

Chats by the Weather Man

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PROGRAM.....

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NOT FOR PUBLICATION

ANNOUNCEMENT: The Weather Man is going to tell his radio audience about the fire-weather warning service of the Weather Bureau this evening. His weekly chats, released by Station _____, are a regular feature of Uncle Sam's farm radio service.

---ooOoo---

Good fishing weather -- for so early in the Spring -- so my friend, the weather man, and I, took a long hike into the woods. We were sitting on a sun-warmed rock under a tall pine, fragrant and friendly. A small, timid breeze now and then whispered through the branches.

The weather man looked up through the branches into the blue sky and sighed deeply and happily.

"Jim", said he, "this is great. Do you remember what that good friend of our forests, John Muir, once said?"

I picked out a brown pine needle and chewed it reflectively. "No, I don't believe I do", said I.

"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!"

"Don't we still have beautiful forests?" I asked.

"Why, yes, Jim", the weather man answered. "But fires and carelessness and lack of conservation measures are rapidly cutting down on them. Fire, of course, is the greatest single menace of our forests. The United States Forest Service says that we have had 51 thousand forest fires in this country in the last 10 years. Fire sweeps an average area of 15 millions acres every year in this country alone. More than 11 million acres of this are forest land. The annual damage runs up to 20 million dollars a year -- outside of the damage done to young forest growth, watersheds, and other damage for which we can place no value in money. Think of it!"

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

"But that's not all", continued my friend. "Forest fires are a great enemy of wild life: game, birds, and fish. The fires sweep across the nesting grounds of grouse and other game birds, destroying eggs and young birds. Fires destroy the forage on which big game animals live. When fires come late in the Fall, big game frequently dies of starvation the next Winter. Fires spoil the fishing -- for good fishing, as every ~~Isaac~~ Walton knows, depends on clear waters. Fires leave the water muddy and dirty. IF SPORTSMEN ONLY KNEW HOW BIRDS AND ANIMALS ARE DRIVEN OUT BY FIRE-- HOW COVERTS AND NESTS ARE DESTROYED -- AND HOW MUCH FOOD FOR WILD LIFE GOES UP IN SMOKE OF FOREST FIRES, THEY'D BE VERY, VERY CAREFUL WITH CAMP FIRES, SMOCKES, AND FIREARMS WHEN IN THE WOODS".

The weather man stopped for a minute and looked off into the woods. Then he went on: "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 forest fires are caused by man himself. WHEN THE AMERICAN PEOPLE STOP BURNING THEIR WOODED AREAS, THE SOLUTION OF THE NATION'S TIMBER SUPPLY PROBLEM WON'T BE FAR OFF!"

"Well, for the love of Pete, can't we do something to prevent this? I exclaimed.

"Why, sure", said the weather man confidently. "And some day forest fires are going to be a pretty scarce article. First, we've got to educate the people as to the real meaning -- the real damage -- of forest fires. First, we've got to teach 'em how to behave in the woods. A book of etiquette for campers, see? Then, -- and the Forest Service is already well under way on this thing -- then, we've got to develop still more our fire-weather warnings service of the Weather Bureau".

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

"Exactly", the weather observer replied.

"Say -- tell me about it. I've already heard about the other".

The weather man leaned back against the friendly old pine tree and began:

"Most folks think that Summer's the dangerous time for forest fires. That's not so. Spring and Fall are the worst fire seasons, especially in the eastern sections. In Summer, the woods are green with leaves. In Winter, snow and rain keep the timber wet. But in Spring and Fall, it's ripe for trouble.

"Issuing fire-weather forecasts isn't exactly a new thing", he continued. "At first, the regular daily forecasts were used mainly by the forestry interests in the Pacific Coast States. Soon, however, we learned more about their value and 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, telling how valuable the service actually is. 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 forecast service".

"But how do you issue the warnings?" I asked. "That's what gets me".

"Depends somewhat on the region", he replied. "The worst fires in Washington and Oregon occur along with the dreaded east wind. When even moderately warm, dry weather comes before these east winds, conditions are caused which start fires easily. And when they start ----! Even human efforts, well organized and vigorous, 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 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's dry, material dries out quickly and fires start easily. A foreknowledge, then, of the humidity of the air 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.

Meteorologists 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 other stations. They then draw up their weather charts, about as all weather observers do, for use in their own territory. I've already told you, Jim, 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".

"I think I see the idea", said I.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

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