

Wildfires: Sparking Conversation Around Risks & Mitigation

Listening Session | July 27, 2025

It is no surprise with the changes that we are witnessing and experiencing driven by climate change, that wildfire risks are becoming more of an issue across New York State. Through some of our initial research and scoping work through our Panther Creek Project and identifying contributing factors, such as forestry management practices and Ash tree mortality due to the Emerald Ash Borer, we recognize the need for a more localized and comprehensive program to address these risks, and to create an expert and community driven action plan and approach to management and mitigation.

- Brief overview of increasing wildfire risks in the region
- Changing climate conditions and wildfire patterns in the Northeast & local ecological factors (forests, land use, water) contributing to wildfire risk
- Examples of community-led wildfire mitigation from other regions
- Firewise Community initiative & other tools and resources

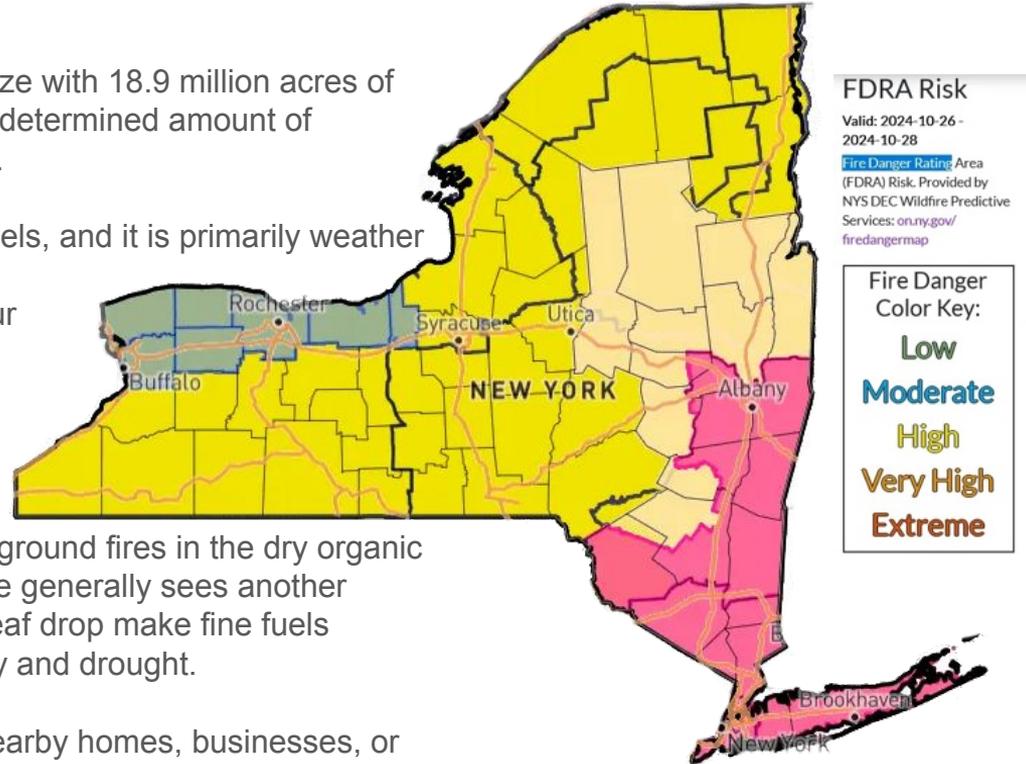


New York State encompasses 30.9 million acres in size with 18.9 million acres of non-federal forested lands. In addition, there is an undetermined amount of open-space non-forested lands with wildfire potential.

Wildfire risk varies with seasonal changes in forest fuels, and it is primarily weather driven. The period in the spring after snow melt and before green-up generally when the largest fires occur due to cured grass and forest fuels rapidly becoming available to burn during dry periods with low relative humidity. High winds also frequently occur during spring weather patterns that aid to drive fire spread. During years of extended drought, wildfires occur during the mid to late summer months presenting as ground fires in the dry organic matter on the forest floor or as surface fires. The state generally sees another spike in fire activity in the fall as cured grasses and leaf drop make fine fuels available again during periods of low relative humidity and drought.

These fires can be very intense, and may threaten nearby homes, businesses, or improvements, thereby becoming a wildland-urban interface fire.

Source: NYSDEC (<https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/wildfires>)



Wildland fires do occur in New York State. Many areas in New York, particularly those that are heavily forested or contain large tracts of brush and shrubs, are prone to fires. The Adirondacks, Catskills, Hudson Highlands, Shawangunk Ridge, and Long Island Pine Barrens are examples of fire-prone areas.

DEC Forest rangers are concerned that many rural communities throughout the state may be at risk from wildfire damage. Wildfires may occur more frequently, with greater intensity, and with much more potential for damage because of a variety of factors, including:

- Accumulation of fuels, like dead branches, brush and leaf litter, due to the lack of significant fires in the recent past;
- Climate change, causing warmer and dryer fire seasons, increasing the threat of fires starting from lightning strikes;
- Increased construction of homes and structures in densely forested areas, increasing threats to life and property; and
- Firefighting resources that are insufficient to combat larger fires and protect structures.

