

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Fire Program Update | Prevention Efforts & Tech Demonstration

March 3, 2026 | DNR.WI.GOV



Objectives

- Fire program overview
- Prevention efforts
- Technology demo
 - WisBURN, dashboards, story map
- What's on the horizon
- Challenges



Suppression resources

- DNR fleet:
 - 108 engines
 - 77 heavy units (engine w/dozer)
 - 5 low ground units (w/engine)
 - 13 heavy dozers
 - 11 DOA detection aircraft
- 3 DNR Incident Management Teams
- Wisconsin Army National Guard Blackhawks (helicopters)
- 2 Single Engine Scoopers (contract)



Forest fire strategy

Use a variety of strategies for forest fire protection:

- Preparedness and training in fire suppression
- Strategic use prescribed fire
- Equipment fabrication (LeMay Forestry Center)
- Enforcement
- Fire prevention/education
- Network of partnerships (agencies & local governments)



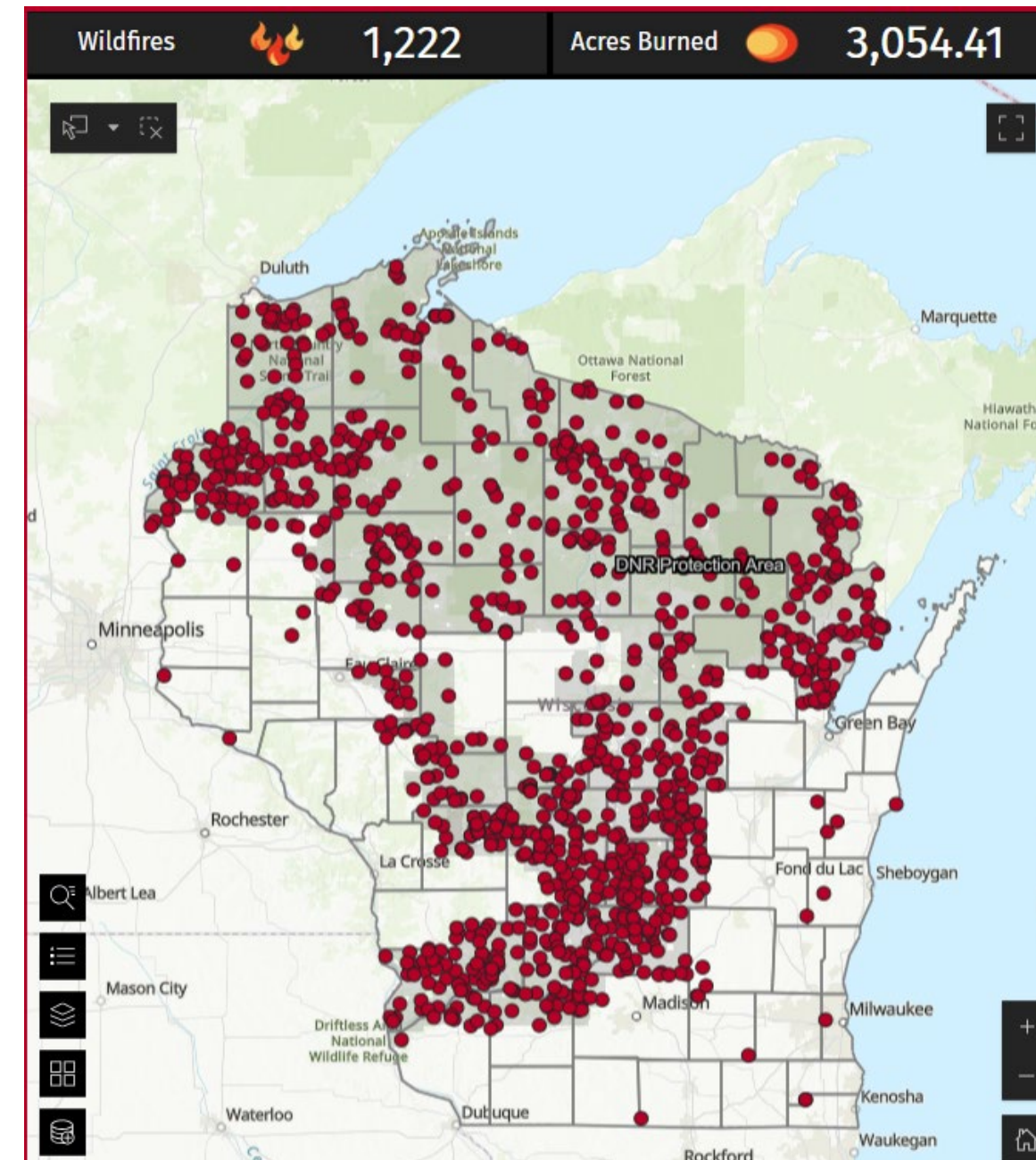
Partnerships

- Fire departments
- Great Lakes Forest Fire Compact
- WI Army National Guard/Emergency Management
- Federal firefighting agencies
- The Nature Conservancy



Wisconsin has wildfires?

- An average of 900 wildfires burn 2,000 acres annually in DNR Protection Areas (10-yr avg)
- Additional wildfires occur in Cooperative Areas
- Most fires are small (1-2 acres)
- An average of 40 structures are lost every year (500 saved)
- 98% wildfires are caused by people

