



The Forest Fire Warden News

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources Bureau of Forestry

“A lot can change in 100 years.”

With the end of 2015 we conclude the 100 year anniversary of Pennsylvania’s Forest Fire Wardens. What and how have things changed over the past 100 years? It is hard to imagine what life was like 100 years ago. For perspective I looked up some of the historical events and headlines from 1915. Of course WWI dominated much the headlines of the day. Some of the other events and headlines that caught my attention were: the first coast to coast telephone call is made; Japan claims economic control of China; the first wireless message sent from a moving train to a train station; Ford built its one millionth car (a model T); the first German Zeppelin attack over Great Britain; the neon tube sign is patented; Pluto is photographed for the 1st time.

A lot can change in 100 years. Today we have GPS technology to help us do our jobs. This change in technology wasn’t even imagined when I started my career. When I first started with the Bureau of Forestry everyone relied on printed topographic maps to get around (by the way that was only 30 years ago – not 100 years ago). Now, just the other day, I used a GPS app on my cell phone to get me to my daughter’s new apartment in Philadelphia. I just provided the address and the phone app gave me a real time map not to mention the friendly voice that gave me turn by turn driving instructions. It even told me when I would arrive.

Change often times comes about so gradually that we never notice it unless we stop and think about it. It’s sort of like watching children grow. Take for instance the marvel of the first coast to coast phone call that was made 100 years ago versus cell phones that everyone relies upon and carries around with them these days. Fire fighters 100 years ago didn’t have the sophisticated radio and cell phone communications we have today. They were not wearing Nomex clothing, using GPS technology, getting air tanker support, using fire behavior models or getting spot weather forecasts. They didn’t have the great training we have available to us these days. Times change. Technology and social perspectives change. I once heard it said that the only permanent thing in life is change. So we continue to change and adapt and improve as we are able and as is needed.

But there are some things that change very little. One of those things is our need for and reliance on the men and women who serve as Forest Fire Wardens. Forest Fire Wardens were instrumental to protecting Pennsylvania’s Forests 100 years ago. Just as they still are today. And just as important and also relatively unchanged, is the pride, sense of purpose, and care that motivates Forest Fire Wardens to become a warden and to do the work that they do. With all the advances in technology and science and everything else that have come about these many years - it still comes down to people that care. Thank you for the pride, dedication and care you demonstrate. I hope that never changes. Many thanks for all that you do.

Chris Plank

Begin at the Beginning

In the last issue of the newsletter, I indicated my intent to articulate a mission for the wildland fire program. Over the past several months, the staff from the Division of Forest Fire Protection and the forest districts have been working to this end. Through these efforts, I am pleased to say that we have established the following mission:

The wildland fire program safely and effectively manages wildland fire to enhance and protect life, property, and natural resources for the public benefit within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Establishing this mission statement is more than just something nice to hang on the wall. Mission statements provide a foundation, purpose, and direction; even when supervisors or leaders are not directly present or available. Attainment of the mission, in this case the enhancement and protection of those things valued by our society (life, property, natural resources) become the goals and drivers

Division of Forest Fire Protection Personnel

Chris Plank,
Chief Forest Fire Warden

Mike Kern,
Forest Fire Protection
Division Chief

Charles C. Choplick,
Logistics and Finance
Section Chief

Matt Reed,
Operations and Planning
Section Chief

Brian Pfister,
Fire Operations Specialist

Jason Williams,
Aircraft Operations and
Safety Specialist

Chad Northcraft,
Air Operations Forester

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 Schmidt,
Administrative Assistant

of our actions, plans, and decisions. Other concerns, such as eliminating human-cause wildfires, keeping fires as small as possible, or extinguishing them as frugally as possible are ultimately outcomes, not drivers, of our actions and decision making.

One other part of articulating a mission was to establish a set of core values. These core values are: Safety, Leadership, Cooperation, Communication, and Responsibility. The core values further define expectations of behavior and courses of action for personnel within the wildland fire program.

The Wildland Fire Program Mission, Vision, Core Values is included in entirety in this issue of the newsletter. It applies to everyone involved in the program including employees, wardens, and crewmembers. It is expected that all will read the document and make a genuine effort to integrate it into their wildland fire operations.

“A Fire Adapted Community takes responsibility for its wildfire risk. Actions to be addressed are resident safety, homes, neighborhoods, businesses and infrastructure, forests, parks, open spaces, and other community assets.”

That definition is taken right from the “FAC” informational booklet.

Does this mean the Nation Fire Protection Association's Firewise Community Program is out? The International Association of Fire Chiefs' Ready, Set, Go is a no go?

