



Central Pine Barrens Wildfire Task Force

Theodore Kern, Chair

Captain Tim Byrnes and Baycan Fidelis, Co-vice Chairs

Wildfire Task Force Meeting

Wednesday, March 27, 2024 at 7:00 pm

Westhampton Beach 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 November 30, 2023 by Ed Schneyer, seconded by Andrew House.

Robert T. Calarco
Chairman

Administrative

Timothy C. Hubbard
Member

Member attendance

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, Jack Blaum from Suffolk County FRES, Rodney Trafford from Hampton Bays Fire Department, Darryl Schunk and Thomas Glover from Westhampton Beach Fire Department, Baycan Fideli from Riverhead Fire Department, Ed Schneyer from Southampton Chiefs Association, Virginia Haughn from Eastport Fire Department, Rich Bova and Phil Thompson from Suffolk County Water Authority, Sean Marshall from NY Air National Guard, Joe Pollina from National Weather Service, Chris Steel from Manorville Fire Department, and Tim Byrnes from NYS DEC Forest Rangers.

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

Baycan Fideli started the meeting with a safety message. He highlighted the importance of paying attention when working roadside at brushfires.

Presentations

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Suffolk County Water Authority Fire Department Outreach Program – Phil Thompson

Phil Thompson discussed the relationship of elevation to water pressure. The higher the elevation the lower the water pressure. Maps are available to fire departments with pressure zone boundaries to help when it comes to fire. Suffolk County Water also offers personalized presentations to

fire departments for their benefit.

Mr. Thompson related this to the Pine Barrens. He outlined that there is limited water pressure in the Core Preservation Area. His presentation outlines where fire wells are in the area, and discussed wells vs. hydrants. He also stressed knowing what equipment neighboring fire departments and having compatible equipment to operate it. He stressed to please check equipment to make sure it is operating correctly

Joe Pollina, National Weather Service – Spring/Summer Outlook

Described the spring outlook, March had 7.8 inches of rain this year. Temperature has been about 6 degrees above normal. The rest of Spring is expected to have near normal or above normal precipitation and temperatures. The Summer forecast is similar.

Polly Weigand, Central Pine Barrens Commission – Air Curtain Burner

The Central Pine Barrens Commission is working with SUNY ESF and DEC with a test of the Air Curtain Burner. This efficient machine helps consume large material effected by the southern pine beetle and evasive species. A study will be done to determine the effects to the air quality. This machine is portable and can be brought to different locations and effectively burn the material quickly with little ash remaining. Ms. Weigand also gave an update on SPB. Suppression is continuing to be done but it continues to spread, and more work is being done to thin the area surrounding the affected trees. Lastly, Ms. Weigand discussed the Northern Long Eared Bat, now that it is considered endangered, prescribed fire and Southern Pine Beetle clearing has been limited in the last year.

Francois de la Roche, Team Rubicon

Mr. de la Roche discussed Team Rubicon's mission and explained that it is a veteran-led humanitarian organization, built to serve communities after disasters and crises. Locally Team Rubicon has aided with environmental issues. They work with the DEC with trail clearing. They are equipped with 30 sawyers that can help cut trees effected by Southern Pine Beetle.

Program Updates

Central Pine Barrens (Judy Jakobsen, Central Pine Barrens) Ms. Jakobsen updated the Wildfire Task Force on recent Law Enforcement activities. The Pine Barrens has 3 Enforcement officers that works with agencies to oversee clearing, dumping, and land use issues in the Pine Barrens. 104 incidents were addressed in 2023. 38 have already been documented in 2024. Ms. Jakobsen alerted the members that they have 20 cameras, including FLOCK cameras, located throughout the Pine Barrens that help capture dumpers.

Fire Weather reporting starts with brush fire season. The Pine Barrens Commission issues the Fire Danger Weather Rating daily. Reports are sent out daily when the level is moderate or above. To sign up for these updates, please see Judy Jakobsen.

