

The Point of Origin

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Point of Origin

Awareness begins in your community

Fall 2012

The extended 2012 wildfire season demonstrates the value of partnerships

Jolene Ackerman, Wildland Urban Interface Coordinator, Wisconsin DNR



The most acute fire danger in Wisconsin occurs March through the end of May, after the snow is gone and before vegetation greens up. Much of southern Wisconsin experienced an extended fire season this year, as drought conditions kept fire danger high throughout most of the summer. By the end of summer, 1,300 wildfires burned 2,000 acres in DNR protection areas; 33 structures burned and another 427 were threatened, yet saved with fire suppression efforts. Fire departments assisted with suppression efforts and structure protection on nearly three-fourths of these fires. The main causes of fires have been debris burning, equipment, and power lines. The following highlights some of the larger fires, demonstrating the priceless value of partnerships during intense fire years, such as this one. The Wisconsin DNR would like to thank its partners for helping to protect the people, property, and natural resources in Wisconsin.

occurred on **January 7th**, when a broadcast burning project escaped the landowner's control and he called the Oakdale Fire Department and Tomah DNR for assistance.

■ Between **January and February**, traditionally a time for preparing for spring fire season, DNR fire crews and our fire department partners had already logged in 25 wildfires. Fires were numerous and burning statewide by March, calling for periodic suspension of burning permits.

■ A passing train caused a 94-acre marsh fire in Green Lake County on **March 20th**. Along with the DNR, seven fire departments and two hand crews were on scene to extinguish it.

■ An Adams County wildfire was started on **March 17th** by some folks burning bee hives in a fire pit. The wind picked up and blew the fire into the sur-

rounding long grass. The Adams and Quincy Fire Departments assisted the DNR and the fire was contained at 32 acres.

■ The Fitchburg Fire Department responded to a grass fire at Nevin Springs on **March 20th**. With assistance from DNR Wildlife staff and the Town of Madison, Oregon, Verona, Middleton, McFarland and Blooming Grove fire departments, the 32-acre fire was contained at a bike trail.

■ A wildfire was spotted at a boat landing in Brown County on **March 27th**. The Howard Fire Department set up Incident Command and ordered resources from Green Bay, Pulaski, Suamico, Hobart, and Ashwaubenon fire departments to protect nearby structures. The DNR assisted with wildland

(PARTNERSHIPS cont. on page 4)



Scene from the August 3rd Smokey Spur Fire in Portage County.

From the Editors...

Our purpose is to provide you with information about the services, products, and direction of the Wisconsin DNR and the various partners in protection, referring specifically to wildfire prevention, suppression, and outreach. Building partnerships is the key to success!

If you are interested in having an electronic copy of any of the articles for use in your own newsletter, web site, or other outreach tool, contact:

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Did you know? You can now get an annual burning permit without leaving home! All you have to do is either call 1-888-WIS-BURN (947-2876) or go to the DNR web site dnr.wi.gov and enter keyword 'burn permit.'

did you know?



The fire department will save my house, right?



Firefighters cannot help protect your house if they cannot reach it.

Amy Luebke, Wildland Urban Interface Specialist, Wisconsin DNR

People often assume that a fire engine will be parked in their driveway and firefighters will be actively defending their home if a wildfire approaches. During a bad fire day when a major wildfire is burning or when several smaller fires are occurring at the same time, it is unlikely there will be enough firefighting resources available to defend every home. That's why it is so important to follow Firewise recommendations on your property. Your home should be prepared in such a way that it can survive a wildfire even without protection from firefighters.

When firefighters are available to help defend homes, they must choose the homes they are best able to safely and effectively protect. First, firefighters must be able to find your home with the help of road and address signs. Then your home must have adequate access so that fire equipment can enter your property without being damaged. Before firefighters enter a property they also want to make sure that they can quickly exit as conditions can change quickly.

Can firefighters find your home?

Ensure that your home has a fire number sign at the end of your driveway which is easily visible from both directions of travel along the road. Cut back the vegetation until you have a clear view of the sign. Remember that during a wildfire, smoke or darkness can make it difficult to see your address. If your driveway is long or serves multiple residences, additional signs are helpful.

Can a fire engine fit down your driveway?

Your driveway should have a firmly packed surface, be wide enough to accommodate a large fire engine, and have

adequate overhead clearance. Long driveways and driveways with sharp curves may need to be even wider. Many communities have driveway ordinances that outline specific driveway requirements to address this issue. Tree branches and other plant vegetation above and along driveways should be trimmed back on a regular basis. Engines will also need room to turn around once they arrive at your home.

A locked gate could delay an emergency response to your property or could altogether prevent your home from receiving protection in the event of wildfire. Keep in mind that emergency responders may not have adequate time to force entry or cut through locked gates when multiple homes are threatened by a rapidly spreading wildfire.

