1968

1910 forest fires in Montana and Idaho: Their impact on federal and state legislation

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THE 1910 FOREST FIRES IN MONTANA AND IDAHO:
THEIR IMPACT ON FEDERAL AND STATE LEGISLATION

By

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B.A. Michigan State University, 1963
Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA
1968

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August 28, 1968
Date
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INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant forest fires in the history of the United States occurred in the Northwest in 1910. Montana and Idaho suffered the greatest damage, but most of the forested states between California and Michigan endured great losses of timberlands. Eighty-five people died as direct victims of the holocaust in Montana and Idaho. Three million acres of some of the nation's best timberlands went up in flames in those two states.¹

These figures are dramatic, but the number of acres burned and the death rate alone do not make the 1910 fires so important in conservation history. Other fires were equally as large and many killed more people. The Miramichi fire in Maine and New Brunswick in 1825 burned over 3,000,000 acres and killed 160 people; the Coos fire in 1868 on the Oregon coast destroyed 3,000,000 acres; the Peshtigo fire in 1871 devastated 1,500,000 acres, and killed 1,500 people in Minnesota; and the 1894 Hinckley fire killed 418 people, and burned 160,000 acres in the same state.² Therefore, it is

¹Letter from Charles L. Tebbe, Regional Forester, giving background of 1910 fires to news media for 50th Anniversary, 1960.

not damage statistics alone that lend significance to the 1910 fires.

The significance of the 1910 burn involved three factors: (1) the proximity of the year 1910 to the Theodore Roosevelt-Gifford Pinchot era during which the conservation movement had its greatest surge and received ample positive and negative publicity; (2) the extensive fires that occurred during the entire summer of 1910 culminated in a two day orgy of flames during which most of the damage occurred; and (3) the effect that the 1910 fires had on federal, state, and local efforts to prevent future conflagrations.

The story of the 1910 burn has been told many times. Most of the published works have been chronicles of the events of 1910 and have neglected to follow through with the legislative results that may or may not have been influenced by the 1910 fire season. On the other hand, the most exhaustive book on America's forest policies failed to mention the impact of the 1910 fires on the Weeks Law of 1911 which was the first national law providing for federal-state cooperation on the forest fire problem. One study of the history of cooperative forest fire control did associate the passage of the Weeks Law with the 1910 fires, but it failed to give much coverage of the fires.

This thesis, then, will cover the events of the summer of 1910, the background in terms of national policies, and the federal legislation that was influenced by the fire season. There will also be a summary of Montana legislation,
or more precisely, a summary of Montana's lack of legislation.
CHAPTER I

The Background

The impact that the 1910 forest fires in Montana and Idaho had on the nation was, in part, a consequence of the conservation movement in the last decade of the 19th Century and the first decade of the 20th Century. Samuel P. Hays stated, "Conservation, above all, was a scientific movement and its role in history arises from the implications of science and technology in modern history."¹ Congress passed two acts in the 1890's that enabled the scientists and technologists in the area of forestry to assume control of the nation's forest reserves. First, the Timber Reserve Act of 1891 authorized the President to establish forest reserves on the public domain.² Second, the Timber Management Act of 1897 established loose guidelines for the economic development


of the reserves. While implementing these laws, the leaders of the conservation movement stressed a halt to the waste of valuable timber by inefficient lumbering operations and forest fires.

The Division of the General Land Office of the Interior Department became the first administrative agency of the forest reserves after the passage of the Timber Management Act of 1897. Through inexperience, incompetence and a tradition of political orientation, the General Land Office failed to manage the reserves effectively. By 1905 the supporters of scientific forestry persuaded Congress to transfer the management of the federal forest reserves to the Bureau of Forestry in the Department of Agriculture. The federal reserves then came under the control of Gifford Pinchot, head of the Division of Forestry in the Department of Agriculture since 1898.

Pinchot had entered government service at the age of

3 U.S., Statutes at Large, Vol. XXX, p. 11, Ise, U.S. Forest Policy, pp. 196-201 follows the Congressional activities that led to the passage of the Timber Management Act of 1897.

4 Hays, Conservation, p. 36.

5 Hays, Conservation, pp. 36-37 traces the problems that the General Land Office had in managing the forest reserves. Gifford Pinchot, Breaking New Ground (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1947), pp. 196-197 offers a rather jaundiced view of the General Land Office's attempts to manage the forest reserves. E. Louise Peffer, The Closing of the Public Domain (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1951), pp. 43-44 explains some of the corrupt practices that the General Land Office participated in during its tenure as manager of the forest reserves.
thirty-two with impressive credentials. He had studied at Yale and in Europe and had managed a private estate in North Carolina where he profitably applied his knowledge of scientific forestry. Pinchot had also served as the youngest member of the National Forestry Committee in 1896 which President Cleveland had ordered to study the problems of the national forest reserves. He was one of the leaders of the movement for more efficient management of the nation's natural resources and his name became nearly synonymous with the conservation movement.  

Pinchot changed the orientation of the Forestry Division. Instead of dispensing information on arboriculture and individual trees, the Forestry Division became a consulting agency to lumbering firms on matters relating to efficient usage of the wood resources. The concept of managed forests and the emphasis that Pinchot placed on it were new to most Americans who viewed the nation's forests as an inexhaustible resource. The dominant attitude of commercial lumber companies stressed a cut and run policy. The effect of two centuries of this type of activity had laid waste to the forests of most of the timber states east of the Mississippi.  

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7 Hays, Conservation, p. 29.
River and was making deep inroads in the West - the last remaining stand of extensive timber in the country.  

Pinchot's attitude toward the conservation movement reflected a strong emphasis on the utilitarian aspects of the natural resources. He was no romanticist, and he saw little use for the preservationist principles. Although he was a "man's man" in the out of doors, Pinchot stressed the economic development of water, trees and grass in the most efficient manner.  

Theodore Roosevelt became President on September 14, 1901, and the conservation movement gained a sympathetic, activist chief executive. Under Roosevelt the managers and supporters of wise-use policies of natural resources gained more recognition than at any other time in the history of the country. Gifford Pinchot became a top advisor to the President. His access to the highest political office holder in the land was unprecedented for a lower echelon bureaucrat, and Pinchot made the most of it. He convinced Roosevelt to support the transfer of the federal forest reserves. Roosevelt spoke out for the transfer in his first address before Congress. The transfer did not come until 1905, but

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8Hays, Conservation, p. 27.
9Ibid., pp. 40-42.
10Ibid. McGeary, Gifford Pinchot, p. 47.
11Hays, Conservation, p. 172 states, "For all practical purposes, a departmental subordinate, a bureau chief, was Roosevelt's Secretary of Agriculture and Interior."
Roosevelt remained a staunch supporter of the movement for the act.\textsuperscript{12}

The men who managed the nation's natural resources under Roosevelt developed a camaraderie that lasted through two administrations and ended with the election of President Taft in 1908. Informality between departments and bureaus characterized the Roosevelt Administrations. Pinchot and Frederick Newell of the Reclamations Bureau remained close allies on forestry and water problems. Pinchot worked out arrangements to advise the General Land Office on forestry matters, and managed the forests on the Indian Reservations. Roosevelt's endorsement of these informalities and his access to the leaders like Pinchot and Newell buttressed their activities.\textsuperscript{13}

Although the conservation movement gained impetus in the federal government, it suffered from political controversy. The aggressive policies of the Forest Service and the expansion of the national forests during Roosevelt's Administrations created hostility throughout the country. The issue of

\textsuperscript{12}Ise, U.S. Forest Policy, pp. 155-158 covers the transfer movement. Hays, Conservation, pp. 38-44 offers Pinchot's maneuvers to effect the transfer between 1898 and 1905. McGeary, Gifford Pinchot, pp. 45-60 offers insight into Pinchot's personal attitudes and actions taken to achieve the transfer. Pinchot, Breaking New Ground, pp. 192-201 and pp. 254-256 cites the problems that Pinchot encountered in his drive to achieve the transfer.

