



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

Ritual of Preparations

With the arrival of spring, it's time again to begin our annual ritual of fire season preparations. Many districts often hold their annual Forest Fire Warden trainings in the spring and use this time as a chance to refresh their local wardens on basic wildland firefighting topics or address things identified in past after action reviews as needing some additional polish. Early spring is also a good time to ensure equipment is prepared and working and ready to go for the eventual arrival of our fire season.

Large wildfires in states like Oklahoma, Texas, and Kansas have been in the news recently, notable for the speed in which they spread and the risks they present to the public and firefighters. This type of fire activity and unpredictability also reinforces the need for preparedness and our annual rituals of getting ready for fire season. Here in the Division of Forest Fire Protection, our staff have been heavily engaged in preparedness as well. Many hours and dollars get invested ensuring equipment is purchased, funds are allocated, meetings are attended, training is planned, etc. prior to the start of the actual activity.

No matter how much is done, it never seems like we are quite ready, but at the end of the day I know that we have a solid fire organization that is prepared to meet the many challenges that come our way. Much of this confidence rests in our long-established Forest Fire Warden organization, especially the volunteers who have invested so much of their own time and effort for work they truly believe in. Thank you for your past efforts and I wish you safety on the fireline in 2024!

Michael D. Kern, Chief Forest Fire Warden

Division of Forest Fire Protection Personnel

Michael Kern
DFFP Division Chief

Diane Schmidt
Administrative Officer

Sylvia Petrilla
Administrative Assistant

Jake Glick
MACC Assistant Man.

Charlie Choplick
Logs & Fin Section Chief

Rick Temple
Fire Cache Manager

Vacant
Special Investigator

Brian Pfister
Wildfire Prev Specialist

Jesse Geiman
Comms Section Chief

Nick Sholly
Radio Telecomms Specialist

Brian Pace
Radio Telecomms Specialist

Matt Reed
Ops and Plans Section Chief

Mike Becker
Quals and Training Specialist

Todd Breiningner
Prescribed Fire Specialist

Chad Northcraft
Incident Man. Specialist

Katie Dildine
Fire Ops Tech - East

Jason Williams
*Aircraft Ops and Safety
Specialist*

Deep Concerns for Shallow Roots

It's no surprise to the audience reading this that wildfires occur, and firefighters are called upon to put them out. Rocket science I know. You also know that in Pennsylvania nearly all our wildfires are suppressed by volunteers, people like yourselves that have a common bond. No, it isn't the love of fire, it isn't even the flashing lights or the adrenaline, the bond comes from the roots of each of the volunteers. Each of you is deeply rooted in your community, that is why you do what you do. The roots of your "tree", the bond to your neighbors, are why you answer the call time and time again. It used to be that communities had so many roots that their "trees" largely supported each other, their community, and their brothers and sisters in the fire service. A community, and the volunteers that support it, could weather any storm together because of the strength and size of the group. The warden system was that way. The volunteer fire service was that way. The bureau of forestry's wildfire program was that way. Was unfortunately being the keyword here.



Society has drastically changed over time. The numbers in the volunteer fire service, the warden system, and frankly any civic group have consistently declined over the last half century. The "trees" have thinned, many times because of the over stress and demands that make it unsustainable, and so many of the roots that once helped to hold each other up were lost too. Others

have simply fallen away. We now are at a place where it is abundantly clear that we need to rely on the "trees" that we have left more than ever. The ones that remain have lived through and survived many storms, many fires, many thinnings.

Numbers may have fallen but now the most mature, resilient, and experienced survive. These remaining "trees" have one thing in common, besides longevity, and that is deep roots. The roots of a community run deep and that is what keeps someone there. They are the resilient ones, the ones with roots so deep they will not give in or give up when the stressors and change arise. They will not go away until their time truly comes. That is why some fire companies and fire warden lineages, at least where I come from, are generational. What once was common however, is now more of an anomaly. That consistency and longevity sadly isn't in the Bureau of Forestry wildland fire program anymore either. The roots of the wildland fire program used to be in the fire inspectors or forest fire specialist supervisors (FFSS), and then more recently the transition to the fire forester. The fire inspector/FFSS positions in most cases, were filled by people who came from the community they served and where they themselves were deeply rooted in the resource. The people in the entire community at large had a personal and lasting relationship with their fire inspector/FFSS, which was the foundation of the program. In some areas of the state, the fire forester has in fact worked well in a similar way, but generally speaking as a whole, those positions consistently change. The roots of the fire forester "tree" never seem to set roots deep enough to be tried and hopefully last the test of time. This shouldn't be a surprise but merely a sobering recognition of reality.

