

Fire fighting supervisors conduct a costly operation.



Fighting a forest fire takes men and equipment, some of which are shown at this base camp on the Rogue River fire.

Features

Sports

# MEDFORD MAIL TRIBUNE

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## The Rogue River Fire - - An \$11,000 Fighting Operation

Little habits, performed for the most part unconsciously, can be expensive.

This was demonstrated earlier this month when fire burned over 410 acres of brush and timberland just east of Rogue River.

Although the fire's cause probably never will be fully determined, state department of forestry officials said they have to assume it was man-caused, since it started along a paved highway, and all evidence indicates it was man-caused.

The most probable explanation offered is that it started from a passing motorist tossing either a match or a cigarette out of the car window, a habit many motorists have, and a habit which is more unconsciously automatic than deliberate.

### Man-Caused Fires Not Declining

It was about the 50th man-caused fire on state department of forestry protected lands this fire season, a figure comparable to the number at this time last year, indicating that man-caused fires are not declining in numbers despite fire prevention campaigns by agencies concerned about the nation's forests.

Curtis Nesheim, warden for the southwest Oregon district, state forestry department, said "it seems like the number of man-caused fires has increased during the past few years."

Several factors are considered, however, in the more-than-average number of man-caused fires. Among them are:  
1. More people are using facilities in the forests;  
2. More forest areas are being opened for public use;  
3. More motorists are travelling roads in and adjacent to forests and grass and brush areas at lower elevations.

### Most Fires at Lower Level

Most of the man-caused fires are at lower elevations, where tall grass dries out along roadsides and highways, Nesheim noted.

A cigarette or match tossed from a moving automobile combined with extreme forest fire conditions such as prevailed July 2 at Rogue River result in a costly operation.

The humidity early that afternoon was 11 per cent. A 30-mile-an-hour wind was blowing at the top of the ridge. The grass was dry.

If a cigarette started the Rogue River fire, it took only 11 cents to develop into an \$11,000 fire fighting operation. That's about the cost of fighting the 410-acre blaze, which had not yet been declared out a week after it started.

The fire started about 2 p.m., and burned out of control

until about 9 a.m. the next day, July 3. By late Monday afternoon, about 30 men were fighting it; Tuesday morning, there were 100 men, three crawler-type tractors and three felling crews. About 5½ miles of trail, some tractor-made, some hand-made, were established.

State crews were sent to the scene more than a week after it had been controlled. A fire is not declared out until after the last smouldering ember is out in the center of the burned area.

### Man-Hours Not Determined

The number of man-hours required to extinguish the fire has not been determined, and to obtain an accurate figure would be difficult. One would have to consider the number of hours each man spent on the fire line, supervisors, dispatchers, borate drop personnel, cooks and personnel involved in other miscellaneous jobs connected with it.

Nor has there been an estimate of the fire damage itself, although property damage would amount to considerably more than the actual cost of fighting the fire.

Some of the area was overgrown with bushes, some of it was timber approaching the marketable age. The dollar value of the loss in "growing time" for the bushes and trees will never be known. And the "growing time" element is becoming more and more important in forest management today, whether on private or publicly owned lands.

This holds true for any forest fire whether large or small, whether man-caused or nature-caused.

### Only Preventable Ones

Of the two fire causes, man-caused are the only preventable ones, and Nesheim is certain the Rogue River fire never would have occurred if carelessness had been avoided.

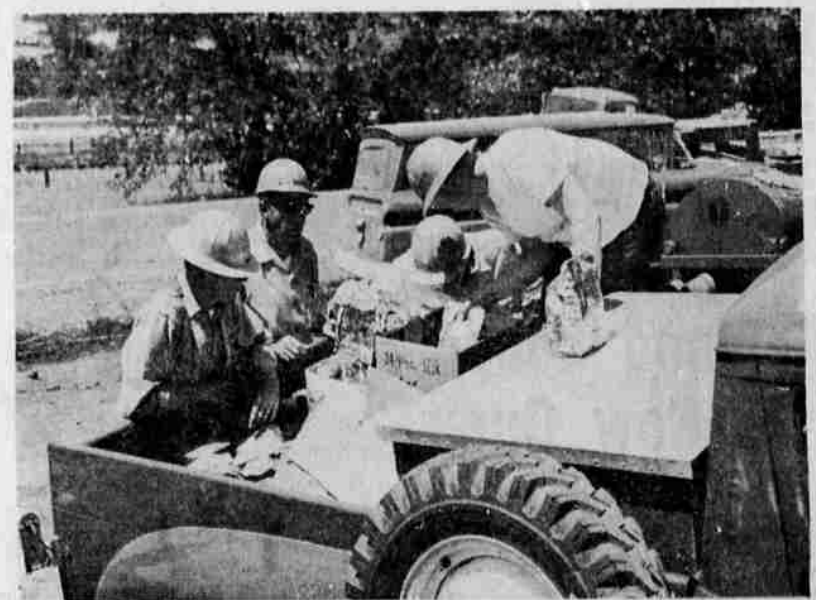
This is the crux of cutting down the number of forest fires, the expense of extinguishing such blazes, and reducing the number of forest acres removed from possible marketing or recreational use.

Nesheim believes the only way to reduce man-caused fires is through a general fire prevention program, since most of the man-caused fires are the result of everyday living habits in areas where people live and through carelessness.

He urged anyone who plans trash or debris burning during the summer to check with one of fire fighting agencies—the state forestry department, rural and city fire departments. Some of the man-caused fires could be reduced this way.

This policy, he commented, probably would not have prevented the Rogue River fire, but practicing carefulness could have.

Knackstedt Photos



Food is prepared for fire fighters by district personnel.



High school boys take supplies to the fire line.



After the fire is controlled, stumps and smouldering limbs are cut from trees and extinguished.



Smouldering after the fire is controlled, are cut from trees and extinguished.