\textsuperscript{13}Hays, Conservation, p. 172.
expanding "Pinchotism" came to a head in 1907.\textsuperscript{14} Congress passed a bill revoking the President's power to create federal forest reserves by proclamation in some of the western states.\textsuperscript{15} Roosevelt, aware of the growing resentment of the tactics of the resources managers, decided to sign the bill for political reasons. Before signing the bill, however, Roosevelt and Pinchot had the men of the Forest Service scout the West for additional forest reserves. Prior to signing the bill revoking his power to create new reserves, Roosevelt announced the withdrawal of an unprecedented 75,000,000 acres for forest reserves. The opposition was incensed, but there was nothing they could do to prevent it.\textsuperscript{16}

President Roosevelt pursued the policies of conservation through areas other than the federal government. In 1908 he called a national meeting of all the state governors as well as influential private citizens. The Governors Conference was held to recruit support for the conservation movement. It was the first of its kind and was highly instrumental in propagandizing and furthering conservation

\textsuperscript{14}Peffer, Closing of the Public Domain, pp. 63-69 and 95-99. Ise, U.S. Forest Policy, pp. 177-178 contends that the aggressive policies of Pinchot and Roosevelt were necessary for the managing of the forest reserves.

\textsuperscript{15}U.S., Statutes at Large, Vol. XXXIV, p. 1269.

\textsuperscript{16}Hays, Conservation, p. 47. Pinchot, Breaking New Ground, p. 300. Peffer, Closing of the Public Domain, p. 99 contends that this action was typically audacious of Pinchot.
sentiment. 17

The high degree of inter-departmental cooperation that marked the Roosevelt Administrations came to an end during the presidency of William H. Taft. President Taft replaced Secretary of Interior James Garfield with Richard Ballinger. Garfield had been a close ally and friend of Pinchot and the Chief Forester began to doubt Taft's sincerity about continuing the policies of Roosevelt. 18 Ballinger had worked in the Department of Interior under Garfield in 1907-1908. He had served as Commissioner of the General Land Office. Ballinger had favorably impressed Garfield and Roosevelt, but Pinchot had not liked him and believed him to be cautious in pursuing the goals of conservation. Ballinger on the other hand resented Pinchot's freedom in the Interior Department.

What began as professional antagonism developed into a major political scandal during the Taft Administration. Secretary Ballinger restored lands to private development which Garfield and Frederick Newell, Director of the Reclamation Bureau since its inception in 1902, had previously withdrawn for government projects. The friction between


Ballinger and Newell over this matter soon involved the Chief Forester. Ballinger became reluctant to accept Newell's advice on reclamation problems, and Pinchot took up Newell's banner. 19

A second and more publicized dispute between Pinchot and Ballinger concerned the Alaskan coal fields. Ballinger had earlier served as legal consultant to a Seattle firm whose intention was to exploit the coal areas of Alaska. Because of complicated legal technicalities, there was doubt about the coal areas being open to private development. Ballinger did not compromise his position in government, but Pinchot claimed he had. The issue came to a head when Louis R. Glavis, an Interior Department employee, investigated the case, and asserted that the company which Ballinger had represented was guilty of fraud. He presented his evidence to both Ballinger and Taft, but neither considered it substantial. Glavis then took his case to Pinchot who had two of his subordinates aid Glavis in preparing the material for Collier's Magazine, a muckraking periodical. Collier's published an inflammatory article highly prejudicial to Ballinger. 20


20 Hays, Conservation, pp. 165-174 traces the events of the Pinchot-Ballinger dispute and the consequences of the controversy on the conservation movement. McGeary, Gifford Pinchot, Chapter 8 closely traces the events that led to the Glavis entry into the Pinchot-Ballinger dispute.
President Taft was properly upset about the developments and recommended that a congressional investigation be made of the whole matter including the Interior Department and the Forest Service. Pinchot, not to be outdone, submitted a letter explaining his case to Senator J. P. Dolliver, and it was read on the Senate floor.

The Pinchot-Ballinger dispute focused the attention of the country on the conservation movement as no other issue had. The matter was dirty, and contained serious political implications. The news media, by their coverage of the dispute, made conservation an every day word.  

President Taft was incensed at Pinchot's letter to Dolliver. He saw only one solution. He fired Gifford Pinchot, the leader of the scientific movement for the conservation of natural resources. The date was January 7, 1910.  

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21 Hays, Conservation, p. 170.
22 Ibid., p. 169.
CHAPTER II

The Background in Montana

When President Taft fired Gifford Pinchot on January 7, 1910, the West was in the process of effecting programs of timber protection. The Forest Service, several state governments and private land owners were taking rudimentary steps to prevent loss of timberlands to fire, disease, and careless lumbering practices. This was particularly true in the Northwest, but Montana showed less concern than some other states. To the people of these areas, however, fire represented the greatest threat to their timber resources in the first decade of the new century. Despite the efforts of the men involved in reducing the fire hazard, the threat still remained in 1910.

The sheer magnitude of its operation in the West compounded the problems of the Forest Service. In 1908 the Service transferred its administration and decision making from Washington, D.C. to six districts throughout the West. Missoula, Montana, became the headquarters for District One.¹

¹The other district headquarters were: District Two, Denver, Colorado; District Three, Albuquerque, New Mexico; District Four, Ogden, Utah; District Five, San Francisco, California; and District Six, Portland, Oregon. Letter from Gifford Pinchot to F. A. Fenn, Historical Files, District One Folder, Northern Region, U.S. Forest Service.
The entire District covered nearly two-thirds of the nation along the Canadian border. District One's easternmost forest was in Michigan and its westernmost forest was in Washington. There were also national forests in Minnesota, North and South Dakota, northern Wyoming, all of Montana, and northern Idaho. As of January, 1910, District One included a total of twenty-seven national forests.²

The personnel of District One consisted of men who were either experienced or trained and proven capable of coping with the problems that occurred in the Western forests. Many of them were native to the West.³ District Forester William B. Greeley was the top administrator, and his second in command was F. A. Silcox, Assistant District Forester.⁴ The individual forests were under the control of forest supervisors, and each forest was further subdivided into districts with a ranger in charge. The extent of individual responsibility was staggering. "Each man was to check and be responsible for 250,000 to 400,000 acres."⁵

In addition to extensive individual responsibilities, there were serious shortages of equipment and effective fire

²Forest Service Record, District One, Northern Region, U.S. Forest Service.
³Publicity Flyer from Washington, D.C., Friday, November 27, 1908, District One Folder, History File, Northern Region, U.S. Forest Service.
⁴Ibid.
⁵Spencer, The Big Blowup, p. 30.
protection systems. The national forests lacked sufficient look-out points, trails, telephone lines, pack trains, and tool caches. District Forester Greeley considered the lack of an effective system of trails "the most serious immediate need." He stated, "I propose to get at this matter still more aggressively next year than this year."