As someone who previously held the fire forester role, and in the district where I was born, raised, and served as a line officer in the volunteer fire service, I struggle writing this. I held the fire forester position for a little over four years, and that wasn't nearly long enough. Since switching to the fire forester role in the Moshannon Forest District, we are now on the search for the fourth fire forester since 2012. To put it into perspective, the lineage of fire inspectors/FFSS here spanning back nearly six decades can be traced to the same number of people. I recognize and apologize for being part of

the revolving door of the fire forester. I still work in my home district to this day, now overseeing the wildland fire program in a manager capacity and strive to foster relationships between new fire foresters and the community they serve. I recognize the extreme difficulty of attempting to build and rebuild bridges along the way and attempt to assist the new fire foresters to reach deep into the community, helping them to set down their roots. No matter how much help you have though, transplanting is tough. Even after successfully transplanting any plant, or “tree” for that matter, it takes time, sometimes years for them to experience active growth again and begin to thrive. It takes time for them to build their roots deep into the fire community of the warden program and fire service. But we must remember that in this case, the “trees” can decide where to set their roots and so if the ground isn’t fertile, they won’t choose to die there but simply move on to better ground.

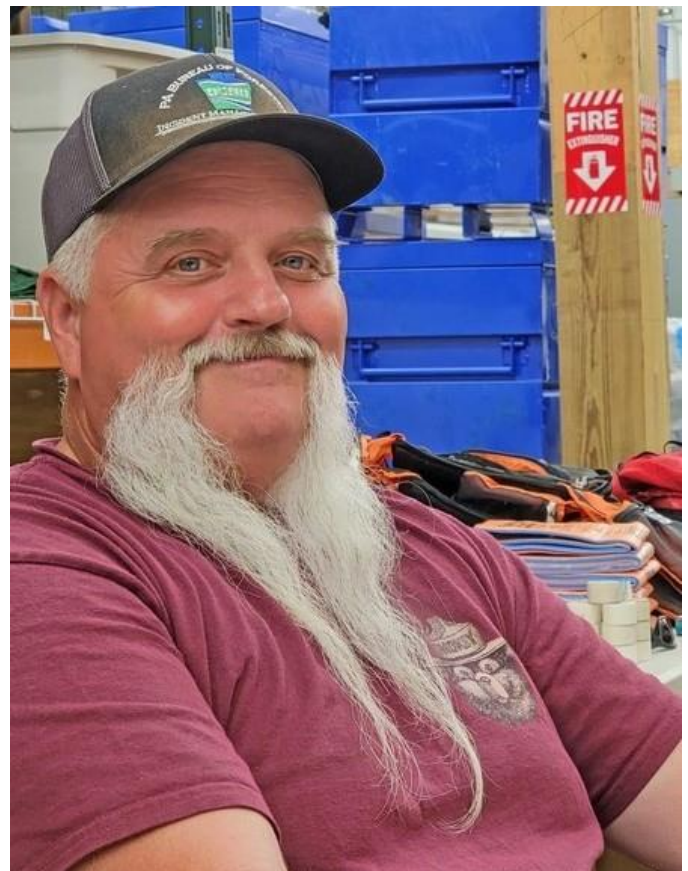
The fire warden program in Pennsylvania has a rich, deep history which spans over a century. The deep roots of that heirloom warden program can be traced all the way back to George Wirt, where the story ultimately began. The hard truth of the matter is this: If we want the heirloom legacy of the forest fire warden and ultimately the wildland fire program in Pennsylvania to continue the way it has, we must work together to find the best leaders to hold the primary fire roles within the districts, regardless of job title. A fire forester could be the best option, but so could a fire inspector/FFSS or whatever other job title we want to give the position; the title doesn’t make the position, the people that stand in that role do. In the end we need to be able to see the fire service and warden program, or the forest if you will, for the trees that make it. The trees with history that have put down deep roots. The ones that are not only resistant, but nearly impossible to transplant.

