Michigan Department of Natural Resources

2022 Fire Management Program Report

The Michigan DNR's fire management program protects people, property and the landscape from wildfire. Teams battle hundreds of fires each year, train local fire stations and conduct prescribed burns to renew the landscape.

Fire season summary

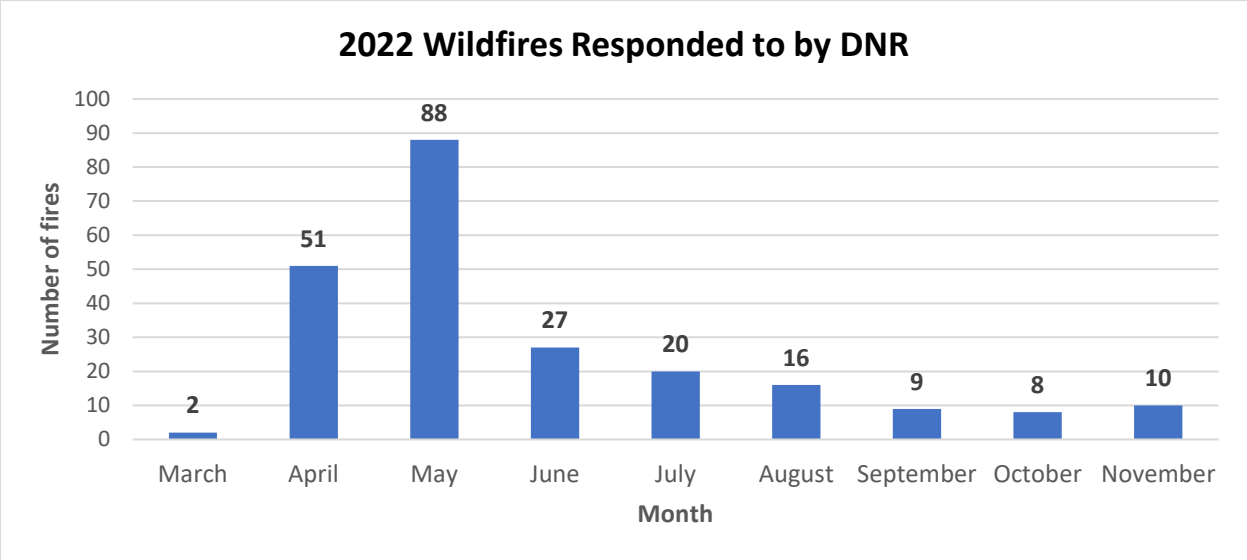
DNR fire crews responded to 231 fires that burned a total of 3,415 acres in 2022, starting in March and ending in November.

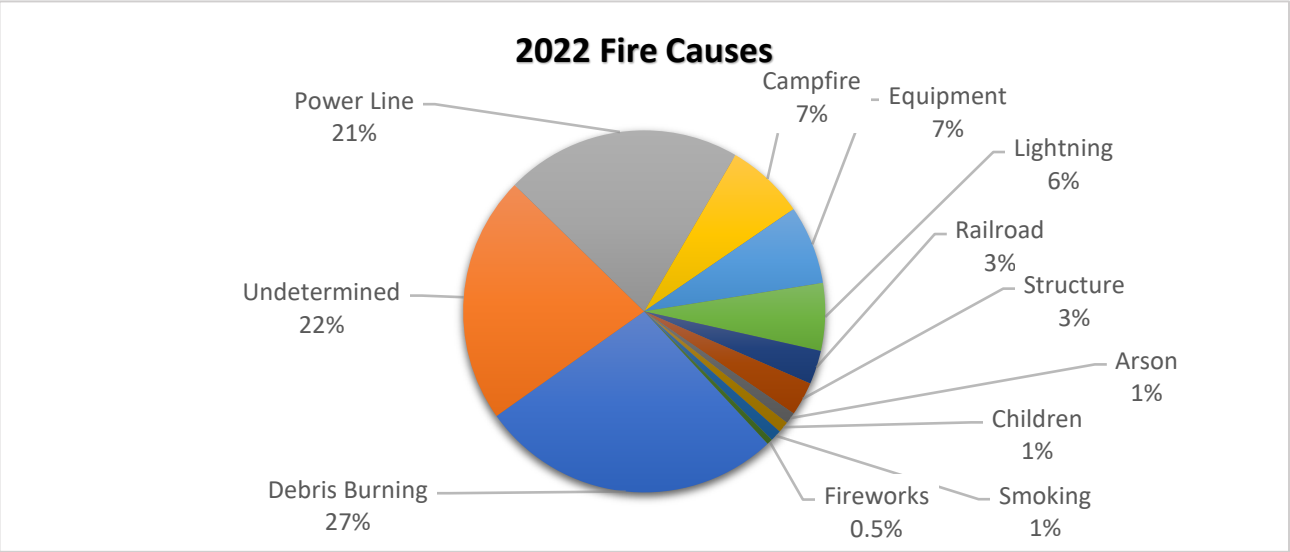
The largest fire was the lightning-caused Blue Lakes Fire, which burned more than 2,500 acres of land in Cheboygan and Montmorency counties. Another significant fire, the Creighton Marsh Fire, burned about 200 acres in dense swampland in Schoolcraft County.

