

The News-Review

CHARLES V. STANTON, Editor and Manager

ADDY WRIGHT, Asst. Bus. Mgr.

GEORGE CASTILLO, Asst. Editor

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EVER PRESENT DANGER

By Charles V. Stanton

A valuable service is being performed by the U. S. Weather Bureau in supplying daily reports on forest fire danger to newspapers, radio and television. A daily reminder of the hazard of fire in our forests is unquestionably an important factor in securing public cooperation in forest fire prevention.

Although this service is designed particularly for industrial operations in the woods, logging and sawmilling, it is of equal importance to anglers, hunters, picnickers and even those simply travelling through the forests.

There is one thing to be feared, however, in connection with these daily reports. Announcement that fire danger is low could well cause some uninformed person to grow careless, believing that a forest fire could not get a start. I use the word "uninformed" advisedly, for any person having intimate knowledge of the forest knows that fires can start at any time and under almost any conditions.

Electrical storms many times start fires even though the woods are drenched with rain. Forest fires have been known in areas blanketed by snow. While it is true that the danger is less while forests are wet and while the per cent of humidity is high, there is an ever present danger of forest fire, a danger that should never be overlooked or discounted.

Many Fires Avoidable

Fire records over the past years show that the public has become conscious of the cost of forest fires. As stumpage has increased in value, people have realized that wilful and negligent destruction of trees constitutes an economic loss. This knowledge that jobs, payrolls and profits were going up in smoke has resulted in a very great reduction in fire losses.

It seems only a comparatively few years ago that thousands of acres of Douglas County forest lands were burned over every year by incendiaries. Timber at that time had no value in Douglas County. There were few sawmills. It was the prevalent opinion that sawmills couldn't exist except on tidewater, aside from capacity to supply the immediate local need. Douglas County's timber, having a higher incident of disease than found in Washington, then leading in lumber production, was thought by many people to be virtually worthless. Few people at that time had vision to see that cutting was outstripping growth and that the industry was cutting itself out of business in all operating centers.

Douglas County's income was from agriculture, particularly sheep, turkeys, prunes. Many of our farm and civic leaders held the opinion that it was good economy to burn off the forests and create pasture. Sheep and cattle ranged free on Oregon and California grant lands, and on national forests. Thus there was a great deal of incendiary burning along the borders between private and federal lands.

If Douglas County today had all the timber deliberately burned by incendiaries, we would be able to support a far greater industry than we can now maintain with the available resource. Yet, should we blame a past generation for lack of vision?

Should Benefit From Error

We can look back to many mistakes. Not only did incendiaries destroy thousands upon thousands of acres of timber that today would be merchantable, but timber was stripped needlessly from more thousands of acres of private farm lands.

All over Douglas County we can see where trees were removed from shallow soil. The soil was not able to produce pasture. Because the ground was not covered, erosion set in and caused immeasurable loss. In other localities the cleared land became choked with weeds and brush.

Undoubtedly we are making mistakes today, mistakes for which we will be criticized by oncoming generations. We, too, lack vision.

It is possible, however, for us to profit by the mistakes of the past. We know now that deliberate destruction of timber was a great error, one that is proving costly today. Yet, while we have made excellent progress in reduction of man-caused fires in late years, we still have too many forest fires each year. A considerable number of fires could be prevented by just a little more caution, a little more care, a little less carelessness or negligence.

We should keep firmly in mind at all times that forest fires hurt our pocketbooks, that there is an ever-present danger of fire in the forest, that while we may make other mistakes because of our limited vision, we need not leave blackened and burned forests to the generations still to come.

Editorial Comment

From The Oregon Press

COUNTIES FOUND WANTING

Portland Oregonian

The annual report of the Oregon Chest, which for 14 years has been co-ordinating a state-wide fund raising program for the support of social welfare agencies, reveals again that the level of contributions varies radically from county to county.

Officials of the Oregon Chest each year establish a quota for each county, based on a reasonable judgment of its wealth. Each county's contribution to the state fund is largely dependent on the success of the annual Community Chest or United Fund drive within the county. Some counties regularly fill or closely approach their quotas. Others just as consistently fall far below the goal set for contribution to the state fund.

A table compiled by the Oregon Chest shows, for example, that in the past three years, Curry county has annually contributed only about 20 per cent of its modest state quota. Other counties that have regularly fallen far below the mark set by the Oregon Chest as a fair share are Douglas, Gilliam, Grant, Jefferson, Josephine,

Lincoln, Malheur, Morrow, Sherman, Tillamook, Wallowa, Wheeler and Yamhill. Others have occasionally faltered, but not regularly or not by so much.

As a result, the Oregon Chest habitually falls far short of its goal, and its beneficiaries—among which are the Boys and Girls Aid Society, Volunteers of America, Mental Health Association and U.S.O.—must slice their budgets accordingly.

We intend to imply no censure of the counties named above. Rather, we hope that some among their residents