The ruggedness of the terrain posed an additional problem. Although District One stretched across the top of the nation, its most heavily timbered forests lay west of the Continental Divide in western Montana and northern Idaho. Montana, west of the Divide, has been accurately described as having a touch of coastal verdancy to the mountains. There are giant larch and fir and pine. At lower altitudes and alongside the streams, there are cottonwood and quaking asp. The canyons are filled with white, rushing water. The area is dotted with clear lakes. The rivers, which flow generally northward and westward, are blue-green and swift. Between the ranges lie the high valleys. While valleys vary widely as regards temperature, soil, snowfall, and water, all except a few are given a measure of protection from the wind by the ramparts that hedge them in.

Northern Idaho lacks the valleys of western Montana, and is rugged and heavily forested. This then was the land with which the men of District One had to cope.

Between 1900 and 1910 Montana's state government

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7 Ibid., September, 1909, p. 2.
showed greater reluctance to follow the federal government's lead in conservation than the other Northwest states. The State did have laws on the statute books from territorial

In contrast to Montana's indifference California passed strict fire protection legislation in 1905. The Act of March 18, 1905, gave the state forester extensive powers in carrying out his program. He was required to establish fire districts, appoint fire wardens, and appoint federal forest rangers as wardens. He and the wardens could not only arrest violators, but were subject to fine if they did not. In addition to granting the state forester strong powers, the California act was rough on forest law violators. The law "held one whose act resulted in loss to the United States, the state, a county, or a private owner," liable for "double value of property destroyed and to the state or county for all expenses incurred in fighting the fire."

Idaho passed less strict legislation than California. Its first effective fire protection legislation came in 1907. Under the law the state board of land commissioners set up fire districts. Fire wardens were appointed on an annual basis and only if the property owners of the district requested it, and were willing to pay his salary. However, the law outlawed the burning of slash between June 1 and October 1 without a written or printed permit. It further prevented the use of engines in the woods without spark arrestors and campers and others in the woods were subject to fine if they set fires. This law was strengthened in 1909, the same year that Montana got its first fire protection law.

Oregon, like Idaho, passed its first fire protection law in 1905, but revised and strengthened it in 1907. Under the 1907 law the state board of forestry was given extensive powers. The board could appoint as many fire wardens as it deemed necessary. There were also provisions for appointing federal forestry officials as state officers.

Washington passed its first forest protection act in 1903. That law made the state land commissioner ex-officio state fire warden with the power to appoint local fire wardens. Under that law there were penalties for causing forest fires. In 1905 Washington created the office of state forester, and a board of forest commissioners. The state laws regarding lumbering operations were tightened to prevent fires. Greater patrol work was authorized by the new law. Permits were required for burning during the summer months.

days pertaining to intentional or unintentional burning of the woodlands. These laws were unenforceable because no state agency existed to effect their enforcement. There were also laws requiring the railroads to protect the land along their rights-of-way, but these laws applied to grasslands not timberlands.

While the state showed little official inclination to pass timber protection measures, influential individuals began sponsoring conservation proposals. William B. Greeley, District Forester, advocated state-federal cooperation in forest fire protection in all the states in District One. One of Greeley's proposals recommended that the governors of Montana and Idaho appoint federal forest rangers as state fire wardens to enforce the state fire laws and put out fires on state lands.

A second individual who recognized the need for forest legislation was Governor Edwin L. Morris. The Roosevelt Administration, particularly the Governors Conference on Conservation at the White House held in May, 1908, greatly

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10 Acts First Territorial Assembly, 1864, p. 215, Sec. 149; Act January 12, 1872, Codified Laws Territory of Montana 1872, p. 310, Sec. 178, 179; Act February 15, 1881, Revised Statutes 1881, Appendix p. 48.

11 Act February 23, 1881; Comp laws 1887, Sec. 719, p. 830; Same code 1895, Sec. 952.

influenced Governor Norris. In his message to the legislature in 1909, Norris stated,

The time has arrived for us as a people to stop and take an inventory of our natural resources; to observe their rapid consumption and to devise means to prevent the unnecessary and wasteful use of the past and present.

Norris advocated a state system of fire prevention on state lands. He also recommended that wasteful and dangerous lumbering practices such as "the cutting of young and unripe timber" and the "indiscriminate leaving of slashings in logging" operations be abolished.

The Montana legislature responded to Governor Norris' leadership and passed a general land management act on March 19, 1909. Among other things, the Act established a state board of forestry, which consisted of a register of state lands, a state land agent and a state forester. The duties of the forestry board were to practice sound forestry principles, including fire protection, on state lands, and

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13 See above pp. 9-10, and Message of Governor Edwin L. Norris to Eleventh Legislative Assembly of the State of Montana, 1909, p. 22.

14 Message of Governor Edwin L. Norris to Eleventh Legislative Assembly of the State of Montana, 1909, pp. 22-23.

15 Ibid. p. 25.


17 Laws, Resolutions, and Memorials of the State of Montana passed at the Eleventh Regular Session of the Legislative Session, Chapter 147, Sec. 20, p. 298.
"to encourage private owners in preserving and growing timber." The board required that logging operations observe fire protection regulations. It also authorized county commissioners to expend money for forest protection, improvement, and management. Finally, the Act incorporated Greeley's suggestion; namely, that federal forest rangers serve as state fire wardens on state land.

The Law authorized the governor to appoint the state forester, and specified that the job should go to a man who "shall be skilled in the science of forestry." Governor Norris appointed Charles Jungberg State Forester on December 23, 1909.

Within four months of his appointment Charles Jungberg was working out cooperative programs with the Forest Service for fire protection. Jungberg and the supervisors of the national forests worked out basic patrol plans, and the supervisors recommended names of their best rangers for double duty as state fire wardens. These programs were in

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18 Ibid.
19 Morgan, "The Fight Against Fire," p. 69; Laws, Resolutions, and Memorials of the State of Montana passed at the Eleventh Regular Session of the Legislative Session, Chapter 147, Sec. 11, pp. 293-294.
20 Laws, Resolutions, and Memorials of the State of Montana passed at the Eleventh Regular Session of the Legislative Session, Chapter 147, Sec. 9, p. 293.
the elementary stages when the 1910 fire season started so there was little opportunity to perfect them before they had to be applied.