Prescribed Fire (Polly Weigand, Central Pine Barrens) Ms. Weigand discussed the prescribed fire progress under the DEC leadership. 3,300 piles were burned in Sarnoff and 30 in Currans. The Commission has a Type 6 engine that helps assist with the burns and helps support Forest

Rangers, BNL, Fish and Wildlife and the DEC. For Spring, grassland burns will be in Otis Pike and in Eastport. Additionally burns are planned in Sarnoff, Ridge Conservation area, and Upton Reserve at BNL. Acres burned is expected to be about 7000 acres by the end of the burn season. If any member would like to sign up to assist as a volunteer with the prescribed burns, please sign up through the DEC.

NYWIMA Update (Catherine Drew) Catherine Drew stated that the 2024 fire academy will be held from October 17-27, 2024 at Brookhaven National Laboratory. If any members of the Task Force have suggestions or requests for classes they would like to see, please let Catherine Drew (cdrew@scwa.com) or Judy Jakobsen know.

Next Meeting November 2024



Central Pine Barrens Wildfire Task Force

Theodore Kern, Chair

Captain Tim Byrnes and Baycan Fidelis, Co-vice Chairs

Wildfire Task Force Meeting

Tuesday, August 11, 2024

Rocky Point Fire Department

Ted Kern called the meeting to order at 1906 and led the pledge of allegiance and a moment of silence.

Member attendance

Ted Kern from Ridge Fire Department, Joe Kuethen from Suffolk County Fire Rescue, Jack Blaum from Suffolk County FRES, Rodney Trafford from Hampton Bays Fire Department, Baycan Fideli from Riverhead Fire Department, Bryan Vargas from 106th Rescue Wing.

Timothy C. Hubbard
Member

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

Maria Z. Moore
Member

Baycan Fideli started the meeting with a safety message.

Daniel J. Panico
Member

Program Updates

Edward P. Romaine
Member

NYWIMA Update (Catherine Drew) Catherine Drew announced that the 2024 Fire Academy will take place from October 17–27, 2024, at Brookhaven National Laboratory. The academy will offer NWCG and All-Hazard courses, with registration details available at www.nywima.com. Additional courses, including Heavy Equipment Boss and Chainsaw training, are scheduled for December, though details are not yet available.

Update on PSEG Long Island Activities (Ted Kern) Ted Kern provided an update on changes in the insurance industry affecting PSEG. Due to shifts in wildfire-related insurance policies, utilities now have fewer opportunities to file claims for wildfire losses. Industry-wide, a \$50 million cap has been placed on claims.

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Mr. Kern also reported that PSEG's vegetation management team has completed maintenance on 250 miles of transmission circuits and 1,400 miles of distribution circuits. This work has included the removal of:

- 2,000 vine locations
- 4,000 trees
- 2,000 large limbs

He noted that tree health has been impacted by the Southern Pine Beetle and Spotted Lanternfly. Mike Draws met with Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) to discuss the effects of the Pine Beetle at the lab. BNL is monitoring and addressing its impact on their transmission lines separately.

To enhance wildfire preparedness, PSEG has formed a Wildfire Assessment Team and introduced Wildfire Public Safety training, ensuring all employees understand how to minimize wildfire risks at PSEG facilities. Additionally, the company now routinely sends fire weather alerts and safety messages to employees and managers to help reduce wildfire risks.

Prescribed Fire Update (Judy Jakobsen, Central Pine Barrens) Judy Jakobsen distributed a prescribed fire table summarizing prescribed fire statistics and burn types from 1999 to 2024. The Central Pine Barrens Commission's five-member crew, in collaboration with DEC Forest Rangers, conducted prescribed burns on 371 acres, including 51 acres of woodland and 320 acres of grasslands. Over the course of the season, 31 controlled burns were performed. However, limitations arose due to protections for the Long-Eared Bat.

Wildfire Plan and Task Force Membership (Ted Kern) Ted Kern emphasized the need to revisit the Wildfire Plan in 2025 and review membership in the Wildfire Task Force. He also noted that this meeting had low attendance, urging agencies to make a greater effort to participate.

Suggestions for future speakers and discussion topics include:

- A presentation from Gabreski Air Base on helicopter operations (water bucket training)
- Key lessons from recent California wildfires

New Business

Next Meeting November 2024 (tentative)