

**Rural Community Fire Protection  
Grants By County - 1975-1981**

## RURAL COMMUNITY FIRE PROTECTION PROGRAM

Rural Community Fire Protection cost share grants have recently been awarded to 66 eligible volunteer fire departments across the Commonwealth. The average grant awarded to fire companies was approximately \$1500.

This year we received 350 applications for assistance. Several of the fire companies which applied for assistance had received a grant in a previous year, but due to the large number of applications from fire companies which have not received a grant, their applications were not considered for assistance this year.

To date, 467 grants amounting to a total of \$732,141 have been awarded to eligible fire companies. This averages approximately \$1548 per fire company.

Nearly 75 percent of the funds awarded to the fire companies are used to purchase communication equipment or protective gear, such as airpaks and clothing.

Frederick T. Wilcox  
Staff Forester

## AIRCRAFT OPERATIONS ADVISOR HIRED

The Division of Forest Fire Protection is pleased to welcome Forrest "Dutch" Kissinger as the newest member of the Division staff. On April 23, 1981, Dutch assumed the duties of Aircraft Operations Advisor. Dutch transferred to the Bureau from the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency where he had been employed since retiring from the U. S. Air Force in August 1980.

Dutch is a native of Sacramento, Pennsylvania in the Hegins Valley of Schuylkill County. Upon graduation from Hubley Township High School, he enlisted in the U. S. Air Force. During his career with the Air Force, he earned a degree in Business and Management from the University of Nebraska and a Masters Degree in Political Science from Auburn University. As a pilot for more than 25 years, he also acquired a great deal of experience in aviation. In addition to flying experience, the Air Force also gave him a wide background in administration, planning, program development and training.

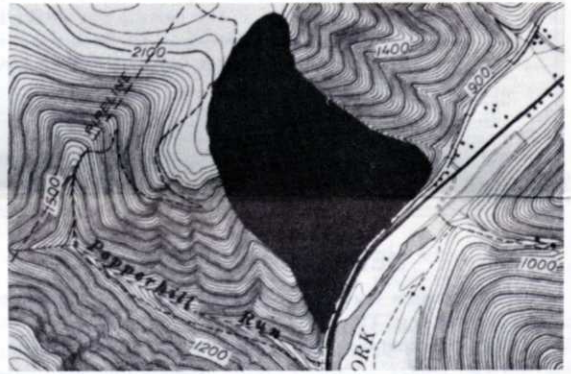
Some of his duty stations include Alaska, Texas, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Vietnam, Africa, The Pentagon in Washington, D.C. and the U. S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Dutch retired from the Air Force with the rank of Colonel.

Dutch and his wife Polly reside at 30 Sunset Drive in Carlisle and they are the parents of five children. In addition to flying, Dutch enjoys hunting, fishing and an occasional game of golf.

Welcome aboard, Dutch!

## PEPPER HILL FIRE

*Editors Note: In the fall of 1938, a tragic wildfire occurred approximately 20 miles southeast of Emporium in Grove Township of Cameron County. Over the years, many of the details and circumstances of the fire had been forgotten. Recently, several members of the Division Office wanted to know exactly what happened. The following account of that fire was put together from information gleaned from weather records, news accounts, recent personal interviews and reports of investigations conducted by the U.S. Army, the Pennsylvania State Police, Coroner's juries and the Department of Forests and Waters.*



**Final Size Pepperhill Fire**

The summer and the early fall of 1938 were unusually hot and dry. Precipitation in Cameron County during August, September and October was nearly four inches below normal. Wednesday, October 19, 1938 was hot and clear. For the fifth day in a row, temperatures were in the 80's and the relative humidity for the day was between 25-28%. A killing frost had occurred on October 7 and since then, no significant precipitation had fallen. Forest fuels were cured and very dry. The wind on the 19th was blowing out of the southwest. Because of topographic conditions, local winds were variable, coming mostly out of the east and southeast. Later that night, a cold front accompanied by .3 inches of rain would move through the area.