I don't think so, I look at the Fire Adapted Community Project, as an umbrella that all other programs fall under. A Fire Adapted Community (FAC) is not just a Firewise Community, but it uses what it needs from all the different elements that are available to them and houses those under the Fire Adapted Community title.



Passed in 2003 the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) and development of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy Plan, provide direction and requirements for developing your Fire Adapted Community.

One of the most important tools in your tool box is the (CWPP) or Community Wildfire

Protection Plan. CWPP's are not all that new, we wrote (EAPs) Emergency Action Plans for our Firewise Communities, now we will write CWPPs.

Under the HFRA a CWPP has three requirements, they are:

1. Collaboration: by local, state and federal agencies and other interested parties.
2. Prioritized Fuel Reduction
3. Treatment of Structural Ignitability

The HFRA requires that three entities must mutually agree to the final contents of the CWPP:

1. The applicable local government

2. The local Fire Department
3. The state entity responsible for forest management.

When you read the National Cohesive Wildfire Strategy Plan you will notice there are three main categories that are addressed.

Restore and maintain landscapes: Landscapes across all jurisdictions are resilient to fire-related disturbances in accordance with management objectives.

Fire adapted communities: Human populations and infrastructure can withstand a wildfire without loss of life and property.

Wildfire response: All jurisdictions participate in making and implementing safe, effective, efficient risk-based wildfire management decisions.

A well-crafted Community Wildfire Protection Plan will address those three categories of the National Cohesive Strategy Plan, as well as fulfill the HFRA requirements.

There are many pieces to the Fire Adapted Community puzzle, including a CWPP, but don't let it throw you. Start with your foundation pieces and build on those. In no time at all you'll have one FAC in place, and then you can start on another.

Wesley Keller
Forest Fire Specialist Supervisor
Wesier Forest District



Cooperating Agencies

A fire occurred on property owned by Linden Hall in Fayette County on 11-17-15 at 1000 hours. This fire had high a priority status not only for the timber value but also for the golf course and million dollar mansion that exists on the property. It started on a very steep river hill adjacent to the railroad tracks. The terrain and topography along with dry weather conditions and wind made it difficult to control. The lead VFD called Fayette 911 for Forestry assistance. I responded along with our district staff consisting of Ralph Campbell, Russ Gibbs, Butch Camp and Tim Abraham. I called members of our staff in because I knew the area and existing conditions meant this fire had the potential to become large. The fire wardens on scene that day were Joe Virgillo, Brian Wise, Bud Seglowich and Joel Ribnisky. Along with these people and the local VFDs the fire was contained by 1900 that evening. Steve Leiendoeker who is a land manager with the Game Commission was also at the fire because the state game lands were directly adjacent to the fire and it had the potential to burn their land also. There were many hot spots and chimney trees still burning along with a coal seam that was still on fire. There was a strong cold front set to move

in with high winds and no rain forecasted for at least 24 hours. We were making plans for the following morning when Steve offered assistance from the game commission. We were going to be shorthanded anyway so I accepted his offer. I well remember the day when the game commission wanted nothing to do with fires on their land or anyone else's for that matter so this was a welcome change. At 0800 the following morning Warden Virgillo, Russ Gibbs and myself returned to the fire scene. Virgillo and I scouted the 21.5 acre fire and found much needed work to be done. I expected the game commission to bring a few guys with little or no experience and no equipment. What I got was the complete opposite. When we came around the corner from scouting the fire to the staging area there they were. Steve was there with Neil Itle one of their top wildfire guys and 6 other men along with type six equipment including trucks, trailers full of fire equipment, water tanks and hand tools. They were all experienced fire fighters with all the required training under their belts. I conducted a briefing telling them the results of our scouting mission and the hazards in the area. Our Forester Russ Gibbs knew and had worked with these guys during his time with the game commission. Warden Virgillo and I went to do the origin & cause investigation and I put Russ in charge. Russ and Neil each took a squad of game commission fire fighters and went to the steepest most dangerous parts of the fire doing 100% mop-up. The fire companies were assigned to other parts of the fire which were not nearly as hazardous. I am used to having far too little help on a fire with the growth potential that this one had. Holding it to just 21.5 acres was a tremendous feat in my eyes. I have seen smaller fires get much bigger under these adverse conditions. The forestry personnel, fire wardens and fire companies all did a great job.

As for the game commission this was the third fire that I was on in 2015 with them and the cooperation was great on all three. I am truly happy to see the direction they are now taking on wildfire suppression on their own lands and hope that someday they would be able to assist the Bureau of Forestry with fires on other lands. For now I think they are mostly working on prescribed fire so this fire was good experience for them. We have to remember a prescribed fire is for the most part a controlled experiment and a wildfire is an uncontrolled emergency where anything can and will happen. We are all here to protect the citizens on the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania from wildfires.

