

The story of a fire

by Marsha Shewczyk

It's a hot, dry September day— fire season. The lookout watchers are aware of that.

From above the trees anything that looks like smoke is carefully watched. Most of the time what looks like smoke is simply dust from the logging operations in the forest. Experience in the tower makes that easier to detect.

But off towards Mutton Mountain something can be seen that doesn't quite resemble dust.. Examination with binoculars indicate that the dust-like cloud has movements much like smoke. It is smoke.

Where is the smoke coming from? The exact location is important when calling Fire Control. The location is charted and the call is made.

A second lookout makes the same report. Smoke is seen coming from Mutton Mountain.

A tone-out. Firefighters stop what they're doing, jump in their cars and report immediately to the Fire Control office. The first men there board the helicopter and start out for the area where smoke has been reported.

Upon arriving the officer in charge surveys the situation, reports the conditions and with the other firefighters begin to halt the fire's progress as much as possible. Other firefighters and trucks are on the way.

The dispatcher at Fire Control headquarters is keeping busy with information coming in and information going out. Directions are issued to firefighters. Trucks are given directions.

The extent of the fire is greater than the 33 Warm Springs firefighters can handle. The dispatcher notifies other units. Before the night is out he'll call in a hot-shot crew trained specifically to combat

range fires.

Firefighters battle the fire until exhaustion overwhelms them. Their Pulaski and shovels continue to make fire lines despite the fatigue of their bodies.

Bulldozers are working on firelines at the other end of the blaze. At another location, back-burning occurs in hopes that the fire will stop when it comes in contact with an already burned area.

Fire retardant is dropped until eventually 36 thousand gallons covers the area. The noise of the helicopter does not muffle the sound of crackling juniper and bitterbrush.

Firefighters are cautioned and reminded of their training. Any size fire can result in loss of life. Winds are continuously checked. Terrain is examined. Areas called chimneys are avoided as fire can sweep quickly through these gulleys.

Four hours of firefighting seems like 12 but firefighters continue to work at containing the blaze. Some firefighters are sent away to sleep for a while. Always, manpower is important. Other firefighters work twice as hard.

Five hundred firefighters fighting for eight days finally bring the fire under control. It seemed like the end would never come. 7698 acres were burned.

Inexperienced firefighters are no longer that. They've learned much. Old-hand firefighters learned more, too. Each fire brings with it new conditions—different terrain, different fuel, different firefighters.

Only a few minor injuries resulted in the days spent at fighting this fire, a few sprained ankles, a bruised leg. Fortunately no one was seriously hurt.

The fire smolders. A few firefighters remain keeping watch. For months the roots of this range vegetation will smolder. The roots go deep in this country.

Wildlife was not affected to a great degree this time. Most escaped before the fire encroached upon their homes.

The lookout watchers have their chairs turned in the direction of the charred, still smokey area watching carefully for any signs of rekindling. The helicopter flies over occasionally also making certain conditions remain stable.

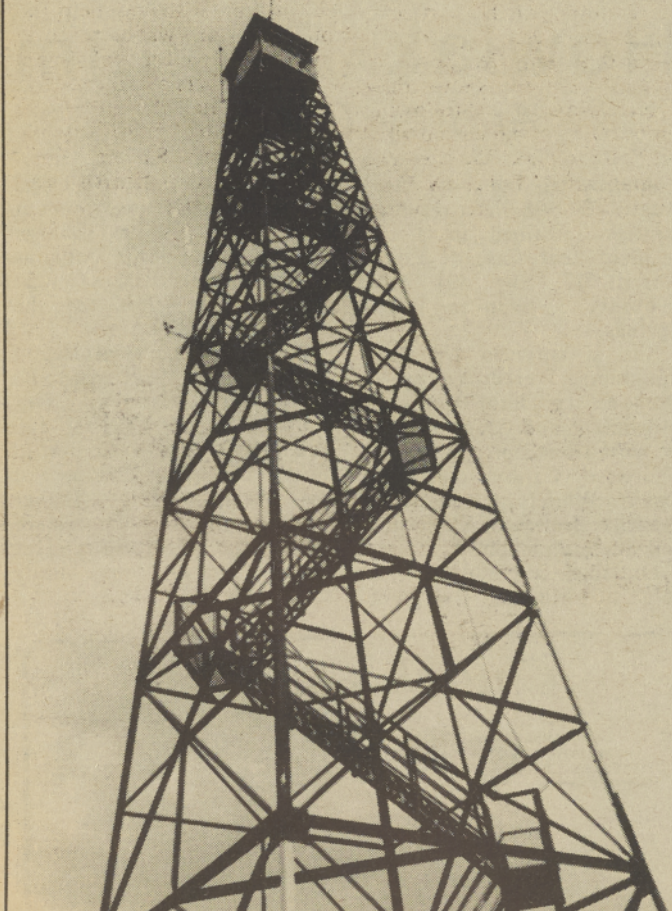
Back at Fire Control headquarters experiences are exchanged. Stories are related. Comparisons to previous fires are made. Things to do differently at future fires are examined.

