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Downe Township brush blaze upgraded to forest fire, affecting 1,500 acres



Firefighters with the Forest Fire Service was dispatched to a large brush fire along Dividing Creek-Millville Road and Ackley Road in Downe Township, Wednesday, April 23, 2014. (Staff Photo by Cindy Hepner/South Jersey Times)

Cindy Hepner/South Jersey Times (<http://connect.nj.com/user/cshepner/photos.html>)

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(<http://connect.nj.com/user/DonWoods/index.html>) By **Don E. Woods/South Jersey Times**

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on April 24, 2014 at 6:00 AM, updated April 24, 2014 at 7:45 PM

DOWNE TWP. (<http://www.nj.com/downe-township>) — In what has been designated a major forest fire, more than 1,500 acres of land in the Edward G. Bevan Fish and Wildlife Management Area are burning, according to broadcast reports.

Fifty firefighters from the state Forest Fire Service, along with area fire departments, **spent the afternoon and evening attempting to contain the fire's spread**

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according to Larry Hajna, spokesman for the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

As of 6 a.m. Thursday, **firefighters continue to battle the fire**

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The Forest Fire Service was dispatched around 3 p.m. Wednesday and closed off Dividing Creek-Millville Road — from Battle Lane to Railroad Avenue — and Ackley Road — from Dividing Creek-Millville Road to Shaws Mill Road — to protect residents and stage fire equipment.

Along with fire apparatuses, the Forest Fire Service is also using tractors, plows, an air tanker and an observational helicopter to help contain the fire.

By the time the fire is brought under control, officials expect an estimated 500 acres will be affected by the forest fire.

According to Hajna, the Forest Fire Service was working to create a perimeter around the fire in order to contain its spread.

No structures are in danger of fire damage, said DEP spokesman Larry Ragonese.

The National Weather Service issued a red flag warning on Wednesday, **stating that the mix of low humidity and high winds**

Fire Warden, Joe Battersby, left, and Kenny Delrossi scan the map and coordinate locations at the brush fire. Firefighters with the Forest Fire Service was dispatched to a large brush fire along Dividing Creek-Millville Road and Ackley Road in Downe Township, Wednesday, April 23, 2014. (Staff Photo by Cindy Hepner/South Jersey Times)

<http://forecast.weather.gov/wwamap/wwatxtget.php?cwa=phi&wwa=red%20flag%20warning>) creates a high danger of forest fires.

“This is prime wildfire season — before you get the foliage coming out — so it’s really dry,” Ragonese said. “Anything can start a fire.”

Along with the dead leaves on the forest ground leftover from winter, there are also fallen trees that have yet to be cleaned up after Superstorm Sandy that has also caused similar fires to spread quickly.

“It amped up the situation a bit this year,” Ragonese said.

Heavy winds from the northwest made controlling the fire difficult, with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration recording winds at 15 mph with gusts of 36 mph during the time of the blaze.

The cause of Downe Township’s forest fire is still under investigation.

Firefighters Battle Forest Fire In South Jersey

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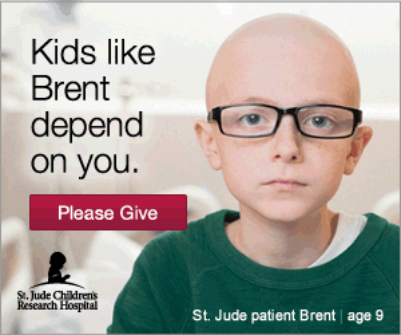
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