

State of Vermont
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Agency of Natural Resources
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Dear Fire Chief,

The Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation (FPR) would like to thank you and your department for your continued partnership in protecting Vermont's communities. This letter is meant to serve as formal communication regarding recent legislative changes related to the Town Forest Fire Warden system. The recently enacted law (Act 162 of 2026), passed by the legislature and signed by the governor, updates Vermont's forest fire, fire prevention, and fire chief statutes (10 V.S.A. Chapter 83, Subchapter 4 and 20 V.S.A. § 2673) and the responsibilities and authorities related to the town forest fire warden, deputy town forest fire wardens, and fire chiefs.

Many of the legislative changes in Act 162 directly affect fire chiefs and their fire departments. We encourage you to review the information below and discuss any necessary implementation steps within your department and municipality.

Town Forest Fire Warden Designation

One of the most significant changes in Act 162 is the designation of the town forest fire warden. Previously, town forest fire wardens were appointed by the Commissioner of FPR with the approval of the selectboard. Town forest fire wardens have the authority for forest fire suppression in their town. Under the new law, the chief of the fire department, fire district, or private fire department with primary responsibility for fire response within the municipality will automatically serve as the town forest fire warden. This aligns the authority for forest fire suppression with the chief of the fire department. For municipalities served by multiple fire departments, the municipality must designate one fire chief to serve in this role. In some cases, this will mean that a fire chief is the town forest fire warden for multiple towns if their department has multi-town primary jurisdiction.

Deputy Forest Fire Wardens

Town forest fire wardens may appoint one or more deputy forest fire wardens to assist with issuing burn permits (Permits to Kindle Fire). Before the statute change, deputy town forest fire wardens were appointed by the Commissioner of FPR. Having deputy wardens who can assist with this responsibility helps ensure continuity during periods when the fire chief is unavailable and helps share the additional workload of issuing permits to kindle fire.

Campfire Definition

Act 162 now establishes a statewide definition of a campfire. A campfire is defined as a fire 36 inches in diameter or less that is built in stone arches, outdoor fireplaces, or existing fire rings, or fires 36 inches in diameter or less built in a location that is 200 feet or more from any forestland, or field containing dry grass or other flammable plant materials contiguous to forestland.

This definition clarifies which fires may be kindled without a permit and aims to help reduce confusion among residents regarding recreational fires. Per state statute, campfires do not require a Permit to Kindle Fire but may be banned by the FPR Commissioner during periods of elevated fire risk. Your town may have ordinances in place that further restrict campfires within your municipality. Clearly defining campfires allows the State to issue burn restrictions on debris burning and campfires during times of elevated fire danger or poor air quality.

Wildfire Reporting Requirements

Act 162 updates reporting requirements to help strengthen communication between municipalities and FPR during wildfire incidents. Town forest fire wardens are now required to notify FPR of all wildland fires in their jurisdiction within 24 hours of discovery. The town forest fire warden must also submit fire reports within 48 hours after extinguishment. This is a significant change from the previous law that required a fire report within 2 weeks. Prompt notification and reporting to FPR is critical to help statewide situational awareness and resource coordination. Departments should ensure that personnel responsible for wildland fire incidents understand these reporting requirements and maintain accurate incident records.

Statewide Wildfire Coordination

Act 162 clarifies the authority of the State Forest Fire Warden during wildfire incidents and strengthens coordination between local departments and FPR. During significant or extended incidents, FPR may provide technical assistance, specialized resources, incident management support, aviation resources, or assume incident command when necessary to protect life, property, or natural resources. These changes are intended to improve coordination and ensure that local departments have access to the resources and support needed to manage increasingly complex wildfire incidents.

Reimbursement and Documentation

Act 162 modifies procedures related to reimbursement for suppression activities on Agency of Natural Resources lands. Should a wildland fire occur on ANR land within your municipality that requires fire suppression and incur expenses, there are now mandatory steps to take in order for the municipality to seek reimbursement. Notification must be made to FPR within an hour of discovery of fires on ANR owned land to be eligible for reimbursement.

Fire departments and municipal officials should ensure that suppression costs, personnel records, equipment usage, and related documentation are maintained in sufficient detail to support reimbursement requests when applicable.

Implementation Assistance

FPR recognizes that implementation of these changes will vary among municipalities, particularly in towns served by multiple fire departments or towns with no fire departments. To support a smooth transition, FPR will be sending training materials, offering online informational and question-and-answer sessions, and working directly with fire chiefs.

Please reach out to your town(s) to inform them of any deputy town forest fire wardens that you have designated.

If you have questions regarding these changes, please contact FPR's Wildland Fire Program by email ANR.WildlandFire@Vermont.gov or the wildland fire staff for your area:

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