



The Forest Fire Warden News

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources Bureau of Forestry

Challenges and Opportunities

As we close out winter and head into the Spring of 2022, there are many challenges before us, but also significant opportunities that are cause for optimism. Challenges evident right now include a global pandemic, societal changes, and even threats of war abroad. Opportunities that have presented themselves include an increased awareness nationally of wildfire risk, recognition of the importance of wildland fire to natural ecosystems, and potential opportunities for significantly increased funding.

Challenges in our wildland fire program are not new. When the Forest Fire Warden program was established in 1915, wildfire protection in Pennsylvania was a controversial topic. Many citizens felt that it was a waste of tax dollars, or just not something that our state should be concerned with. The idea that forest conservation was needed or that wildfires could be a risk to public safety were considered radical and progressive ideas!

At this time, we have a more nuanced understanding of wildland fire in Pennsylvania. We realize that unwanted, human-caused wildfires often start near people's homes and that even small wildfires can threaten life and property and have the potential to cause significant damage if not contained relatively quickly. Conversely, we also recognize that many natural ecosystems in Pennsylvania have evolved with fire and are dependent upon or adapted to periodic occurrences of fire. Our responsibility as fire wardens is to understand, recognize, and incorporate this knowledge into our actions.

The main opportunity that I see before the Forest Fire Warden organization is to continue to provide wildfire protection while balancing that with the awareness that the safe and effective use of prescribed fire in a controlled manner can benefit the Commonwealth. Staff within the Bureau of Forestry and DCNR as a whole have been working diligently to determine the best ways to capitalize on these opportunities so that the Forest Fire Warden program can continue to provide the high level of service it is known for. I am not only confident but optimistic that we can all work together to bring this to fruition.

Please accept my sincere gratitude for your past service and best wishes for a safe and successful fire season in 2022!

Michael D. Kern, Chief Forest Fire Warden

Division of Forest Fire Protection Personnel

Josh Wells

*MACC Assistant Center
Manager*

Diane Schmidt

Administrative Assistant

Charlie Choplick

***Logistics and Finance
Section Chief***

Rick Temple

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*Radio Telecommunications
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*Radio Telecommunications
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*Qualifications and Training
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*Incident Management
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*Aircraft Operations and
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“An Ole Plowboy”

If you have ever been around Dan LeCrone much you have likely heard this phrase in one manner or another. This could have been used as a short simple explanation of his early life, a self-deprecating statement made in frustration, or more often than not thrown out as a modest badge of honor behind which a mountain of a man would humbly attempt to stand behind. If you knew Dan LeCrone, you knew clearly, he was not “just an ole plowboy” and that is a small part of what made him great!



We lost Dan in the evening of November 30, 2021, following a brief battle with sepsis a few weeks after his successful knee replacement surgery. Dan was 62 years old when he went to meet his Lord and Savior. While heaven gained a wonderful soul, his departure has left a huge hole in the lives of his loving family, close friends and coworkers, and the multitude of wildfire and emergency response organizations at all levels he was part of. Time and life continue to move forward and each of us are working to come to grips with this loss and the ramifications of no longer having the husband, father,

friend, mentor, and coworker that was always there and willing to help in any way.

A little bit of Dan’s story from his time with the Bureau of Forestry and as a PA Forest Fire Warden. Dan became a Forest Fire Warden in late October 1994. He had previously helped the district with wildland firefighting, from this District Forester Ralph Heilig and Fire Inspector Steve Corl saw something in him. Their first idea was to get him on as a Fire Warden in the District. Ralph had other ideas in mind as well, as Steve was looking at retirement in the relatively near future. DF Heilig worked to recruit him into employment with the Bureau of Forestry, first as a seasonal Forest Patrolman. At that time, Dan was working full-time on the family farm and had a wife and young daughter to support. However, the farm was going to be sold so Dan took a leap of faith and the ole plowboy accepted the position, thus beginning his career in forestry and wildfire in May 1995. A few months after he was promoted to a longer seasonal position as a Semi-skilled Laborer. The idea was for Dan to learn from and gain experience in wildland firefighting with on-the-job training with Steve. In December of 1997 Dan was selected to become the Forest Fire Specialist Supervisor of Rothrock Forest District following Steve Corl’s retirement. The last 26 years, Dan has been at the helm of the District’s fire program working with the Forest Fire Wardens, Volunteer Fire Companies, County EMS, District Staff, and adjacent Forest Districts to successfully administer all aspects of the fire program. These duties have included the obvious suppression of forest fires, wildland fire prevention activities, fire training, supplying tools, and equipment all of it revolved around Dan being there when and where he was needed and no matter the obstacle, he found a way.

