

Forestry Notes



Wildfires in New Jersey

What Causes Them? What can you do about it?

People cause 99% of wildfires in New Jersey

Causes of fire	Percent of wildfires caused by people
Arson	53%
Children	15%
Smoking	12%
Miscellaneous	9%
Campfires	4%
Equipment use	3%
Debris fires	2%
Railroad operation	1%
	Percent caused by nature
Lightning	1%

People-caused fires are preventable

- ◆ **Arson fires**, willfully and maliciously set, cause the most wildfires.
- ◆ **Children** playing with matches and lighters is the next major cause.
- ◆ **Careless smoking** - discarding lit cigarettes, cigars, pipe heels, and matches.
- ◆ **Miscellaneous causes** are lumped together such as resulting from a car wreck, spreading from a house fire, or fireworks.
- ◆ **Campfires** left unattended, adjacent fuels and faulty campfire rings result in wildfires.
- ◆ **Careless equipment use** such as cutting torches, parking equip. with a hot muffler in high grass, or using chain saws with poorly maintained spark arresters.
- ◆ **Debris fires** — open burning without a permit is prohibited.
- ◆ **Railroad fires** still occur because of un-maintained right-of-way, spark arresters, and pieces of hot brake shoes.

Lightning fires are not preventable

Lightning fires are caused by nature.

New Jersey Wildfires

Disastrous wildfires have occurred many times in New Jersey's history.

Here are a few statistics:

- ◆ In 2008 two fires burned in the Wharton State Forest on 2,000 acres.
- ◆ In 2007 a wildfire claimed 15,360 acres and destroyed three homes in the Warren Grove area.

On an April weekend in 1963 wildfires burned 183,000 acres, 186 homes, 197 other buildings, and causing 7 deaths.

- ◆ In 1997 an 800-acre wildfire burned over 800 acres and damaged 53 homes.
- ◆ In 1995 one wildfire burned over 19,225 acres.
- ◆ In 1930 267,547 acres burned and a huge fire leveled the town of Forked River.
- ◆ In 1838 179,000 acres burned in Burlington and Monmouth counties.
- ◆ In 1871 50,000 acres burned in the Bass River Area.

In 2009, three hundred and thirty two fires burned 500 acres of vegetation in New Jersey. By early April 2010 more than double the number of fires than in 2009 had already burned.

New Jersey Surprises

New Jersey is well known as having the highest population per square mile of any other state in the U.S.

Yet most people are surprised to learn that:

- ◆ Forty-five (45)% of New Jersey is forested and wildfires can burn anywhere in New Jersey's forests.
- ◆ There is an average of 1500 wildfires per year state-wide in New Jersey.
- ◆ In the average year, about 7,000 acres of wildland resources, homes, other personal property, and even more tragically, human lives are sometimes lost.
- ◆ Another surprise is that 99% of new Jersey's wildfires are caused by people.
- ◆ Only 1% of NJ wildfires are caused by lightning. This contrasts to the western US forests where the majority of wildfires are caused by lightning.

You Can Help Prevent Wildfires

Here are ten ways you can help prevent wildfires:

1. Teach children about the danger of playing with matches and lighters.
2. Assure that barbeque stoves are stable, and the area 10 feet around has no burnable materials.
3. Dispose of hot charcoal briquettes by soaking them in water until cool.
4. Clear leaves and brush 10 feet away from a campfire ring before lighting.
5. Never leave a campfire unattended.
6. Grind out cigars, cigarette, and pipe tobacco in the dirt.
7. Never smoke while hiking, horseback riding, or trail biking.
8. Use the ashtrays while in cars or trucks.
9. Keep spark arresters clean on chainsaws, mowers and leaf blowers.
10. Be extra careful with fires on hot, dry, and windy days.



Wildfire photo from NJFFS B-10 Paramount Fire collection



Campfire photo by Charlie Newlon

To report a
fire
CALL:
911



Wildfire photo by John Matel