of Boy Scouts from Troop 111, where an additional 40 scouts participated.

The photo shoots were a success, and the WPAT chose three posters for production and distribution. The posters are being displayed at State Parks, Allegheny National Forest, private campgrounds, State Forest Lands, County Visitor Centers, and local businesses. I'd like to thank Warden Tim Carl and his wife Jen, they were instrumental in the organization and planning of this event.



Jay Lindemuth, Fire Forester, Cornplanter Forest District

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## Wardens Weekend

The weekend of June 23<sup>rd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> wardens from across the commonwealth convened at Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, PA to participate in the Forest Fire Warden Weekend. Though attendance this year was markedly lower than in years past, from all accounts the weekend was well worth the time invested.

Thanks to all wardens that participated in the event, as well as the staff and instructors who devoted tremendous time and effort to make the weekend the best yet. Special thanks to the following: Dave Duffy, Hope Mroczka, John Portzline, Adam Kling, Terry Smith, Todd Breininger, Troy Withers, Chad Northcraft, Matt Reed, Mike Wasco, and Rick Temple.



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## Smokey Bear

Smokey Bear, the enduring iconic image, has been the face of wildfire prevention in America for over 70 years. Smokey's catch phrase continues to this day to be "the" message of wildfire prevention – "*Only you can prevent wildfires*". His message rings true especially here in Pennsylvania, given over 99% of wildfire occurrences are preventable (human caused) in nature. As Pennsylvania Forest Fire Wardens, we are keenly aware of the need to ensure Smokey's message reaches, and is embraced by, the youth of the commonwealth. Throughout the year, wardens promote Smokey Bear and his message, via print and electronic media, in classrooms, and at fairs and festivals across Pennsylvania. This worthwhile effort to educate children as to the dangers inherent in outdoor fires is a tremendous undertaking. Wildfire prevention saves property and tax dollars, but most

importantly, wildfire prevention saves lives. Every year within Pennsylvania, at least one resident perishes as a direct result of a wildfire. One life lost, is one too many lives. The Bureau of Forestry is placing an increasing emphasis on wildfire prevention and encourages all wardens to consider a prevention initiative in coordination with their local forest district. Smokey Bear is doing his part, are you?



**Only you can prevent wildfires.**

### Spring Wildfire Season

This past spring wildfire season was a case of the unexpected. January and February 2017 were anomalies here in Pennsylvania... not much snow, warmer than average temperatures, and sunny days. Personnel and wardens alike were preparing another instance of the 2016 season. Salvation arrived mid-March in the form of Winter Storm Stella, coating the mountains of Pennsylvania with a foot or more of snow. Stella began a cycle of reoccurring precipitation which for the most part persisted through spring and moderated the occurrence of wildfires. February accounted for over 80 wildfires, while March, generally a busy month across the SW, SE, and NE parts of Pennsylvania, only accounted for 66 reported ignitions. Activity increased in April, with 230 starts, yet subsided again in May, with only 24 wildfires recorded.

Three large, 100+ acre, wildfires scorched the forests this past spring. Two of which ignited on April 11 –the Sugar Run Fire, 295 acres within Gallitzin Forest District and the Powerline Fire, 136 acres within the Pinchot Forest District. The last large wildfire of the spring season occurred on May 18 –the Windmill B3 Fire, accounting for 282 acres within the Weiser Forest District. To contain and fully suppress each wildfire required multiple operational periods and the assistance of numerous wardens and volunteer fire companies.

The Bureau of Forestry relies on Forest Fire Wardens and Volunteer Fire Companies to assist with wildfire suppression within Pennsylvania. The aggressive suppression efforts undertaken by fire wardens and VFD's help reduce the risk of life and property loss. A hearty thanks to all Forest Fire Wardens and Volunteer Fire Companies who actively assist with wildfire suppression, your efforts are greatly appreciated.

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### Print

As time goes by, things change. Technology progresses and often enables organizations to change how they communicate. Technology has progressed to the point that most fire wardens have access to the internet. With this in mind, this will be the last printed edition of *The Forest Fire Warden News*. All future editions will be available via the Pennsylvania Forest Fire Wardens webpage on the DCNR website:

<http://www.dcnr.pa.gov/Communities/Wildfire/PennsylvaniaForestFireWardens/Pages/default.aspx>

Notification of new editions of the newsletter will be provided to local forest districts, who may in-turn send out notice to their respective forest fire wardens.

***Conservation & Natural Resources Act, Act 18 of 1995***

**Local Forest Fire Wardens:**

- Whenever fire is discovered in or approaching woodlots, forests or wild lands, immediately to take such measures as are necessary to extinguish the fire.
- Whenever fires have been extinguished, to prepare and submit reports to the District Forest Fire Warden within 60 days of the fire.
- Promptly investigate the cause of each fire which comes to their knowledge, and report to the District Forest Fire Warden.
- To attend an annual meeting of forest fire wardens in the district.
- Perform duties as a patrolman or watchman by the District or Chief Forest Fire Warden.

**District Forest Fire Wardens:**

- Act as the field representative of the Chief Forest Fire Warden.
- Act as an inspector of the work of the local fire wardens and render assistance to them.
- Receive, audit, and approve the reports of local forest fire wardens.
- Conduct educational work and develop cooperation between local agencies for the prevention and suppression of forest fires.

**Chief Forest Fire Warden:**

- Assure a reasonable protection from forest fire to all lands within the Commonwealth.
- Supervise and manage the forest fire wardens throughout this Commonwealth.
- Enter agreements and conduct educational work for forest fire prevention or control.

**Powers and Duties of All Forest Fire Wardens:**

- Employ such other persons to render assistance in extinguishing forest fires.
- Administer an oath or affirmation to any person who he believes knows facts relating to any forest fire or who claims compensation for services rendered.
- Enter upon any land at any time to perform duties in accordance with this act.
- Arrest on view any person detected by him in the act of committing an offense against any of the laws for the protection of forests, woodlots or wild lands.
- Exercise the foregoing powers, not only in the jurisdiction for or within which he may have been appointed but also in adjacent or other boroughs, townships or counties.



# **The Forest Fire Warden News**

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