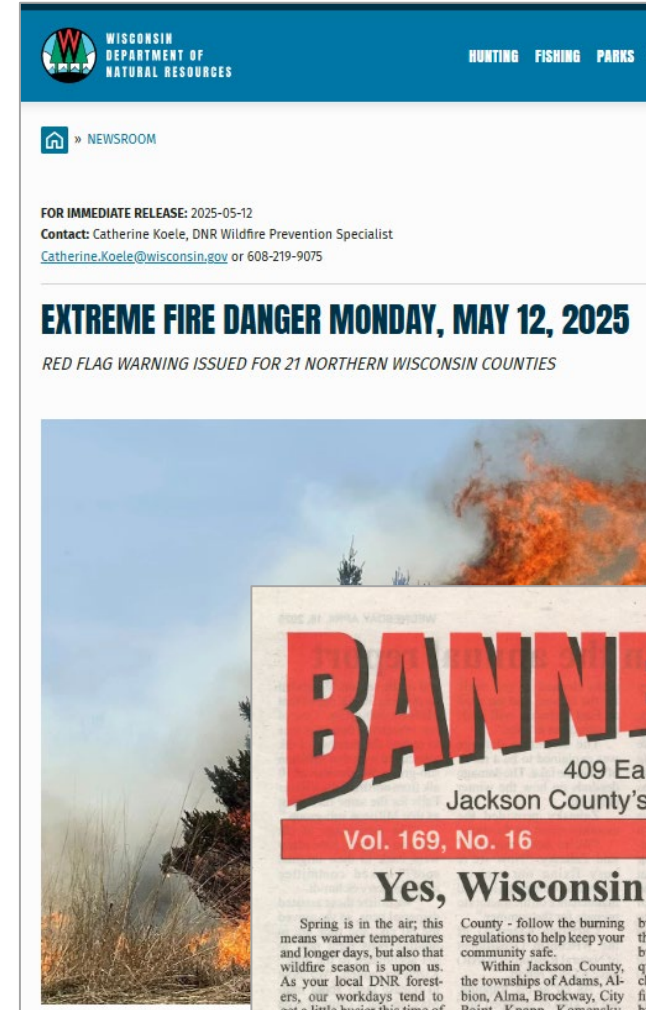


2025 Wildfires

Fire prevention efforts

Traditional & On-the-Ground

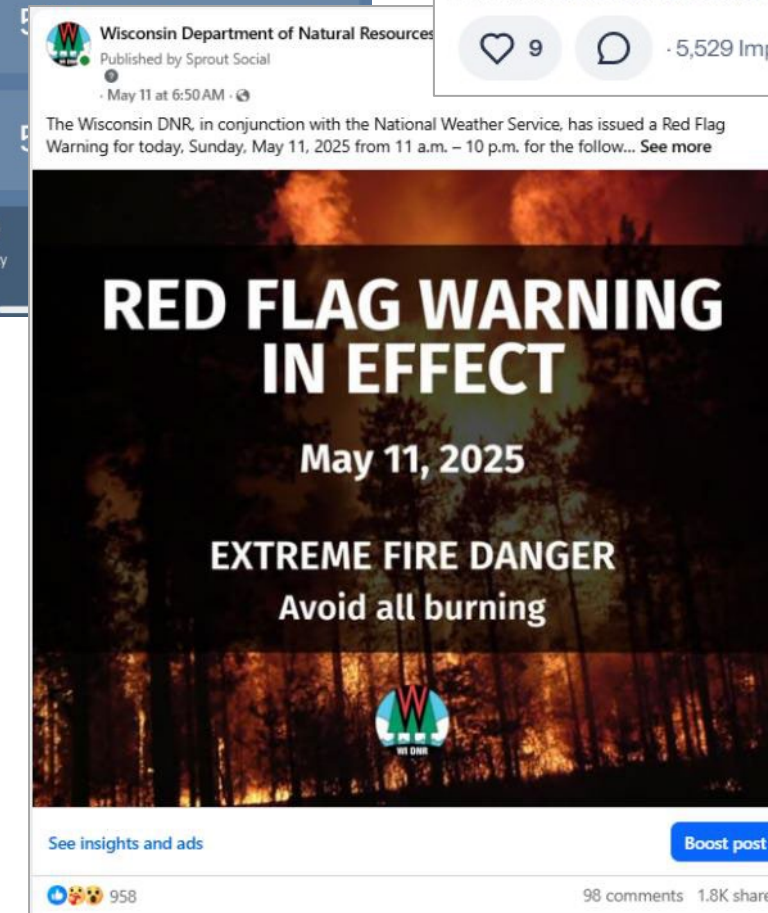
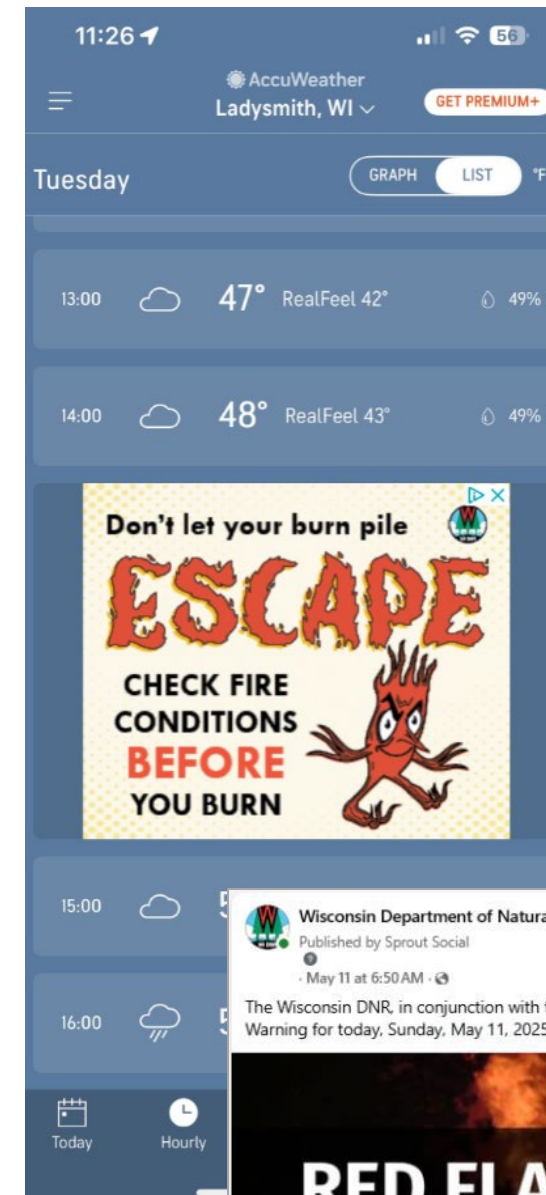
- Suspend DNR burn permits
- News releases
- Numerous news stories/interviews
 - TV, radio, print, streaming
 - Letters to the Editors
 - Fire danger in news segments
- Dept. of Transportation signs
- Natural Resource Magazine