Dan’s passion for fire was not just limited to his home district, he took every opportunity to learn and experience as much as he could when and where it was available. This led him to the “out-of-state” fire program later known as the PA Wildland Fire Crew. His first assignment was as a Firefighter Type 1 (Squad Boss) position for a fire in Flagler County Florida in July 1998. Two years later he got the opportunity to go to Montana as a Crew Boss on the Valley Complex. He even had the opportunity to moonlight as a Task Force Leader for part of that assignment. Over the next decade he worked through many assignments in many western states going up through the Operations side of fire to the Division Supervisor position. He was never one to just be satisfied with where he was at if there was opportunity to learn and experience more, you know “Just an ole plowboy”! It was during these times he had an opportunity to meet the Northern Rockies Type 1 Incident Management Team

Command Staff during a dinner. Dan took notice that those folks ate with the crews and took time to talk to as many people as they could from the Fireline Supervisors to the people running the shower services. That Team was Dan's type of people and he wanted to know more! He left the Operations of fires and turned his sights towards Safety, first as a Line Safety all the way up to becoming the Lead Type 1 Safety Officer for the Northern Rockies Type 1 IMT. By checking into the available records, I found that Dan was on 60 major incidents out-of-state and a few large scale in-state ones. This spanned over a 24-year period. During his time working out-of-state and learning and experiencing more and more he did his best to share that knowledge back home and inspire others to come with him. His love for this work was driven by the sheer challenges faced and his genuine love for the people he served with! If you asked him what he did and what his title was more often than not you heard "I'm just an ole plowboy, but my team does... such and such."

Dan was a Forest Fire Warden first and foremost and he valued that program greatly, but he valued the people that made it up even more. He came up in that program by becoming a Warden even prior to working for the Bureau. He spoke often of the experiences and lessons learned with his Warden comrades. One of his greatest treasures was the relationships that were forged with these brethren on the forests and mountains of Pennsylvania. He worked to keep in-touch with and maintain the relationships that were created on fires, and he valued each of them. He did his best to document the works of those that came before him so that their knowledge would be available for the new generation of wildland fire fighters. It bothered him greatly to have been forced by COVID-19 to not have opportunity to meet in fellowship and training because he knew that relationships are what did and do make the Warden Program a success. There isn't a warden training that I can remember in which he didn't acknowledge his gratitude for the wardens and volunteers in the fire companies and recognize the hard work that they do on every incident. After all he was "just an ole plowboy".

Dan's legacy is one that has turned out in a way that we never expected. He was taken way to soon, we never got to say goodbye, there's still so much he, the collective we (his family, his friends, and his coworkers), and everyone that worked with him in any capacity wanted and planned to do! He was always there, he was the foundation for so much, his leadership was paramount to so many parts of a fire program that spanned his home district, the state agency, and all the way to a National Incident Management Team. However, Dan knew that nothing was forever and over the years he

championed a key idea, planned succession for an organization. He made sure to have people in the district not only trained but comfortable working fire response and incidents. This paid off for us many times while Dan was working large Type III incidents or out-of-state, his coworkers addressed anything that came up in district. He worked to develop new people on the Northern Rockies Team so that they not only had depth in qualified people they had a plan for who would replace someone when they decided to retire. Dan worked with folks in the Division and Senior Management with this same message, along with the goal of having "Fire People" in "Fire Related Jobs". His goal was to see that accomplished before he retired, I trust that work will continue in a positive manner for the future of the organization. He made great strides in bringing new ideas and having uncomfortable conversations to try to develop a better organization for tomorrow. Not bad for "just an ole plowboy"!

Ideally, I would be writing this after his retirement and he would be reading this in his Warden Newsletter maybe grumbling about the attention, but happy with what was accomplished. He would have spent as much time as possible training the person that would come to fill his vacant position and he would have been but a phone call away for the multitude of questions that have already come up and those that are yet to be discovered. Alas that is not the case, but all his work and planning is being tested and moved forward. New people are taking the reins just as he hoped in-district by his cherished coworkers, in PA Type 3 IMT by his friends there, and on the Northern Rockies IMT members. He would say he was "just an ole plowboy" and that the teams and people he was associated with were due the praise, but that is only partly true. We are so much richer in life for having known, cared for, and loved that mountain of a man who was so very much more than just an ole plowboy!