Protecting homes from wildfire is a community effort. Do your part by following Firewise recommendations and providing adequate access for emergency responders.

Cut back vegetation around address and fire number signs.



Fire prevention efforts - Don't forget about Smokey!

Catherine Koele, Wildfire Prevention Specialist, Wisconsin DNR

Many fire departments are involved with fire prevention school programs and events. Fire prevention comes in different forms and it's important to remember that outdoor fire prevention for children can be just as critical as indoor fire prevention. Each year, juveniles are responsible for 5% to 10% of all forest fires that occur in Wisconsin. Correcting inappropriate behavior related to any fire play at an early age can prevent future problems both indoors and out.

Fire prevention starts with education and school programs are an excellent way to promote appropriate behavior. With knowledge, firefighters and educators can stop fires before they start. School programs are an important aspect of any fire prevention program and are normally broken down according to grade levels with some general guidelines listed below.

Pre-school - kindergarten - Programs intended for this age group will need to be short to meet the attention spans of younger children. The fire safety message delivered should concentrate on the danger of playing with matches. A visit with Smokey Bear is recommended, although, be ready for some children at this age to be frightened of Smokey. Consider using age appropriate fire safety videos, slide shows, and posters or flashcards of good fire vs. bad fire. Another idea is to simply read the True Story of Smokey Bear.

Kindergarten- 3rd grade - Programs at this age level should reinforce match and lighter safety as well as the dangers of fire. Smokey Bear appearances are recommended through 2nd grade. The consequences of carelessness should be discussed and tied to forest products with the older students. Students should be informed that fire can injure them. Introduce causes of fires and how to prevent them, especially with older students. Consider using videos, slide shows, fire safety games, Bad Campfire-Good Campfire card series, or even building a good campfire in the classroom. Age appropriate fire prevention or fire safety materials should be distributed.

Grades 4- 6 - Smokey Bear is not recommended at this age. Program ideas include personal protective equipment demonstrations, discussion of fires that have occurred locally, fire ecology discussions, suppression equipment demonstrations, and overviews of fire management. Utilize videos, slide shows and hands-on demonstrations to convey messages dealing with the causes of forest fires, consequences, and how to prevent wildfires from occurring.

Middle school- high school - Consider working with local science teachers and perhaps utilizing outdoor classrooms. Discussions of prescribed burning, fire suppression tactics and techniques, fire danger calculation, burning permits, the wildland urban interface, and wildfire safety is appropriate. Use local internet sources, videos and digital pictures, and

(SMOKEY cont. on page 7)



Smokey Bear appearances in the classroom can be an effective tool used to teach fire prevention and fire safety to younger children.

Fire Danger

Partnerships

(continued from page 1)

fire suppression. The fire burned mostly in marsh and lowland brush for a total of 35 acres.

■ A 35-acre wildfire threatened a subdivision in Fort Atkinson (Jefferson County) on **March 28**. Multiple fire departments were on the scene and all homes were protected.

April through June

■ Fire weather conditions in **April** resulted in the implementation of Emergency Burning Restrictions in the heavily storm damaged area in northwest Wisconsin on **April 7th**, just two days after the Governor made a visit to Siren for an update on storm recovery efforts.

■ On Easter Sunday, the Wisconsin DNR and National Weather Service issued a Red Flag Warning for nearly all of Wisconsin. A Red Flag Warning is issued when wind, temperature and humidity combine to produce conditions supporting extreme fire behavior, should a fire occur. Many municipalities suspended outdoor burning and even campfires in some cases, during this time of high fire danger.

■ Equipment was the cause of a 40-acre wildfire in the Joel Marsh Wildlife Area on **April 2nd**. On scene were the Clayton, Turtle Lake, and Apple River fire departments.

■ A 70-acre fire burned in Amberg on **April 8th** when an aspen tree fell on a power line. Containing the fire required DNR ground crews, air attack, and numerous trucks and volunteers from the Wausaukee, Amberg, and Pembine Fire Departments.

■ On **April 9th**, a wildland fire scorched 90 acres in Manitowoc County near Valders. The fire burned a shed and a barn requiring 17 fire departments to extinguish.

■ On **April 14th**, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Bad River Fire Department assisted DNR fire control to contain an Ashland County wildfire. Fireworks were determined to be the cause of the 45-acre fire.

■ The DNR assisted the Poy Sippi and Winneconne fire departments in extinguishing a 31-acre marsh fire in Winnebago County on **April 26th**, which was caused by a squirrel on a power line.

■ A Vilas County fire started **May 19th** when an aspen tree snapped off in strong winds and fell onto

a power line. The fire crowned in a dense, 80-foot tall red pine plantation. The Land O Lakes, Conover and Phelps volunteer fire departments worked on the fire, with the priority of structure protection. A spot fire, over 1/4 mile ahead of the fire, was detected by patrol. The Land O Lakes Fire was contained at 74 acres.

