



Burning Issues

The Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Forest Heritage Association

<http://www.paforestheritage.org>

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President's Message

This final edition of Burning Issues marks the end of the Pennsylvania Forest Heritage Association as an independent organization and the start of a new chapter in its mission to “preserve and showcase the heritage of forest conservation and forest fire protection in Pennsylvania”. Starting in January 2019, we will become the Pennsylvania Forest Heritage Committee under the umbrella of the Pennsylvania Forestry Association (PFA).

When it was founded in the mid 1990's the vision of the Pennsylvania Forest Fire Museum Association was to create a stand-alone forest fire museum along Route 30 in the Michaux State Forest. Many dedicated people worked over the years to make this dream come true.

The vision was partially realized with the opening of the Forest Heritage Discovery Center in the old Caledonia State Park headquarters building in 2011. Since that time the hard work of the many volunteers has kept the Center open on weekends each summer. On average 1,500 visitors have seen the exhibits and learned about Pennsylvania's forest conservation and wildfire fighting heritage each year.

Why are we making this change? For many years the PFHA Board has been concerned about falling membership numbers, the difficulties of fund-raising to create a new museum, and the challenges of running the current program. We have been having discussions with the PFA, off and on, for the past several years. This past September, the PFHA Board voted for the merger. It was discussed and approved at the PFHA annual meeting in October. The PFA Board voted to approve the merger in November.

Many PFHA members are also PFA members. The missions of our two organizations are very similar. By joining together, we
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John Bitzer, Chief Forest Fire Protection - Retired Bureau of Forestry



To say John Bitzer has been around forestry and wildfire issues for a while would be an understatement. John is an “old growth” forester – no disrespect intended. He began his formal forestry education at Mont Alto and graduated from the Penn State main campus in 1956.

His first job was as a research forester with the PDF&W in Clearfield, where he spent two years measuring trees. It was while he was stationed in the Moshannon District that he and the park manager at Black Moshannon State Park “volunteered” to find out the effects of a water drop on a federal surplus vehicle. They took a “deuce and a half” out on the runway at Black Moshannon Airport and had the Stearman biplane make a water drop on the vehicle – while they were inside. Sometime after the windows were replaced and the inside of the truck had dried out John decided on a change of scenery.

He transferred to McConnellsburg where he spent a couple of years and then moved on to Stroudsburg where he became the
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Message from the Editor

Readers:

Over the past three years it has been a privilege and a lot of fun to provide you with this newsletter. I have learned a great deal along the way and I hope I have provided you with an informative and entertaining newsletter.

As many of you know, I published a book this year, that is the first comprehensive history of wildfires in Pennsylvania. I have taken the liberty of including some of those stories from the book (as well as some stories that didn't quite make it) here in this newsletter. I hope you have enjoyed them.

While this is the last edition of *Burning Issues*, this is not the end, but rather a change in direction. The merger of the PFHA with the Pennsylvania Forestry Association is a positive step forward. As PFHA membership dwindled, the merger is a revitalization of the effort to keep the history of Pennsylvania's forests and its wildfire heritage alive. So, join in. Be assured the mission and the goals of the PFHA are not being abandoned.

I hope to contribute from time to time to the PFA magazine and continue to remind you of the incredible history of Penn's Woods. Have a happy and enjoyable holiday season and be safe with fire – in your home and in the woods.

Mike Klimkos

Editor



(President's Message cont. from Page 1)

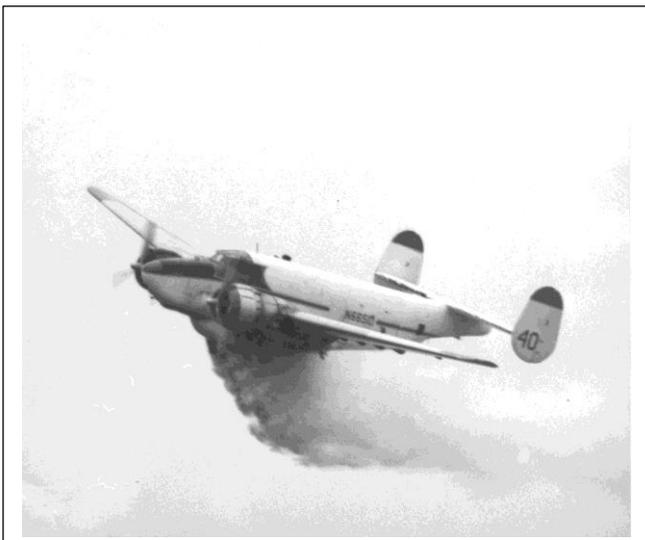
are increasing the number of potential volunteers. We will be better able to continue our current museum program at Caledonia State Park, develop new online programs (including efforts we have already started with PAFORE), preserve and maintain our collections, and partner with other agencies and organizations. The resources that have been collected through past hard work will continue to be used for their original intention of teaching the public about the history of forest conservation and wildfire fighting and helping interest people conserving and expanding our State's forest resources.

