



Central Pine Barrens Wildfire Task Force

Theodore Kern, Chair

Captain Tim Byrnes and Baycan Fidelis, Co-vice Chairs

Wildfire Task Force Meeting Wednesday, March 26, 2025 at 7:00 pm Eastport Fire Department

Ted Kern called the meeting to order at 1915 and led the pledge of allegiance and a moment of silence.

Captain Tim Byrnes conducted attendance; a quorum was achieved.
Motion to approve the minutes from August 13, 2024 was made by Ed Schneyer.

Administrative

Timothy C. Hubbard
Member

Maria Z. Moore
Member

Daniel J. Panico
Member

Edward P. Romaine
Member

Member attendance

Ted Kern and Andrew House from Ridge Fire Department, Nick Gibbons from Suffolk County Parks, Joe Kuethen from Suffolk County FRES, Rodney Trafford, Rick Nydegger, Lou Stellato from Hampton Bays Fire Department, Donald Metcalf and Thomas Glover from Westhampton Beach Fire Department, Baycan Fideli from Riverhead Fire Department, Ed Schneyer from Southampton Chiefs Association, Chris Hulse, Virginia Haughn from Eastport Fire Department, Phil Thompson from Wading River Fire Department, Michael Gadman, Bryan Vargas from 106th Rescue Wing, Chris Steel from Manorville Fire Department, and Tim Byrnes from NYS DEC Forest Rangers, Bed Hubbard from Quogue Fire Department, David Dougherty from Flanders Fire Department, Christopher Timpone, Dan Roessler, Michael Langulla from SCPD Arson Squad, Alex Glassing from East Quogue, John Wernet from NYS DEC, Anthony Todaro from Brookhaven Town, Rich Bernier from Rocky Point Fire Department and Andrew Smith from Town of Riverhead Fire Marshalls Office..

Additional attendees included Judy Jakobsen, Jason Smith and Catherine Drew from the Central Pine Barrens Joint Planning and Policy Commission.

Presentations

National Weather Service Spring Outlook – Judy Jakobsen, Central Pine Barrens Commission

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Judy Jakobsen presented the Spring weather outlook prepared by Joe Pollina of the National Weather Service. Please refer to the attached presentation for detailed charts and data. Judy reported that recent unsettled weather has improved drought conditions compared to earlier this year, and this trend is expected to continue over the coming weeks and months. Above-normal temperatures are also anticipated during this period. These warmer conditions could lead to faster fuel drying, while normal to above-normal precipitation may contribute to vegetation green-up.

2025 Westhampton Pines Fire – Ed Schneyer, Suffolk County FRES

Ed Schneyer reported on the response to the March 8, 2025 Wildfires in the Central Pine Barrens. He outlined the conditions that contributed to the fire's spread, including a High Fire Weather Index, dry fuels, and weather conducive to active fire behavior. The report included details about evacuations, community impacts, structural damage, and a firefighter injury. Mr. Schneyer also reviewed the coordinated response by NYS and local agencies, including law enforcement and fire departments. He described the use of air assets, heavy equipment for fire line construction, and land operations that played key roles in containing the fire.

A follow-up discussion focused on interdepartmental communication and the importance of reviewing and updating the Wildfire Task Force Plan. Ted Kern requested volunteers to assist with the update and encouraged interested parties to speak with him after the meeting.

Prescribed Fire Update – Jason Smith, Central Pine Barrens Commission

Jason Smith shared that the 2025 fire season began actively in the Central Pine Barrens. The prescribed fire crew arrived on March 8 and immediately began supporting suppression efforts. The Commission's prescribed fire team assisted local partners, firefighters, and first responders in mitigating hot spots and performing mop-up operations to help bring the wildfire under control.

The crew will remain on-site through the end of May to conduct prescribed burns in grasslands and woodlands, aimed at reducing wildfire risk and improving ecosystem health. Prescribed burns are scheduled to take place in forested areas near the Rocky Point, David A. Sarnoff, and Otis Pike Pine Barrens State Forests.

The Science and Stewardship staff will continue monitoring forest responses in both wildfire-affected and prescribed burn areas throughout the season.

Program Updates

Central Pine Barrens Update – Judy Jakobsen, Central Pine Barrens Commission

Judy Jakobsen provided an update on the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for the Town of Southampton. The Commission has been awarded a \$185,000 grant to develop this CWPP, which will cover more than 29,000 acres and enhance wildfire preparedness. This will be the second CWPP developed by the Commission, following the Ridge–Manorville–Calverton plan.

CWPPs aim to reduce wildfire risk while protecting residents, property, and natural resources. These plans help identify needs such as hazard mitigation, structure protection, and emergency preparedness, and they also improve community access to funding and resources for wildfire prevention and response.

Judy also reported that Fire Weather reporting has begun. The Commission issues a daily Fire Danger Weather Rating when the risk is moderate or higher. Those interested in receiving these updates should contact Judy Jakobsen.