When state agencies cooperate with each other using their combined resources including both equipment and personnel the public wins, as we all do.

Leland R. Jordan
Forest Fire Specialist Supervisor

Fire Trip to Tanana Alaska

On July 10th I got the call from Brian Pfister to pack my bags because he had an assignment for me as a Task Force Leader Trainee in Alaska. The fire was Spicer Creek Fire in Tanana, Alaska. So upon telling my husband where I was going, he said, "that is the town Yukon Men is filmed in. I hadn't watched the show but he had started naming off all the people on the show. I said I am going to fight a fire so I probably will not be meeting these people. Well, I was wrong! On the left is Charlie Wright and on the right is Pat Moore - both of these men are on the Discovery Channel show, "Yukon Men".



I arrived in Tanana on Sunday July 12th. This is a remote village along the Yukon River and the only way into the village is by foot, plane, or boat in the summer season. The people in Tanana live a subsistence life style. They fish or hunt for most all of their meat. They have gardens to grow vegetables and gather berries to can or freeze for the year. Many people had tundra freezers to keep things fresh. They trap and make things out of the hides or trade them for things they need that they can't provide for themselves. ATV's are the most common form of transportation in and around the village. There are vehicles in this village but they were

brought in on barges and it is very costly to bring them in. No vehicle laws such as registration, inspection, or license exist in the town - they just do what they have to, to keep the wheels going around. Boats are used to go up and down the river when it isn't frozen. Once the winter has set in most people use snowmobiles and dog sleds to get around in the few hours of daylight where they are checking on neighbors or checking a trap line. Some residences had electricity, others may have had generators and some had nothing. Everyone I met was very friendly and always willing to help you whenever needed. I was very thankful I had this opportunity to meet these people and learn about their way of life.

Jodi Skipper, Management Forester

Lyme Disease/Red Fox

With Lyme disease on the rise in Pennsylvania, we need to understand why this is happening and take measures, if possible, to reduce and hopefully one day eradicate this debilitating and sometimes deadly disease from our environment.

We often associate white-tailed deer and the deer ticks they carry for spreading Lyme disease in the United States, especially in the Northeast. There's no doubt that deer are a major cause of high tick numbers due to the size of the animal and their ability to carry a large number of adult breeding-age deer ticks. The only problem with this presumption is that most of the time deer ticks spread Lyme disease to humans in their nymph or second life-stage, not as an adult. When deer ticks are in this nymph stage they are more commonly found on small rodents, such as mice, chipmunks, voles, shrews and ground moles.

The Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies in New York reports of a study conducted from the mid-eighties to present concerning Lyme disease and the relationships between white-tailed deer and the red fox in the Northeast. This study initially found that over the past 30 years increases in Lyme disease could not be correlated with deer abundance. Instead the steady increase of Lyme disease consistently correlated to the wide range decline in red fox. In turn, low red fox numbers correlated with increases in coyotes where fox once hunted and called home. Both the red fox and the coyote compete for the same habitat consisting of old and active farms with open fields, "hedgerows" and small wooded areas intermixed with streams and residential areas. The habitat for grey fox is mostly in dense wooded settings and they kill some small rodents but nothing like the red fox do in keeping the small rodent population in check. Feral domestic housecats also get their share of small rodents but not enough of them. Mange, distemper and rabies also reduce the red fox population in some areas. Another study in 2008 found that 80 to 90 percent of Lyme-infected ticks acquired the bacteria from shrews, the eastern chipmunk and the white-footed deer mouse. Landowner wildlife surveys of predator hunting and trapping in Pennsylvania and neighboring states from 1984 to 2009 shows how drastic the numbers are in decreased fox kills and increases in coyote kills. For example, in 1984 the fox kill was about 25,000 as compared to an 80 percent decrease in 2009 with under 5,000 killed, while the coyote kill increased over 600 percent in those years.

In theory Lyme disease increases as fox numbers decline and coyotes rise in population. When North America's coyotes

expanded their range and population in the 1900s, in the absence of grey wolves, they killed and displaced red fox, which prey heavily on small rodents. Red fox also bury or hide their prey for consumption later, meaning that they don't just kill their daily need of food but will kill and eat whatever is most easily obtained, which would effectively reduce the small rodent population, thus, reduce Lyme disease. Furthermore, as fox decrease and rodents increase, coyotes occupying former fox habitat areas do not prey on and control small rodents as fox do. Coyote populations are typically smaller than the fox population they killed or evicted and prefer rabbits, pets, fawns and even adult deer over pint-sized prey like small rodents. As a result, a growing army of rodents are carrying the larvae and infected nymphs of deer ticks around with them just waiting for the next victim.

