

# The Forest Fire Warden News



## Forest Fire Wardens 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

The Forest Fire Protection Act of June 3, 1915 officially established the Pennsylvania Forest Fire Warden system that remains in effect to date; next year, we will be celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PA Forest Fire Warden. Planning is ongoing to celebrate this historic event.

A 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Picnic is being planned for June 20, 2015 at Hyner Run State Park in North Bend, near Renovo; more information on this event will be available in the Spring edition of this newsletter. An updated kiosk is going to be installed at the Forest Fire Warden Monument located at nearby Hyner View State Park adjacent to the existing Forest Fire Warden's Monument. Additional events are also being discussed.

Each forest district has 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary banners available for any 100<sup>th</sup> planned activities. Please email any pictures and information to the DFFP at [ffp@pa.gov](mailto:ffp@pa.gov) and post this information on social media sites as well. This historic event is a great opportunity to inform the public of the important work we do and may be a great opportunity to recruit new fire crew members and possible future Forest Fire Wardens.



### *Division of Forest Fire Protection Personnel*

Randy White,  
Chief Forest Fire Warden

Mike Kern,  
Operations and Planning  
Section Chief

Charles C. Choplick,  
Logistics and Finance  
Section Chief

Brian Pfister,  
Fire Operations Specialist

Jason Williams,  
Aircraft Operations and  
Safety Specialist

Chad Northcraft,  
Air Operations Forester

Vacant,  
Federal Excess/  
VFA Coordinator

Levi Gelnett,  
Wildfire Prevention  
Specialist

Todd C. Breininger,  
Fire Operations—Eastern

Joseph R. Miller,  
Fire Operations—Western

Terry Smith,  
Special Investigator

Richard Temple,  
Fire Cache Manager

Sally A. Fortney,  
Clerk Typist 2

Diane Lehr-Gebhard,  
Administrative Assistant

## What does it mean to be Fire Adapted?

A fire adapted community accepts fire as part of the natural landscape. The community understands its fire risk, and takes action before a wildfire to minimize harm to residents, homes, businesses, parks, utilities, and other community assets. These collective actions empower all residents to be safer in their environment. To help prepare your community, consider your role in making it fire adapted:

- Build homes with fire-resistant materials
- Landscape gardens using native plants
- Support land management practices in parks, forests and natural areas that reduce wildfire spread to your community
- Encourage the development and implementation of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan
- Work with neighbors to get recognized through the Firewise Communities/USA® Recognition Program
- Encourage your local fire department to participate in the Ready, Set, Go! Program
- Prepare an emergency planning kit and safety plan
- Meet with your local forester to better understand your region's unique fire risks
- Locate your community's resident safety zone
- Talk to your insurance agent about your wildfire coverage and how to reduce risk
- Promote the adoption of building codes and local regulations that address structural and site vulnerabilities to wildfire
- Identify shared responsibilities with other community members and explore local tools and solutions

Learn more and find resources at [www.fireadapted.org](http://www.fireadapted.org)

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## Leader's Intent Allows Goals to Be Achieved

Leaders must clearly communicate their task, purpose and end state in order to have their objectives met on the fireground.

By Matthew Tobia

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In June 1863, General Robert E. Lee was on the offensive. Having secured victories in several major battles, Lee was buttressed by the idea that he could quickly end the "War Between the States" if he could position his army between the Union forces and Washington, D.C. J.E.B. Stuart, a cavalry commander, was Lee's eyes and ears in troop movement. On June 30, Lee did not know where Stuart was nor what he was doing. More importantly, he did not know where the Union army was nor what it was doing. While this lack of information contributed to Lee's defeat, historians have long argued about whether Lee's failure should be attributed to Stuart, or to the fact that Lee may have failed to effectively communicate his "Leader's Intent."

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### Understanding Intent

A clear vision communicated by a leader is critical to the success of the company for several reasons. First, understanding Leader's Intent allows the company officer to make informed decisions. When a task cannot be completed, or the planned course of action has to be altered, the company officer must communicate the change. It is also the company officer's responsibility to clarify when the Leader's Intent is not clear. Assumptions between officers allow for the misinterpretation of task and end state, contributing to a poor decision ultimately owned by the IC. The higher the stakes, the more explicit the Leader's Intent must be.