A total of 71% of wildfires originated on private lands. Most fires at 27% were started by debris burning.

Of the 329 commercial and residential structures and outbuildings threatened by wildland fire, most were saved; just 28 buildings were destroyed.

In addition to Michigan fires, staffers assisted with fire response in Alabama, Arizona, California, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, Tennessee and Washington. Virtual assignments were made to provide remote assistance to Arizona and New Mexico. The DNR is fully reimbursed for providing aid to other areas, and these opportunities provide critical training that benefits DNR programs.





Prescribed burning

Teams conducted 73 carefully planned and executed prescribed burns on nearly 6,200 acres of land in 2022. Prescribed burns are used to kill invasive plants, stimulate the growth of native prairie plants and help wildlife thrive by improving fire-dependent habitats.

Aviation

DNR aircraft pilots flew 620 hours of fire detection and suppression flights in 2022, scanning the skies for potential wildfires and reporting active fire conditions to crews on the ground.

In addition to traditional aircraft, staff used drones and the IGNIS plastic sphere dispenser to conduct 1,500 acres of prescribed burning. Drones were also used to detect hot spots during the Blue Lakes Fire and Creighton Swamp Fire.

A collaboration between the Michigan State Police and DNR allowed agencies to use a helicopter and water-filled “Bambi bucket” to assist with suppression and drop water on two fires.

A "Bambi bucket" is used to drop water on wildfire.

Fire equipment

The Forest Fire Experiment Station and Roscommon Equipment Center program focus on developing specialized equipment for wildfire control. Projects include engineering new equipment, modifying existing equipment and testing commercial equipment.

A conversion of a Navistar engine and four new Caterpillar fire plows were delivered to field units in 2022. Additional projects included building a fire plow, designing of an M916 freightliner for wildland fire work and a project to redesign former Stewart & Stevenson military tactical vehicles to serve as fire engines. More information is available at Michigan.gov/RoscommonEquipmentCenter.

Wildfire prevention

DNR firefighters participate in community and youth-focused events to share fire safety messages and communicate that people start 9 out of 10 wildfires.

Events included the U.P. State Fair, local parades and festivals, DNR programs and more. Firefighters also talk about natural resources careers with Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Little League, 4-H and other youth organizations.

Additional prevention activities include installing electronic Smokey Bear fire danger signs outside DNR offices. The latest in this project was installed at the Stephenson Field Office.

Infrastructure and land management

In addition to fighting fires and conducting prescribed burns, DNR fire management staffers assist with a variety of other duties. In 2022, these included forest cultivation work, maintaining equipment, maintaining trails by removing hazard trees and installing culverts and bridges to improve access to state forests.

Right: Bridge construction and cleanup conducted by the Escanaba unit.