



The Forest Fire Warden News

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources Bureau of Forestry

Evolution of the Forest Fire Warden Program

As we approach yet another spring fire season, it is important to ensure that our annual rituals of preparation are underway in order to have a safe and successful fire season. Likewise, this is a good time to look at our warden program to ensure that it is also ready to meet the upcoming challenges. Over the past several months, the Division of Forest Fire Protection has been working in cooperation with other Bureau of Forestry staff to make some updates to the guidance document that we use to manage the Forest Fire Warden program. Updated copies of the *Pennsylvania Forest Fire Warden Program* manual have been distributed to the Bureau of Forestry staff and are available by contacting your District Forest Fire Warden. Several changes were made that our local Forest Fire Wardens should be aware of.

Most significantly, the use of the "Special Assistant" Forest Fire Warden title has been discontinued and all assistants have been transitioned to regular Forest Fire Warden status. Given that both Special Assistants and "regular" wardens had the same powers, duties, and badges, this change will simplify our record-keeping and eliminate some areas of confusion over the different roles and responsibilities of each classification. There was no intent to reduce the number of wardens through this change.

Additionally, the one-year probationary period was removed from the program guidelines. Given that all local wardens serve under the direction of the district fire warden, the tracking of who is currently under probation seemed to be redundant. Also, when appointing new wardens, the course *Wildfire Observations and Origin and Scene Protection for First Responders* (FI-110) will now be required prior to appointment.

After 100 plus years of service, some changes along the way are inevitable if an organization is to continue to be relevant. Despite these changes, Forest Fire Wardens remain an integral part the wildland fire program in Pennsylvania. I would like to personally thank all the Forest Fire Wardens for their efforts in 2017 and wish you all a safe and successful 2018!

Michael D. Kern, Chief Forest Fire Warden

Division of Forest Fire Protection Personnel

Mike Kern
Chief Forest Fire Warden

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*Logistics and Finance
Section Chief*

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*Operations and Planning
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Wildfire Operations Specialist

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Administrative Assistant

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*Fire Operations Technician
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Reduction in Volunteers

A common thread has been noticed in the short time that I have been employed in the Gallitzin Forest District. Being new at the fire forester position, I was advised to make myself known to the fire departments and wardens in my coverage area. While visiting, lack of new volunteer fire fighters was a common thread. Unless you are actively participating within these fire departments, or working with wardens, I don't believe the public even comprehends the repercussions of a diminishing volunteer fire department staff. I would ask you to take a few minutes, and think to yourself. If a 911 call was placed and emergency stated, and the 911 operated replied: "No one is available to assist you with your emergency now." Are you ready to hear that statement? For me, personally it is very comforting to place that call and know assistance is on the way.

What are some of the main reasons that volunteers in fire departments are declining? According to the National Volunteer Fire Council and United States Fire Administration, it turns out it's very much a social issue; basically times are changing. Most people aren't working where they live, and face demanding schedules both at work and at home. The necessity for two-income households and the "me" generation are also a factor.

As a society our time has become a precious commodity. Becoming a volunteer firefighter becomes a second job, time for training is on average 176 to 200 hours. Many employers aren't tolerant of volunteer firefighters leaving during work hours to respond to an emergency. The nature of the emergency has also changed over the years. Water on fires isn't what our firefighters are being called upon for anymore. Only 5% of calls are true fire calls. Call volumes have increased over the past two decades to 16,315,000 nationally. Firefighters are being asked to do more; fires, natural disasters, hazardous material incidents, water rescue emergencies, high-angle rescue and confined space emergencies as well as other public services calls. These all require additional hours of training.

This phenomenon isn't just relegated to volunteer fire departments across the nation. The forest fire warden program in DCNR is also being affected. A volunteer firefighter put it in perspective: "Wildland firefighting is what you (meaning me) do all the time. For me, it's just a small part of what I do every spring."

As a volunteer I know that you truly believe with all your heart and soul that you are making a difference in the world; that there is hope for humanity and that we need to help each other in time of crisis. As a society, we do step up in times of crisis, but our emergency services are on duty 24/7/365.

This fire forester greatly appreciates the wardens that are participating in wildfire prevention, education and suppression in Pennsylvania. Volunteer firefighters are dwindling, so are new forest fire wardens. There is no quick answer to this volunteer issue that has been on a slow but steady increase. It's happening and there is no clear answer on the horizon.

Mandy Burgoon, Fire Forester, Gallitzin Forest District

Wildland Fire Crew

This past year was a very busy year for western wildfires. There were roughly 10 million acres that burned, which is significantly above the yearly average of 6.5 million acres. Pennsylvania dispatched resources to Montana, Oregon, Idaho, West Virginia, Georgia, California, Arizona, and Nevada. In total we sent 214 persons on assignment with the bulk of them dispatched on eight (8) Type 2 initial attack crews.

