

A Mission Acres Woodland Fire Report

This is a brief report on the potentials for a woodland fire in the Mission Acres woods given this year's extremely dry conditions, President Ellie Smith asked me to do this since I will be unable to attend the Annual Meeting. Likely, she asked me because of my experience as a National Forest fire control officer and my lectures at Purdue University on forest fire control management.

There hasn't been a woodland fire of any consequence in the past 55-years on either side of our Whispering Trail. However, there is evidence that one or more ground fires have burned through our woods sometime in the last hundred years. Such fires are easy to control as they travel along the ground, burning the fallen leaves and other tree debris. These fires do kill small trees, low growing juniper and Arbor vitae, and Canadian yew. Fortunately, we have not been faced with extensive logging slash on either side of the road which would definitely complicate the fire potential situation.

The degree of forest fire danger is based on several factors, chief of which is the moisture content of the fuel. Other factors considered to be important are the types of fuel present, the amount of fuel per unit of area, wind conditions, air temperature and humidity level. In Michigan, the worst times for fires are in early spring and late fall when the woody vegetation is dry and the herbaceous material is tinder dry and able to intensify the early phases of a developing fire.

In recently observing the woodland condition on both sides of Whispering Trail, I found that at a point somewhere near Joan Kroupa's entrance drive the open woodland on the Nyblad side of the road changes. Here, there begins a mix of planted pine, dead and dying juniper and fir trees mixed with some hardwoods. It is quite thick and takes in part what we used to call Magic Meadows. A ground fire here could trigger a potentially explosive fire under the adverse conditions of drought and would be hard to stop ... killing both trees and burning through the remaining juniper "islands."

The actual risk of a fire starting is a people problem. In our area, lightning induced fires are rare. In dry conditions, a youngster with matches, someone igniting fireworks or truck drivers and other service people who smoke can unknowingly be agents in setting fires. More likely are those irresponsible persons who set small to large trash or beach fires and leave them unattended.

The bottom line is that during critically dry periods all of us should be alert to the dangers of fires starting in the woods and avoid fire-risky activities while remaining alert to risk factors out there which are beyond the control of us as individuals or our Association.

Jack Callahan
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