Ryan Ling, Forest Assistant Manager, Moshannon Forest District

Do your part, don't let a
WILDFIRE  **start!**

Terry Smith

After 38 years of service to the Commonwealth, Terry Smith retired from the Bureau of Forestry on Jan 12th of this year. Terry spent the last 11 years of his career working for the Division of Forest Fire Protection as the Special Investigator. He was a reliable, dedicated, and levelheaded employee who was focused on moving the Division forward and it was a pleasure working with him as his supervisor as well as his tenure as Forest Fire Specialist Supervisor in the Bald Eagle State Forest.



I’m certain many of us will cross paths with Terry in the future as he plans on remaining active as a Forest Fire Warden, instructor, and member of our IMT.

At his retirement luncheon Terry stated that in his 38 years, he never had a bad day at work!

Charlie Choplick, Logistics and Finance Section Chief, Division of Forest Fire Protection

Wildfire Danger Rating Sign Dedication in Erie County

On Wednesday, July 12th, 2023, wildfire danger notification took a large step forward with the installation of a new Wildfire Danger Rating sign along Route 99 in Washington Township, Edinboro, Erie County. This two-sided sign is strategically situated along the busy highway, so that whichever direction a driver approaches, they can clearly see the current wildfire danger rating.



The installation of this important wildfire danger marker was a result of many months of coordination among several important cooperators including: Washington Township who owns and provided the land; Hobb Lumber and Hurta Trucking who donated time and materials; and dedicated members of the Crawford Erie County (CEC) Wildland Fire Crew and District 14 Fire Wardens, who came up with the design and saw the project through completion.



Two “special guests” were present to help inaugurate the sign --- Tom Atkins, Meteorologist with WJET-TV News -Erie and Smokey Bear who gave his “paw of approval” for this project.



This sign will increase public awareness and promote wildland fire safety for years to come. Shortly after the ceremony concluded, the local area experienced a sudden, strong downpour --- talk about quick results. Fantastic job CEC --- Thanks for helping us raise awareness and visibility about northwestern Pennsylvania wildfire danger!

Cecile Stelter, District Forester, Cornplanter Forest District



Alignment of Fuel Conditions

The spring fire season of 2023 was, to say the least, above average for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Most districts across the state turned in record breaking numbers of wildfires and acreage burned for the spring season. Most notably, our spring fire extended well into mid-June, weeks beyond the typical “end” of our spring fire season, which typically occurs during the week leading up to Memorial Day, when adequate leaf expansion creates higher relative humidity values through transpiration and by shading fuels on the forest floor. Red Flag Warnings were issued across the Commonwealth on June 2nd and 3rd while most of the agency’s primary fire personnel were committed to the Wildfire Training Academy in Shippensburg, PA. Multiple wildfires broke out during that red flag event, but a few of them were out of the ordinary. The conditions surrounding and leading up to the occurrence of those wildfires and the fire behavior that was observed are what is most notable. What is also notable is that, as wildland fire professionals, we could have and should have recognized that those conditions were in place and anticipated the fires that occurred as a result.

So, what resulted in the problematic and extreme fire behavior that we encountered last June? Why was fire behavior more active after green-up than we’ve ever seen before? While there are several answers to that question, we can look at the final unit of the new and improved S-190 training to sum that up into one word: ALIGNMENT. Alignment is typically taught as a scenario where the three elements of the fire environment, fuels, weather, and topography, fall into alignment for short durations of time, creating extreme fire behavior and rapid rates of spread. The alignment that occurred in June of 2023 was different; it was an alignment of weather and climate factors that interacted with excessive fuel loading and chemical content, resulting in greater fuel availability and levels of fire behavior that were far beyond what is typically experienced in Eastern Area fuel models.