■ A 20-acre fire in Iron County was started by a lightning strike in a remote area. Access to the area was difficult; crews responded with canoes and pumps. The Bureau of Indian Affairs assisted the DNR with suppression efforts and mop up of the fire.

■ The end of **May**, traditionally a time of reprieve, resulted in the movement of DNR fire control equipment and personnel to assist with suppression efforts in Michigan. The Duck Lake Fire, started by a lightning strike, burned 21,069 acres over a three-week period. A total of 136 structures were lost, including 49 homes and cabins, a store, and a motel.

July through September

■ Nearly 500 wildfires burned over the **summer** months. A high percentage of the fires were caused by equipment, which is normal this time of year as people are mowing, harvesting crops, and working or playing outdoors. By the beginning of July, emergency burning restrictions (EBR) were put in place in 11 counties in the southern third of the state. EBRs limit activities that can result in the start of wildfires, such as outdoor burning, ash/charcoal disposal, fireworks, campfires, and smoking. Many local municipalities implemented their own outdoor burning bans at this time. By mid-July, EBRs were in place in 17 counties and campfires were banned in many state parks.

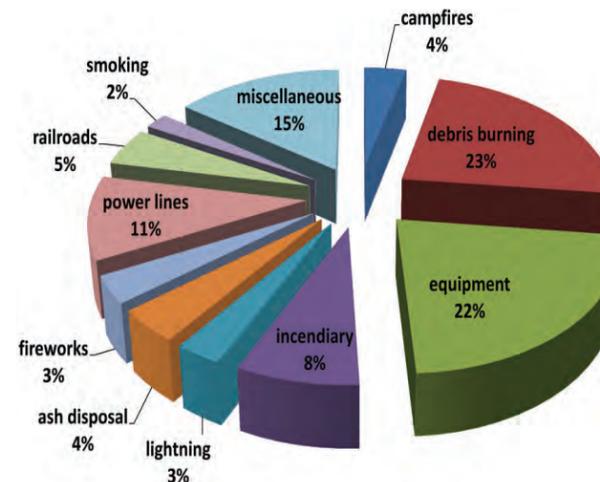
■ On **July 6th**, a 41-acre Wood County fire resulted when a haybine cutting head struck a large rock; sparks ignited the surrounding 6' tall marsh grass. Firefighters from the Rudolph Fire Department and DNR worked to contain the wildfire and protect nearby structures. Peat fires were a problem for several days.

■ A 24-acre Juneau County fire began along the I-94 interstate on **July 16th** when a vehicle tire blew. Numerous fire departments were on scene and an Army National Guard Blackhawk helicopter assisted with water drops on the fire.

■ DNR fire control staff assisted the Rudolph Fire Department on another marsh fire on **August 1st**. The fire was contained at 102 acres, yet continued to burn for days underground in the peat.

■ The Smokey Spur Fire burned 20 acres in Portage County on **August 3rd**. The fire burned from an open field into a red pine plantation where it quickly turned into a running crown fire, producing 100 foot flame lengths and intense heat. Several fire departments were on scene assisting with fire suppression and protecting homes in the area.

2012 spring and summer wildfire causes.



During the summer months, equipment becomes the number one cause of wildfires.

Barnes-Drummond Community Wildfire Protection Plan success story

Marty Kasinskas, Wildland Urban Interface Forester, Wisconsin DNR

A picture from Potawatomi Firewise Day with guest speaker Lu Peet (Barnes town chair). Left to right standing: Greg Roman, Dianne Hess, Dawn Pitman, Lu Peet & Mary Bielke. Left to right kneeling: Tom Jacobson, Vern Wilcox, Lenny Benser & Jeff Brittan



In 2004, community leaders from the Towns of Barnes and Drummond in Bayfield County came together to discuss wildfire issues in the area and to begin the creation of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) which would benefit their communities in preventing and aiding in the suppression of wildfires. Over the next year they met and gathered information that would give them a strategic direction to educate their citizens and reduce wildfire fuel loading in their jurisdictions. The result was the creation of the Barnes-Drummond CWPP which was adopted by the Towns in December 2005. The plan identified and prioritized educational opportunities and areas of federal, state, county, town, and private lands where fuel treatment projects were necessary to reduce the threat of wildfire to their communities and infrastructure.

One of the most noteworthy goals of this plan was the creation of a Firewise Community in the Potawatomi Property Owners Association. This brought great success to the plan. By partnering with property owners in Potawatomi, the town leaders had a direct line to one of the most populated rural areas of Bayfield County. The success of fuels mitigation projects and educational events in the Potawatomi area was and will be tremendous due to their new partnership.

Six years after the CWPP was adopted, all objectives in the plan have been met or exceeded.

Some of the same community leaders who initiated the Barnes/Drummond CWPP are back at the table to update the CWPP by refreshing the wildfire prevention and fuels mitigation strategies the communities will undertake over the next five years.