NYWIMA Update – Catherine Drew, Central Pine Barrens Commission

Catherine Drew reported that the 2024 New York Wildfire and Incident Management Academy (NYWIMA) was held October 17–27 at Brookhaven National Laboratory, with additional academies conducted in December and February 2025 and offered free training to volunteer firefighters in Nassau and Suffolk counties. Planning is now underway for the 2025 Academy and Task Force members are encouraged to submit suggestions or requests for courses to Catherine Drew (cdrew@scwa.com) or Judy Jakobsen.

Next Meeting

June 25, 2025 location tbd

September 17, 2025

November 19, 2025



Central Pine Barrens Wildfire Task Force

Theodore Kern, Chair

Captain Tim Byrnes and Baycan Fidelis, Co-vice Chairs

Wildfire Task Force Meeting Wednesday, June 25, 2025 at 7:00 pm Wading River Fire Department

Baycan Fideli called the meeting to order at 1915 and led the pledge of allegiance and a moment of silence.

Baycan Fideli conducted attendance; a quorum was achieved. Motion to approve the minutes from March 26, 2025 was made by Virginia Haughn.

Timothy C. Hubbard
Member

Maria Z. Moore
Member

Daniel J. Panico
Member

Edward P. Romaine
Member

Administrative

Member attendance

Anthony Todaro from the Town of Brookhaven, Michael Langella and Christopher Timpone from the SCPD Arson Squad, Jack Blaum from Suffolk FRES, Rodney Trafford from Hampton Bays Fire Department, Andrew Smith and Liam Keating from the Town of Riverhead, Mark Donnelly, Kathryn Thompson, and Phil Thompson from Wading River FD, Mike Gadman and Bryan Vargas from the 106th Rescue Wing, Virginia Haughn from Eastport Fire Department, Rich Bernier from Rocky Point FD

Additional attendees included Judy Jakobsen and Catherine Drew from the Central Pine Barrens Joint Planning and Policy Commission.

Presentations

NYWIMA Update

Catherine Drew reported that the 2025 New York Wildfire and Incident Management Academy (NYWIMA) will be held October 18–24 at Brookhaven National Laboratory, with an additional academy planned in December for the Wildland Chainsaw Class. The website will be updated with class information once available.

PSEG Update

Mr. Fideli reported on behalf of Mr. Kern on PSEG Long Island activities.

Over the past six months, PSE&G has conducted helicopter inspections of high-voltage transmission lines to assess vegetation and infrastructure conditions. Follow-up vegetation cleanups were completed in CSET, along the south lines, and across major east–west corridors to prevent vegetation

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from contacting lines and reducing the risk of fires caused by falling or damaged components.

PSE&G is also addressing low-level vegetation concerns in low-wire areas. Cleanup efforts have focused on the south side and the Middle Island Ridge region, where last summer's dry conditions resulted in thick, hazardous ground vegetation. Multiple vendors are assisting with this work.

Finally, PSE&G is collaborating with Suffolk County OEM to develop a new outage reporting system designed to improve communication about downed lines, outage severity, affected regions, and estimated restoration times. The new Level 1/Level 2 reporting system will be shared with stakeholders once finalized.

Fire Weather Update

Judy Jakobsen reported that since May 1st, the region has remained in low fire danger conditions due to seasonal green-up, humidity, and generally favorable weather patterns. Although there were a few moderate days earlier in the spring, fire danger has remained predominantly low and is expected to stay low until conditions potentially dry out in July. Fire danger ratings are available on the Commission's website, and mailing notifications are sent when conditions reach moderate or higher. Suffolk County Fire Rescue also provides daily fire danger reports. Statewide monitoring shows similar low fire danger across most of New York, with only isolated exceptions.

Prescribed Fire Update

Judy Jakobsen reported that the 2025 prescribed fire season has concluded in the Central Pine Barrens. The five-member crew assisted DEC with burns conducted in Sarnoff, Monmouth Point, and Curran's Field. In total, the Commission supported 15 prescribed burns covering 321 acres—308 acres of grassland and 13 acres of woodland—made possible by favorable weather conditions. No additional burns are currently scheduled, as July and August are typically too hot and recent weather has limited opportunities. BNL has been attempting more woodland burns in June when conditions allow.

During discussion, questions were raised regarding prescribed fire planning in the Westhampton area near Route 31. It was noted that the grant funding secured earlier this year is being used to develop the Southampton Pine Barrens Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Program Updates

Central Pine Barrens Update – Judy Jakobsen

Judy Jakobsen provided an update on the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for the Town of Southampton. The Commission has been awarded a \$185,000 grant to develop this CWPP, which will cover more than 29,000 acres and strengthen wildfire preparedness. This is the Commission's second CWPP, following the Ridge–Manorville–Calverton plan.

The CWPP aims to reduce wildfire risk while protecting residents, property, and natural resources. It will identify priorities for hazard mitigation, structure protection, and emergency preparedness, and will help the community access funding and resources for wildfire prevention and response. A stakeholder meeting will be held in the fall.

Brush Fire Update

Phil Thompson from the Suffolk County Water Authority provided an update on the new water line installation along Nugent Drive, a joint project between SCWA and the Town of Riverhead to improve water supply in areas with contaminated wells. Multiple new hydrants, spaced approximately 800 to 1,000 feet apart, are being installed along the roadway.