I would argue that most full-time fire personnel in the state recognized going into the spring season of 2023 that drought conditions remained in place through the winter after an exceptionally active fall

season in 2022. Snowfall amounts were low, and wetting rain events were few and far between throughout the spring fire season. As the vegetation pushed leaves and started up the growing season systems, the water that remained in the soil was taken up, and the little rainfall that we did receive was not enough to fill the void. If you think back and remember the drought conditions, our yards were mostly brown and dead, the soil was as hard as concrete. In the meantime, spongy moth larvae were emerging and consuming overstory foliage, exposing surface fuels to solar radiation. The real magic in these fuel conditions occurs when the live fuel moisture drops below 100% and the chemical content of the shrub fuels contributes to aggressive burning. While we did not and do not have an active monitoring system in place for live fuel moisture, observable characteristics in the fuel models would indicate that live fuel moisture was ranging anywhere from 80-120% across the landscape, based on defined characteristics in the NWCG PMS-437 publication.



During the typical spring fire season in the Northeastern United States, initial attack firefighters are typically fighting fires that are active in 50-75% of the fuel available on the landscape. Residual soil moisture from snowmelt and frost takes ground fuels out of the equation in the early season when scratch lines and leaf blower lines can hold fires in place easily. As the season progresses, fires still burn primarily in the fine dead fuels, with more active fire behavior being prevalent in the shrub layer when wind and ladder fuels align to contribute to torching and crown-fire like behavior in the shrub layer. When fire season extends into the growing season, fire penetrates deeper into the duff layer, resulting in longer residence time- and time-consuming mop-up operations. And, when live fuels become available in the fuel model, we see a drastic increase in the Energy Release Component,

which interprets to more radiant heat, more pre-curing of additional live fuels, and rapid rates of spread as a result. With air temperatures in the mid-90's during a red flag event and higher levels of solar radiation during longer days, surface fuels are cured and receptive to spot fires. Spot fires were documented during last fire season to have occurred at distances of ¼ to ½ of a mile on the Crystal Lake, Pool Hollow, and Game Refuge Trail wildfires.

While not all these wildfires occurred outside of our "normal" fire season, each fire exhibited a little bit of what our fuel models are capable of when conditions align in favor of rapid wildfire development. When drought conditions persist from previous seasons, we can anticipate more problematic and extreme fire behavior where large loadings of fuel are present, especially in fire adapted ecosystems where chemical content of the shrub fuels contributes to a higher Energy Release Component. As firefighters we train to anticipate changes in the fire environment before they happen, so that we can react quickly and effectively to the changes in fire behavior that result. As fire professionals, we should be working to anticipate when severe fire weather and fuel conditions are in place, so we can prepare accordingly, and respond effectively when severe wildfires occur.

¹<https://www.nwccg.gov/publications/pms437/fuel-moisture/live-fuel-moisture-content>

Shaun M Doran, Fire Forester, Bald Eagle Forest District

Mid-Atlantic Coordination Center

The Mid Atlantic Coordination Center, MACC, located in Harrisburg, PA is the Mid-Atlantic sub-geographic area coordination center for six states, three Forest Service National Forests, four National Park Service zones with 38 parks, parts of 2 US Fish and Wildlife Services Zones with 26 Refuges, and resources from other cooperating agencies National Weather Service, Regional Offices, FEMA, Research Programs, etc. The MACC has initial response responsibility for three (3) NF: the Allegheny NF (ALF) in Pennsylvania, the Monongahela NF (MOF) in West Virginia, the Wayne NF (WAF) in Ohio and in the future New River Gorge NPS (NRP). In addition

to these National Forests, initial response responsibility exists for some State Offset lands.

The principal mission of MACC is the cost effective and timely coordination of land management agency's successful emergency response to wildland fire. As a partner in the National Response Framework (NRF) and as an interagency cooperator, the MACC will also meet the requirements of all-hazard incidents as directed by the NRF or Presidential and Secretarial direction. This is accomplished through planning, situation monitoring, and expediting resource orders between States, National Association of State Foresters (NASF), US Fish and Wildlife Service Regions, Forest Service Regions, National Park Services Regions, National Weather Service (NWS) Regions, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Regions through the United States Fire Administration (USFA) and other cooperating agencies.