Second, Leader's Intent ensures that the goal is still achieved even if the leader is temporarily or permanently removed from the equation. Our subordinates must be able to step up if something were to happen to us. Leader's Intent is designed to address the serious circumstances when the formal leader is out of the picture but the goal must still be accomplished.

Finally, Leader's Intent provides a consistent framework for all directives given by a company officer to their crew. By providing task, purpose and end state, the officer is more likely to be understood in terms of their envisioned outcome.

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### Intent Defined

Leader's Intent is predicated on three components: task, purpose and end state. Combined, these terms give the incident commander (IC) or division/group supervisor a framework to ensure objectives are met.

Task is the physical work to be done. Whether it is extinguishing a fire on the second floor of a home, containing a brush fire or shutting down a highway, the task defines the specific objective to be accomplished.

Purpose provides the context for the action or reason that the action is to be undertaken, and answers the question "why." For example, a division/group supervisor may direct a task force of engines and brush trucks to a community of residences with the task of conducting a structural assessment.

The purpose of the action might be to determine the viability of defending homes from an approaching wildland fire, if any life safety issues exist, or if operational objectives must be altered. Understanding why something is being undertaken contributes to a definition of the risk that is to be accepted when performing a particular task.

End state provides the leader with an opportunity to describe what the event should look like on the far end or when the operational period has been concluded. This might include the parameters of actions to take if the supervisor is no longer able to communicate. Especially with incidents covering a wide area, Leader's Intent is critical because the leader is often disconnected from subordinate officers (company officers) who must exercise discretion when in the heat of battle, often with incomplete information.

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### Clear Sight

General Lee's lack of situational awareness leading up to Gettysburg is as instructive today as it was 150 years ago. There are numerous examples of firefighter fatalities due to the IC's Intent not being understood, communicated or followed. It is crucial that company officers are prepared to follow.

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### Bureau of Forestry event salutes Forest Fire Warden for long service

State legislative proclamations, best wishes from friends and colleagues, and personal thanks and praise from DCNR's secretary capped off a day in Lackawanna State Forest honoring a Pittston, Luzerne County, man who has served more than 50 years as a PA Forest Fire Warden.

Frank J. Nocito was honored Oct. 3 at a gathering at the Manny Gordon State Forest Picnic Area that saw him and other forest fire wardens and wildfire fighters take home warm thanks from DCNR Secretary Ellen Ferretti.

Pittston resident Frank J. Nocito was honored for 50 years of service as a Pa. Forest Fire Warden in the Lackawanna State Forest District. He is flanked by state Rep. Mike Carroll and District Forester Nicholas Lylo. "I thank Mr. Nocito and all the others here who have served as forest fire wardens and have an extended history of serving long, volunteer hours to be the local eyes, ears and boots on the ground in detecting, fighting and preventing wildfires—often on private land," Ferretti said.

"We may have 2.2 million acres of state forestlands, but we have 17 million acres of woodlands stretching across Pennsylvania—and we need all the help we can get from folks like Mr. Nocito when wildfire threats often soar in spring and fall."

Noting "recent and widespread wildfire devastation in other states," Ferretti told her listeners, "We must always be appreciative of the dedication of folks like you—our fire wardens, Bureau of Forestry firefighters, and volunteer fire company members."

Spearheaded by Lackawanna State Forest District Forester Nicholas Lylo, the Nocito testimonial was attended by state Rep. Mike Carroll (D-118th), who presented the fire warden

with a House of Representatives' proclamation that echoed the sentiments of Lylo:

“Frank is one of those rare individuals who always put his duty first,” the district forester told the gathering. “It is this caliber of dedication exhibited by Mr. Nocito and fellow fire wardens across the state that makes the role of a district forester just a little bit easier.”

DCNR Secretary Ellen Ferretti and Smokey Bear joined friends and firefighting colleagues who turned out in force at a Lackawanna State Forest gathering to honor longtime fire warden Frank J. Nocito.

Nocito was hired in 1963 by the then-PA Department of Forest and Waters as a PA Forest Fire Inspector and was appointed soon after as a PA State Forest Fire Warden. In 1998, he retired from state service after working 35 years as a forest maintenance supervisor with the Lackawanna State Forest. However, he continued on as an active fire warden until the present time.