David Yeager, Assistant District Forester, Rothrock Forest District



**WILDLAND
FIREFIGHTER
FOUNDATION**

2022 Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant

The 2022 Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Grant application period is currently open on DCNRs e-grant site; <https://apps.dcnr.pa.gov/grants/> The deadline to apply is Thursday, May 12th. The maximum grant has been increased to \$12,500. We are still awaiting notification of our award amount from the USFS at this time, but expect it to be at a minimum equal to last year's funding; \$870,532.

Future improvements are expected to the e-Grant website which will simplify grant administration and tracking and give recipients the ability to upload closeout documentation directly to the website.

For the last several years, each Forest District has been awarded a portion of VFA funds to help support the volunteers that assist the Bureau on a regular basis; Forest Fire Wardens most definitely fall into this category, so contact your district leadership if you have any pressing needs.

Supply chain issues are causing equipment delivery delays for many of the VFDs that received 2021 funding and extensions are being granted upon request.

Charlie Choplick, Logistics and Finance Section Chief, DFFP

Drone Incursions

Drones or Unmanned Aerial Systems have become more widely used by the public and have become cause for concern for our Air Tankers and Helicopters. Drone incursions occurred on two fires in 2021.

The first incident occurred when the Type 3 helicopter was dispatched to a fire in Forest District 19. While the aircraft was enroute the IC of the fire notified the tanker base by landline of the drone in the area. The pilot was contacted through Air East and requested to check-up short of the fire and contact the IC on the air-ground frequency due to a drone in the area. Ground resources were unable to locate the source of the drone and the helicopter was ordered to Return To Base by the IC without ever working the fire.

The second incident occurred when a SEAT was dispatched to a fire in Forest District 12. While the aircraft was on final for the dry run a drone was identified as being in the area. The aircraft was notified of the incursion through the assigned air-ground frequency and requested to hold outside the area while the source of

the drone was searched for. This incursion also affected a fire recon aircraft working the same fire. The source of the drone was located, and air operations continued without incident after the drone departed the area.



A SAFECOM was submitted for each incident. Both reports have been reviewed and made public. Each SAFECOM can be viewed at www.safecom.com #21-0236 and #21-0237.

As we approach the 2022 fire season, please keep your eyes open for Unmanned Aerial Systems or Drones and notify the IC immediately if one is in the area.

Mike Becker, Training and Qualifications Specialist and Jason Williams, Aircraft Operations and Safety Specialist, Division of Forest Fire Protection



PA Wildland Fire Academy

The Pennsylvania Wildland Fire Academy is back for 2022! After a two-year hiatus, we're able to begin training again, and this year should not disappoint. Fifteen courses are offered, which range from basic to advanced and include both classroom and field training. The 2022 academy focuses on wildland engine operations, and will be hosted at Shippensburg University from May 31 through June 5.



Following initial registration, student selections will be made based on class size limits, student needs, and agency needs. Registration for courses will open at the beginning of March and run through April 15, when student selection will occur. After that, courses with open seats will remain open until May 20, 2022.

Courses to be offered include:

- **ENOP**, Engine Operator
- **FI-110**, Wildland Fire Observations & Origin Scene Protection for First Responders
- **L-280**, Followership to Leadership
- **S-130**, Firefighter Training (Blended) - Field Day ONLY
- **S-131**, Firefighter Type 1
- **S-200**, Initial Attack Incident Commander
- **S-211**, Portable Pumps and Water Use
- **S-212**, Wildland Fire Chain Saws
- **S-215**, Fire Operations in the Wildland-Urban Interface
- **S-219**, Firing Operations
- **S-230**, Crew Boss (Single Resource)
- **S-231**, Engine Boss (Single Resource, Blended)
- **S-270**, Basic Air Operations

Registration for the following offerings must occur through the local forest district:

- **Basic - Wildland Fire Crew** [initial training for traveling to out-of-state fires]
- **FFT1 / CRWB On-the-Job Training (OJT)** [limited to existing trainees in these positions]

You may register for one or more classes. All NWCG classes meet national standards, and participants will receive an NWCG certificate, although a limited number of courses are state and/or agency specific.