While fire can and does occur year-round in the MACC footprint, there are two defined fire seasons. The spring fire season is defined as March 1st through May 15th or until full green up has occurred. The fall fire season is defined as October 1st through December 1st or until there is a season ending event. During the summer months, June through September, is the western US fire season. The MACC has two thousand six hundred resources which it can mobilize to support the fire seasons. The spring and fall fire seasons require more initial response dispatchers because of the local fires while the summer season relies heavily on logistics dispatchers.

Jake Glick, MACC Assistant Manager, Division of Forest Fire Protection



Only you can prevent wildfires.

Size Up, A Critical Operational Task

You receive a dispatch to a fire, now is the time to start sizing it up. Yes, even before you arrive on scene. What type of fire is it? Where is the fire located? What radio frequencies will you use? There may be even more information available before you arrive.



Upon arrival, an IC will need to be established. From there the size of the fire, status of the fire, local weather conditions, access routes, values at risk, hazards, and resource needs can be determined. You may be able to accomplish this task from one spot, or you may need to walk around the fire. This process will provide you with the information needed to request the appropriate resources for the fire, especially Bureau of Forestry resources. This information also provides the basis for briefing incoming resources and allows them to work together effectively and efficiently because they are on the same page.

If we don't conduct a size up, we may have difficulty in addressing the concerns addressed in the 10 and 18s. When it is all said and done, the fire will be out.

The size up gives us one more tool to help accomplish this job as safely as possible. Because at the end of the day, the primary goal is for everyone to return home safe and sound.

Chad Gadsby, Fire Forester, Clear Creek Forest District





Outdoor Burning

As Smokey Bear says-

"Only You Can Prevent Wildfires."

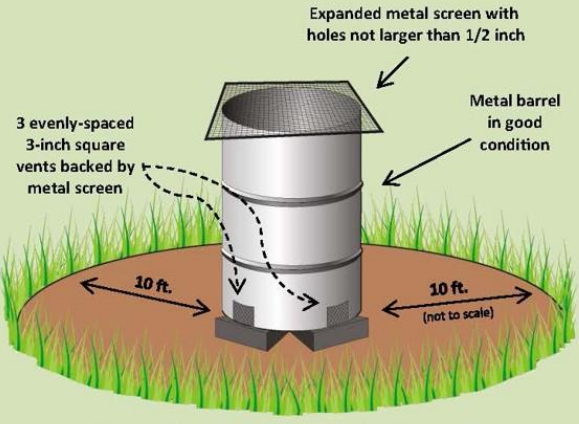
Smokey's message certainly rings true here in Pennsylvania, as 99% of all wildfires are caused by humans. Whether the result of a campfire, burning leaves or trash, or using equipment on windy-dry days, the majority of wildfires are preventable.

Proper care and precaution is the responsibility of all Pennsylvanians when outdoor burning. Burning leaves, brush, or residential debris accounts for over half of all wildfires in the Commonwealth.

To reduce the probability that your outdoor fire will turn into a wildfire, read and follow the items on the reverse-side of this card prior to burning.

Always consider alternatives to outdoor burning such as composting, recycling, or chipping woody materials.

The first steps toward wildfire prevention are being aware and being prepared.



Expanded metal screen with holes not larger than 1/2 inch

Metal barrel in good condition

3 evenly-spaced 3-inch square vents backed by metal screen

10 ft.

10 ft. (not to scale)

Ground cleared down to mineral soil or gravel at least 10 feet around barrel.

Sample rack card available from your local forest district.



Michael Mazur

1950-2023

Michael Mazur started his career with the Weiser Forest District as a forest fire lookout under Pat Free. He then worked as a forest patrolman out of the Penn Forest Fire Control Station under Fire Inspector Ridder Rebold. When Ridder retired, Mike became the Fire Inspector in Carbon county. After Norm Lacasse retired, Mike was promoted to the position of Service Forester in Carbon county. Mike then became Assistant District Forester under Don Oaks.