Fire prevention efforts

Digital & Paid

- Paid media campaign
 - Radio ads
 - Gas station ads
 - Weather app ads
 - Restroom ads
- Social media posts
 - Facebook posts
 - Shared widely by local fire departments
 - Nextdoor posts targeted to affected counties
- Emails with safety reminders to burn permit holders



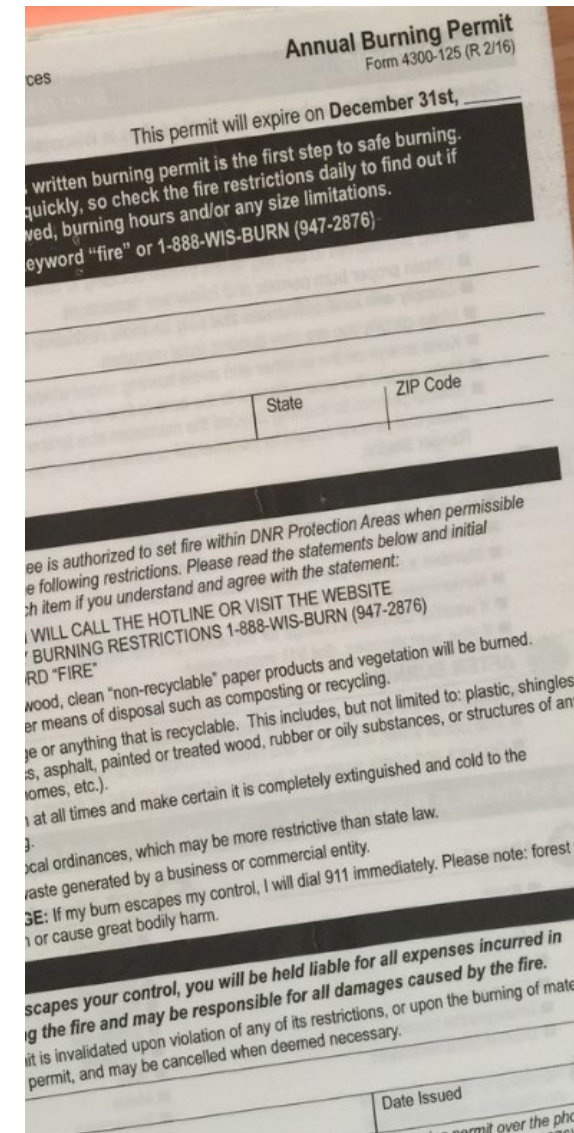
Fire prevention efforts

- 200 fire safety kits in distribution
 - Plush campfire sets, instructions, new flashcards (grades 3-5)
- Launch of new fire prevention GLFFC campaign-- Burn SAFE
 - Focus on fire construction/assessing own physical abilities
 - Highlighting prescribed burn safety
 - More Smokey ducks!



Fire prevention training

- Project collaboration with Customer Service & Licensing
- Intended for new hires (CS, foresters)
- Online 70-min, self-paced
- Topics: burn permit regulations, issuance ‘how-to’, WisBURN, legal/illegal materials, burn violations
- May expand to some external key partners (e.g. Sheriff Offices/dispatchers, fire depts)



