

Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission

Fire Management Media Plan
Prescribed Fire Planning and Wildfire Contingency

Goal of plan

An informed (and ideally sympathetic) media can be your partner in educating the general population with regards to Pine Bush management issues. Ultimately, informed citizens, with input in an ongoing planning process, will usually be understanding and supportive citizens.

Summary of plan

- Designate a “media savvy” spokesperson to work year-round with the media to help ensure accurate news reports on programs and incidents.
- In the event of an incident, the spokesperson runs a communication center from which information is provided to the media and the public, and from which news reports are monitored and corrected.
- In the event of an incident, be honest and concerned, talk in simple language, and adopt a sensitive, caring, apologetic tone. Stick to hard facts that are inherently educational with regards to why prescribed fire is used as a management tool. Avoid a defensive tone and assume something went very wrong.

Preparatory work with media

- Develop and maintain (print, television & radio) media contacts on a year-round basis.
- Take the initiative to provide important media contacts with personal tours of the Preserve and/or fire management events (site preparation, burn training, and controlled burns).
- Designate a primary media contact person (year-round) for all Preserve issues. This person should cultivate personal relationships with media contacts, and become an “expert” source for the media.
- Additional staff and partners should also be exposed to and given the opportunity to work with the media, for recognition and for practice for the time they might be the primary spokesperson in a crisis.
- Supply up to date Pine Bush information, maps and phone numbers, in a format that is useful to different forms of media (newspapers, TV and radio). Phone numbers should include primary, backup and home/emergency numbers for the designated primary media contact.
- Prior to each prescribed fire season, update media contact list, being sure to touch base with all contacts. Include phone/cell/pager and fax numbers for each individual.

Capital District Area local media sources & contacts

Newspaper

- *Albany Times Union* (Fax 454-5628)
 - Kim Martineau (454-5093)
 - Dina Cappiello (454-5465)
 - Melissa Grace, Fred LeBrun, Liz Benjamin, Jay Jocknowicz
- *Altamont Enterprise* (Fax 861-5105)
 - Andy Schotz (861-5008)
- *Colonie Spotlight* (Fax 439-0609)
 - Phillip Schwartz (439-4949)
- *Schenectady Gazette* (Fax 432-6388)
 - Jill Bryce (432-4391) (Fax: 458-7362)
 - Sherry Clark (432-4391)
- *Associated Press*

Radio

- WRVE 99.5 (Fax 452-4855)
- WGY 810 (Fax 452-4859)
- WFLY 92.3 (Fax 786-6692)
- WGNA 107.7 (Fax 782-1486)
- WAMC 90.3 (432-0991)

Television

- *FOX23* (Fax 862-0930)
 - David D'Antuono, VP/General Mngr 862-0995
- *WRGB Ch 6 (CBS)* (Fax 346-6249)
 - Megan Chiplock, reporter: 381-4988
- *WTEN Ch 10 (ABC) and 19* (Fax 426-4792)
 - Martin E. Miller, Action News: 436-0771
 - Dan Levy, Anchor/Reporter: 436-0771
 - Michael McCardel, reporter: 436-0771
- *WNYT Ch 13 (NBC)* (Fax 434-0659)

Designated primary media contact person

- Designee(s) should have basic prescribed or wildland fire training and have participated on, or observed one or more burns. Experience with media relations and familiarity with “incident command” is helpful. Designees must be “media savvy.”
- Possible courses to assist with this include: One-day Albany Pine Bush prescribed fire training course and/or S130 basic wildland firefighter/S190 introduction to fire behavior, and I-100 Incident Command System.
- Media contact personnel must be familiar with burns scheduled for any given day and should have a copy of the prescription, and access to the fire management and contingency plans.

Albany Pine Bush designated media contact(s):

- Primary: Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission Executive Director –
Willie Janeway - ph 785-1800 x215/ fax 785-1888/ cell 469-1394/home 355-3780
- Backup: Albany Pine Bush Conservation Director –
Christopher Hawver – ph 785-1800 x218/ fax 785-1888/ cell 495-399/home 477-7383
- Supplemental media contacts:
NYSDEC Citizen Participation – Central Office and/or Region 4
Central: Jennifer Post – ph 457-5400/ fax 457-7735
Region: Rick Georgeson – ph 357- 2075/ fax 357-2087
The Nature Conservancy – New York State Office and local chapter office
State: Andy Beers or Bob Zaremba, ph 273-9408
Chapter: Stephanie Gifford, ph 272-0195

Procedures for a Wildfire Incident (escaped prescribed fire or unplanned ignition)

In the event of an incident, be honest and concerned, speak in simple language (avoid jargon), and adopt a sensitive, caring, apologetic tone. Stick to hard facts that are inherently educational with regards to why prescribed fire is used as a management tool. Avoid a defensive tone and assume something went very wrong.