Throughout every job that Mike held, he left an impression on the public. From Firefighting to Forest Stewardship, Mike made an impact on the people he served because he put in an effort above and beyond just doing his job. He went out of his way to make everyone feel important.

Mike was instrumental in gaining federal excess for many districts and dozens of volunteer fire companies across the state. He would spend countless hours reviewing the website and freezing firefighting and maintenance equipment. Mike created a database program to track the federal excess equipment he acquired.

Mike had a likable personality which endeared him to others. He fostered many relationships with our employees, as well as employees from State Parks, Penn Dot, and DEP which allowed for the sharing of equipment and ideas.

Mike was instrumental in the WHiP program and having the Bull WHiP award won by the district for several years. He believed the Wardens and Crews are the backbone of the district. Mike created the Give-Me-Five approach for the wardens to be seen in their communities. Give-Me-Five gave the wardens the opportunity to talk to landowners and businesses about wildfire prevention and in turn would receive a WHiP for every five people they talked with.

As for firefighting, Mike took a very hands-on approach. There are so many stories of fires on the Broad and Blue Mountains, just a rake and see you in the morning. He often taught the younger folks to work smarter and not harder. You know where the fire is going, get there before it does. Raking hand lines, putting in a wet line with the tender, or directing the air support, he would do it all. I'm sure there are many more stories.

In his own famous words *"I came here with no friends, and I'll leave here with no friends."* He was mistaken in the last part... he left with more friends than he knew.

Many were blessed to have known and worked with Mike.



Lisa LaSalle / Hope and Mike Mrocza, Weiser Forest District

Years of Service

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

Dist	Name	Year Appointed	Years of Service
01	Ralph E Heilig	1958	65
02	Thomas D Haubrick	1963	60
09	Paul C Augustine	1963	60
18	Garry C Seiger	1963	60
08	Karl Schlentner	1968	55
08	Ronald E Barnett	1968	55
06	Richard J Meintel Jr	1973	50
11	John P Zborovian	1973	50
14	James H English	1973	50
17	Stephan J Cashman	1973	50
18	Guy D Geschwindt	1973	50



