

Forest Fire, the Red Paradox of Conservation

By W. B. GREELEY

Secretary-Manager, West Coast Lumbermen's Association

On August 14, 1933, in an upper reach of Gales Creek, Tillamook county, Oregon, two logs rubbed together. One was a Douglas fir, on its way to the landing. The other was a cedar windfall, tinder dry. A high wind was blowing from the north-east. Sparks popped from the friction of the two logs into dry logging debris, and the wind fanned them into small tongues of flame. Smoke spiraled upward.

Like all major disasters, the Tillamook fire seemed to be managed by some malignant power of fate. It started at noontime. The operation was closing down because of fire danger. Conditions were plainly bad. The fire spread with the explosive force, despite the efforts of loggers and other experienced fire fighters; and before nightfall it had covered 400 acres. The area was very rough and lacked trails. By nightfall of the second day the fire had spread over about ten sections. There it was held until August 20, when the wind again blew hard from the east and the humidity fell. The fire marched westward, spreading over 40,000 acres. On August 25 the fire blew up. Within forty hours, from midnight of August 24 until the evening of August 26, a tornado of flame swept twenty miles to the west and ten miles to the south. It brought smoky night to the region, and carried clouds of ashes to the sea.

The area burned in the Tillamook fire was 244,706 acres. The volume of timber killed was 10,257,517,000 board feet, nearly three times the West coast cut in 1933. This was one of Oregon's finest timber stands. Six years of direct employment for 14,000 men and a loss in lumber values from \$275,000,000 went up in smoke. The burned timber would have built one million small homes.

The Tillamook burn, although some timber has been salvaged and much of the area is reforesting, remains a monumental testament to the red paradox of the American conservation movement. After forty years of conservation, we must admit defeat at the hands of conservation's chief enemy—the forest fire. This is a harsh statement, in view of all the splendid progress in organized fire prevention, public and private. But the hard facts speak for themselves.

The forest fire statistics of the federal forest service for 1937 provide substantial evidence. The year 1937 was a "good" forest fire year, on the basis of five-year averages. It yielded only 185,000 forest fires in the United States, Alaska excluded. They burned over only 22,000,000 acres of land, or but a little more than half the acreage burned in 1936. More than eleven per cent of the total unprotected forest area of the country was burned over; and ninety-four per cent of all acreage burned over was unprotected forest land. The bill of damages on the 1937 unprotected acreage burned is stated by the forest service as \$18,202,740.

Viewing the situation over a term of years, the record shows that during the five-year period, 1933 to 1937, the number of forest fires which occurred in the United States, Alaska excluded, averaged just short of 172,000 a year, and that the average acreage burned amounted to 36,327,754 acres with total yearly damage of approximately \$43,000,000.

In the protected forest area of the United States, the service reports an annual average of 66,752 forest fires, of which 4,175 were started by campers; 16,282 by smokers, 16,487 by incendiaries; 9,126 from debris burning; 5,813 by lightning; 1,207 from lumbering. The latter caused two per cent of the total fires; while campers, smokers and arsonists caused fifty-five per cent; lightning, nine per cent; and debris burning, or land clearing, fourteen per cent. Railroad fires, a little more than four per cent of the total, and fires of miscellaneous and unknown causes make up the remainder.

In 1937 and again in 1938 140,000,000 trees were planted on 155,000 acres of national forests; more than 150,000 acres planted—but the annual fire loss is 287,000 acres on those forests.

What does it profit conservation to plant new timber crops while failing to control fires that burn an area a third larger than that planted?

In the State of Washington in 1938, according to the state forester, 2,197 forest fires burned over 116,000 acres. In the same year, in the state's western lumber region 80,000 acres were cut over. The forest industry of western Washington spent more than \$800,000 for fire control and the production of new timber crops in the year 1937. The 1938 record shows the effect of that expenditure. Of the state's 2,197 fires, only fifty-seven originated in lumbering operations, or less than three per cent. There were 772 smokers' fires; 148 campers' fires.

What does it profit conservation, when made an active force within the forest industry, to expend hundreds of thousands of dollars for the growing and protection of new timber, while forest-fire prevention outside the industry fails?

The lesson of all these statistics is that the forest fire problem is a public problem. Solution of the fire problem should be the first order of business for the conservation movement. Putting these two points together, it logically follows that the big job of conservation today is in the field of public responsibility for forest fires. Forest industry, in at least much of the country, is doing more than its part in forest-fire prevention. The Forest Service and state forestry departments are doing a wonderful job of fire protection on lands under their jurisdictions. The great failure lies on the public side, with the campers, the smokers and the land clearers, and with law enforcement agencies that have failed to halt the incendiary in the forest.

The root of the problem is public indifference and ignorance. There is no public will to prevent forest fires, as there is, for example, to preserve wildlife, because the public has not been educated in the realities of fire control.

Education of the public in forest-fire responsibility and control has been pushed hard on the West Coast, yet it is notoriously true in this region that a "stump rancher" may be jailed three months for shooting a deer out of season to feed his family, and yet be fined no more than five dollars, if at all, for burning debris on his land without a permit, in violation of the law, and often with the destruction of adjacent growing timber. The smoker or the camper who starts a forest fire, seldom suffers more than inconvenience if he is caught by the law officers. Of the state of Washington's 2,197 forest fires in 1938, 436 were incendiary fires. To date not one of the criminals responsible for those fires has been brought to book. Smokers and campers who start fires are also violators, for if they obey the regulation, they do not start fires.

