

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

LIGHTNING STORMS

According to W.G. Morris, of the U.S. Forest Service, more than half of all the fires that occur in the national forests of Oregon and Washington are started by lightning. Hence the importance of studying the frequency, distribution and habits of lightning storms in that part of the United States.

The Forest Service has compiled and analyzed records made by fire lookouts during the past seven years in the states mentioned in order to learn where lightning storms occur most often, where they cause the most fires, whether or not certain types of such storms cause more fires than others, whether the storms follow definite lanes across each forest, the average length of their tracks, their average speed and direction of movement, etc.

It appears from this investigation that 66 per cent. of all lightning fires are caused by widespread storms, occurring about four days each summer. One of these started 215 forest fires in one day in the state of Washington. The rest of the lightning fires are due to numerous localized storms scattered through the season. Hence special efforts should be made to predict the relatively few storms of a general character and to mobilize fire-fighting forces in time to deal with them.

The majority of lightning storms are from 11 to 40 miles long, but some attain a length of 200 miles. They usually move 6 to 20 miles an hour, though some move faster than 40 miles an hour. Their usual direction in Washington and Oregon is toward north or northeast.

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