



News for Immediate Release

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DCNR Seeking Information in Bedford County Wildfire

Harrisburg – The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is seeking the public's help in the probe of a sprawling Bedford County wildfire last week that investigators have labeled arson.

Discovered Saturday, April 19, the blaze scorched nearly 1,000 acres of state game lands and private woodlands in the Wills Mountain area near Centerville, Bedford County. Hampered by terrain and weather, more than 100 firefighters battled the wildfire for six days.

"Circumstances surrounding this wildfire lead us to believe it was intentionally set," said Bureau of Forestry Forest Fire Protection Division Chief Randall White. "We know it started about 2 p.m. April 19 in the interior of the tract. Any information offered on anyone observed in that area near that time will be treated with utmost importance and strictest confidence."

Information can be forwarded to bureau Special Investigator Terry Smith, 717-362-1472; terrsmith@pa.gov.

Utilizing hand labor and bulldozers to create firebreaks and aircraft to drop flame retardant, fire crews were hampered by dry, windy conditions; steep terrain; thick vegetation; and dense smoke. Speed limits on a section of nearby Route 220 were reduced to 35 mph at the height of the blaze because of smoke.

Firefighters included personnel from local volunteer companies, the bureau and the Pennsylvania Game Commission, which owns State Game Lands No. 48. Aside from the game lands, some private woodlands also burned. No injuries or property damage were reported.

The Bedford County wildfire was the largest woodland fire statewide in a week that proved to be very busy for bureau and volunteer firefighters. More than 100 fires were reported April 19-26.

"Even though weather conditions may seem to have temporarily moderated, the public is reminded that the threat of wildfires still exists," White said. "The Bureau of Forestry asks the public to be especially careful with any outside burning, which is one of the leading causes of wildfires."

For more information on wildfire prevention, visit www.dcnr.state.pa.us (select "Forestry" under "Quick Links" then "Wildland Fire").

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