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## “An Ole Plowboy”

If you have ever been around Dan LeCrone much you have likely heard this phrase in one manner or another. This could have been used as a short simple explanation of his early life, a self-deprecating statement made in frustration, or more often than not thrown out as a modest badge of honor behind which a mountain of a man would humbly attempt to stand behind. If you knew Dan LeCrone, you knew clearly, he was not “just an ole plowboy” and that is a small part of what made him great!



We lost Dan in the evening of November 30, 2021, following a brief battle with sepsis a few weeks after his successful knee replacement surgery. Dan was 62 years old when he went to meet his Lord and Savior. While heaven gained a wonderful soul, his departure has left a huge hole in the lives of his loving family, close friends and coworkers, and the multitude of wildfire and emergency response organizations at all levels he was part of. Time and life continue to move forward and each of us are working to come to grips with this loss and the ramifications of no longer having the husband, father,

friend, mentor, and coworker that was always there and willing to help in any way.

A little bit of Dan’s story from his time with the Bureau of Forestry and as a PA Forest Fire Warden. Dan became a Forest Fire Warden in late October 1994. He had previously helped the district with wildland firefighting, from this District Forester Ralph Heilig and Fire Inspector Steve Corl saw something in him. Their first idea was to get him on as a Fire Warden in the District. Ralph had other ideas in mind as well, as Steve was looking at retirement in the relatively near future. DF Heilig worked to recruit him into employment with the Bureau of Forestry, first as a seasonal Forest Patrolman. At that time, Dan was working full-time on the family farm and had a wife and young daughter to support. However, the farm was going to be sold so Dan took a leap of faith and the ole plowboy accepted the position, thus beginning his career in forestry and wildfire in May 1995. A few months after he was promoted to a longer seasonal position as a Semi-skilled Laborer. The idea was for Dan to learn from and gain experience in wildland firefighting with on-the-job training with Steve. In December of 1997 Dan was selected to become the Forest Fire Specialist Supervisor of Rothrock Forest District following Steve Corl’s retirement. The last 26 years, Dan has been at the helm of the District’s fire program working with the Forest Fire Wardens, Volunteer Fire Companies, County EMS, District Staff, and adjacent Forest Districts to successfully administer all aspects of the fire program. These duties have included the obvious suppression of forest fires, wildland fire prevention activities, fire training, supplying tools, and equipment all of it revolved around Dan being there when and where he was needed and no matter the obstacle, he found a way.

Dan’s passion for fire was not just limited to his home district, he took every opportunity to learn and experience as much as he could when and where it was available. This led him to the “out-of-state” fire program later known as the PA Wildland Fire Crew. His first assignment was as a Firefighter Type 1 (Squad Boss) position for a fire in Flagler County Florida in July 1998. Two years later he got the opportunity to go to Montana as a Crew Boss on the Valley Complex. He even had the opportunity to moonlight as a Task Force Leader for part of that assignment. Over the next decade he worked through many assignments in many western states going up through the Operations side of fire to the Division Supervisor position. He was never one to just be satisfied with where he was at if there was opportunity to learn and experience more, you know “Just an ole plowboy”! It was during these times he had an opportunity to meet the Northern Rockies Type 1 Incident Management Team

Command Staff during a dinner. Dan took notice that those folks ate with the crews and took time to talk to as many people as they could from the Fireline Supervisors to the people running the shower services. That Team was Dan's type of people and he wanted to know more! He left the Operations of fires and turned his sights towards Safety, first as a Line Safety all the way up to becoming the Lead Type 1 Safety Officer for the Northern Rockies Type 1 IMT. By checking into the available records, I found that Dan was on 60 major incidents out-of-state and a few large scale in-state ones. This spanned over a 24-year period. During his time working out-of-state and learning and experiencing more and more he did his best to share that knowledge back home and inspire others to come with him. His love for this work was driven by the sheer challenges faced and his genuine love for the people he served with! If you asked him what he did and what his title was more often than not you heard "I'm just an ole plowboy, but my team does... such and such."

Dan was a Forest Fire Warden first and foremost and he valued that program greatly, but he valued the people that made it up even more. He came up in that program by becoming a Warden even prior to working for the Bureau. He spoke often of the experiences and lessons learned with his Warden comrades. One of his greatest treasures was the relationships that were forged with these brethren on the forests and mountains of Pennsylvania. He worked to keep in-touch with and maintain the relationships that were created on fires, and he valued each of them. He did his best to document the works of those that came before him so that their knowledge would be available for the new generation of wildland fire fighters. It bothered him greatly to have been forced by COVID-19 to not have opportunity to meet in fellowship and training because he knew that relationships are what did and do make the Warden Program a success. There isn't a warden training that I can remember in which he didn't acknowledge his gratitude for the wardens and volunteers in the fire companies and recognize the hard work that they do on every incident. After all he was "just an ole plowboy".

Dan's legacy is one that has turned out in a way that we never expected. He was taken way to soon, we never got to say goodbye, there's still so much he, the collective we (his family, his friends, and his coworkers), and everyone that worked with him in any capacity wanted and planned to do! He was always there, he was the foundation for so much, his leadership was paramount to so many parts of a fire program that spanned his home district, the state agency, and all the way to a National Incident Management Team. However, Dan knew that nothing was forever and over the years he

championed a key idea, planned succession for an organization. He made sure to have people in the district not only trained but comfortable working fire response and incidents. This paid off for us many times while Dan was working large Type III incidents or out-of-state, his coworkers addressed anything that came up in district. He worked to develop new people on the Northern Rockies Team so that they not only had depth in qualified people they had a plan for who would replace someone when they decided to retire. Dan worked with folks in the Division and Senior Management with this same message, along with the goal of having "Fire People" in "Fire Related Jobs". His goal was to see that accomplished before he retired, I trust that work will continue in a positive manner for the future of the organization. He made great strides in bringing new ideas and having uncomfortable conversations to try to develop a better organization for tomorrow. Not bad for "just an ole plowboy"!

Ideally, I would be writing this after his retirement and he would be reading this in his Warden Newsletter maybe grumbling about the attention, but happy with what was accomplished. He would have spent as much time as possible training the person that would come to fill his vacant position and he would have been but a phone call away for the multitude of questions that have already come up and those that are yet to be discovered. Alas that is not the case, but all his work and planning is being tested and moved forward. New people are taking the reins just as he hoped in-district by his cherished coworkers, in PA Type 3 IMT by his friends there, and on the Northern Rockies IMT members. He would say he was "just an ole plowboy" and that the teams and people he was associated with were due the praise, but that is only partly true. We are so much richer in life for having known, cared for, and loved that mountain of a man who was so very much more than just an ole plowboy!

**David Yeager, Assistant District Forester, Rothrock Forest District**



**WILDLAND  
FIREFIGHTER  
FOUNDATION**

# Dan LeCrone

1959 - 2021



Take time to remember those  
who have gone before us.





# **The Forest Fire Warden News**