At 11:10 a.m. on the 19th of October, District Forester Charles Baer phoned Camp Cameron CCC Camp S-132 and asked that someone be dispatched to check a report of a wildfire in the vicinity of Sinnemahoning. Truck driver George Poloski was immediately sent to investigate. At noon, Poloski phoned to report that there were several fires burning in the area. He returned to Camp Cameron to eat and to pick up a crew of fire fighters.

Two crews of CCC enrollees from Camp-132 were dispatched towards the fire. Crew #1 under Foreman Adolph Kamrath had 25 enrollees and Crew #2 under Foreman Gilbert Mohney had 22 enrollees. Both crews had been on a fire the day before and they had not returned to camp until 5:30 a.m., October 19th. There were indications that several men on Crew #2 were suffering from exhaustion. During a subsequent investigation, CCC Enrollee Leader Edward Sofchak testified: "When we were called back out at 1:00 p.m., I looked at the men and a couple of them were not fit, in my mind, for any further work - Bogush and Steffanic were pretty tired. They almost fell asleep on the truck." Also during the investigation, Enrollee Peter Damico was asked: "Did you get rest Wednesday morning?" and he replied: "I went to bed, but it was too hot and I couldn't get much sleep."

Alfred Kuleck of Emporium was Senior Leader at Camp Cameron. During an interview in November of 1980 Kuleck said, "The boys never should have been sent out. They were tired. I believe regulations required at least six hours of rest and I don't think they had that much. I remember that

Basil Bogush complained to me that he didn't want to go because he was too tired."

Most of the enrollees were either 17 or 18 years old and were untrained in fire fighting. During the investigation several enrollees were asked, "Have you ever had any instructions in fire fighting?" Their answer was usually, "No, sir. I was told what to do when we got on the fire line." There was also an indication that Crew #2 Foreman Mohney had little knowledge of either fire behavior or proper fire fighting tactics. In addition, at least one man was probably mentally incompetent and should have not been on the fire line. When the educational adviser for the camp was asked, "Would you say that any enrollees were mentally incompetent to understand fire fighting orders?" his answer was, "Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ He never passed a grade in school in his life. He knew his ABC's, but he could neither read nor write. His I.Q. was close to 60."

About 1:45 p.m., the two crews arrived at the fire along the Austin road, north of Sinnemahoning. There were at least four fires burning in the vicinity. The decision was made to attack one of the smallest fires. In the words of one of the enrollees: "Kammrath told us to take the middle fire of the four we saw. The fire had only started along the road covering a strip of about 75 yards." This fire would later be called the Pepper Hill Fire.

Approximately 2:00 p.m., Crew #2 under Foreman Mohney began building fire line and backfiring along the right flank up a hollow from the Austin road. By 2:30 p.m., about 200 feet of fire line had been constructed. At that time, Camp Forester William Houpt arrived at the fire scene. After conferring with Foreman Mohney, it was decided that Crew #2 should proceed to the top of the mountain and construct line downhill. Forester Houpt then went to another fire.

Between 2:45 and 3:00 p.m., the crew left the backfire and started up the extremely steep hollow. The wind seemed to be shifting and increasing in strength. The crew shortly became separated and many crew members made frequent rest stops while the more fit continued climbing. Enrollee Sofchak later testified: "We tried to keep the men together but they did not do so. The tired men stopped and rested while the rest proceeded up the hill."

Several men noticed that the fire had spread behind them but they were not alarmed. Enrollee William Koerber stated, "We looked back and saw the fire behind us, but we did not think much of it at the time."

By 3:30 p.m. with the advance of a cold front the winds continued to shift and increase in strength. This caused the fire to advance rapidly up the hollow.