Like the federal and state sectors, the private interests of Montana were inadequately equipped to deal with a major conflagration in 1910. This was not true, however, of all the private land owners of the Northwest. Following the severe fire season of 1902 the lumber interests in the Pacific Northwest began programs of cooperative fire protection of privately owned lands. By 1909 the privately sponsored associations of California, Washington, Oregon and Idaho combined to form the Western Forestry and Conservation Association.\(^{23}\) Montana companies did not participate in the Western Forestry and Conservation Association, and were, in fact, reluctant to form any of their own protective associations. It was not until February, 1910, that Montana timber owners took action to protect themselves when lumber interests in Lincoln and Flathead Counties formed the Northern Montana Forestry Association.\(^{24}\) The N.M.F.A. did not become a moving force in fire protection, however, until 1911.\(^{25}\)

Although the lumber companies in Montana showed


\(^{24}\) Morgan, "The Fight Against Fire," p. 132.

\(^{25}\) Minutes of the Northern Montana Forestry Association, May 11, 1911.
reluctance to form cooperative fire fighting organizations, William Greeley did persuade some companies to cooperate with the Forest Service in fire protection measures. Greeley used the agreement with the Big Blackfoot Milling Company of Bonner, Montana, to persuade others to work out similar fire fighting programs.  

The large railroad companies also showed a willingness to help prevent forest fires. William Greeley worked out informal agreements with the three transcontinental lines that crossed Montana and other parts of District One. In September, 1909, Greeley wrote to Gifford Pinchot the following summation of Forest Service-Railroad programs:

A great deal has been accomplished with the railroad companies in the form of informal agreements, under which the railway officials have put a considerable number of men on patrol work along their rights-of-way, allowed Forest Rangers in many cases to use speeders, instructed their employees to report fires to Forest Officers and assist at the request of any Forest Officer in fire fighting, and similar agreements.  

The informal agreements of September became formal agreements in the spring of 1910. On May 9, 1910, The Great Northern Railroad and the Department of Agriculture agreed to "prevent damage to the national forests from fires along all lines operated by these railroads." The Northern Pacific Railroad followed the Great Northern by signing a formal agreement.

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26 Daily Missoulian, June 4, 1910.
agreement with the Forest Service in early June, 1910.\textsuperscript{29} The Chicago, Milwaukee and Puget Sound Railroad concluded an agreement with the officials of the Coeur d'Alene National Forest in Idaho to pay the wages of Forest Service employed men who worked on fires along the Milwaukee right-of-way.\textsuperscript{30}

With the various cooperative agreements secured, the Forest Service officials regarded the coming summer with optimism. The efforts of the Forest Service, the private companies and the States were insufficient, however, to deal with a major catastrophe in the woods.

\textsuperscript{29}Daily Missoulian, May 24 and June 8, 1910.
\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., May 31, 1910.
CHAPTER III

Fire

District One of the Forest Service had set up a basic organization for combatting forest fire by the early spring months of 1910. The forestry officials hoped for favorable weather and a light fire season in order to develop their organizations further. They received neither.

As early as March, 1910, there were abnormally low amounts of precipitation and unusually high temperatures in District Twelve of the United States Weather Bureau, which was the Columbia Valley Drainage and included Idaho and Montana west of the Continental Divide.\(^1\) Balmy weather extended into April.

The mean temperature ... was 51.2\(^{\circ}\), and it was above normal in nearly all sections, especially in the eastern portion of the District where, in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming this was the warmest April on record at most stations.\(^2\)

The trend continued in May, and by June the precipitation for the entire District Twelve was 0.50 inches.\(^3\) In July


\(^2\)Ibid., April, 1910, p. 640.

\(^3\)Ibid., June, 1910, p. 950.
over one-hundred weather stations in the District recorded no measurable precipitation. The *Monthly Weather Review* for July, 1910, noted: "It has been a long time since a season so favorable for forest fires has occurred ..." By August the situation had not changed, and the *Monthly Weather Review* for that month stated: "Such a drought is unprecedented, and it has caused the streams to become the lowest on record, and the ranges to dry up and become bare of feed." Charles A. Donnel, an assistant observer for the United States Weather Bureau in Idaho, stated in the *Monthly Weather Review* for August, 1910, that the precipitation for the six months from March through August was only 58% of what is normal. The temperature, however, was unseasonably cool. The mean temperature for the District was 62.7° while some stations in northwestern Montana had a mean temperature of 53°. The Weather Bureau credited the presence of smoke in the atmosphere as the reason for the unseasonably low temperatures.

The first forest fire of the 1910 season started in the Blackfeet National Forest of northwestern Montana on April 29. By late May there had been a scattering of fires throughout District One, and District Forester William Greeley

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8 *Daily Missoulian*, May 1, 1910.
authorized the forest supervisors to purchase necessary equipment with which to fight fires the rest of the summer.9

As late as June 8, Greeley remained optimistic about the coming summer.

In going over the details of the fire protection agreements I feel well satisfied with the work to be done this summer. Things look very good for an excellent season and fire danger will be reduced to a minimum. The railroad companies are giving every assistance in the work and the large lumber companies are becoming active in helping us. I look for the best year we have ever had in the forest service.10

By the end of June there were fires in all the forests of the District.11 In July the fire situation became more serious; new fires sprang up nearly every day, but the planning that had taken place earlier helped relieve the situation. The fire fighters controlled most of the blazes within a few days and kept losses to a minimum.12 By mid-July, however, the fire season was recognized as one of the most dangerous ever, and the public slowly became aware of the impending danger. The Daily Missoulian placed the subject of forest fires on its first page on July 14. It also ran an editorial on that same day warning the citizens of western Montana to use caution in the woods because the situation was

9Daily Missoulian, May 27, 1910.
10Ibid., June 8, 1910.
12Daily Missoulian, June and July 1-14, passim.
the most dangerous since 1889.

A jurisdictional conflict in Glacier Park added to the problems of the forestry officials during the month of July. Congress had created the park on May 11, 1910, and had appropriated $15,000 for "its improvement and the construction of roads and trails." No funds were allocated for the protection of the Park from fires. When serious fires broke out in the Park during mid-July, District Forester Greeley sent men into Glacier from the Flathead and Blackfeet National Forests to prevent the Park fires from spreading into those two bordering forests. Greeley explained his motives to the Daily Missoulian on July 16:

We do not know whether there is any money appropriated in the national park funds for the purpose of fire fighting, but the fires up there are threatening two of our national forests and so we have sent men to fight them. The Flathead National Forest adjoins Glacier National Park on the south, and the Blackfeet Forest is immediately west of it. We could not wait to make the necessary inquiries from Washington - the situation was too serious - so we sent men from the two forests mentioned to fight the park fires; the matter of meeting the expense will be settled afterward.