The crews were tasked with a variety of work and were able to garner a great deal of experience to bring back home to aid in suppression of in-state wildfires. Pennsylvania dispatched 57 single resources in a variety of overhead positions. The states that we were able to assist were greatly appreciative, given their resources were stretched beyond capacity to handle all the wildfires that were occurring.



The Mid-Atlantic Mobilization Center at the Lower Swatara Fire Department was kept busy last year sending and receiving fire crews. The MOB center also aided with the disbursement of personnel and supplies to communities affected by hurricane Maria.

Levi Gelnett, Wildfire Operations Specialist, DFFP

Many Different Hats

As a still somewhat new “fire” forester working in the Gallitzin Forest District, I sometimes find my role in the bureau a little un-clear. I started in the district in 2012, which should seem like more than enough time to adjust to working in a district, but now I’m not sure if twenty years would be enough. Spring fire season is quickly approaching and the demands on my time are increasing by the minute. Plans for training our district staff compete with time for training of wardens and fire companies, presenting school programs, equipment purchasing, equipment maintenance, fire investigations, warden “banquet” planning, district resource management plans, and district activity plans. The list goes on and on. I have also recently been rewarded (or cursed depending on your perspective) with the opportunity to start branching out of the fire forester role into timber management forestry and service forestry, or what is now known as rural and community forestry. Both are in addition to my other roles as GIS coordinator, computer coordinator, safety officer and history coordinator to name a few.

My job is certainly not the only one that involves the wearing of many different hats, nor is it exclusive to foresters or to the people in this organization. Looking back through the 100 plus years of Pennsylvania state forestry to the role of the original forest rangers, reveals many different duties ranging from fire protection to law enforcement to land surveying. Despite this seemingly never-ending list of duties, the one that ties us all together throughout our history into today, from fire wardens to district foresters, is our responsibility to protect the public and the lands of Pennsylvania. It is written into all of our job requirements and in the warden’s oath.

While most would see this responsibility as ultimately important, there have been those who apparently felt differently. How many have heard the story of the district forester who was encouraged to retire because he was nowhere to be found during a fire? The little bit of information I can find regarding this true story paints the picture of this occurrence sometime during the early 1960s: The Gallitzin Forest District had a large wildfire burning for over a week. The district forester at the time had disappeared. Someone from Forest Fire Protection in Harrisburg was called in to take control of the fire. After the fire was finally extinguished, the district forester showed up, only to be given the option of retiring or being fired.

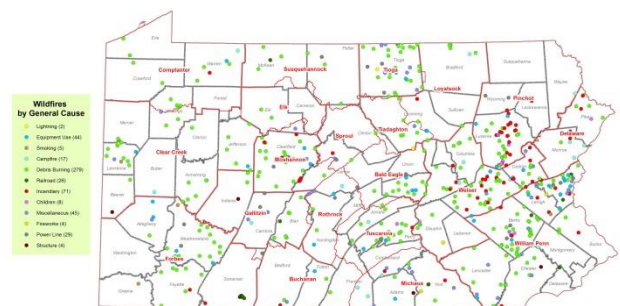
Could something like that happen today? We all have a role in fighting wildfires in Pennsylvania, but whether it is 1910 or 2018, it needs to be juggled with all of the other wants and needs in our life, be they work-related or private. Wildfire management demands a lot of responsibility, but by working together and keeping a focus on safety for all involved, it is a role that can easily be continued for another 100 years.

Chris Fatzinger, Fire Forester, Gallitzin Forest District

2017 Wildfires

As you can see in the table below we had a total of 534 fires for 1649 acres in Pennsylvania. The leading cause of wildfires was debris burning. The weather assisted us last year and we ended up having a below average fire season. Pennsylvania averages about 650 wildfires accounting for roughly 4500 acres yearly. The second leading cause was incendiary fires. These numbers are also down from the average in part due to the weather and the prosecution of several arsonists.

2017		
Cause	# fires	Acres
Campfire	17	115
Children	8	4
Debris Burning	279	300
Equipment Use	44	37
Fireworks	4	2
Incendiary	71	715
Lightning	2	1
Miscellaneous	45	54
Power Line	29	76
Railroad	26	315
Smoking	5	24
Structure	4	6
Total	534	1649



Levi Gelnett, Wildfire Operations Specialist, DFFP

Years of Service

Please join the Chief Forest Fire Warden in congratulating the following Wardens, who are receiving their 50+ years of service awards.

District	Name	Year Appointed	Years of Service
05	Ronald Pawlowski	1957	60
05	Kermit Port	1957	60
08	David Steward	1957	60
14	Eugene Wagner	1957	60
18	Kenneth Parrish	1957	60
01	Howard Kelly Jr	1962	55
07	Robert Laubach	1962	55
09	Sheldon Sharpless	1962	55
15	Paul Buchsen	1962	55
17	George Conrad	1962	55
18	Richard Gearhart	1962	55
18	Sydney Kurtz	1962	55
02	Ralph Mellott	1967	50
02	David Williams	1967	50
04	Floyd Wilford	1967	50
09	Andrew Pillot	1967	50
09	Wallace Finn	1967	50
11	Thomas Bast	1967	50
11	Adrian Prokarym	1967	50
14	Harry Drury	1967	50
14	Mark Hess	1967	50
14	Charles Thompson	1967	50
15	Kenneth Wingo Jr	1967	50

In Remembrance

Wardens who passed away in 2017.