This year you will receive your renewal notice from the Pennsylvania Forestry Association. I urge you to renew your membership and take advantage of the benefits of PFA membership. Life members will automatically be transferred over from PFHA to PFA. The PFHA website and Facebook page will be discontinued and merged into the PFA social media. And be on the lookout for the PFA quarterly magazine, Pennsylvania Forests and the PFA monthly e-newsletter "Forestry News You Can Use".

I would like to express my thanks to our current and past Board members, volunteers and members for all their support for the PFHA. We will need all your help to make this transition work.

Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions and concerns at my email pel2@psu.edu. I would like to wish everyone a very Happy Holiday Season!

Peter Linehan



(Bitzer cont. from Page 1)

Assistant District Forester and after Gene McNamara moved to Harrisburg.

John notes that attitudes about forestry and fire in the Delaware State Forest District changed but it was a slow change, and in fact some of the old attitudes regarding wildfire are still prevalent. It was in that district that the 30,000 acre "Non-Protection Area" had been done away with only a little more than a decade before.

In 1984 John transferred to Harrisburg as McNamara's assistant and later became the division chief, responsible for all the wildfires in the state. He retired in 1991 and returned to the Poconos where he spent much of his career. He winters in Florida. John is the treasurer for PFHA. Today you are more likely to find him with a 9 iron in his hand rather than a fire rake.

110 Years Ago

On December 24, 1908, the *Montour American*, made note of Forest Commissioner Conklin's summation of what was happening in Pennsylvania forests:

In an address before the Pennsylvania Forestry association at Philadelphia, Commissioner Conklin said that the forest fires in Pennsylvania this fall were the worst known since the department was established. The enactment of more stringent laws for the preservation of the State forests and of a law which would foster timber culture was recommended by the meeting. It was announced that during the past year 64,566 acres had been added to the State's holdings, making in all 817,057 acres which have been actually paid for. In addition to this 125,000 acres are under contract that will be conveyed to the State just as soon as the title is certified to.

100 Years Ago

In the fall of 1918 wildfires were prevalent in Pennsylvania's forests. Often the fires were blamed on chestnut hunters, who set fire to dried leaves to make the nuts easier to find. The Chestnut Blight which had been discovered in the Keystone State in 1904 would end that problem but produce a whole new set of problems.

70 Years Ago

In 1948 the PDF&W had purchased the 2,089 acres in Carbon and Monroe Counties to utilize as an experimental forest.

50 Years Ago

In 1968 Eugene McNamara was promoted to Acting Chief of the Division of Forest Fire Protection. In 1973, McNamara became Chief of the Division of Forest Fire Protection.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Pennsylvania Forest Heritage Association is to preserve and showcase the rich heritage of forestry and forest protection in Pennsylvania, and to inform and educate the public about present-day forestry, including forest fire protection, and its future in the Commonwealth

Vision Statement

The Pennsylvania Forest Heritage Association is a place of discovery. Significant artifacts and interactive exhibits trace the past and point to the future of forestry in Pennsylvania. The museum is dedicated to the stewardship of all forest resources and honors the men and women who sustain today's forest. Here everyone can enjoy a variety of experiences that further an understanding of forestry and forest fires.

Membership Application

Please enroll the following as a member of the Pennsylvania Forest Heritage Association

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-Mail: _____

Check One:

- Student/ Youth \$5
- Individual \$15
- Family (number in household _____) \$25
- Sustaining \$35
- Non-Profit Volunteer Organization (check below) \$35

- Forest Fire Crew
- Volunteer Fire Company
- Forest Fire Wardens Assoc.
- Other Organization _____

- Corporate \$100
- Life \$300
- Contributing \$ _____

- I do not wish to join but I would like to make a donation \$ _____
- Make Checks payable to:

Pennsylvania Forest Heritage Association

Mail to:

**The Pennsylvania Forest Heritage Assoc.
6151 Route 209
Stroudsburg, PA 18360-7039**

PA Forest Heritage Assoc.
P.O. Box 176
Fayetteville, PA 17222-0176

«Name»
«Address»
«City», «State» «Zip»

Return Service Requested