There is no course tuition, and all meals and lodging are provided on-site via the PA Bureau of Forestry. Should a student opt out of the provided meals and lodging, the Division of Forest Fire Protection will not cover the expenses.

For additional information, course descriptions, prerequisites, course matrix, and to register, please visit <https://dffp.ticketleap.com/2022-wildland-academy/>

Contact your local forest district to register for Basic or OJT.

Forbes Forest District

In memory of forest fire wardens we have lost since 2020:

- **Fred Brown** – of Acme, appointed as forest fire warden in 1969 and had over 51 years of service. He passed away in December of 2020.
- **Joseph Dennis** – of Smithfield, appointed as a forest fire warden in 1974, 46 years of service.

Pinchot Forest District

In memory of forest fire wardens and fire employees we have lost since 2019:

- **Forrest Compton** - Appointed as forest fire warden in 1943 and had over 75 years of service.
 - **John Maza** - ADF, appointed as a forest fire warden in 1980, 38 years of service.
 - **Joe Quinn** - Forest Patrolman, appointed as a forest fire warden in 1979, 40 years of service
 - **Patrick Solano** - Deputy Secretary DER and Acting Secretary DCNR and Honorary Forest Fire Warden
 - **Ernest Renfer** - Forest Patrolman and "Smokey Bear", 45 years of service
 - **Patrick Aita** - Forest Lookout Bear Springs and Dry Land Hill Fire towers, 25 years of service.
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Years of Service

Please congratulate the following Wardens for their 50+ years of service.

| Dist | Name | Year Appointed | Years of Service |
|------|-----------------------|----------------|------------------|
| 09 | Robert Radomsky | 1956 | 65 |
| 09 | Homer S Cowder | 1961 | 60 |
| 17 | Maurice Hobaugh | 1961 | 60 |
| 10 | Robert F Davey Jr | 1961 | 60 |
| 01 | William F Vanidestine | 1961 | 60 |
| 08 | Bernie Bowser | 1966 | 55 |
| 09 | Donald E Foster | 1966 | 55 |
| 14 | Donald K Wary | 1966 | 55 |
| 08 | Gary J Grecco | 1966 | 55 |
| 08 | Leonard L Hoffman | 1966 | 55 |
| 01 | Wallace Haulik | 1966 | 55 |
| 07 | William H Rockey | 1966 | 55 |
| 04 | Albert L Tennant | 1971 | 50 |
| 18 | Darryl J Brewster | 1971 | 50 |
| 06 | Francis Morihlatko | 1971 | 50 |
| 08 | Gerald A Lauer Sr | 1971 | 50 |
| 08 | James D Daugherty | 1971 | 50 |
| 18 | John D Payne | 1971 | 50 |
| 01 | John P Berst | 1971 | 50 |
| 05 | Joseph D Fye | 1971 | 50 |
| 04 | Joseph M Ambrose | 1971 | 50 |
| 20 | Richard H Farr | 1971 | 50 |
| 10 | Wade C Maurer | 1971 | 50 |
| 08 | William G Zahniser | 1971 | 50 |



In Remembrance

Wardens who passed away in 2021

| Dist | Name | Year Appointed |
|------|--------------------|----------------|
| 04 | Joseph A Dennis | 1974 |
| 05 | Daniel D Lecrone | 1994 |
| 08 | Thomas J Bewley | 1990 |
| 08 | Myron G Crawford | 1981 |
| 08 | Ricky H Custer | 1990 |
| 10 | Richard L Biggans | 1983 |
| 10 | Calvin P Funk | 1965 |
| 10 | Boyd A McKinney Sr | 1993 |
| 10 | Ronald Saylor | 1970 |
| 12 | John J Eastlake | 1965 |
| 14 | John A Hegedus | 1978 |
| 14 | George Logan | 1964 |
| 16 | Floyd S Williammee | 1977 |
| 17 | Paul M Felton | 1950 |
| 17 | Benjamin N Powell | 1966 |
| 17 | Carol A Prangley | 1991 |
| 17 | Guy A Rice | 1978 |
| 18 | Robert W Thomas | 1981 |
| 20 | Jeffery L Peterman | 2007 |



Josh Wells

My name is Josh Wells. I was originally born in North Carolina. Honestly, I can say I have never heard of a born and raised Southerner moving to the North. But here I am, and I'm excited to see the great opportunities my new home has to offer. I recently retired from the Army and have had extensive experience in recovery operations for hurricanes, flooding, and earthquakes. It wasn't until two years ago when I was stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA did I get any exposure to wildland fires. While I wasn't on the front lines helping extinguish or control the fire, my main efforts were in the coordination aspect. I acted as the liaison personnel between Department of Defense firefighters and state firefighters.



