



West Virginia Division of Forestry
www.wvforestry.com
Joe Manchin III, Governor
Randy Dye, Director/State Forester

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A century-long dedication Division of Forestry keeps West Virginia's forestland safe from fire

Charleston, W.Va. - The West Virginia Division of Forestry (DOF) has been protecting the state's forest resources since 1908 when more than 1.7 million acres of forestland were destroyed by fire. This devastation prompted the West Virginia Legislature to enact the Reform Law of 1909 to protect our forests, the state's only renewable resource, and gave the DOF the authority to confine, extinguish or suppress fires throughout the state. Today, the DOF is responsible for protecting nearly 12-million acres of forestland across West Virginia.

To help facilitate the protection of West Virginia's forests from fire, the wildfire protection program focuses on three areas: prevention, preparedness and suppression.

Prevention

A familiar face in the fight against forest fires, Smokey Bear is an icon that has been teaching wildfire prevention for 65 years. Together with DOF personnel, Smokey journeys to West Virginia's schools, fairs, festivals and other community events to share tips on fire safety and remind every generation that they can help prevent wildfires.

Another method used to help prevent forest fires is the Firewise West Virginia program. This program targets homeowners in high-risk fire areas and provides education and assistance in developing plans and strategies aimed at minimizing potential wildfire damage.

Protecting the state's forestland is a monumental task and requires the help of many partners and various tools. With data collected from 13 Remote Automated Weather Stations (RAWS) placed across West Virginia, Forestry officials can predict fire behavior and wildfire danger. Information collected is used to notify the public and local partners of the potential for dangerous fire weather.

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Preparedness

To aid in the battle against wildfires, the DOF provides training, personal protective gear and excess military equipment to partners who assist with fire suppression efforts. The division also conducts nationally accredited wildfire suppression training that qualifies personnel to assist in national wildfire emergencies. In recent years, DOF personnel have assisted with fire emergencies in Alaska, California, Louisiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Texas and Wyoming.

Suppression

The DOF doesn't work alone when it comes to fighting forest fires. Partners such as volunteer fire departments, local fire wardens, the National Guard and trained volunteers aid in wildfire suppression as well. Volunteer firefighters are usually the first responders to the scene of a forest fire and are credited with saving many acres from wildfire destruction.

Even though there is a danger of forest fires year-round, most occur in the spring and fall. During these seasons, forests dry out quicker on warm windy days making leaves, twigs, branches and brush ample fuel for a fire.

Foresters advise residents to follow the fire prevention safety restrictions to keep themselves and their homes safe, and to avoid the risk of wildfires in woodlands, fields and parks.

- From March 1 through May 31 and from Oct. 1 through Dec. 31, outdoor burning is prohibited between the hours of 7 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- All outdoor fires must have a safety strip no smaller than 10-feet wide around the material being burned.
- All fires must be completely extinguished and not left unattended for any period of time.

Be aware that periods of unusually low precipitation increase the likelihood of severe wildfires. If your region is experiencing a dry season, especially with high winds, exercise extra caution when in contact with any flammable materials.

To learn more about the Division of Forestry, contact Ben Webster, fire staff assistant, at 304-558-2788.

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