Another problem, a lack of sufficient man power, occurred in July and continued to plague the fire fighting efforts throughout the season. Newspaper reports daily mentioned the growing need for more men. By July 20 the fire situation in the Coeur d'Alene National Forest was so severe that Supervisor William Weigle refused to send men to the

13Daily Missoulian, July 17, 1910.
aid of the Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation because all of the available men were being used in the Forest. In fact, Weigle's area was so desperate that $6,000 was spent on fire fighters' wages for the week previous to July 20.  

The Forest Service officials, aware of the present and future needs for experienced men, altered their normal paying procedures in order to satisfy the fire fighters more fully. Because of the often temporary nature of the work and the short durations which individual men might spend in an area, special "disbursing agents" were sent into the woods to pay the fire fighters who were there on emergency call. This system contrasted sharply with the normal custom of "making vouchers, having them properly okayed, sending checks and getting them cashed."  

Greeley abandoned another normal personnel procedure on July 27. Whereas the usual policy had been to hire men on a temporary basis to meet specific emergencies and then release them, Greeley authorized the forest supervisors to hire as many "temporary" fire fighters as possible and keep them on the payroll to meet future needs. In a circular to the forest supervisors Greeley emphasized three reasons for this change in policy:

14 Daily Missoulian, July 14-31, passim.
15 Ibid., July 21, 1910.
It is necessary, in the first place, to retain a strong guard on every fire which is placed under control, until the rains come, to prevent out breaks resulting from high winds... In the second place, it is absolutely necessary to greatly strengthen the patrol. The Forests are so dry and fires spread so rapidly that the patrol force of an ordinary season is wholly inadequate to handle the present situation. In the third place, we need to keep on hand where they are immediately available, a strong force of experienced fire fighters who can be brought together quickly and relied upon to do good work... I want to emphasize especially the necessity for reducing but slowly the crews employed to bring large fires under control. Keep the best men and when they are no longer needed to guard a particular area, place them at some point where they will strengthen the patrol and be available when the next fire breaks out.17

Thus the number of men employed by the Forest Service soared to its greatest height in the history of the organization.

The private organizations that had entered into agreements with the Forest Service supported the cooperative deals by allowing literally hundreds of men to participate in the fire patrol work. Newspaper reports on almost any given day in late July and early August reported the numbers of men that the railroad and lumber companies supplied for fighting fires. Foremost among those offering assistance in Montana were the Big Blackfoot Milling Company, The Northern Pacific Railroad Company, the Great Northern Railroad and the Chicago, Milwaukee, and Puget Sound Railroad.18

Another problem that occurred in July and haunted the area the rest of the summer was the rumor of disaster. As

17Circular from W. E. Greeley to all Forest Supervisors, History File, Northern Region, U.S. Forest Service.

18Daily Missoulian, July, passim.
early as July 20, civilian and governmental officials in Libby, Montana, sent out word that there was no verity to the rumor that some towns in Lincoln County had been swept up in flames. The Daily Missoulian ran an article denying the rumored destruction of towns in that area. The report from Libby stated in part: "... and it is not probable that anything of the kind will ever happen, for it would have to be a most extreme condition that would cause any town in this county to be burned on account of forest fires."\(^{19}\) This was a brave statement in light of events in the near future.

The incessant occurrence of new fires at the end of July left the Forest Service officials in Missoula with little to do but accept their fate, and trust in the judgement of their men in the field. W. B. Greeley told the Daily Missoulian on July 29 that it was impossible to keep up with daily events. The worst areas at that time were in the Coeur d'Alene and Lolo Forests. The Coeur d'Alene situation was highly distressing. New fires were breaking out at the rate of three to four a day, and the reports from Wallace, Idaho, indicated that only one-third enough men could be obtained to help fight the conflagrations. The worst of the Lolo fires took place in the Nine Mile area. Men were sent to that area daily, but could do little to prevent the spreading of fires. Speaking of the two forests, Greeley stated: "In them there are so many fires that are serious, and so many

\(^{19}\)Daily Missoulian, July 20, 1910.
others which at any time may become serious that we are very uneasy about them."\textsuperscript{20}

While the situation bordered on catastrophic, the Forest Service had a champion in the \textit{Daily Missoulian}. That paper credited the Forest Service with the prevention of wholesale destruction of the entire area. One article on July 30 stated: "Taken together the forest conditions are as favorable as they could be under the existing circumstances; and that the situation is no worse, speaks volumes in praise of the efficiency of the Forest Service." On the same day the \textit{Missoulian} ran an editorial which reiterated its earlier contention that the 1910 fire season was the worst since 1889, and praised the Forest Service for its efforts.

That this summer has not witnessed a repetition of the disastrous experience of the summer of 1889 is due principally to the organized efforts of the fire fighters of the forestry service. These men have labored diligently, and, in the face of discouraging conditions have been unexpectedly successful. True, the fires are not yet extinguished, but they have been held within limited areas and their destructiveness has been curbed to a great extent. The forestry service has certainly made good this summer; it has given ample warrant for its existence.\textsuperscript{21}

By July 31 the men in the woods had the fires fairly well under control with the major exception of the Lolo Forest. Governor Norris allowed the Montana National Guard units to attend summer camp at American Lake, Washington.

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\textsuperscript{20}\textit{Daily Missoulian}, July 29 & 30, 1910. \\
\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}, July 30, 1910.
\end{flushright}
They had been held at Libby to assist in the fire fighting. William B. Greeley, once more optimistic because of the success of the Forest Service in controlling the conflagrations, made the following statement to the news media on July 31:

We are holding our own against all of the fires within the jurisdiction of field district no. 1, and the outlook today is that we can continue to hold the flames in check and protect most of the commercial timber on the reserves indefinitely. While a big general rain is anxiously desired, still I have no hesitation in saying that the situation is well in hand, and that we fear no heavy losses further than have already resulted.

We were in so much better condition to fight fires this year than ever before that the work has been comparatively easy. With trails and means of communication to some of the districts otherwise remote we have reached forests and preserved a working system that has been impossible before.

Greeley's optimism was short lived, however, because during the first week of August new fires erupted throughout the District. The Lolo and Coeur d'Alene Forests remained under siege from the fires. Elers Koch, Lolo Forest Supervisor, had 260 men in addition to his regular crew, and his daily expenses for fighting fires were up to $1,000. The Big Creek tributary of the St. Joe River in the Coeur d'Alene Forest was beleaguered by fires in the first week of August. Reports from Wallace, however, stated that the officials were optimistic about getting them under control.