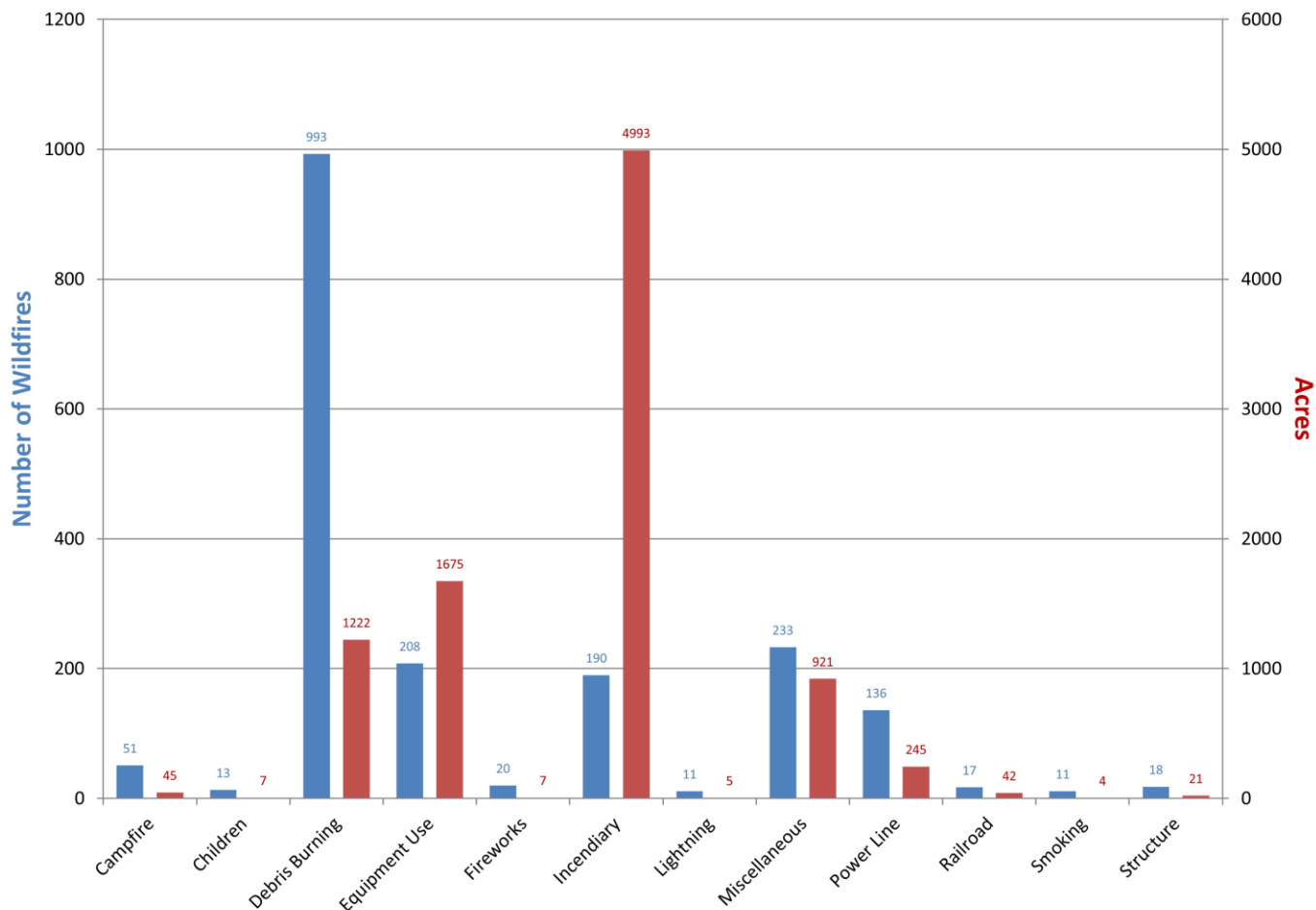
In Remembrance

Wardens who passed away in 2023

Dist	Name	Year Appointed
03	Richard W Wertz	1988
06	Edward J Hudak	1985
08	Harold Davis	1992
08	Richard L Jordan	1963
08	William G Zahniser	1971
09	Jack D Laing	1988
09	Oscar Neeper	1968
12	Ronald C Bierly	1990
16	James R Ryan	1972
17	Ira G Shade	1989
18	William C Eschbach	2008
18	Michael Mazur	1978
18	Richard A Sterner	1975