District	Name	Year Appointed
01	Walter Monn	1951
04	Theodore Carns Jr	1967
05	John Foster	1971
07	Jake Brindle Jr	1905
08	Reid Henry	1962
08	Wallace Landes	1967
14	William Huber	1960
17	Donald Fink	1967
17	Arthur Vennel	1990
18	Myron Messinger	1905
18	Victoria Pakosh	2000
18	Russell Sincavage	1952

Ash Tree Safety Advisory

I was constantly scanning the Ash trees on my property looking for indicators of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). I knew it wouldn't be a long wait. I see Ash trees all over the district that have been affected. It wasn't a matter of if, but rather when. During late winter 2017, I noticed woodpecker damage on a small group of Ash trees next to the house and realized that EAB had been there for a while, but the signs of EAB were now starting to show. I began to wonder how I was going to manage my problem.

I knew these trees looked fairly healthy before the woodpeckers came, and the deterioration had already begun long before the arrival of the woodpeckers. I became concerned not only for my own Ash tree problem, but also for the fire community that must deal with risk management and keeping our fire resources safe. Dying Ash trees will rapidly increase dead snags per acre in the wildland fire environment. I am also aware of the dangerous nature of how an Ash tree breaks down with unpredictable structure failure.

After discussing my concerns with the staff of the William Penn Forest District, I was granted permission to pursue the development of a Firefighter Safety Advisory in conjunction with our interagency partners.

A secondary concern developed through discussion, and reviewing comments from After Action Reviews on large fires, that some community response resources become concerned when we use a strategy that is different from direct attack. Firefighter and public safety is our number one priority, and sometimes is competing with other objectives. The advisory was developed to include examples of mitigation measures to resolve issues with competing objectives and help create a common operating picture across all agencies responding to a wildfire event.

Within the time frame it has taken to research and write this advisory, the Ash deterioration problem has worsened substantially in my neighborhood, and will continue to be a concern across the Commonwealth for years to come. Please review the following Firefighter Safety Advisory.

James Stiteler, Maintenance Repairman, William Penn Forest District

FIREFIGHTER SAFETY ADVISORY

WILLIAM PENN FOREST DISTRICT PHONE: 610-582-9660

Subject: This advisory is issued to elevate Risk Management regarding wildfires in known areas of significant Ash, Hemlock, and Oak tree mortality from various forest pests and to increase situational awareness where potential hazards exist related to trees killed by these pests. These pests cause large areas of dead snags and catastrophic tree failures that may cause injury or possible death to firefighters.

Discussion: There has been a noticeable increase in dead snags per acre, and affected trees are extremely dangerous. Falling branches and trees can result in injuries and even death. Each tree species dies in a different manner which causes different types of hazards. The threat is not limited to forested settings, as many of these trees in suburban settings are also affected.

Difference from Normal Conditions: Normal dying trees tend to break down and/or fall over time, and although falling dead (snags) and green trees remain a persistent threat to firefighter safety, large areas of standing insect killed Oak, Ash and Hemlock greatly increase snag exposure to firefighters. For example, EAB killed ash trees are a major threat as they start to deteriorate in as little as 6 months. No load stresses required to cause limbs or whole trees to break and shatter. Massive, unpredictable structure failures often result.

Concerns to Firefighters:

- Within the tree mortality areas, falling branches and trees along with snags will be a major concern due to density and decay rates.
- Dead and dying trees are a contributor to spot fires.
- Suppression strategies may not be understood by all cooperating resources.

Mitigation Measures:

- Brief and ensure firefighters are using situational awareness and mark hazard trees.
- Firefighters need to share valuable initial hazard tree “snag intelligence”.
- Create effective fuel breaks that reduce the snag exposure to ground resources.
 - May include indirect line and burnout operations.
 - May include specialized mechanical equipment.
- Consider alternative containment lines/management action points/point protection.
 - Protecting values at risk.
- Modify suppression strategies and tactics.
 - Consider disengaging fire at night fall.
- Establish safe mop up standards and expectations to limit exposure.
 - Cut perimeter snags and limit 100 percent mop-up.
- Establish clear priorities for safety if there is a conflict with resource objectives.
 - Clearly define Task, Purpose, End State.
- Ensure that the priority of firefighter safety and confinement/resource protection objectives are not misunderstood, or act in conflict.
- Outcomes of accidents are largely unpredictable; concentrate on the probable rather than the possible.

Additional: Coordinate with Volunteer Fire Departments, Forest Fire Wardens, and EMA’s regarding firefighter hazard tree safety. All entities must ensure firefighter safety is the number one priority, and that alternative suppression strategies may need to be implemented during wildfires.



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