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22Daily Missoulian, July 31, 1910.
23Great Falls Tribune, July 31, 1910.
In addition to the Lolo and Coeur d'Alene Forests, the Missoula National Forest had new fires at Rock Creek, Ranch Creek, and Greenough Gulch. The Seeley Lake area of the Missoula Forest broke out in flames on the 1st of August. By the 3rd the flames had crowned and were running uncontrolled. Glacier Park was threatened by fires along the Great Northern right-of-way. The Flathead Indian Reservation was burning at Arlee and Dixon. The New York Times reported fires eight miles long on the Montana-Idaho border. The Bitterroot Forest had large fires in the first week of August. In addition, the Northern Pacific Railroad had fires on its line west of Missoula. The N.P. was able to maintain control, but the situations at Dorsey, Taft, Paradise, Drexel and Tunnel No. 8 near St. Regis remained dangerous. By August 4 the Clearwater fires were reported to be fifteen miles long and twenty miles wide.

The fire situation in the first week of August was complicated by charges of incendiarism. The Great Falls Tribune published the following report on August 2:

It has been learned that several of the fires in the Bitterroot Valley have been started by enthusiastic land owners throughout the spotted fever district, who have set fire to the underbrush and small timber in the hopes of cleaning out the woodticks which are supposed to carry the fever. A government physician investigating fever conditions, has issued a statement of warning saying that the tick season is over; and such fires are entirely useless besides being extremely dangerous.

24 Daily Missoulian, August 1, 1910.
The *Daily Missoulian* published a similar article on August 6 reporting that W. V. King, an entomological assistant of the Bureau of Entomology, warned the Bitterroot residents that the ticks would survive the fires.

Another serious problem confronted the administrators of the forests - a lack of packers and horses to supply the men in the woods with food and equipment. This problem was especially acute in the Clearwater Forest where the fires were sometimes as far as seventy to eighty miles from the railroads.\(^2\^6\)

The fires of early August created the need for even more men. Butte, Spokane and Missoula were already supplying the bulk of the men. Yet the *Daily Missoulian* stated:

> Men, men, men: is the frenzied cry of the forestry officials. Said a prominent official of the forest service yesterday: 'We can't keep up this pace much longer. The men already on the ground cannot continue the work for fire fighting indefinitely, nor can we go on getting 100 or 150 new men each day very many more days. The available supply is now almost exhausted or so it seems.'

The situation became so grave that many fires in the area went unmanned.\(^2\)\(^7\) By August 5 the Forest Service officials estimated that there were 1200 to 1500 extra men employed to fight fires.\(^2\)\(^8\) Yet the need for men increased.

The man power situation was so desperate at the end

\(^{26}\) *Daily Missoulian*, August 1 & 8, 1910.


of the first week of August that the use of the United States Army troops was considered as an alternative. The *Helena Independent* reported on August 4 that Greeley requested the use of troops from the *War Department*. Major-General Leonard Wood, Army Chief-of-Staff, forwarded Greeley’s request to President Taft; and on August 8 the President authorized the use of regular army troops to fight forest fires in Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and California. The *War Department* immediately notified Major-General T. H. Barry, Commander of the California Department at San Francisco; Brigadier General Maus, Commander of the Department of Columbia at Vancouver, Washington; and Brigadier General Walter Howe, Commander of the Department of the Dakotas at St. Paul to prepare their commands for fire fighting duty, and to release them to the Forest Service on request.

Whereas the *Daily Missoulian* favored and supported the work of the Forest Service in the summer months of 1910, there was another viewpoint of the value of the organization. The *Helena Independent* articulated the sentiment of those who opposed the work of Greeley’s men. It stated on August 4:

> The cry for help referring to the request for army troops belated as it is, is one of the very few reasonable demands that have emanated from the forestry bureau as operated in this state. We believe and contend that these lads in Lincoln

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30 *Daily Missoulian*, August 9, 1910.
green y-clept foresters, are an expensive and useless burden to the public ...

The Pinchot troupe of foresters now infesting the west should be called in, paid off and abolished. If they are not a nuisance, they are of no practical use in the business of preventing or fighting forest fires. They are untrained, scattered, ignorant of woodcraft in most cases, without discipline and without experience in the real hardships and trials incident to the work of guarding and saving the forests ...

Guardianship of the forest reserves comes naturally, logically and economically within the functions of an army of disciplined soldiers. Combat with an onrushing forest fire is fit work for fighting men.

On August 9 F. A. Silcox, Associate District Forester, notified the forest supervisors that the troops were available at their request. Silcox also conferred with the commanding officers at Fort Missoula and Fort Harrison in Helena to ascertain the number of men and the amount of equipment that would be available.

District Forester Greeley ordered the use of troops for use in the Lolo and Clearwater Forests on August 9. The Daily Missoulian reported the Army's response.

The officers in charge of Fort Missoula and Fort Harrison would be more than glad to comply with Mr. Greeley's request, if it were not for the fact that all the available troops are attending the annual maneuvers at American Lake and that a corporal's guard has been left to attend to the absolute imperative duties of the post.

On August 15 the Butte Intermountain commented on the readiness of the Army to assist in the woods:

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31 Daily Missoulian, August 9, 1910.
32 Ibid., August 13, 1910.
It is to be hoped that when the United States army faces an enemy in the field it will act more rapidly than it has upon the forest fires. A week elapsed between the order for the use of the troops and their actual engagement. It is the old, old story of red-tape.

Amazing, too, is the calm assertion that not only is there not sufficient equipment for the guard, which Governor Norris offers, but for all the troops themselves. A fine state of preparation for war, when bare camping essentials are lacking. Who knows the day when we may regret all this?

The present fires are the first severe test to which Mr. Roosevelt's green rangers have been put and it clearly indicates that something is radically wrong. The force is not large enough. The millions upon millions of feet of timber destroyed were worthy of more conscientious precaution.

What is to be done, again next year? The lessons so bitterly learned should not be without profit. It may be well to have the army on hand, during the dry weeks of 1911.

Troops did arrive in Missoula on August 13, and were immediately dispatched to needy areas. The army played an essential role in the patrol and extinguishing efforts in the woods until the advent of the fall rains and snow.

While the foresters were waiting for the troops, the crisis in the forests increased in intensity. Elers Koch commented:

The 10th of August was a bad day, with low humidity and high winds. Fires picked up everywhere and there was a wave of fire which crossed the Bitterroot Range from Idaho into Montana in many places all the way from Stevens Peak to the Lolo Pass.33

The Lolo, Cabinet and Coeur d'Alene Forests came under severe attack from fires. The small mining town of Wallace, Idaho,

33Koch, "History," p. 3.
in the heart of the Coeur d'Alene flirted with disaster. Winds blew hot cinders into the town from the Placer Creek region to the south of the city, and Wallace was in more danger than at any other time in the summer. The townspeople of Wallace became concerned to the extent that a reported 100 families packed their belongings readying for an evacuation, and some families left town rather than risk catastrophe. Those that stayed in Wallace showed an increased interest in fire insurance, and the local insurance offices did a veritable land office business. The *Daily Missoulian* reported: "The insurance men do not hesitate to give the desired policies, since the people in touch with the fire situation are certain that Wallace is not in any danger."