During the investigation of the fire, CCC Enrollee Harry Mackey testified: "I was with Mr. Mohney and we two were the last ones up the hill. The rest of the crew was practically on top. Mr. Mohney was a heavy man and he couldn't move very fast. He had previously complained of his shoes being slippery and he couldn't climb the hill. The wind at this time was quite strong and came in gusts. The wind shifted and blew the fire around us upstream. It shifted again and came up at us. The fire was a good 100 feet away when it started up the hill toward us. I didn't take a dozen steps before the fire came up on Mr. Mohney. I was about 25 or 30 feet above him and I sprayed him with water from that distance. He yelled for water and I couldn't see him because of the flames so I threw the spray can of water toward him and I ran from the flames. He fell over and screamed. He screamed for about three or four minutes at the most. After I went up the hill, I stopped and looked down but instead of taking a chance of running through the flames, I continued running up and around the flames. The head of the fire was about 75 yards above me and I had to run up and around it. The flames were traveling faster than I could climb the hill under ordinary circumstances." In this way, Enrollee Mackey escaped unharmed.

Mohney was the first fatality of the fire. When his body was

recovered, it was noticed that his watch had stopped at 3:48 p.m.

Further up the hill others suddenly realized that they were in danger. Two days after the fire, Enrollee Peter Damico gave the following testimony from his hospital bed: "I was with George Vogel, Ross Hollobaugh, Steve Jacofsky and Basil Bogush. Hollobaugh looked back and hollered, 'There is fire below us!' The fire below was about 50 or 60 yards away. I believe that we were about three quarters of the way up the hill at this time. When we saw the fire, the five of us started to run to the right and up. The fire was catching up with us fast and we stopped at a big rock. Here we squirted water over all five of us. I would say that the fire was about 15 or 20 feet away from us and it was below us. We wet our handkerchiefs and put them over our faces, but couldn't keep them there because breathing was so difficult. It was awful smoky. Fire came up from below and to our right. Vogel and I fell off the rock. Basil also fell off the rock. When I fell off the rock, I began rolling down the mountain, but a small tree in the burned area stopped me. I climbed the tree and got a little air. I was burned when I climbed the tree. Then I saw Hollobaugh going down the mountain below me and he was also burned. He was right below me. Then I saw Basil and he was bare. Then I yelled for Vogel - he and Steve Jacofsky were coming down. They came on down to where Basil was and I climbed down the tree and told Vogel to come on. Steve was in back of us and bare too. Basil was yelling, but since we were burned we could do nothing with our hands. Steve told me that as soon as we got down we would send a doctor. Me, Vogel, and Steve were going. Steve was a little behind on the way down and he was calling, 'Wait for me.' We waited for him and did this for two or three times but our pain was getting worse. I told Vogel that we had better hurry and get ourselves out."

Basil Bogush died at the fire scene. Steve Jacofsky died the next day at St. Mary's Hospital. Ross Hollobaugh died the next day at the Renovo Hospital. George Vogel died in the Renovo Hospital on November 2, 1938. Peter Damico was transferred from Renovo Hospital to Walter Reed in Washington, DC on November 7, 1938. Damico eventually recovered and, although scarred, he was able to return to Camp Cameron as an enrollee.

When the fire made its run, Enrollee Andrew Kiliany was with nine other men further up the mountain. His testimony was: "I did not get to the top of the hill but about 50 yards from the top. The fire then began closing in behind us and it looked like we were becoming trapped." Most of the men apparently ran uphill and to the right and escaped around the header. However, a few became confused and panicked. The investigator asked Enrollee Kiliany: "Did the fellows lose their heads?" His answer was, "About half of the fellows did lose their heads." Most of the men with Kiliany managed to escape unharmed. However, three others were not so fortunate. The bodies of Enrollees John Boring, Andrew Stefphanic and Howard May were later found in the burned area. Howard May was a "rookie" and had been a member of the CCC for less than two weeks.

Enrollees Sofchak and Kiliany were credited with saving the lives of a number of men by calling them into a safe area. Three of those saved were Carl Yereb, Chester Penko and William Koerber.

Chester Penko testified: "We were trapped before we got to the top. Three of us tried to make a break for it. We ran upward and towards the right of the thing. We got about 50 feet from the edge of the fire. The flames were about 25 feet high." Koerber was with Penko and Yereb and he said, "We dropped our cans and ran. When we got a ways from the fire, we climbed a tree." Yereb testified, "We climbed up a tree to see if there was any chance of escape, but there was danger of the flames reaching the tree." Then the three heard

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Kiliany and Sofchak calling. They climbed down the tree and they were guided to safety by Kiliany's voice.