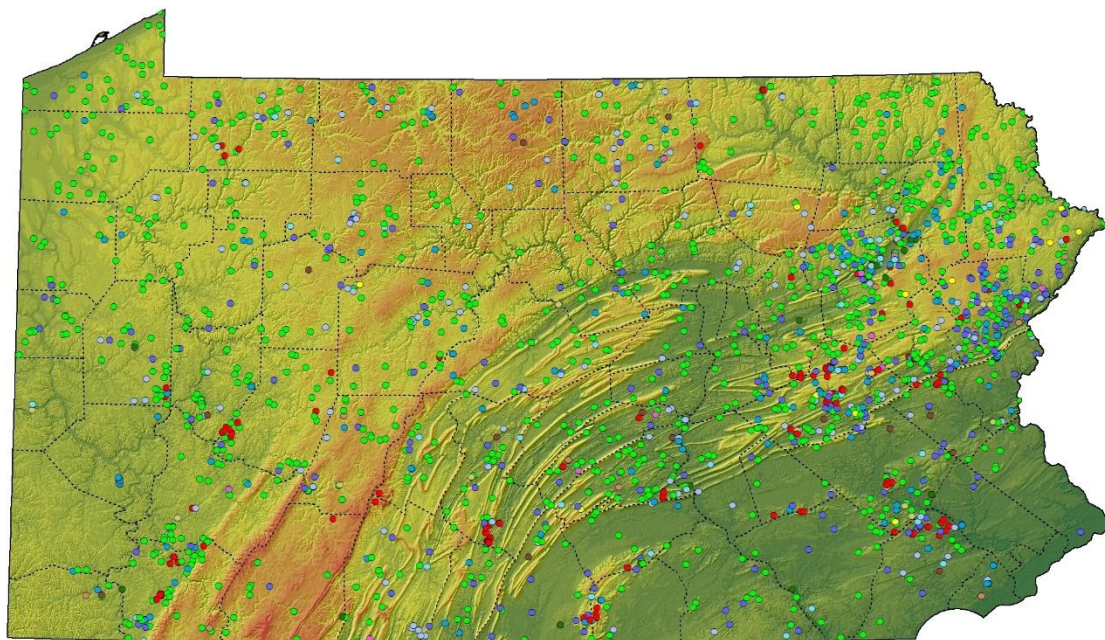


2023 - Number of Wildfires and Acres per Cause Class



Wildfires by Cause

- Lightning (11)
- Equipment Use (208)
- Smoking (11)
- Campfire (51)
- Debris Burning (993)
- Railroad (17)
- Incendiary (190)
- Children (13)
- Miscellaneous (233)
- Fireworks (20)
- Power Line (136)
- Structure (18)



1,901 Wildfires / 9,186 Acres

2024 Pennsylvania Wildland Fire Academy

The 2024 Pennsylvania Wildland Fire Academy will be hosted at Shippensburg University from May 28 through June 3. We're targeting eighteen courses this year, ranging from basic to advanced instruction. As usual, courses may include both classroom and field training. There is a large variety of courses offered this year.

Following initial registration, student selections will be made based on class size limits, student needs, and agency needs. Registration for courses opens March 14 and run through April 12, when student selection will occur. After that, courses with open seats will remain open until May 19, 2024.

Courses planned to be offered include:

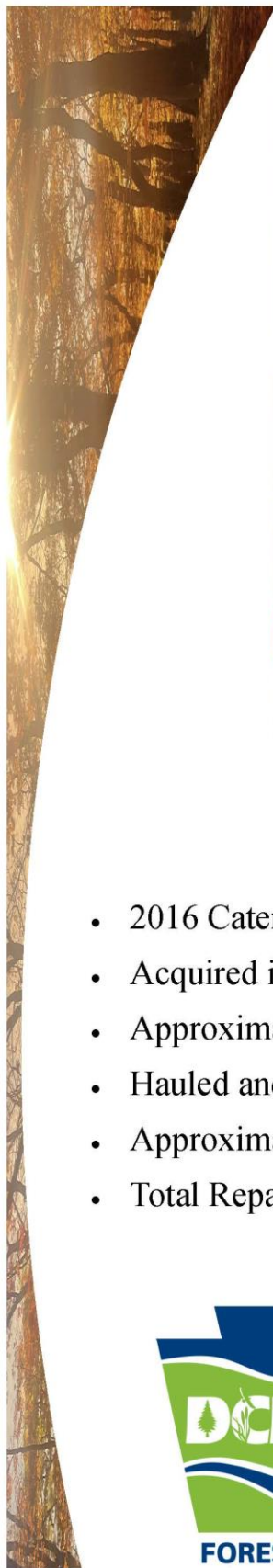
- ATV/UTV Operator Safety Training
- A-219, Helicopter Transport of External Cargo
- National Safety Council Defensive Driving Course
- DZOP, Dozer Operator
- FI-110, Wildland Fire Observations & Origin Scene Protection for First Responders
- L-280, Followership to Leadership
- O-305, Type 3 All Hazards Incident Management Team
- 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-219, Firing Operations
- S-270, Basic Air Operations
- S-290, Intermediate Wildland Fire Behavior
- WFA, Fireline Wilderness First Aid
- 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 by 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://www.ticketleap.events/tickets/pennfire/2024_pa_academy

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



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
AND NATURAL RESOURCES



FFP Success Story

- 2016 Caterpillar D7R2 Dozer
- Acquired in July 2023 for fire break construction and maintenance
- Approximately 4,000 lifetime hours on machine
- Hauled and repaired in house with DCNR staff
- Approximately 65 total man hours in repair time
- Total Repair Costs: \$9,156.17
 - Estimated MSRP of Replacement: \$998,803
 - ***Cost Savings to DCNR: \$989,646.83***



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