1. Pre-determined contingencies – First and foremost, the crew on site of an escape must follow pre-established emergency protocol (calling for back-up suppression forces, falling back to contingency lines, etc.).
2. Activate a communications center. – The primary media contact needs this “war room” and should be equipped with multiple phone lines, a scanner, a fax, plus access to and/or an ability to monitor media reports (Radio and TV). A map of the Preserve must be available for reference, and a “faxable” map to send to the media showing the location of the burn and direction of the escape. The Pine Bush Commission’s administrative office can serve as this center. This has the benefit of removing the media from the site of the incident for the purpose of interviews with the spokesperson. At other times it may be appropriate to have the communication center at the site.
3. Establish contact with personnel at the incident - The spokesperson must receive facts from the field. This information must also be communicated immediately with lead DEC personnel. In coordination with DEC, establish communication (cell phone) with personnel on site or at the incident command post. While the primary responsibilities for field personnel are related to control and safety efforts, the spokesperson needs facts regarding the size of the fire, what may have caused the escape and what is being done for control. The field personnel should be in contact with the media spokesperson as often as possible.
4. Reach out to the media - Be proactive. Recognize reporter deadlines and return all calls as soon as possible (within 15 to 20 minutes). Call back even if you have nothing new to report. Prioritize TV and radio ahead of daily papers, and daily papers ahead of weekly papers. Agree to any and all interviews. Avoid the statement “the Commission wasn’t available for comment,” or worse.

5. If no facts are available – Assume something went wrong. A suggested statement with regards to a confirmed escape might incorporate some of the following:
 - *Clearly something went very wrong with a prescribed burn in the Pine Bush.*
 - *The focus now is on safety and controlling and extinguishing the fire to minimize damage or inconvenience to people and property in the area.*
 - *Fire is dangerous, and can be very destructive. Large 500-acre plus wildfires used to burn every ten or fifteen years as a natural part of the Pine Bush. While this was good for the rare Pine Bush environment, such fires today would threaten people and property, and can no longer occur.*
 - *Smaller prescribed fires simulate the effects of larger wildfires. These fires are initiated only when weather conditions and forecasts are conducive to effective burning while also minimizing the risk of possible escape. Periodic prescribed fires decrease the build-up of organic materials and thus reduce the potential for wildfires.*
 - *Consistent with preestablished emergency contingency plans, suppression agencies are responding and the fire will be contained and extinguished.*
 - *The Pine Bush fire management program has been active since 1991. Since then over 600 acres have been safely and effectively burned.*
 - *The Pine Bush fire management program will be immediately suspended. There will be an independent, outside review of the incident to determine what went wrong and what changes can be made to decrease the potential for an escape or a wildfire.*
6. Monitor media reports - disperse information and simultaneously correct mis-information. Do not allow false statements to go uncorrected or they will be repeated and “become fact.” First impressions are powerful. While correcting facts to help the media reflect reality, be proactive and provide statements (sound bites) that accurately reflect the program. Try to speak in short sound bites and do not try to provide long detailed explanations, especially if a camera/recorder is running.
7. Provide for positive external statements - This can be one of the most powerful ways of gaining balanced coverage in the media. No matter what you say, you are still representing the Pine Bush Commission. A positive statement from an external party such as a fire department chief or suppression official will have significant impact.
8. Identify the Commission - With the media, identify and put the focus on the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission, not our partners/members such as the State, municipalities, the County or The Nature Conservancy. Remember a simple rule - Partners/donors get all the credit when something goes right. The Commission gets the blame if something goes wrong.
9. Communication with partners - Key individuals within associate or partner agencies/organizations should be informed directly and as soon as reasonably possible. Ideally this communication is in advance of their hearing news reports. Initiate contact after confirmation of an incident, or when there is otherwise incomplete information. Suggest there be coordination with the Commission prior to their issuing comments to the media. Suggest that any media contact be forwarded to the established communication center.

10. Follow-up

- Arrange for an outside authority to critique the incident, interview involved individuals and issue a report. The Commission and/or Pine Bush Commission staff should not lead such an investigation. No attempt should be made to keep anything from the public. Everything should be made available, good and bad. Honesty and credibility is critical. All planning documents should be reviewed.
- Write an editorial or “letter to the editor” to express gratitude for support from suppression forces/agencies/volunteers
- Issue a press release to correct any incorrect facts if necessary
- Invite the media to the next burn and provide news releases and information packets
- Learn from the experience

- January 2000, Chris Hawver and Willie Janeway, Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission