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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed Feb. 16, 1935

"LIGHTNING ZONES"

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The late F. G. Plummer, of the U. S. Forest Service, said many years ago in a bulletin of that Service: "Throughout the Cordilleran region of the West there are certain areas which, because they have a marked hazard from lightning, are said to be in the 'lightning zone.' A lightning zone is conceived to be a layer of the lower atmosphere; a thunderstorm stratum, which touches the summits of some mountains and the lower slopes of others. The altitude of the zone varies." The same idea reappears in Ward's "Climates of the United States," where we read: "The 'lightning zone' on mountains is at about the level of the base of the thunderstorm clouds. Above and below it there is greater safety."

So far, at any rate, as it bears upon the frequency of lightning fires in the western forests, this idea is now believed to be a fallacy, and the Forest Service itself has abandoned it. An analysis of a 10-year record of such fires in the northern Rockies showed that the fires occurred at all altitudes, wherever there was dry inflammable forest material.

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