The confidence of the forestry officials was temporarily bolstered by the cessation of strong winds on the 12th of August, but the high winds resumed on the 13th and blew pieces of burning bark into Wallace from the nearest fire which was six miles away. More important than the activity of the wind was the number of actual and potential men fighting fires in the Coeur d'Alene. Weigle had 1800 men fighting fire, and he also had the knowledge that soldiers could be

35 Koch, "History," p. 4.
obtained on request. Weigle, in fact, ordered two companies of soldiers from Fort George Wright, Washington, on the 13th. The two companies arrived in Wallace on the evening of the 14th. Another 100 army men came to Wallace on the 16th. These men were all Negroes of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry, under the command of white officers. The first two companies bivouacked a few miles outside of Wallace at a private ranch on Placer Creek, and the second group camped on the Wallace city park awaiting orders from Weigle. The soldiers did not have to wait long. One company of men was sent to Avery, Idaho, to assist in the fighting there, and the other was sent to the fires further up Placer Creek.

While the remaining soldiers waited, the citizens of Wallace attempted to induce rain by exploding dynamite. The Daily Missoulian published the following report on August 17:

The theory that thunder and lightning cause rain and that manufactured thunder and lightning ought to be followed by rain is the one on which Wallace men base their belief in the efficacy of exploding dynamite to bring a fall of moisture. Dynamite has been exploded at irregular intervals for the past 60 hours, one shower of rain falling.

The fire fighters were making more practical efforts to reduce the hazard to Wallace. Two-hundred men on the Big Creek tributary of the Coeur d'Alene River, assigned to

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38 Daily Missoulian, August 15, 1910.


40 Daily Missoulian, August 19, 1910.
keep the fires from crossing the divide into Wallace, completed a ten mile trench around the city. District Forester Greeley, in Wallace on the 16th, telephoned to Missoula and reported that conditions in Wallace had improved very much from what they had been on the 10th. With the trench protecting Wallace from the Big Creek fires, and soldiers on the Placer Creek fires, which were the biggest in the immediate area, Greeley stated, "The only thing that can endanger the town is an exceptionally high wind, as the danger from an ordinary breeze has practically passed." 41 Supervisor Weigle, in his report of the 1910 fires in the Coeur d'Alene confirmed Greeley's analysis of the situation. Reiterating Greeley's statement, Weigle went on to say: "... and there is not any question whatever that had there been normal conditions we would have been successful in stopping all of these fires without any great loss of timber." 42

As the crews around Wallace attempted to prevent fires from entering that town, men in other areas in District One fought against fires. South of the Wallace area on the St. Joe River, still in the Coeur d'Alene Forest, fires drove settlers out of their homes. Two people, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Burzinski, were believed killed by flames on the Big Creek of the St. Joe River as early as August 14. However, these names do not appear on the final official lists of fire

41Daily Missoulian, August 17, 1910.
42Weigle, Report, p. 3.
victims. Reports stated that "the greater part of the Big
Creek settlements have been wiped out." Flames were reported
to have been fanned by winds to the extent that nothing but
rain could stop them.\footnote{Daily Missoulian, August 15, 1910.}

In addition to the Coeur d'Alene Forest area, most
of the other forests suffered extensive fire damage between
August 10 and 20. Flames swept into the Lolo Forest from
three directions: the Clearwater Forest to the south, the
Coeur d'Alene to the west, and the Flathead Indian Reservation
to the north. High winds in the Clearwater Forest, combined
with inaccessible terrain and the ever present drought, made
that area highly vulnerable. Assistant Supervisor Penn, of
the Clearwater, reported new fires in the Selway and Eldorado
drainage regions that burned through the forest faster than
a man could walk. Reports from Kalispell indicated that the
fire situation in the Flathead section was the worst of the
season. Supervisor Bushnell of the Cabinet Forest reported
that his situation was grave, and that he could use more men,
in addition to the 400 that were under his command, but he
lacked experienced men to act as supervisors. W. N. Miller,
Supervisor of the Kaniksu Forest on the Washington-Idaho-
Canadian border, reported three fires out of control in the
Priest Lake area that were inaccessible to the fighters. The
Blackfeet Forest also came under severe attack from fires.\footnote{Ibid., August 12, 14, 15, 17, 1910.}
As the fires renewed between August 10 and 18, the fighters increased their efforts; as soon as the men gained control of a fire they were shipped to another. The numbers of soldiers too was increased, so that every area that was in danger had troops assisting the civilian fire fighters.45

As August 20 approached the Forest Service began to control the fires. The Daily Missoulian reported on August 18 that the forestry officials were gaining the upper hand. The report stated in part,

"... The organizing of men and equipment has been completed under adverse conditions, but the job has been done ... had it not been for the forest service and its admirable supervision of the wooded country there would be no checking the flames now."

The Forest Service officials used various techniques to prevent the fires from spreading. Back fires, trenches, and pinching the flames into the less valuable timber stands were the most common techniques. F. A. Silcox told the Daily Missoulian that a stand of timber that had been contracted for sale at $95,000 was saved by pinching the fire away from it. Silcox stated that the sale of that one stand covered the cost of the fire fighting for the entire summer up to that time.46

By August 19 the men fighting fire in District One were again optimistic. Although many new fires continued to spring up, the system of controlling them had been well

45Daily Missoulian, August 10-20, 1910, passim.
46Ibid., August 18, 1910.
established. With the exception of the more remote areas, the fires could be reached and controlled within a few days in most cases. The men expected the fall rains to begin any day then, and the outlook, while not cheery was at least not pessimistic. As Greeley mentioned on August 17, only an exceptional wind could endanger the area.

The high winds that Greeley feared struck on the afternoon of August 20. A gale of hurricane proportion swept throughout most of the national forests in Idaho and western Montana. The winds and fires hit most severely in the Clearwater and Coeur d'Alene Forests in Idaho and the Lolo and Cabinet Forests in Montana. Many trees that had survived earlier fires were uprooted, and rangers reported being nearly blown from the saddles of their horses. "Within thirty-six hours a strip of territory approximately one-hundred twenty miles in length, running northwest and southeast, and from twenty to thirty-five miles in width was burned."47 All of the previous efforts to control the fires were in vain as the fires crowned and ran uncontrolled over forests, towns, rivers and men.

The first area hit was the Nez Perce National Forest in Idaho. Although the Nez Perce had lost some timber to fires during the 1910 summer, it had survived the season in good shape compared to the forests farther north. The

hurricane hit there on the afternoon of August 20. The little community of Elk City, Idaho, stood right in the path of the rampaging winds. It miraculously escaped serious damage mainly through the efforts of Ranger G. I. Porter and the women of Elk City. 48

The winds then swooped into the Clearwater National Forest, which at that time included the present Clearwater area as well as the Selway and Lochsa River drainages. All of the headwater region of the Clearwater burned. The flames crowned and spread across the Bitterroot Range as far as ten to fifteen miles on the Montana side. The holocaust also struck the Selway River region and its chief headwater tributary, Moose Creek, where an unsuspecting group of fire fighters was camped.

