

Christmas Tree Thieves Plague Area Forests



TREE NICKED TO CATCH A THIEF — The three nicks cut into the Christmas tree by Paul Nichols, assistant district warden of the Klamath Forest Protective Association, may prove instrumental in capturing the thief who cut down that tree, among many others, and stockpiled

them in the forests to be surreptitiously loaded on trucks. Foresters make such cuts on trees that they find stacked in the forests and then alert state police to look for those marks as the officers check the loads of truckers carrying trees to market.

Photos and Story
By DICK BRIGGS

Early one brisk November morning an automobile roared along a little used backwoods road in Klamath County, stopping occasionally, while a figure stepped from the car to disappear into the forest. After making several such stops, the driver turned the car around and sped away from the hinterlands. Meanwhile, the former occupants of the car began cutting down Christmas trees and stockpiling them until later that evening when the driver would return in a truck, load the trees onto the vehicle, and depart into the night with the crew and the stolen merchandise.

This is one of countless methods used by some unscrupulous Christmas tree dealers who annually rob from \$2,000 to \$10,000 in growing trees from private landowners and the public domain in the county.

Such dealers are alert to the methods of the Klamath Forest Protective Association and other forest agencies who maintain constant patrols to catch these pillagers of the forests.

The method of transporting cutters to the woods and returning later to pick them up along with their stolen trees is done to fool foresters who drive through the backwoods and watch for tire marks leading from the more traveled thoroughfares onto spur roads.

When a forester observes such tire marks he follows them into the forest and seeks out the driver of the car to check his tree harvesting permit and bill of sale, providing,

of course, that individual is cutting Christmas trees.

If there are no tire marks, a forester might pass by an area where thieves are operating—not knowing that they had been driven to the area and let out on the main road.

Escaping the consequences of such thievery isn't as common as was the case about five years ago, according to George Wardell, local supervisor of KPFA which administers nearly 1.2 million acres within the district.

At that time, an estimated 5,000 trees were looted annually from forests in the county during the Yuletide season. Since then forestry associations, state police and other law enforcement groups have begun to work more closely to curb the activities of the unscrupulous who steal fir trees from government or private forests and sell them on the Christmas tree market.

As a result of the improved cooperation, Wardell now estimates that the number of trees stolen from the forests have decreased from 5,000 to 1,000 each year.

Even the Federal Bureau of Investigation has been instrumental in trapping some of the looters. Last week an FBI agent, assisted by Oregon State Police, arrested two Oregon men while they were loading 432 silvertip Christmas trees onto a truck, about one-half mile from Highway 38, near Crescent.

The men had cut the trees, valued at nearly \$1,400, without having either a harvesting permit or a bill of sale.

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STOLEN TREE MATCHED WITH STUMP — Commercial tree cutters caught hauling Christmas trees without a harvesting permit or bill of sale are subject to suspicion of theft. Haulers without such papers will have their load confiscated; foresters then take the trees and seek to match them with the stumps of trees which have been illegally cut. Forest patrolmen use this and other methods of collecting evidence in order to prosecute the offender in the criminal courts.

Features

KLAMATH FALLS, OREGON, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1963



REWARD FOR STEALERS OF TREES — Paul "Nick" Nichols attaches a poster to a KPFA signboard offering \$250 reward for the arrest and conviction of anyone wrongfully cutting or removing Christmas trees from

lands in that area. Offers of such rewards are one of various deterrents used by foresters to discourage the theft of trees on private and government lands.



CONFISCATED TREES — Several hundred fir trees confiscated from a trucker near Fresno, Calif., and traced to Klamath County are counted by KPFA Supervisor George Wardell preparatory to establishing a fine. In such cases, KPFA confiscates the trees and fines the trucker double the stumpage rates. Forest agencies and state police are working with the local district attorney's office in an effort to increase penalties for the offense.

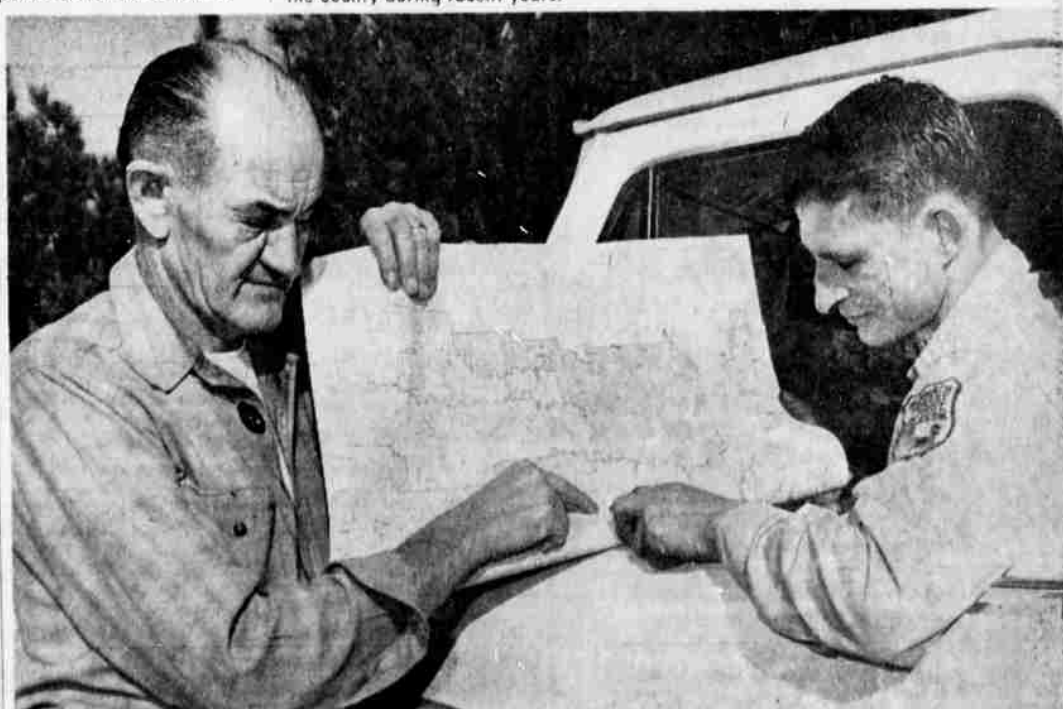


TIRE TRACK PROVIDES A CLUE — A tire track made by a truck driven off with a load of illegally cut Christmas trees is measured by Paul Nichols in the first of numerous steps taken by KPFA to learn the identity of the tree thief. KPFA estimates that 1,000 Christmas trees are stolen annually in Klamath County, a substantial decrease from the approximate figure of 5,000 set about five years ago. Improved cooperation between foresters and police has significantly reduced the number of such thefts in the county during recent years.



MAP CHECKED AGAINST BILL OF SALE — George Wardell (right), district warden of the Klamath Forest Protective Association, and Art Stone, employee of the association, read a bill of sale presented by a commercial tree cutter and note on a map the area where the trees are

to be cut. Later, KPFA patrolmen check on the cutter in the field to determine that he remains within the boundaries set forth in the bill of sale. Commercial cutters must present such a document to KPFA before they obtain harvesting permits.



PATROLMAN PLOTS DAY'S WORK — Emil Harris (right), KPFA fire warden at Kings Cabin and Pole Butte, points out to George Wardell, district warden, an area where a stack of illegally cut Christmas trees had been concealed to be retrieved later by the cutter. While

foresters maintain close surveillance of private and government lands, state police stop truckers hauling trees along the highways to check their bills of sale and harvesting permits.