

# FOREST FIRES IN WASHINGTON

By JOEL SHOMAKER  
Chairman, Washington Conservation Commission

The State of Washington has passed through another ordeal of forest fires. Thousands of acres of standing timber have been burned over and the country left in ashy desolation. Large areas of young forest growth have been wasted, and soil fertility consumed, by the unnatural burning process. The loss to life and personal property has not been so great as in adjacent States, but the total waste resulting from fires will reach almost the highest point in the records of State history.

My own experience will give an illustration of what has taken place in other sections. On July 3 a fire was noticed in an isolated spot on my Nature Nursery. It had been started in the débris left from loggers, several hours before I discovered the smoke, as I live on the waterfront of Hood Canal and the fire was set far back on the upland. It had made such a start, when fighters arrived, that nothing could be done but watch the marching path of destruction.

That fire continued its trail of annihilation for about two months. I worked day and night to save my own property, and many others labored to prevent conflagrations in both private and public property. I place the loss to my nursery, in timber, young forest growth, plants and shrubs, waste in soil fertility and destruction of scenery, at \$10,000. It burned over nearly 200 acres of my land and extended far out into the neighboring country.

The season was favorable for fires, as it is said to have been the driest summer in twenty years. I patrolled the borders of the fire approaching my dwelling, and, with shovel in hand, checked the flames for a time. But nothing but water did any good. When

the family had been aroused to take the boat, and trees were falling all around the house, we put a stop to the flames by using water, carried by hand from the bay, and cutting trenches to prevent burning leaves from crossing.

Other fires in my vicinity did much damage to the forest and soil and threatened homes and settled communities. In some districts the fires extended into towns and the danger became so great that Governor M. E. Hay issued a proclamation calling on all loggers to cease operations for twenty days and set their employes to work in trying to put out the flames. Appeals were made to the War Department for assistance in bringing rain, by firing guns, at different ports on the shores of Puget Sound.

It was feared that a repetition of the "Black Friday" of 1902 would be witnessed, and the President of the United States was asked to help in bringing rain. Troops were called out from the annual encampment and sent to different sections of the Northwest to aid the forest rangers in saving timber and valuable properties. Smoke covered the land and waters, and navigation was impeded in the same manner as during the raging fires of 1902. August was a critical month, and but for showers at the close of the month would have been a time of wonderful waste and destruction of timber, watersheds, and native resources.

What caused the forest fires? That question is always uppermost after the country has been laid waste. As I see it, forest fires are synonymous with ignorant and malicious mischief. It was the custom of Indians and some pioneers of Puget Sound to set fire to dead brush in order to clear deer trails, burn

over patches for wild blackberries, or open places where grass could be grown for pastures. In some instances, it is asserted, parties took the fire plan for getting even with land owners and others. Again, it is stated that men set fire to timber in order to obtain work, at 30 cents an hour, fighting the fires.

The wasteful methods of logging may be held responsible for the origin of many fires. Loggers take out marketable timber in the easiest and cheapest way possible. They fell trees in all directions and leave the limbs and branches where they fall. They knock down enormous quantities of young timber and thereby leave slashings for fire, whether it comes as an accident or for other purposes. No efforts are put forth by the average loggers to guard the property of the land owner or the surrounding citizens. They simply skim off the cream and kick over the bucket to prevent others from securing benefits from the remnants.

Clearing land by burning slashings is one prolific source of fires. That method appears to me to be an obsolete, dangerous, and slovenly way to clear logged-off land. I would not slash and burn any portion of my land, nor permit others to do so. It destroys the soil fertility that every farmer needs and must replace at much expense. There is no time gained by resorting to such methods. The slashing burner endangers his own property and that of his neighbors unnecessarily. The only way to properly clear land is to cut the brush and logs, pile in the right condition, and burn under safe restrictions. Our forefathers cleared land that way, and they lived and prospered and did not menace others.

Many valuable lessons may be gleaned from the forest fires of 1910. One of the first is the wise, efficient, and capable system of the United States Forest Service, exemplified in the national forests. The plan adopted by that branch of our government for protecting the forests and conserving their resources for use now and in the future, is most commendable. And the men engaged in that department are entitled to all the praise the people of Washington can be-

stow for their heroic efforts in behalf of the government and the people comprising the nation. They make it possible for mature timber to be removed without damage to the growing forest, and encourage the spirit of national conservation.

A system of patrol for national, state and private forests, similar to that introduced on the reserves, should be adopted everywhere that trees are grown for use, now or hereafter. It is too late to lock the stable door after the horse is stolen. And it is generally too late to stop a forest fire after it is once under good headway. The remedy lies in preventing the blaze in its incipiency. Some men will set forest fires, in unguarded places, so long as the world stands. Some men will get drunk so long as liquors are manufactured, regardless of the wants of their families. We need laws that will curtail the destructive forces in depraved manhood, in the forest and saloon.

In Japan the man who plants a tree for posterity is considered a philanthropist, while in the United States the man who destroys the native forest, in quest of present money, and is successful, is held up as a capitalist. It is just as sensible for the orchardist to cut down his trees to harvest the fruit as for the logger to waste the young forest in removing the marketable timber. The Forest Service is trying to remedy this evil. It should be upheld by every loyal American citizen, and its plans should be adopted everywhere that timber is a commodity.

The Washington Forest Fire Association is an important factor in saving the timber of this State. It works in harmony with the warden system, provided for by the state legislature. They cooperate with the timberland owners, and assist materially in preventing fires and stopping the course of those which get from under control of private parties. But both organized forces need more assistance from the state and nation. They cannot perform impossibilities. A fire warden cannot be in many places at the same time. Their powers



Big Creek Fire, Where Thirty Lives Were Lost

should be enlarged and their duties extended to cover broader educational fields of labor.

Conservation of natural and national resources is a national question of more importance than any issue before the American people. It forms the foundation of present and future agricultural and commercial prosperity. If handled correctly it will make of the State of Washington one of the greatest commercial divisions in the world. If neglected, or corrupted through political manipulation, it will result disastrously to the entire people. It is a question in which the homeseekers and investors of the entire nation should have a common interest.

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The forests should be held sacred for use, now and in coming years, and not wasted or destroyed by any forces, either private or national. They contain the sources of power for developing the country, and that should not pass from the control of the whole people. They hold the reservoirs for supplying water for irrigation and domestic purposes, in the valleys of industry, and should be guarded by all the people, for the benefit of all the people, and not for the enriching of corporate interests in furnishing the necessities of the people, in order to make money from monopolies in things the people must have to insure continued prosperity.