The red fox with its preying and caching habits, and ability to live and thrive among humans, could play a vital role in reducing Lyme disease hosts where humans live, work and recreate. Unless the red fox rebound or nature finds other ways to control rodent populations, Lyme disease will likely keep rising and plaguing hunters, hikers, campers, foresters and other outdoor recreationists.

Kurt Rumley
Management Forester."

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Bureau of Forestry

Wildland Fire Program Mission, Vision, Core Values

Mission

The wildland fire program safely and effectively manages wildland fire to enhance and protect life, property, and natural resources for the public benefit within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

This mission is derived from the DCNR mission, the Bureau of Forestry mission, and legal mandates and will be accomplished through:

- Preparedness
- Training
- Prevention
- Cooperation
- Suppression
- Prescribed Fire
- Investigation
- Enforcement
- Innovation

Vision

The wildland fire program is a leader locally and a contributor nationally.

Core Values

- **Safety** – We provide for firefighter and public safety through sound risk management.
- **Leadership** – We serve as a positive example, providing leadership, technical expertise, professionalism, organization, and direction to the fire program.
- **Cooperation** – We work to develop and foster positive working relationships and treat local, state, and federal cooperators as equal partners.
- **Communication** – We share information and communicate effectively both on and off incidents.
- **Responsibility** – We operate proactively within our role to take all actions necessary to accomplish the mission safely and effectively.

PENNSYLVANIA WILDFIRE SUMMARY

2015 Spring			2015 Fall		2015 Total			
District	# fires	Acres	# fires	Acres	# fires	Acres	% Total # Fires	% Total # Acres
1	21	22	7	6	28	28	3.4%	0.7%
2	5	14	6	73	11	87	1.3%	2.1%
3	10	23	7	31	17	55	2.1%	1.3%
4	64	91	28	79	92	170	11.3%	4.1%
5	16	59	3	17	19	76	2.3%	1.8%
6	12	52	6	5	18	56	2.2%	1.3%
7	24	41	4	3	28	44	3.4%	1.1%
8	64	137	3	2	67	139	8.2%	3.3%
9	41	88	10	10	51	98	6.2%	2.4%
10	8	12	1	9	9	21	1.1%	0.5%
11	133	487	7	31	140	518	17.1%	12.4%
12	1	3	1	2	2	5	0.2%	0.1%
13	2	45	1	0	3	46	0.4%	1.1%
14	19	27	5	17	24	44	2.9%	1.1%
15	13	91	0	0	13	91	1.6%	2.2%
16	20	133	3	3	23	136	2.8%	3.3%
17	72	149	3	4	75	153	9.2%	3.7%
18	108	2058	20	13	128	2071	15.7%	49.7%
19	39	186	2	1	41	187	5.0%	4.5%
20	26	125	2	15	28	140	3.4%	3.4%
Total	698	3844	119	320	817	4165		

Cause	2015 Spring		2015 Fall		2015 Total			
	# fires	Acres	# fires	Acres	# fires	Acres	% Total # Fires	% Total # Acres
Camp Fire	33	91	10	7	43	98	5.3%	2.3%
Children	11	5	1	0.1	12	5	1.5%	0.1%
Debris Burning	389	928	41	81	430	1009	52.6%	24.2%
Equipment Use	27	868	16	44	43	912	5.3%	21.9%
Fireworks	5	2	0	0	5	2	0.6%	0.0%
Incendiary	141	1637	31	111	172	1748	21.1%	42.0%
Lightning	4	0.6	1	0.1	5	0.7	0.6%	0.0%
Miscellaneous	47	276	12	34	59	309	7.2%	7.4%
Power Line	20	25	5	18	25	43	3.1%	1.0%
Railroad	11	3	1	22	12	25	1.5%	0.6%
Smoking	6	4	0	0	6	4	0.7%	0.1%
Structure	4	5	1	4	5	9	0.6%	0.2%
Total	698	3844	119	320	817	4165		

Size Class Code	Size Class	2015 Spring		2015 Fall		2015 Total	
		# fires	Acres	# fires	Acres	# fires	Acres
A	0-0.25	206	34	43	6	249	40
B	0.26-9	436	822	67	125	503	947
C	10-99	52	1160	9	189	61	1349
D	100-299	2	306	0	0	2	306
E	300-999	2	1522	0	0	2	1522
F	1000-4999	0	0	0	0	0	0
G	5000+	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals		698	3844	119	320	817	4165

*Slight differences in acreage figures may exist due to rounding.

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