Three of the enrollees had already reached the top of the mountain when the fire made its run. They were Andrew Shenal, Andrew Majorksy and Andrew Gaydos. These men found safety by climbing on a large rock. Marjorksi testified: "There was nobody ahead of me. I had my instructions and knew what to do. When we got to the top of the hill, the fire began closing in on us and we couldn't do anything but get on a rock." Shenal said, "I was near the top of the hill when somebody yelled that something was wrong so I ran to the right and went up on a rock and waited 'til the fire passed by." Gaydos also testified: "We were on top of the hill when we realized we were becoming trapped. There was a large rock up there. None of us had any trouble to get on the rock. I sprayed my tank of water at the fire. We heard Bogush yelling for somebody to help but he was about 600 feet down the hill and we could not get down to help him." The three stayed on the rock for about ½ hour. After the fire passed, they climbed downhill through the burned area. Gaydos's testimony continues: "We then went over the burned area and down the hill. We went down about 700 feet and found two of the fellows who were burned to death. Boring was on his knees with his hands on his head. The other fellow was also on his knees with a hand and his head on a rock. We then heard Bogush and went over to him. I heard Bogush holler, 'Jesus, save me,' but we could do nothing for him. He did not recognize us at all."

In all, the fire claimed eight lives. The men were:

Foreman Gilbert Mohney, age 38, Ridgeway, PA  
 Enrollee Basil Bogush, age 19, Conemaugh, PA  
 Enrollee John Boring, age 19, Johnstown, PA  
 Enrollee Ross Hollobaugh, age 18, Rimersburg, PA  
 Enrollee Stephen Jacofsky, age 17, Johnstown, PA  
 Enrollee Howard May, age 18, Erie, PA  
 Enrollee Andrew Steffhanic, age 18, Twin Rocks, PA  
 Enrollee George Vogel, age 17, hometown unknown

It was necessary to identify some of the dead through comparison of dental records. Former Senior Leader Kuleck who viewed most of the bodies said, "The only one I could identify was Foreman Mohney, and that only because of his size (he was very heavy). The others were burned beyond recognition."

About 8:30 p.m. that evening the fire was extinguished by rain. It had burned a total of 134 acres of dense, second growth hardwoods. The cause was listed as incendiary.

*Editors Note: In the next issue of the "Warden News" we will review the finding of the investigation and how this fire relates to you as a Fire Warden in 1981.*

Warren A. Ely, Chief  
 Operations Section

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What's the solution? A firm commitment to fire prevention by all levels of the Fire Service.

This should include fire planning at the fire company level to identify priority areas in the company service area where the greatest number of debris fires occur.

Then a strategy can be developed to solve the problem. This may include educational efforts, open burning restrictions, solid waste management proposals, and other concrete attainable objectives.

How about it? Let's make plans now to formulate a plan of action to reduce debris burning fires.

I can promise you one thing, if you don't, the spring of 1982 will be a repeat of the spring of 1981.

E. F. McNamara  
 Chief Forest Fire Warden

## ANNUAL SERVICE CERTIFICATES

During the current year, 458 service certificates and lapel pins are being presented to individuals who have served in the capacity of fire warden for 10 years or more, in intervals of 5 years.

Included in this group of individuals are 19 men and one woman who have served the Commonwealth for 50 years or more. These fire wardens, their county of residence, and their years of service are as follows:

Name	County	Years of Service
Vaughn Tenley	Bedford	50
E. Clyde Pyle	Delaware	55
Edward Long	Erie	50
Rebecca Goodwin	Fayette	55
Raymond LaShure	Forest	55
Melvin Fisher	Fulton	50
Robert Stamm	Lancaster	50
Joseph Paddock	Luzerne	50
Warren Cope	Luzerne	50
Robert Startzel	Luzerne	50
James Reap	Luzerne	50
Charles Wentzel	Lycoming	55
Robert Bates	Monroe	60
Ralph Steinhart	Northumberland	50
Daniel Dechert	Schuylkill	50
Harry Haas	Schuylkill	55
Otto S. Wilt	Somerset	60
Monta Apgar	Tioga	55
S. E. Robinson	Tioga	55
John Johnston	Westmoreland	50

This year the certificates presented to these 20 dedicated individuals are mounted on oak plaques and covered with a clear plate of plexiglass.

