



On The Line: Fighting Wildfires In Vermont Forests

The Agency of Natural Resources has a long history with forest fire suppression, dating back to 1904 when a Forestry Commission and the Town Forest Fire Warden system were created by the Vermont Legislature. This was in response to devastating forest fires in 1903 that burned thousands of acres of timberland. The Forestry Commission soon became the Vermont Forest Service, and through many changes in titles and missions, this sector of state government is now housed within the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. The current Town Forest Fire Warden system is overseen by the

Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR).

Once again, this past spring contained a long dry stretch of weather featuring many consecutive days of very high fire danger. FPR worked with the National Weather Service and Division of Emergency Security and Homeland Security (DEMHS) to increase public awareness of fire danger through press releases and special weather statements. The Town Forest Fire Warden system again proved valuable in keeping what could have been a disastrous spring fire season in check through the regulating "Permits to Kindle Fire". Annually Town Forest Fire Wardens issue in excess of 20,000 fire permits and provide a local resource to their towns for wildland fire prevention, education and suppression. So far in 2013, 116 fires have been reported by the fire wardens to FPR, totaling 271 acres burned.

FPR fire staff are working closely with DEMHS to better respond to wildland fire and to provide enhanced training to the Town Forest Fire Wardens. Fire wardens and fire departments needing assistance are urged to call DEMHS for access to FPR staff and equipment dedicated to wildland fire response throughout the year.

Also in the spring of 2013, there were 3 prescribed burns conducted by FPR with assistance from the VT Fish and Wildlife, DEC, the National Weather Service and the US Forest Service. These burns were successfully completed and fulfilled multiple objectives on 55 acres of Wildlife Management Areas.

Within the Agency, there is a small cadre of employees who maintain specific qualifications for Interagency Fire assignments across the country and Canada. Last year, seven firefighters were mobilized for various fireline positions to Idaho, Montana, Missouri, Nevada and Minnesota. This past spring, fourteen firefighters attended the required fire refresher and in May, twelve firefighters passed the work capacity test at the arduous level, carrying 45 lbs. over 3 miles in 45 minutes or less.

FPR is also involved with firefighter trainings through the Vermont Fire Academy Firefighter Level 1 Certification; is represented on the Northeast Forest Fire Protection Commission, the Northeastern Forest Fire Supervisors and the Vermont Fire Service Training Council.