Now I serve as the Assistant Center Manager for the Mid-Atlantic Interagency Coordination Center (MACC). This has introduced me to an entirely different perspective of firefighting and all-hazard dispatch. Some of my responsibilities here are making sure all compact members equipment is accurately reflected in IROC. Assisting in the scheduling and managing of resources that come in and out of the MACC. Tracking/creating resource orders and making sure they get filled. More importantly, I see myself as a conduit between the DCNR-FFP and the other compact members, both state and federal.

Josh Wells, Assistant Center Manager, MACC



10 Standard Fire Orders

Fire Behavior

1. Keep informed of fire weather conditions and forecasts.
2. Know what the fire is doing at all times.
3. Base all actions on current and expected behavior of the fire.

Fireline Safety

4. Identify escape routes and safety zones and make them known.
5. Post lookouts when there is possible danger.
6. Be alert. Keep calm. Think clearly. Act decisively.

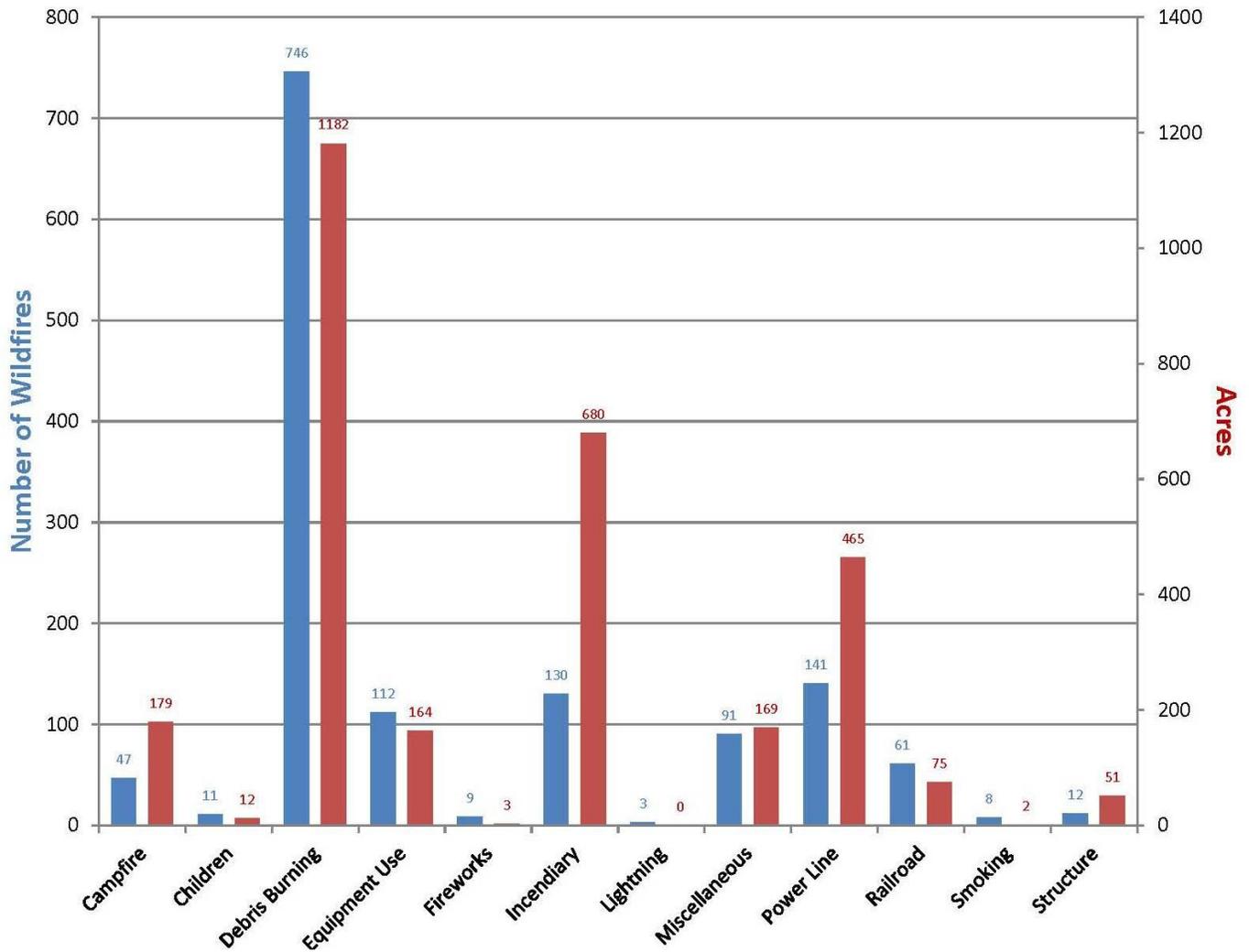
Organizational Control

7. Maintain prompt communications with your forces, your supervisor, and adjoining forces.
8. Give clear instructions and be sure they are understood.
9. Maintain control of your forces at all times.

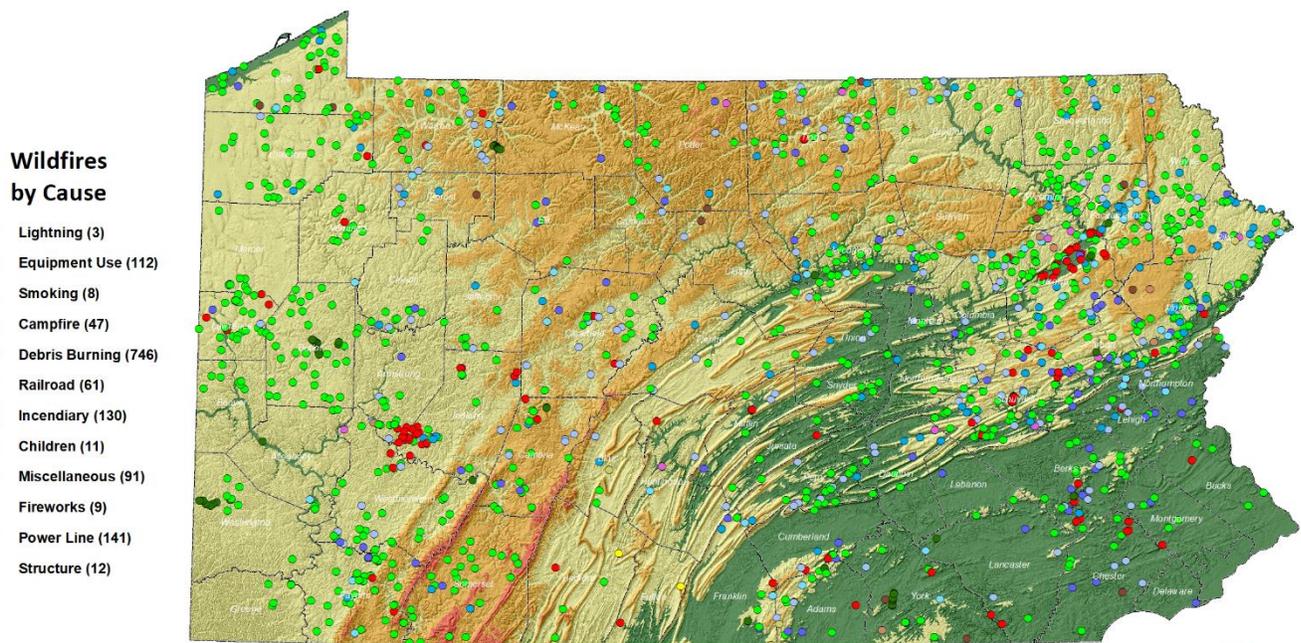
If 1-9 are considered, then...

10. Fight fire aggressively, having provided for safety first.

2021 - Number of Wildfires and Acres per Cause Class



2021 - Pennsylvania Wildfire Occurrences reported to DCNR



1,371 Wildfires / 2,981 Acres

Dan LeCrone

1959 - 2021



Take time to remember those
who have gone before us.





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