



Restoring Fire in the Shawangunk Mountains New York 2006

Restoring fire to fire adapted ecosystems when it has been long excluded is no easy task. The absence of fire, whether through suppression efforts or the pressure of urbanization, changes forested areas by increasing the amount of natural fuel on the forest floor and the potential for wildland fire. Prescribed fire is being gradually reintroduced to the Shawangunk Ridge in New York's Hudson Valley Region in order to reduce fuel loads, control invasive plant species, and protect native plant communities.

A section of the Appalachian Mountains, the northern Shawangunks support one of the world's best examples of a rare ridgetop dwarf pitch pine barrens and the second largest chestnut oak forest in New York State. Members of the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership protect over 30,000 acres of this important area.

Increasing fire management in the Shawangunks is a collaborative effort between the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership, the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission, and The Fire Learning Network. With funding by the National Fire Plan, prescribed fire projects have been completed on three demonstration areas of the Mohonk Preserve.

National Fire Plan funding has supported the completion of a Wildfire Pre-Incident Plan with extensive involvement from the Cragmoor Volunteer Fire Company and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation; initiation of a pilot Firewise Community USA program for the Hamlet of Cragmoor; completion of three demonstration burns in Fall 2005 and preparation of five additional demonstration burn plans for Spring 2006; preparation of an informational brochure and presentations for more than 15 outreach meetings with local municipalities, fire departments, emergency services, and other interest groups across the ridge; basic wildland firefighter training for 45 partners and local volunteer firefighters; and the purchase of a Quick Deploy fire weather station.



Burn crew members from the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership consult along the fire line during a prescribed burn on the Mohonk Preserve in November 2005. Photo courtesy The Nature Conservancy

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