

BREA NEWS

<https://bera.bnl.gov/brea/>

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July/August 2025

BREA Meetings

BREA meets on the second Tuesday of every month (except for August), at 1 p.m. in the Eastern Time Zone. All BREA members are invited.

BREA meetings are held via Zoom. Some meetings will be hybrid so that retirees living on Long Island can attend in person. Contact any officer for help to join a meeting.

Meeting Schedule

July 8, 2025

August 2025 – NO MEETING

September 9, 2025

BREA Officers

President

Arnold Moodenbaugh
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* * *

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Thirty years ago, Long Island faced the largest fire New York had seen in nearly 90 years. Read about the Sunrise Fire of 1995, starting on page 2.

From the President

by Arnie Moodenbaugh, moodenba@optonline.net

Hello to BREA retirees.

BREA members have asked for an update on the new Science and User Support Building (SUSB, Bldg. 101). Badging and other GUV center activities have now been relocated to SUSB. The building is accessible before the main gate via the first exit from the traffic circle. If you zoom in on the map online at <https://www.bnl.gov/maps/point.php?Lat=40.86348&Lng=-72.89636>, you'll see that the traffic circle is located well before the security checkpoint. SUSB hours are 7-5 M-F, but closed on BNL holidays.

This newsletter looks back 30 years at the 1995 Sunrise Fire. Our family has vivid memories of it, having just moved into our "new" house in Westhampton. We were a few hundred feet from the evacuation zone and watched as burning embers came down from the sky.

In the fall, BREA will schedule a couple of talks from BNL staff members. Check for more information in the September/October newsletter and in the meeting invitation/agenda emails.

– Arnie Moodenbaugh, moodenba@optonline.net

Looking Back at the Sunrise Fire, 1995

Thirty years ago, in August 1995, flames were first reported in the woods near Suffolk County Community College Riverhead, close to Sunrise Highway. There had not been rain for about about three weeks. North-northwest winds were sustained at 25 mph, with gusts up to 35 mph. Humidity was at 17 percent. And areas of the Pine Barrens had not burned in a long time.

The Sunrise Fire of 1995 took four days to contain and scorched 4,500 acres of pine barrens. More than 3,000 fire, EMS, law enforcement and support personnel at state and federal levels responded to the event. You can read Marsha Belford's report on the Lab's response in the *Brookhaven Bulletin* of September 1, 1995, which is archived on BNL's website: <https://www.bnl.gov/bnlweb/pubaf/bulletin/index.php>.



In this photo, taken in 1995 by Roger Stoutenburgh, many of those who fought the Sunrise Fire, either as part of the Lab's Fire/Rescue Group or as volunteer firefighters from their home communities, were joined by others who contributed to the efforts.

Shared Memories

From Chuck LaSalla: That photo on page 1 is the actual fire. I'm standing there with another firefighter trying to stop it from crossing Sunrise Highway. The only thing that's not true is Godzilla coming out of the woods! My cousin John Bukowski inserted the monster.

What I remember the most was driving down Sunrise Highway as the officer in charge and seeing nothing but fire on both sides of the highway. It was a pretty scary scene – like we were driving into hell.

It was absolutely the biggest brushfire I ever fought in my career. Although we've had many other brushfires, it was definitely the biggest. I can remember being on Sunrise Highway with other fire engines, shooting water into the woods as the fire approached us with flames that were probably 30 to 40 feet high. The next thing I know it jumped over our heads and four lanes of highway and the median and was on the other side of the road. We didn't even slow it down!

– Chuck LaSalla, capt43@optonline.net

(At the time of the Sunrise Fire, LaSalla was First Lieutenant with the BNL Fire/Rescue Group. He started as a volunteer junior firefighter at age 17. "The rest is BNL history – 41 years from firefighter, lieutenant, deputy chief and finally chief. I just thought it was the greatest job ever," said LaSalla, who retired in 2019.)

From Andy Feldman: At the time, I had been involved with the Suffolk County Fire Rescue and Emergency Services as a volunteer and resources officer. I was also deeply involved with the US Air Force assigned to the North East Air Defense Sector. As part of that commitment, we were required to be part of our local fire rescue services. So I was called in early to provide assistance, which was to get road construction equipment to remove brush and combustibles.

Who else would I call first?? The Lab!

That was some fire. All of the commissioners and deputies left to get out to the fire, leaving me as Watch Officer of the Emergency Management Center in Yaphank, with 60 police chiefs, fire chiefs and county workers.

(continued on next page)

What a night to remember. Looking back, that was a 36-hour duty assignment, with a few minutes of naps in the old bomb shelter and food service provided by the Suffolk County jail.

– Andrew Feldman, Andrew_J_Feldman@outlook.com

(In BNL's Contracts and Procurement, Feldman had been pulled into duty at Suffolk County's command center.)

From Betty Elder: I remember all the firemen staying on site. They came from all over to fight that fire. I remember being able to see it going to and from work. And I remember when it jumped over Sunrise Highway and was burning on both sides of the road!

