

TRAIN SPARKS BRUSH FIRE THAT BURNS OVER 55 ACRES IN HILLCREST

by N. Griswold

On Saturday May 9th, 2015, just after noon an eastbound train leaving Binghamton sparked multiple fires along the railroad tracks through Port Dickinson, Hillcrest, Port Crane, and Sanitaria Springs. Several departments were initially dispatched for spot fires along the tracks. Some fires were quickly extinguished while others were harder to access and due to hot, dry, and windy weather conditions and quickly grew out of control.



N. Griswold Photo- View from across the river at Emergency Services. The larger fire is on the left.

Very quickly the incident was split into sectors including one southwest of the intersection of Nowlan Road and the railroad tracks. This fire was estimated at several acres before it was contained behind a large camp at the end of Franklin Ave Extension. Several small fires were being worked along Rt 7 in Port Crane. The train causing the fires was stopped in Sanitaria Springs in the area of Tunnel Road where fire crews responded for spot fires and a possible fire on the train. The largest of the fires was northeast of the Nowlan Road intersection and was estimated at nearly 55 acres before it was contained.

Most resources during this incident were concentrated in the area behind the Chenango Valley High School above the railroad trucks and in the area of Prentice Hill Road and Bellview Road. From the railroad tracks the fire quickly spread up the steep terrain towards the houses on Bellview and Prentice Hill. Fire crews with engines, tankers, and brush trucks initially concentrated their efforts in back yards and successfully kept any structures from becoming involved. Once all structures were protected crews used brush trucks, ATVs, and ground teams to recon how far the fire had spread and begin containment of the fire. Finally two bulldozers were utilized to dig fire breaks through the woods to finally stop the fires advance.

During this incident dozens of agencies and hundreds of firefighters from Broome and Chenango Counties assisted in the effort. Every fire and EMS agency in Broome County was activated to either respond or standby to cover for agencies that were responding. Several agencies in southeastern Chenango County were also requested to respond.

EMS agencies responded with ambulances and ATVs to assist and provide rehab at the different sectors of the incident. Police also had a large presence at the incident to help with evacuation of homes and road closures. New York State Forest Rangers responded several rangers; State Fire sent representatives, and New York State Police sent a helicopter to assist with aerial recon of the fire. In total 31 Agencies worked together on this incident to bring it to a positive end with no structures involved and only a couple minor injuries reported.

Broome County Fire Coordinators established a Command Post at the Chenango valley High School. All units were staged at this location and then deployed from there. A landing zone for the helicopter was also set up at this location. A tanker shuttle was set up from Nowlan Road to Prentice Hill and continued through the incident. The fire was finally ruled 100% contained about 19:30 hours and the last crews exited the woods around 21:00. Several departments returned both Sunday and Monday to finish extinguishing hot spots within the burned out area.



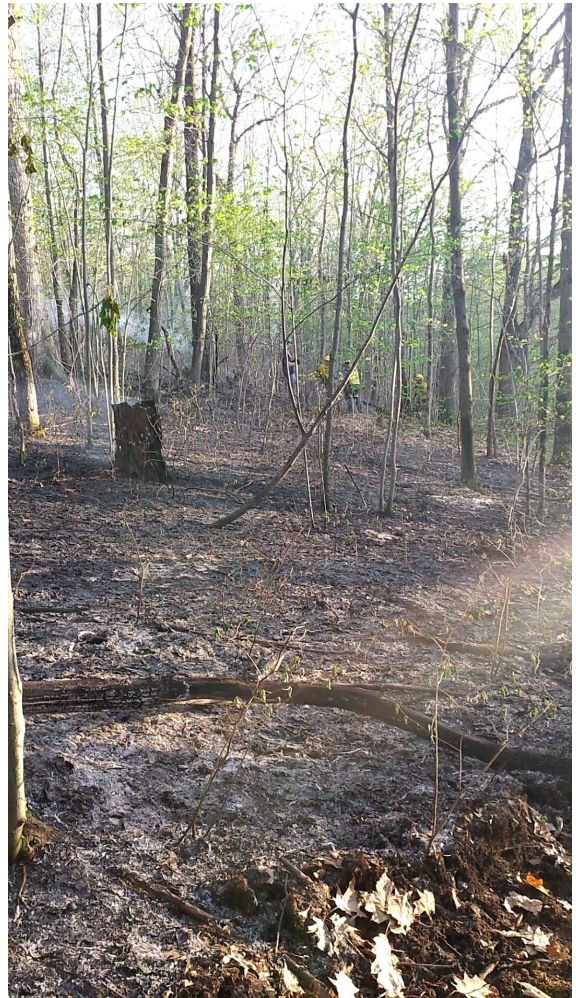
N. Griswold Photo - Fire quickly spreading east through the woods.



S. Ellsworth photo - Fire advances uphill towards the houses.



N. Griswold photo: Fire spreads east towards the fire break cut by one of the bulldozers.



N. Griswold photo - Forest Rangers and County Coordinators assess the fire break and rule the fire 100% contained.