NEW INTRO TO BURN PERMIT TRAINING

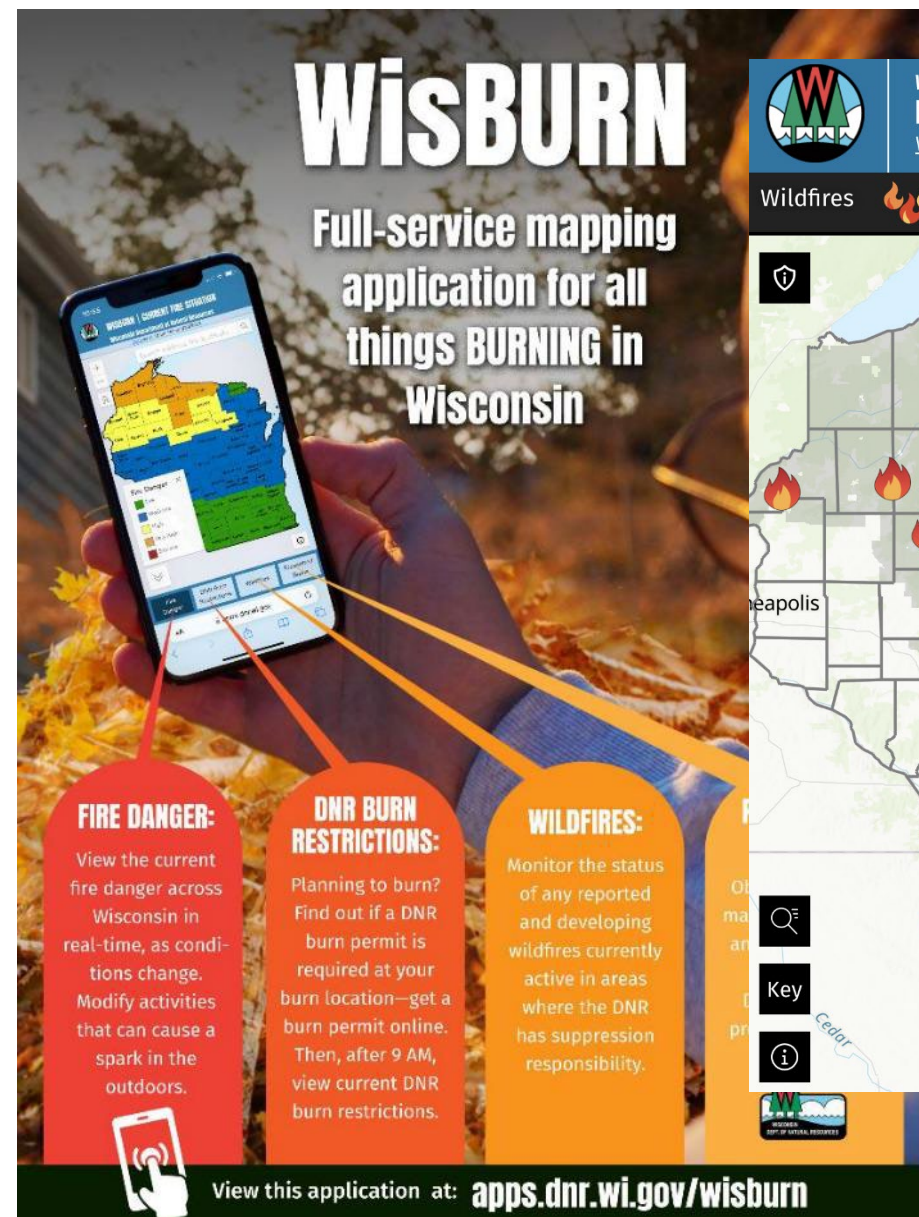
- ✓ burn permit issuance
- ✓ WisBURN application
- ✓ legal vs. illegal materials
- ✓ reporting violations

Using technology

- New! Fire drones (Alta X IGNIS)
- Individual Forest Fire Reporting System
 - Central hub for all internal fire information
 - Populates national databases
- WisBURN
 - Current fire danger, burn restrictions, current wildfires and prescribed burns
- Fire Dashboards
 - Current and historical wildfires and prescribed burns