– Betty Elder, bettyelder81@gmail.com

(Over 200 emergency reservations were handled by Elder and others in the Staff Services Division.)

From John Searing: While time does seem to make many memories fade, this one does not! The fire behavior was the most extreme that most of us had ever seen on Long Island. Here's a particularly vivid memory. The fire behavior went extreme very early. I was up in the Suffolk County Police Helicopter with County Exec Bob Gaffney and Suffolk County Fire Commissioner Dave Fischler. The flame lengths were well over 100 feet high – verified by the ground reports I was getting on the radio. I got notice that the fire had overrun multiple fire department units and firefighters were scrambling. I have never felt such a feeling of physical sickness from an event! Visibility was limited and the radio chatter was pandemonium. Units were calling others looking for their firefighters. It took about two hours to sort it all out, and we found everyone. Only minor injuries were reported. We did have some trucks burned over though. A small price to pay. We were all pretty emotional afterwards.

The lesson from a management perspective is that your training can prepare you for most but not all things. On-the-ground leaders need to be ready to take local control and make split second decisions, not just for their own people but for the greater good. That's why we did not have anyone with serious injuries or worse. After the fire, many departments started to use the incident command system.

– John Searing, johnmsearing@gmail.com

(A project engineer in BNL's Safety and Environmental Protection Division, Searing responded as a volunteer firefighter with the Rocky Point Fire Department. He is now Acting Director of the Plum Island Animal Disease Center, after serving as Suffolk County's Deputy Commissioner of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services.)

Reducing Risk: Prescribed Burns

In January 2025, more than a dozen wildfires tore through southern California. Wildfires thrive on dry conditions, winds that accelerate the flames and low humidity. As a proactive measure to reduce the risk of wildfires in its local community, Brookhaven Lab does prescribed fires on its land. The last prescribed burn took place just last month, in June 2025.

According to BNL's Natural Resource Manager Kathy Schwager, prescribed fire reduces fuels available for wildfire by burning organic material such as vegetation, dead leaves and tree limbs. This is done under moderate conditions and in a systematic manner.



Wildland firefighters conducted prescribed burns at Brookhaven Lab twice in May 2023.

– photos above and on page 4 by Kevin Coughlin

The Lab sits within the Long Island Central Pine Barrens, one of only three Atlantic coastal pine barrens in the world. Pine barrens are “fire-adapted ecosystems,” which means that they need fire to survive. The Long Island Central Pine Barrens is home to pitch pine trees, some of the most fire-adapted trees. In addition to withstanding fire, pitch pine trees can also handle a lack of nutrients and droughty soils.

Without fire, organic material builds up, creating conditions for less fire-adapted trees to grow and outcompete the pitch pines. Also, the southern pine beetle, whose population is growing in Suffolk County, infests pine trees and impedes the flow of nutrients and water. These disruptions kill pine trees in a matter of months. Schwager said that prescribed burns can mitigate the loss of pitch pines due to the increased presence of southern pine beetle.

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Renew BREA Membership

Membership expires on December 31 of every year no matter when you paid your dues (which are requested by January 31 of the following year). To stay on BREA's mailing list, complete the form below and mail it to me along with your payment. Include your email address so BREA can send you timely information.

If you have questions or if your contact information has changed, send me an email at bettyelder81@gmail.com.

PLEASE PRINT

Last name: _____ First name: _____ MI: _____

Street: _____ City: _____ Zip+4: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Membership type:

☐ annual (\$10) ☐ 5 years (\$40) Life ☐ (\$95)

Dues cover year(s) _____

Date: _____ Check amount: _____

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Mail form and check to:

Betty Elder, Membership Chair
215 River Drive
Moriches, NY 11955

– Betty Elder, Membership Chair
bettyelder81@gmail.com

In Memoriam

We deeply regret to inform you of the passing of the following retirees.

Conrad M. Dabrowski, 87, April 18, 2025

Robert McNair, 71, April 27, 2025

Joseph Perry Jr., 100, March 14, 2025

Sylvester C. Suda, 90, July 3, 2024

More information may be found at BREA's website:

<https://bera.bnl.gov/brea/>. To post an obituary for a deceased BNL employee or retiree, email information to msrowe.hi@gmail.com or mail it to BREA (see panel below for address).

Prescribed Burns (continued)

Prescribed fires are ignited along the fire line, a barrier of material that will not burn intensely. In the photo below, the dirt path adjacent to the fire serves as the fire break.



Reflecting on the California fires early this year, Schwager said, "Prescribed fire is not a panacea, however. If people insist on living in or immediately adjacent to wild lands, they must do their part to treat the fuels around their houses, use building

materials that are fire resistant, etc." She added, "More prescribed fire needs to be done, for sure, but it won't matter if your gutters are full of pine needles and you have vegetation growing right up next to your house or you're storing firewood on your wooden deck."

– Mona S. Rowe, msrowe.hi@gmail.com

Brookhaven Retired Employees Association

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