Public opinion must be aroused in behalf of fire control before there can be better enforcement of fire protection laws. At present public opinion is passive to the vast majority of forest fires, and may be excited—and then only temporarily—by spectacular forest disasters. As human psychology goes in other fields, it is reasonable to presume that the spectacular side of forest fire devastation has been so played up that the public is dulled to the destruction wrought by the hundreds of thousands of unspectacular surface fires.

Timber is a crop. One-fourth of the land area of the United States is fit only for the growing of timber. To keep this part of our land productive in the only crop it is fit to grow, it is vitally necessary to provide real fire control. Fire is the enemy of the young forest, of growing timber, just as the boll weevil is the enemy of cotton, just as the corn-borer is the enemy of corn, and as drouth is the enemy of all farm crops. Science may solve the problems of the boll-weevil and the corn-borer. Droughts must be left to Providence. The solution of the forest fires problem rests almost solely with the public.

Nebraska-Kansas Event.

The Nebraska and Kansas clubs will hold their monthly potluck dinner at the W.O.W. hall in Eugene, Friday, May 26th, at 6:30 p. m. Each family is requested to take a covered dish and sandwiches; dishes and silverware, coffee, cream and sugar to be furnished by the committee. The program will be put on by the Cascadian Bowmen's club, followed by dancing with the Linn family orchestra of five pieces furnishing the music. All former "Cornhuskers" and "Jayhawkers" are invited to attend the gathering and to take their friends.

Insurance Rate Reductions

New, lower rates, auto liability. Our aim: To always be in position to serve your best interests.

Phone: Office 36; Res. 192J

Arnest Insurance Agency

Saginaw

A pre-bridal shower was given for Mary Alma Benston by the Walker high school girls one evening last week at the home of Iris Montieth. Games were played and refreshments of ice cream and cookies were served to the following: Mary Alma Benston, Freda and Nellie Stalder, Mildred Lindsay, Nellie Haight, Dorothea Wright, Eleanor Warren, Betty Fisher, Dorothy Hohman, Della Moore, Marie Hansen, Iris Montieth, Mrs. Inez Montieth and Mrs. Ruby Benston.

Mr. and Mrs. Winner of near Portland have moved here and are living at the Lawrence Prine place.

Mrs. William Sharon and children are visiting at the home of Mrs. Sharon's parents near Roseburg.

Martin Olsen spent the week end with an uncle, Mr. Ream of Eugene.

The Friendly Neighbors club met Thursday afternoon at the home of Mrs. Viola Perry. A handkerchief shower was given Mrs. Perry, who is leaving soon. She was also the club president so the vice president, Mrs. Ruby Benston, was elected as president and Mrs. Helen Russell was elected vice president. Visitors were: Mrs. Mary Smith and Mrs. Halverson of Walker; Mrs. Claude Kirkendall and Louise Finn. The next meeting will be with Mrs. Virgie Copple, June 1st.

A large crowd attended the graduation exercises at Walker high school Monday evening.

Hugh Reynolds Is Convicted Friday

Hugh W. Reynolds, former Eugene labor council secretary, was convicted of perjury by a Lane county jury Friday at Eugene, after a four hour deliberation by the jury. Sentence will be passed May 29th. The penalty is from two to four years in the pen.

Reynolds allegedly committed perjury in his trial of March, 1938, as to his activities of November 15, 1937, the date a Eugene barber shop window was broken. The state held that Reynolds had seen and conversed with the three men now in the penitentiary, alleged, to have broken the windows.

Films Developed and Printed

25c 6 or 8 Exposures

Free Enlargement of Your Choice With Every Roll

REPRINTS 3c EACH

Guaranteed Work

Thrift-Wise

Cottage Grove, Ore.

BENTER HOLSTEINS WIN NATIONAL HONORS

National honors have been bestowed upon Adolph Benter, Creswell, for the outstanding production of members of their pure bred Holstein herd, according to an announcement from the Holstein-Friesian Association of America. From the Benter herd came two Honor List cows, ranking in second and fourth places.

SPONSORS SOCIAL EVENING

The finance committee of the H. E. club of the Dorena grange is sponsoring a social evening next Thursday, May 25, at 8 p. m. There will be a short program consisting of musical numbers, readings and skits after which there will be games and amusements. There is no admission charge and the public is invited.

If You Are Interested in Special Mercantile Values

you won't have to go out of Cottage Grove to find them Friday and Saturday. It will pay you to look over advertisements appearing in this issue and get details of Saturday's special attraction.

FIRST NATIONAL BANK

THE WHY OF DOUBLE YOUR MONEY BACK

WHY? . . .

For 65 days, Richfield and other automotive engineers tested 16 different types of gasoline, many of which were popular competitive gasolines, in most of the types of cars on the road today.

They recorded with precision instruments all types of driving—highway—city—mountain and desert. One of the new formulas developed in Richfield's great new refinery amazingly outperformed all 15 other gasolines in all makes of cars. That's why we can guarantee that no other non-premium gasoline can touch the performance of this new miracle fuel.

WHY—IF IT'S SO PERFECT A FUEL SHOULD ONLY RICHFIELD HAVE IT?

BECAUSE we've just completed a new refinery costing millions of dollars and designed to produce this more costly formula—economically. Most gasolines are made of not more than three ingredients—this miracle fuel is a blend of six. We assured ourselves by these conclusive tests that this new ALL-TIME HI-OCTANE would outperform other non-premium gasolines in all makes of cars and trucks under all conditions. We had to

make some startling offer like a 200% guarantee to encourage some folks to try it just once; because we knew in most cases that even a child would be able to tell the difference. Our dealers report over 10,000 new customers who are praising this new miracle fuel.

JUST WAIT TILL YOU TRY NEW ALL-TIME HI-OCTANE!

RICHFIELD