WisBURN | Fire dashboards



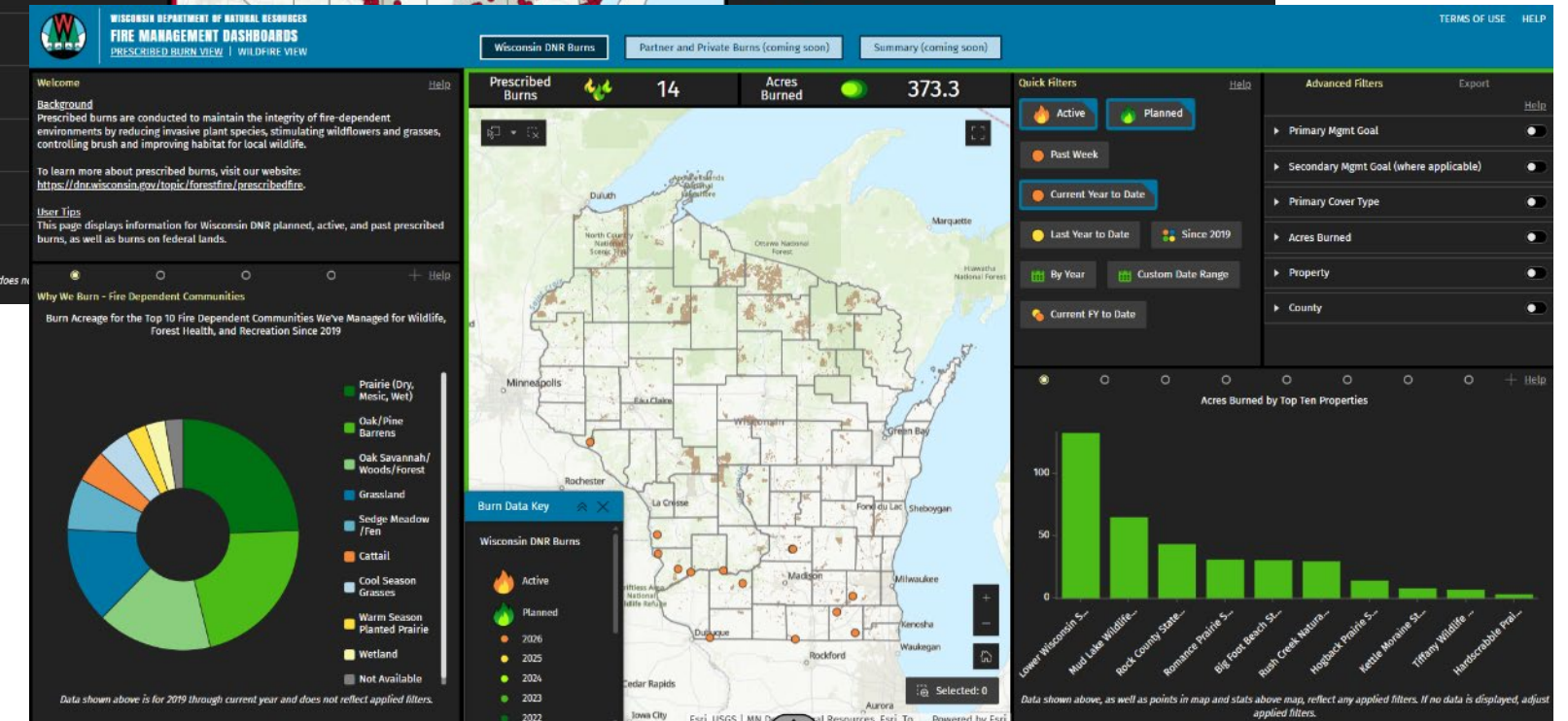
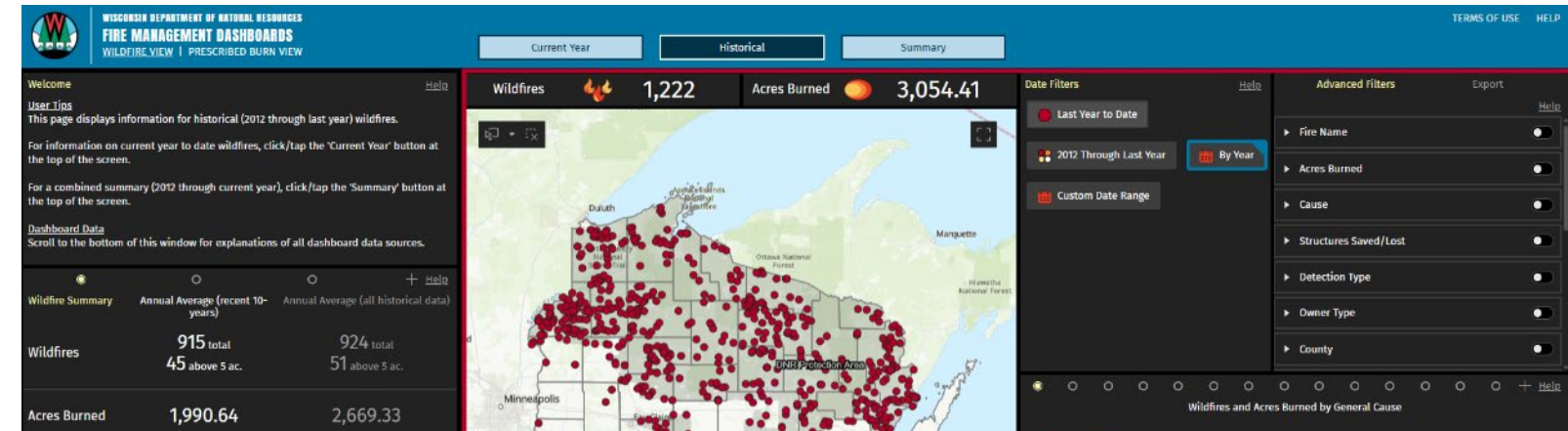