The long-term plan includes extending the water line past the residential area toward the power lines and then connecting south toward Pine Ridge and Riverhead Road, though there are ongoing coordination challenges with county and NYS Parks property. The project will ultimately tie into a three-million-gallon reservoir and connect to existing fire wells near Connecticut Avenue toward Manorville. These improvements will significantly enhance firefighting capability in an area where water supply has historically been limited. A map will be circulated when available.

Next Meeting

November 19, 2025



Central Pine Barrens Wildfire Task Force

Theodore Kern, Chair
Captain Tim Byrnes and Baycan Fidelis, Co-vice Chairs

Wildfire Task Force Meeting Wednesday, November 15, 2025 at 7:00 pm Eastport Fire Department

Ted Kern called the meeting to order at 1915 and led the pledge of allegiance and a moment of silence.

Baycan Fidei conducted attendance; a quorum was achieved.

Motion to approve the minutes from August 13, 2025 was made by Phil Thompson and seconded by Andrew House.

Administrative

Ryan P. McGarry
Chairman

Member attendance

Jerome Halpin
Member

Maria Z. Moore
Member

Daniel J. Panico
Member

Edward P. Romaine
Member

Ted Kern and Andrew House from Ridge Fire Department, Nick Gibbons from Suffolk County Parks, Rodney Trafford from Hampton Bays Fire Department, Chris Timpone, John Boreshesky, Michael Langella and Richard Brooks from Suffolk County Police, Baycan Fidelis from Riverhead Fire Department, Ed Schneyer from Southampton Chiefs Association and SC FRES, Anthony Todaro from Brookhaven Town, Chris Hulse, Virginia Haughn from Eastport Fire Department, Phil Thompson, Hunter Thompson and Kathryn Thompson from Wading River Fire Department, Ronald Tedesco and Robert Yatsko from Gabreski ANG, Christopher Timpone, Dan Roessler, Michael Langulla from SCPD Arson Squad, Brian Herbig and Mike Draws from PSEG, Rich Bernier from Rocky Point Fire Department and Liam Keating from Town of Riverhead Fire Marshalls Office..

Additional attendees included Judy Jakobsen and Catherine Drew from the Central Pine Barrens Joint Planning and Policy Commission.

Presentations

New York Wildfire and Incident Management Academy (NYWIMA), Catherine Drew, Central Pine Barrens Commission

Catherine Drew reported that one NWCG class and three ICS classes are scheduled for December and are currently at capacity, with approximately 100+ participants expected.

Statistics from the October 2025 session were also provided, noting 115 participants across 9 classes.

Planning is underway for the 2026 training session, and members are encouraged to contact NYWIMA with any course requests or suggestions.

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Fire Weather & Prescribed Fire Update, Judy Jakobsen, Central Pine Barrens Commission

Judy Jakobsen provided an overview of current fire weather conditions, noting elevated fire danger, dry fuels, and weather conducive to active fire behavior. She invited members to request inclusion on the daily fire danger report distribution list.

Ms. Jakobsen also reported that planning is underway for the 2026 prescribed fire season. The Commission is in the process of recruiting a five-person prescribed fire crew, which will support grassland and woodland burns from March through June. The objective of these efforts is to reduce wildfire risk and improve ecosystem health.

Planned burn areas include Rocky Point, David A. Sarnoff, and Otis Pike Pine Barrens State Forests.

Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), Judy Jakobsen, Central Pine Barrens Commission

Judy Jakobsen provided an update on the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for the Town of Southampton. The Commission has been awarded a \$185,000 grant to develop the plan, which will cover more than 29,000 acres and enhance regional wildfire preparedness.

This will be the second CWPP developed by the Commission, following the Ridge–Manorville–Calverton CWPP.

CWPPs are designed to:

- Reduce wildfire risk
- Protect residents, property, and natural resources
- Identify needs such as hazard mitigation, structure protection, and emergency preparedness
- Improve access to funding and resources for wildfire prevention and response

Future stakeholder meetings will be scheduled, and all relevant agencies will be notified.

PSEG Update, Mike Draws, PSEG

Mike Draws provided an update on PSEG's vegetation management activities, including:

- Oak tree removal
- Pine clearing
- General vegetation management within utility rights-of-way

Mr. Draws noted that current practices involve cutting and stacking material in a manner that does not impede access to fire roads.

Additional updates include:

- Transmission trimming program underway, with approximately 200 miles planned
- Work is being conducted by contractors beginning in December
- Additional maintenance scheduled for April

Mr. Draws also introduced Brian Herbig from PSEG.

Wildfire Detection Technology (AI Camera System), Ted Kern

Ted Kern presented on AI-based smoke detection camera systems currently utilized by utilities.

Key points include:

- System provides early wildfire detection using cameras mounted on towers
- Capable of determining approximate fire location (GPS coordinates)
- Includes 24/7 third-party monitoring with real-time alerts

Mr. Kern highlighted several benefits:

- Improved situational awareness
- Faster response times
- Enhanced monitoring of weather conditions and vegetation, particularly in remote areas

A motion was made to close the meeting by Andrew House and second by Ed Schneyer

Next Meeting

March 25, 2026 location Manorville