During his career, Nocito was in charge of fire suppression and prevention work in Luzerne and Lackawanna counties. He was part of the great fire suppression effort during the drought years of 1963-64, which led to a significant spike in wildfires in the district. More than 100 fires burned some 8,000 acres during that time.

Marked by a proud history in which their 100th anniversary will be celebrated in 2015, about 1,600 men and women serve as volunteer PA Forest Fire Wardens. Properly trained local forest fire wardens are appointed primarily to detect, extinguish and investigate wildfires. Wardens actively promote fire prevention in their community, often visiting schools and civic groups in a statewide, team-effort that earned them a national salute from the USDA Forest Service in 2013.

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### **Personnel Change**

Ann Price, our Administrative Assistant, joined the ranks or the “happily retired” in July 2014 after nearly 35 years of dedicated service to the Commonwealth. Ann spent the last 8.5 years in Forest Fire Protection where she did a superb job keeping things on track. Ann plans on spending her golden years doing what she wants to do instead of what someone else wants her to do! Planning an Alaskan getaway and her daughter's wedding as well as tending to her mother and cooking for and accompanying her husband and friends on out of state hunting trips is keeping her more than busy. Ann will surely be missed by the Division and we wish her all the best!

Diane Lehr-Gebhard joined Forest Fire Protection as the Administrative Assistant in August 2014. Her professional background includes clerical, financial and cash management experience. She attended Lebanon Valley College and Penn State University.

In addition to working at a financial holding company for over 20 years, she was also employed at an insurance company, as well as a non-profit organization that assisted adults with developmental disabilities. Prior to joining FFP, she worked for the Department of State in Harrisburg.

Diane enjoys piano, tennis, kayaking, biking and hiking. She resides in Swatara Township near Hummelstown.

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### **Wildfire Investigation Task Force**

The Wildfire Investigation Task (WITF) was formed in 2004 by DFFP Special Investigator Robert McJilton and Forest Fire Supervisor Specialists Lee Jordan and Ken Barnes shortly after the National Wildfire Coordination Group (NWCG) developed the modern FI-210 course, Wildland Fire Investigation, which teaches a scientific methodological approach to wildland fire investigation. The purpose of the WITF is to develop, train, and maintain a cadre of professional wildland fire investigators within the Bureau of forestry and to provide the professional development and the training needed to ensure that these investigators have the expertise and knowledge to represent the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in civil and criminal court cases.

The current WITF meets twice a year to discuss current issues concerning wildland fire investigation. This group ensures that newly hired Fire Foresters receive the tools and training required to perform their investigative duties and assist them into obtaining national qualifications. This WITF is constantly evaluating developing technological advances in surveillance equipment and wildfire investigation techniques. The task force members are the ones called upon by the DFFP when wildfire investigation assistance is required throughout the Commonwealth.

Current WITF Members:

Terry Smith – DFFP Special Investigator  
Lee Jordan – FD 04 Forest Fire Supervisor Specialist  
Dan LeCrone - FD 05 Forest Fire Supervisor Specialist  
Brian Plume - FD 16 Forest Fire Supervisor Specialist  
Shawn Turner - FD 19 Forest Fire Supervisor Specialist  
Jake Glick – FD 18 Fire Forester

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### **Finding Balance in Wildland Fire Training**

I recently read a quote that stated “Train as if your life depends on it, because it does.” When we get down to basics, training is ultimately a safety issue. We provide training so that our personnel can do the tasks that they are asked to do safely and effectively. Well trained firefighters can do their job safely because they are not distracted by uncertainty and know how to handle the complex situations faced on wildland fires.

Nationwide, wildland fires are becoming larger and more complex. There are fewer resources to respond to these fires among volunteers and in all agencies. Wildland firefighters are also being given the task of responding to emergencies other than wildfires. This means that the workload and potential risk to wildland firefighters is increasing. Given these factors, risk management dictates that we should increase and not decrease the amount of training. Pennsylvania has not been immune to the changes in complexity and resource availability.

In today's society, there are multiple demands on everyone's time. The Division of Forest Fire Protection recognizes this fact and tries to balance these demands with the need to keep firefighters safe in a complex and changing world.



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