

CHAT BY THE WEATHER MAN

Wed. April 18. 1928

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

ANNOUNCEMENT: Next week is American Forest Week. Don't forget. In order to help you keep the Week in mind, the Weather Man is going to tell you about forest fires and how the Weather Bureau helps fight them, today. His talk comes as this week's regular CHATS BY THE WEATHER MAN, a radio feature prepared by the U. S. Department of Agriculture and broadcast bi-weekly by Station _____. Please stand by.

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Good hiking weather.

So my friend, the Weather Man, and I took a long walk into the woods the other day.

We were sitting on a sun-warmed rock under a tall pine, fragrant and friendly. A little, timid breeze fluttered and whispered through the branches.

The Weather Man looked up through the pine branches into the blue sky and sighed deeply and happily.

"Bill," he said, "this is certainly great. I wonder if you remember what that good friend of our forests, John Muir, once said...."

I picked out a brown pine needle and chewed it reflectively. "Don't believe I do," I said.

"The forests of America," said Muir, "however slighted by man, must have been a great delight to God, for they were the best he ever planted".

"But why did he say, 'must have been', 'were', and so on?" I asked. Don't we still have beautiful forests in America?"

"Why yes, Bill," my friend said. "But fires and carelessness and lack of conservation measures are rapidly cutting down on them. Fire, of course, is the greatest single menace to our forests. The United States Forest Service says that we have had 51 thousand forest fires in this country in 10 years. Fire sweeps over an average area of 15 million acres every year in this country alone. More than 11 million acres of this are forest land. The annual fire damage to our forests runs into 20 million dollars, not counting the damage done to young forest growth, watersheds, and other damage for which we can make no estimates in money. Think of it!"

I was surprised and showed it. Of course I knew that forest fires reap a terrific harvest every year in the U. S., but I didn't know it is as heavy as this.

"But that's not all," the Weather Man went on. "Forest fires are a great enemy of wild life-- game, birds, fish. Fires sweep over the nesting grounds of grouse and other game birds, destroying eggs and young birds. Fires destroy the forage on which big game lives. When fires come late in the fall, big game frequently dies of starvation the following winter. Fires spoil the fishing. Every Izaak Walton knows that good fishing depends on clear waters, and fires leave the streams and lakes muddy and dirty. If sportsmen only took more thought on how birds and animals are driven out by fire--- how coverts and nests are destroyed--- and how much wild life food goes up in the smoke from forest fires--- they'd be very, very careful with campfires, smokes, and firearms when in the woods."

The Weather Man stopped for a moment and looked off into the woods. Then he continued. "Forest fires destroy lumber, injure labor, kill industry, rob the community, and increase taxes," he said. "And the worst part of it is, 90 per cent of all forest fires are caused by man himself. WHEN THE AMERICAN PEOPLE STOP BURNING THEIR WOODED AREAS, THEIR FORESTS, THE SOLUTION OF THE NATION'S TIMBER SUPPLY PROBLEM WON'T BE FAR OFF!"

"Well, for the love of Pete, isn't there something we can do about this!" I said, rather excitedly I guess.

"Why, sure," said the Weather Man confidently. "And some day, forest fires are going to be rather a scarce article. First, we've got to educate the people as to the real meaning, the real danger, of forest fires. That's one reason why we have Forest Week. We need a book of etiquette for campers, see? Something to teach folks how to behave in the woods. Then we must develop still further our fire-weather warnings service of the Weather Bureau. The Forest Service is doing all it can to cooperate with us in this."

"Do you mean that the Weather Bureau can forecast fire-weather?" I asked in amazement.

"Exactly," said the Weather Man.

"How?"

The Weather Man leaned back against a friendly old pine and began....

"Most folks think that summer's the danger-time for forest fires," he said. "That's not so. Spring and fall are the worst forest-fire seasons, especially in the eastern sections of the country. In summer, the woods are green with leaves. In winter, snow and rain keep the timber and brush wet. But the forests are ripe for trouble in spring and fall.

"Issuing fire-weather forecasts isn't a new thing exactly," he continued. "At first, the regular daily weather forecasts were used mainly by the forestry interests in the Pacific Coast States. Soon, however, we learned more about their value and then we extended the service. At present, the Weather Bureau's fire-weather warning service is divided into seven districts. I could quote you a score of letters from men who know what they're talking about, showing the value of the service. There have been times when fire-weather warnings, issued by one or more of these offices, have saved damage to the forests more than equal to the entire cost of the whole weather forecast service."

"Tell me about the warnings," I said. "How do you get them out?"

"That depends somewhat on the region," my friend said. "The worst fires in Washington and Oregon occur along with the dreaded east wind. When even moderately dry, warm weather comes before these east winds, conditions are caused which start forest fires easily. And when they start.... Well, even the best-organized plans of men have a mighty hard time to stop them. Very often, the fires aren't put out until they've destroyed vast areas of valuable timber land."

"If we know what the weather is today--- and what it will be tomorrow--- over large areas in the forest regions, we can put experience and science together and make forecasts of value for the entire region. There are times when the fire hazard is low and fires are few. There are other times when fires break out easily and spread rapidly--- without apparent reason. We now know that this difference in fire hazards is caused mainly by differences in the drying power of the air from time to time. When the air is dry, material dries out quickly and fires start easily, see? A foreknowledge, then, of the humidity of the air--- that is, of its moisture content--- will go a long way toward accurate fire-weather forecasting. And, when the fires once start, this knowledge will help to fight the fire already under way.

"Now, meteorologists, weather observers, at the different weather and forest stations in fire areas make their daily observations of wind, humidity, and other weather conditions, with the aid of their instruments and the reports from the other stations," the Weather Man said. "Then they draw up their weather charts, much the same way as all other weather observers do, for use in their own territory. I've already told you, Bill, how the weather maps are made and how we make our daily observations. It's not so different in fire areas, except that we pay special attention to fire-weather and learn by experience what to expect under certain conditions. Then, of course, we become forest-conscious, tree-conscious, as you might say. We know that we're making things safer for these beautiful trees, for these forests that mean so much to America and Americans."

R-WMC 4/18/28

I looked around me--- heard the wind in the pines--- smelled the tang of the needles and the bark--- heard the cool ripple of the little creek down in the hollow. The Weather Man had told his story. I waited a minute or two. Then---

"I think I see what you're working for," I said.

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ANNOUNCEMENT: When you go into the woods, remember what the forest experts say. If you want more information on how to prevent forest fires, drop us a line soon.

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