Year	Wildland Fires	Acres Burned	Average Acres Burned Per Fire
2019	74	212	2.9
2020	192	1,123	5.8
2021	138	551	4
2022	162	1,287	7.9
2023	146	1,382	9.5
2024	122	6,495	53.2

Source: NYSDEC (<https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/wildfires/firewise-new-york>)

WEATHER

Dry fall leads to upstate wildfire, warnings across New York

BY SPENCER CONLIN | ULSTER COUNTY PUBLISHED 6:34 PM ET OCT 20, 2024

FOCUS New York Isn't Ready to Fight More Wildfires

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New York Isn't Ready to Fight More Wildfires

The Jennings Creek wildfire burned over 5,000 acres across New York and New Jersey and took 14 days to contain.

Navigation menu with links for HOME, TODAY, and social media icons (Facebook, X, Email, RSS). Includes a 'Greenwood Lake from Rockland, C Agencies Contini' snippet.

Nov Volunteer forest r New York wildfire

By Eric Levenson, Paradise Afshar and Aiaa Elias 6 min read · Updated 7:13 PM EST, Sun Nov

Facebook, X, Email, RSS icons



Nathan Porceng has been reporting on the issue for New York Focus and says the solutions to deal with both the wildfire risk and low staffing levels are complex.

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te officials said tically contained ate. Asst. Chief Keith



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itions, Fire Danger High: Wildfires Reported in 10 ies April 23, 2025 by Editorial Staff — Leave a Comment



New York State is getting an early start this year on drought conditions and wildfires. Between April 14 and 21, Forest Rangers and local fire departments responded to fires in 10 counties across New York State which burned more than 37 acres of land.

Fires were reported in Albany, Clinton, Greene, Herkimer, Orange, Putnam, Saratoga, Schoharie, Warren, and Washington Counties

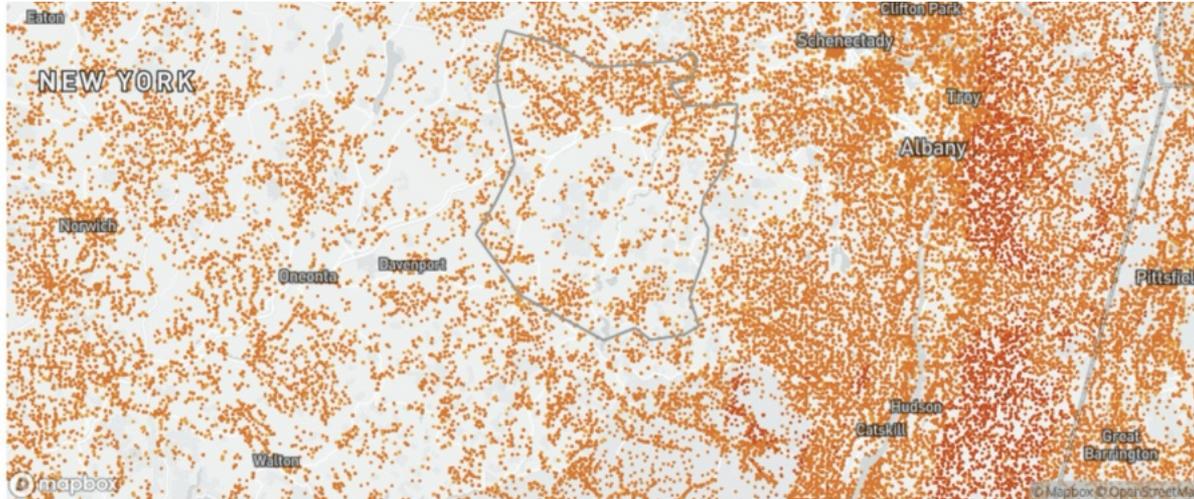
Does Schoharie County have Wildfire Risk?

Moderate



There are **13,562** properties in Schoharie County that have some risk of being affected by wildfire over the next 30 years. This represents **58%** of all properties in Schoharie County.

In addition to damaging properties, wildfire can also cut off access to utilities, emergency services, impact evacuation routes, and may impact the overall economic well-being of an area. Overall, **Schoharie County** has a **moderate risk of wildfire** over the next 30 years. This is based on the level of risk the properties face rather than the proportion of properties with risk.



Properties at risk from fire



Residential: **Moderate Risk** ⓘ

11,318 out of 23,999 homes at risk

Commercial: **Moderate Risk** ⓘ

564 out of 1,553 properties at risk

Infrastructure: **Moderate Risk**

29 out of 80 facilities at risk

Social: **Moderate Risk**

19 out of 117 facilities at risk

FOREST MANAGEMENT & WILDFIRE RISK

As global climate change brings warmer temperatures and more droughts, managing forests is more imperative than ever. If we are not adequately able to manage our forests, we're likely going to see more, not less, wildfires in the future. Many ecosystems and forests are "overdue" for a fire, as they have not been managed through brush clearing and periodic, small fires from lightning strikes or controlled small burns set by Indigenous people that used to happen approximately every 10 or 15 years. (1)

Some examples of forest management strategies to mitigate wildfire risks can include:

- Prescribed Burns: reducing the "fuels" (leaf litter, brush, sticks, etc.) so if and when a wildfire does occur, there is a lot less fuel on the ground to support the fire
- Clearing Fire Breaks: are areas where vegetation is cleared to create a barrier that can stop the progress of a fire.
- Vegetation Thinning: through various techniques - mechanical or with livestock, involves removing smaller trees and brush
- Fuel Management: reducing flammable vegetation, thinning tree canopies to prevent fires from leaping across treetops, and removing dead wood and debris.

SOURCE: (1)<https://www.npr.org/2021/07/10/1014914937/the-warming-climate-is-sparking-wildfires-on-the-east-coast>

