

Bethlehem Authority Police Report

MAY 2022

Eric Yeakel

1. On Sunday 4/24/22 I was notified by the Authority Forester, who was actively planting trees, about a fire that may be on Authority Land in Tunkhannock Twp. After a few phone calls I found that the fire was definitely on our land. Upon arrival I found the Tunkhannock Twp Fire Chief who explained DCNR discovered the fire and is in command for the event. It was not determined where or how the fire started at this time. I remained on scene until nightfall after all Volunteer Fire Depts had been released. I was able to locate the DCNR Incident Commander at that time and was informed that everything was under control. DCNR personnel would return early in the morning and sweep for any hot spots.



After speaking with DCNR I patrolled around the fire site. The wild fire had burned an area that was part of the prescribed burn that occurred last year. The wild fire also burned a portion that was prepared to be part of a prescribed burn this year. DCNR personnel contained the wild fire by burning inward from the fire lanes. The area is too thick with scrub oak and other vegetation for vehicles or equipment to gain access so burning was the best option. The DCNR had a plane dropping fire retardant (ammonia based fertilizer and red dye) on areas where they did not want the fire to enter as well as onto the logging equipment present on our property. Today the retardant can still be seen on grasses and trees. A

helicopter was also dropping water throughout the area during the entire event.



The next morning, Monday, I spoke with several DCNR personnel and the belief at the time was the fire started on State Game Lands that border our property. The investigation would start Tuesday morning. The DCNR commander stated that he appreciated our fire lane maintenance as the fire would have been more difficult to contain had we not had the fire lanes worked on last fall. The importance of regular fire lane maintenance was apparent with the amount of equipment it took to contain the fire and keep it from spreading to other areas or houses. In total there were 5 agencies combating the wild fire (Tunkhannock, Chestnuthill and Tobyhanna Townships, DCNR, and National Park Service). The fire effected 90 acres of Authority land and 200 acres of State Game Lands. According to TNC and the State Game Commission prescribed burns, along with regular fire lane maintenance, help keep the amount of fuel (flammable material from trees and grasses) to a minimum which helps keep wild fires from becoming out of control.

The DCNR investigator determined that the fire was started intentionally. What the individual used to ignite the fire is unknown as nothing was left behind. Most likely a lighter was used and then carried off by the actor. The fire was started in a grassy field that borders directly alongside Authority land. The fire then spread throughout Game Lands and Authorityv property.

2. TNC conducted the Prescribed burn on our property and PGC land near the wild fire location a week after the wild fire. Prior to the burn I assisted TNC and PGC personnel by using our drone to get a view of the area that was burned and how it effected the planned prescribed burn area. Both agencies were able to determine that the prescribed burn could be completed soon, as conditions were favorable. A large amount of land around the planned burn site was already burned due to the wild fire. This would minimize the risk of a fire spreading to areas outside the planned area.
3. The new Tracks have been installed on the UTV and are going through the manufacturer's prescribed break-in process. The tracks work very well in the soft muddy areas without needing to shift to 4 wheel drive. I'm already looking forward to next winter and using them in the snow.
4. Turkey season is open and most hunters I spoke with are reporting not seeing any birds. I see turkeys everyday while on patrol and it's always in different areas. We have a healthy wild turkey population so hunters should be seeing birds.
5. Monroe County Conservation District performed their annual sampling on Tunkhannock Creek. The sampling is for insects and other invertebrates to help monitor the health of the stream.
6. An individual was found trespassing on an ATV in the Penn Forest area. An Authority Deputy cited the individual for trespass by motor vehicle.