

LOCAL VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENTS COMMENDED FOR EXCELLENT SERVICE

On Saturday April 25, 2009 I watched as Division of Forestry staff worked through the night with the Nile Township Volunteer Fire Department to protect residents living along Mackletree Road from the largest wildfire ever fought at Shawnee State Forest.

The firefighters who battled this blaze did so with courage, skill and an obvious commitment to their neighbors. As I drove along Mackletree Road that Saturday evening, local firefighters were diligently watching over each home to assure the safety of those living within, and to protect their property from damage.

It is a testament to the skill and training of all the firefighters who brought this fire under control, that not a single building was lost, and more importantly, not a single serious injury recorded.

Given the scale of the fire, its intensity, the number of firefighters involved, and the steep slopes of the Shawnee hills, that's a remarkable accomplishment.

I commend the bravery and ability of the Nile, Washington, Union, Rosemount, Green, Brush Creek, and South Shore, KY Volunteer Fire Departments. Their captains and the many volunteers working with them, are among our most valued partners in protecting Shawnee State Forest. The members of these fire departments are volunteers and do this hard, dangerous work for their community without financial compensation.

Please know their efforts extend well beyond the long hours spent defending firelines that last week of April. The preparation needed to safely and effectively control wildfires comes from hours of training and preparation.

Since the 2003 ice storm local fire departments have participated in a dozen, six-hour wildfire training courses provided through the Division of Forestry and the State Fire Marshall's Office. In that time some 155 firefighters from Scioto County have undergone training.

In addition to providing wildfire training, the Division of Forestry has worked to provide 11 surplus military vehicles with an original value of more than \$126,000, 12 sets of firefighter protective gear to outfit 120 firefighters, and \$45,000 in direct funding support to Scioto County volunteer fire departments.

The cooperation shown between leaders with the local fire departments and Division of Forestry staff is evidence of a true partnership that provides ongoing benefits for local residents.

For the community support provided the Division of Forestry during the Shawnee wildfire please know we are profoundly grateful. A special thanks is due to Life Ambulance, Westside IGA, Tim Horton's, the Salvation Army and the American Red

Cross for providing meals to firefighters throughout the five days of around-the-clock suppression efforts.

The Division of Forestry encourages all neighbors and users of Shawnee State Forest to help us to continue to protect this amazing natural resource. It's now six years after the historic ice storm, and downed and damaged trees have sufficiently dried to the point that fire conditions within the Shawnee State Forest can rapidly resemble conditions usually only seen in western states.

These dangerous conditions will continue for many more years, and the Division of Forestry will continue to work with local communities on preparedness, and continue our efforts to reduce the likelihood of catastrophic wildfire.

We ask that everyone be especially careful of debris burning during dry conditions, to report suspicious fire activity, and to continue to support their excellent, local volunteer fire departments.

Submitted by David Lytle, state forester and chief, Ohio Division of Forestry