The Division of Forest Fire Protection commends these twenty individuals for their many years of dedicated service toward fire prevention and fire suppression.

Frederick T. Wilcox  
 Staff Forester

## COMPUTER LISTS

For the past 3 months the Division has been revising the list of Fire Wardens. During this time, we have also entered all Fire Warden names and addresses into our computer. The machine will print such things as labels for the Warden News.

This is our first attempt at printing the labels and we may have overlooked names or your name may be on the list more than one time. When you receive your Warden News, please check your address and the spelling of your name. If there are any errors, please let us know. Also, if you receive more than one copy of the News, please let us know.

Fire Wardens are a mobile group. Each mailing we have almost 50 Warden News returned to our office with change of address. With the computer system we will be able to change the addresses easily and quickly.

The Division is also keeping a record of the length of service as a Fire Warden on the computer. We will be able to keep an accurate record of length of service for any future needs.

We have also asked the Districts to supply us with your Social Security number. The numbers are important for us to index your name on the computer and now the Districts will have the numbers available in case of accidents, or other times they may need the numbers.

Putting the Fire Warden names on computer will make us more accurate in our dealing with you through the Warden News and we will save time and money in updating our lists.

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The group returned to the classroom where Chief Warden McNamara made a few closing remarks and presented each warden with a Certificate. In addition to the Certificate, each warden received a hard hat, a Nomex fire shirt, new warden patches and a "1981 Training" patch.

By all accounts, the weekend was a worthwhile experience and if at all possible, the Division plans to conduct a training session next summer.

The Division wishes to express its thanks to Fire Warden J. Grant Shatzer. Grant is Superintendent of Plant Services at Dickinson College. Through his efforts, the college supplied the fire wardens with excellent meeting facilities, excellent food and excellent accommodations. Grant was available all weekend to assist us in making the meeting such a success.

The Division would also like to thank the following people: District Foresters Sam Rhody and Ken Reed for attending as observers and helping out whenever needed; everyone in District #3 who assisted, especially Forest Technician Barry Wolfe; Bureau Safety Coordinator Jim Lipko for his part in the program; and most importantly, the Forest Fire Wardens who attended the meeting. Their enthusiasm and interest made the meeting an enjoyable experience.

John P. Berst  
Staff Forester

I want to compliment the 79 Fire Wardens who gave up a nice summer weekend to meet with the Division Staff and me for the State Fire Warden Training School at Dickinson.

This was a clear expression of your interest and commitment to keeping Pennsylvania green.

Sincerely  
E. F. McNamara  
Chief Forest Fire Warden

## SMOKEY BEAR STAMP

Michael Marchese of Williamsport, PA, has been trying for years to have the U.S. Postal Service issue a postage stamp honoring Smokey Bear. Working from his home, Mr. Marchese has written letters and made numerous contacts urging the U.S. Postal Service Stamps Division to issue this stamp.

Mr. Marchese's idea has been rejected by the Postal Service up to this date. Now with help from the Bureau of Forestry and the U.S. Forest Service, he hopes his efforts to have this stamp issued will be successful.

State Forester Richard Thorpe, members of the Division of Forest Fire Protection staff and Don Hansen, Project Manager of the Smokey Bear Program from the U.S. Forest Service, met with Mr. Marchese in July to organize a national campaign to promote the postage stamp. Help from U.S. Legislators and State Governors will be solicited to bring pressure for this stamp. Already, Mr. Marchese has received help from States of Pennsylvania, Alaska and New Mexico.

Since 1977, Mr. Marchese has been trying to get the postage stamp issued. "That year, there was a rash of forest and building fires," he said, "and I thought that there should be some way that we think of fire prevention every day, not just during Fire Prevention Week. I thought how people see stamps all the time and I began trying to get a Smokey Bear stamp to promote fire prevention." Since 1977, his idea has been rejected by the Postal Service several times, but he keeps trying because "the committee approves only 20 stamp issuances a year out of 1,500 new subject suggestions."

Mr. Marchese is a city fireman in Williamsport and he has spent many off-duty hours presenting fire prevention programs to school children. He is not only active in fire prevention, but he organized a program to collect eyeglasses for the visually handicapped and he organized a book collection drive for the library in Williamsport.

The ever-optimistic Marchese feels that a national lobbying effort will bring pressure on the Postal Service to approve this stamp.

Mr. Marchese wants all the help he can get to pass a fire prevention stamp with Smokey's picture. If you are interested in supporting the Smokey Bear stamp, please write to the U.S. Postal Service, Stamp Division, 475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW, Washington, DC 20260, to express your support.

## PEPPER HILL FIRE - CONTINUED

Editors Note: On October 19, 1938, 8 CCC crew members were burned to death while aiding in the suppression of a wild-fire in Cameron County. In the last issue of the "Warden News" the factors leading up to the accident and the death of the men was discussed. In this issue these men's deaths are related to fire wardens suppressing fires today.

On October 20, 1938, a board of U.S. Army Reserve Officers was convened at Camp S-132 for the purpose of investigating the tragedy. After hearing testimony from 30 witnesses over a period of five days, the board adjourned on October 25, 1938. The board's findings were:

1. The crew foreman and 7 enrollees perished by burns sustained by fire.
2. They were ascending a steep mountain with forest fire on their left, in order to combat the fire from its topmost point when the flames ignited the area below traversed by them and rapidly spread upward, below and to their right, completely trapping them.
3. Death in each instance occurred in the performance of duty, and not as a result of own misconduct.
4. The enrollees were not under the influence of alcohol or narcotics at the time of death.

The board additionally found as follows:

1. Prominent cause of death of the aforementioned enrollees:
  - a. Poor judgment on the part of the squad foreman, Gilbert Mohny, in attempting to ascend a 2400', 30 degree slope and leaving an uncontrolled and unguarded fire less than 200' to his left rear. This fire, under a shifting wind, swept across the rear of his party, then up the right flank, trapping the entire party.
  - b. The early exhaustion of squad Foreman Gilbert Mohny who was killed in the fire. He was among the first of his party to succumb from fatigue and his example caused his party to straggle and become disorganized.
2. Contributing causes of the deaths of aforementioned enrollees:
  - a. Lack of organized forest fire fighting training. Regulations state specifically that foremen and enrollees must be trained in forest fire fighting before being permitted to fight forest fires.
  - b. Lack of an actively organized safety committee.

The board adjourned without recommending disciplinary action against any individual. Later, it was recommended that several people be disciplined, but there is no record of any action ever being taken.

On October 19, 1939, the first anniversary of the Pepper Hill Fire, the Wayside Memorial was dedicated to the memory of the eight men who perished in the fire. The memorial is located south of Emporium along Pennsylvania Route #120. A bronze plaque at the memorial was purchased with donations of CCC enrollees from 40 camps in the Northern District of Pennsylvania. The plaque says, in part, "In memory of the men of CCC Camp S-132 who heroically sacrificed their lives in performance of their duty on October 19, 1938 while quelling forest fires in the vicinity of Jerry Run and Lick Island. May they rest in peace."

Forty-two years have passed since the Pepper Hill Fire claimed eight lives. No firefighter since then has been burned to death on a Pennsylvania wildfire. For that reason, it may seem unlikely that a similar tragedy could ever occur again. That is not necessarily true. Given similar fire behavior factors (weather, fuel and topography) coupled with a lack of fire behavior knowledge, poor physical condition and poor judgment, it could happen again!