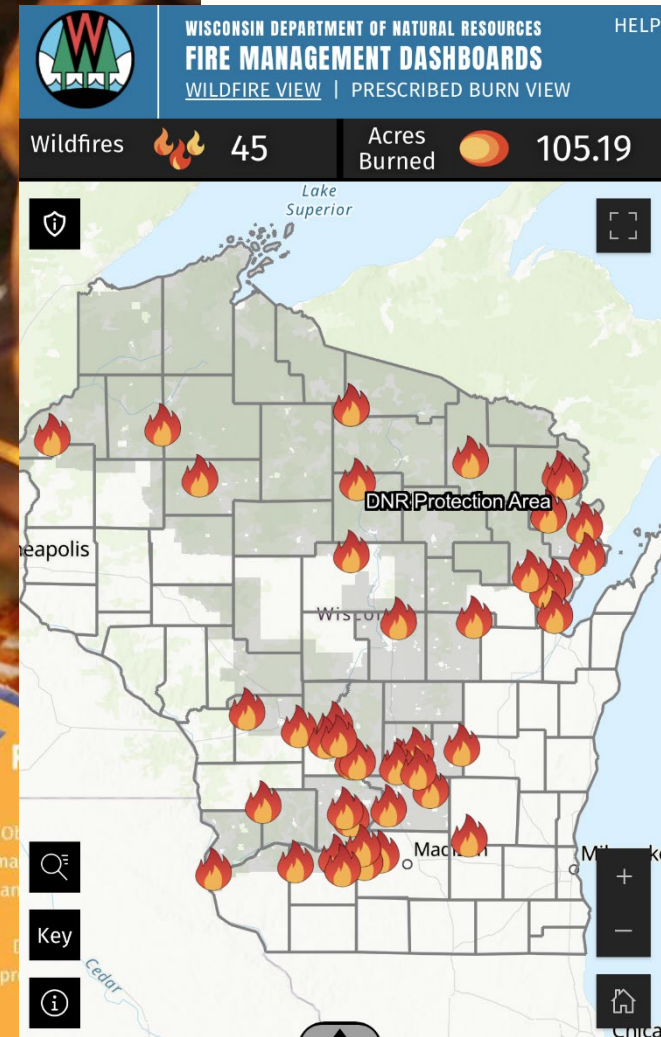
WisBURN
Full-service mapping application for all things BURNING in Wisconsin