Firefighters at home are recovering from exhaustion and smoking-filled eyes and lungs feeling satisfied that they were able to help combat the fire before it destroyed more than it did. Drifting off to sleep they wonder if they'll be able to sleep all night or if their pager will again tone-out calling them to another fire.

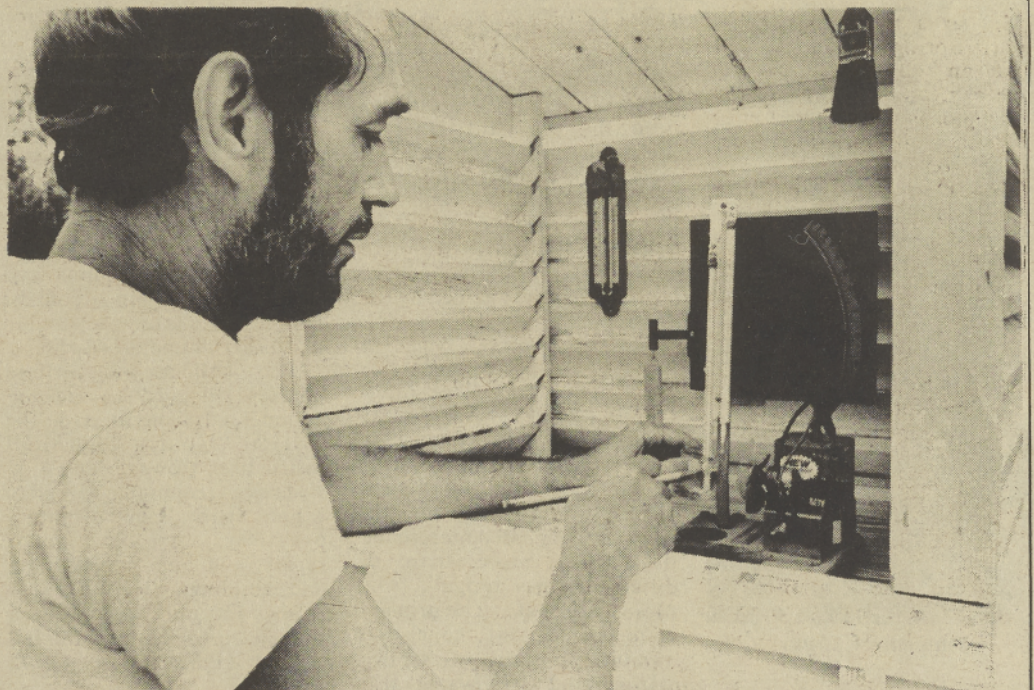
It's still hot and it's still dry. It's possible that this fire may be the last one of this fire season and it's possible that it's not.



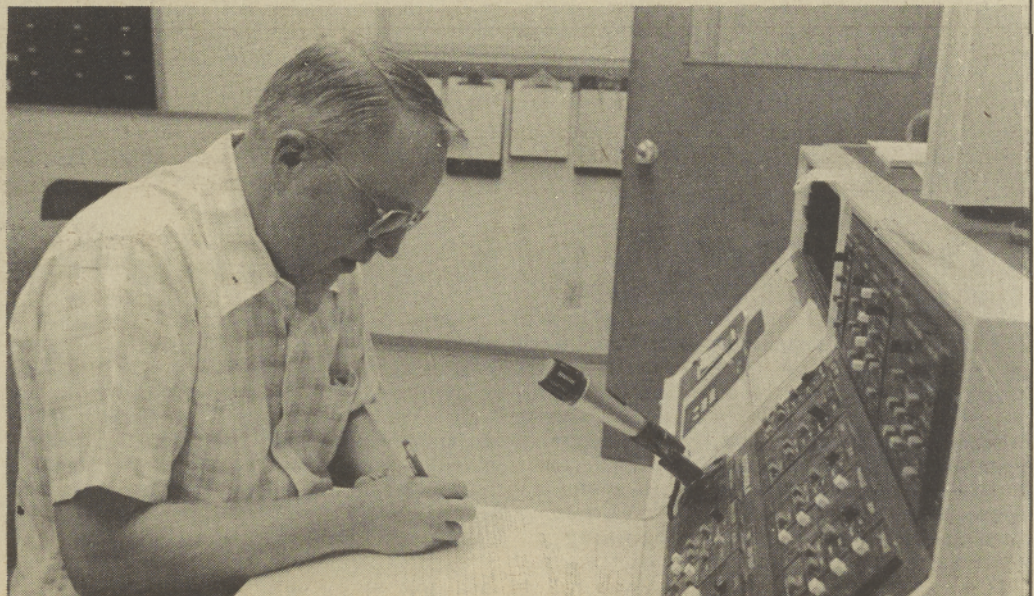
Unsilently remains cover burned areas. Destruction to foliage and wildlife can be extensive due to fire.



Three towers over 100 feet in height located on buttes in the area over look reservation lands. From these towers observers can see smoke many miles in the distance.



Jim Keene has watched for reservation fires for many years. He daily checks conditions, reports them to the Fire Control office and then spends the day in the lookout tower searching for smoke.



While firefighters are battling a fire in the field the dispatcher helps to coordinate activities by making communication with firefighters.