FIRE DANGER: View the current fire danger across Wisconsin in real-time, as conditions change. Modify activities that can cause a spark in the outdoors.

DNR BURN RESTRICTIONS: Planning to burn? Find out if a DNR burn permit is required at your burn location—get a burn permit online. Then, after 9 AM, view current DNR burn restrictions.

WILDFIRES: Monitor the status of any reported and developing wildfires currently active in areas where the DNR has suppression responsibility.

View this application at: apps.dnr.wi.gov/wisburn



<https://apps.dnr.wi.gov/wisburn>

<https://dnrmaps.wi.gov/wildfiredashboard/>

Evolution of Fire | Story map (demo)

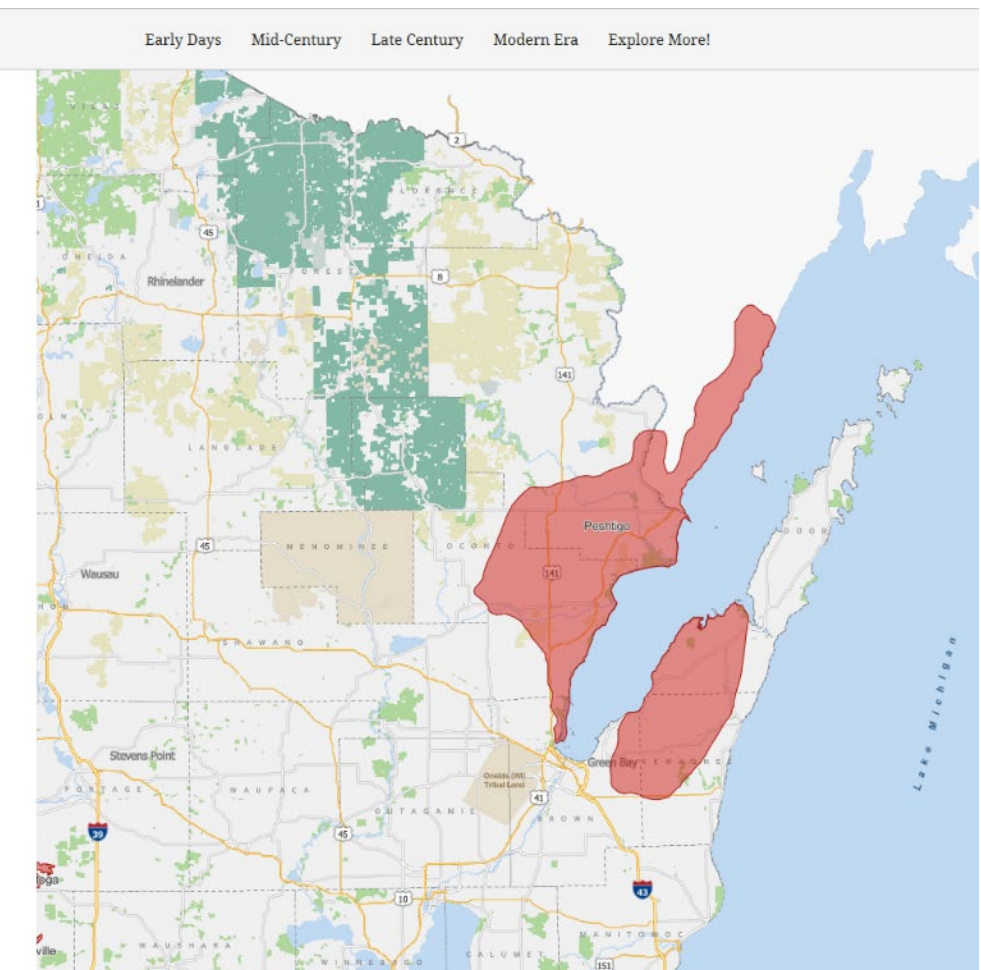


1871: Peshtigo Fire

On October 8, 1871, the deadliest wildfire in American history burned over 1.2 million acres in Northeast Wisconsin. Burning through at least 17 towns on both sides of Green Bay, the Peshtigo Fire caused an estimated \$169 million in damages. It is estimated that 1,200 to 1,500 lives were lost during the inferno, 800 of which perished in Peshtigo alone. It is said that the city of Peshtigo was lost in an hour. Survivors reported that the fire was caused by railroad workers clearing land for tracks, but we may never know if that is true or not. Because the Peshtigo Fire happened on the same night as the Great Chicago Fire, it is lesser known outside of the Great Lakes region.



Artistic depiction of the Peshtigo Fire



<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/c2d80b3479f04b769b6c18f4ee3636e3>

What's on the horizon...

- Fire Program Review
- Budget status
- Prescribed burning
- Fire season outlook



Fire program challenges

- Extended fire seasons
- Firefighter burnout
- Firefighter recruitment/retention
- Staff turnover/more training
- IT development
- Fiscal barriers
- Uncertainty with federal government (e.g., grant funding, programs, partner support)



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QUESTIONS?