Ranger Ed Thenon's crew of thirty men had arrived at the Moose Creek camp on the afternoon of the 20th. They had crossed over the Bitterroot Mountains via Lost Horse Pass because the area they were to work was practically inaccessible from the Idaho side. The crew bedded down early after their strenuous journey of the day, but needles and debris from the tree tops falling on the tent aroused Thenon at around 10:00 p.m. Shortly after, Ranger Lou Fitting called Thenon out, and claimed that he had seen a star fall and start a fire across the creek from the camp. Thenon's

description follows:

I knew it was out of reason to think a star could have set this fire, and in looking around to the west, the direction the gale of wind was coming from, I saw the sky aglow with pink color spread across the width of several miles. I knew at once all about Fitting's star and where it came from. 49

Thenon wakened his men, and ordered them to pile all the camp equipment and food on a sand bar in the creek. Some of the men became hysterical faced with such a desperate situation and began crying. The cook and another man completely lost their wits. The cook became violent and had to be held by three men; the other man danced around and sang lullabies to himself.

When the men had arranged the equipment as ordered, Thenon told them to lie down in the stream and cover themselves with wet blankets. Some of the hysterical men had to be held by those who retained their composure. The crown fire passed over the heads of the crew, and Thenon, while attempting to put out fires on the canvas that covered the food, resorted to sticking his head in a bucket to escape the heat. He later claimed it saved his life. The crown fire lasted about five minutes, but the crew had to contend with the ensuing ground fires. Thenon immediately called roll and only two men were unaccounted for. These two men had moved down the stream and sought refuge under a fallen cedar. They reported back to camp when they heard the crew

49 Koch, "History," p. 17.
shouting their names and were surprised to find the others alive.

Thenon's crew salvaged enough food to survive. Their horses remained safe only because Lou Fitting had covered them with blankets, and had thrown water on them. Thenon's crew came through their ordeal with no casualties, although the man who had sung lullabies to himself never recovered and had to be placed in an asylum.\(^5^0\)

When Thenon's crew had first made camp, Lou Fitting's brother, Ray, had left Moose Creek to scout the fire conditions on the North Fork of Moose Creek. When the hurricane struck, he found refuge in a stream under an overhanging ledge. He covered his head with his coat and stayed under water as long as he could. "He said he was really scared when the dead fish began to drift down past him. If the water was hot enough to kill the fish he had visions of being boiled alive."\(^5^1\)

The tempest swept past the Clearwater Forest and struck the Coeur d'Alene. The Coeur d'Alene National Forest lost more timber and had more people killed than any other area in District One. That area had the most settlements, and there were large numbers of men employed to fight fires.

The folk hero in the legend of the 1910 burn was

\(^5^0\) The above material is recorded in Thenon's report, that is only available in Missoula in Koch, "History," pp. 16-19.

\(^5^1\) Ibid., p. 19.
Edward C. Pulaski. His family lineage traced back to Polish Count Casimir Pulaski, a hero of the American Revolutionary War. Pulaski later invented a fire fighting tool, which to this day carries his name.\footnote{Hult, \textit{Northwest Disaster}, p. 107.}

In the summer of 1910 Ed Pulaski was a Forest Service ranger in the Coeur d'Alene National Forest. His supervisor, W. G. Weigle, described him as a man

who is about forty years of age, (is) a man of most excellent judgement, conservative, thoroughly acquainted with the region, having prospected throughout the burned area during the last twenty-five years, and is considered by the old timers in the region as one of the best and safest men that could have been placed in charge of a crew of men in the hills.\footnote{Weigle, Report, p. 5.}

Pulaski had charge of about one-hundred fifty men in the area along the divide between the Big Creek of the St. Joe River and the Big Creek of the Coeur d'Alene River. His men were scattered over several miles in that area. When the hurricane struck Pulaski was inspecting his crews on Placer Creek, which runs southwest out of Wallace, Idaho. He found a camp of about forty men and led them toward Wallace, which was about ten miles away. About half way to Wallace, Pulaski found that he was cut off from the town by new fires. His men began to panic, but Pulaski assured them that he could lead them to safety. Pulaski took the men toward two prospector tunnels. With the fires advancing at their rear and dense smoke making it nearly impossible to
see, Pulaski left the men and inspected the tunnels to see if it were safe to stay in them. He decided the larger of the two was safe, went back to the men, and ordered them into the tunnel of the War Eagle Mine. All but one man reached the safety of the tunnel before the fires caught up to them.

All together there were forty-two men and two horses in the tunnel with Pulaski. He ordered the men to lie down with their faces on the floor of the tunnel. Pulaski hung blankets over the entrance of the tunnel by fastening them to the timbers. He positioned himself as close to the entrance as he could, and scooped water from a small stream in the tunnel floor onto the timbers and the blankets to keep them from burning. He did this until he fainted. The heat and wind outside the tunnel sucked all the cool air out and forced heat and smoke in the tunnel. All of the crew lost consciousness for at least some of the time in the tunnel. One man, however, recovered earlier than the rest and found the fire situation much safer. He walked into Wallace to get help, and arrived there about 3:00 a.m. on the 21st. A rescue party immediately left for the tunnel, and removed all the men and the horses. Five of the men were dead from suffocation. The rest of the crew, including Pulaski, ultimately recovered, although some were hospitalized. The rescue party was unable to recognize the man who had failed to reach the tunnel. Forest Supervisor Weigle stated in his report that, "Had not Pulaski known the location of this tunnel everyone of the forty-two men in his crew would have
While Pulaski's men waited out the siege in the War Eagle Mine tunnel, Ranger John W. Bell's crew sought refuge at the homestead clearing of Joseph Beauchamp on the Middle Fork of the Clearwater Big Creek. Weigle described Bell as a man about thirty-five years of age, thoroughly acquainted with mountain conditions, having spent a large part of his life in this western country. He is conservative and thoughtful and an all around man of the mountains.55

Under ordinary conditions, claimed Weigle, the Beauchamp clearing would have provided sufficient shelter for the fifty some men in Bell's crew. The conditions, however, were nothing if not extraordinary. The clearing had a shallow stream that ran through it, and most of the men sought shelter in the water by lying face down in it. Seven men hid from the conflagration in a small cave that Beauchamp had dug out to store things in.

The wind storm that preceded the crown fire by a few minutes blew over and broke off nearly all the trees in the dense forests of that region. The crown fire followed and the heat was so intense that the men in the creek had the skin on the back of their necks burned off as well as the hair on the back of their heads. A falling tree killed three men in the stream. The seven men in the cave burned to death.

One of the men, minus his hair and part of his skin,

54 Weigle, Report, pp. 4-7.
55 Ibid., p. 7.
made it to Wallace at 9:00 a.m. on the 21st. He had walked twelve miles through a smoking, sizzling jungle of debris and wasted forest. Weigle had already sent out a search party for Bell's crew, but when the injured man arrived in Wallace he sent two doctors on foot to help. "It required a crew of seventeen men working all day Sunday (21st), Sunday night, Monday, and Monday night to open the trail to the injured men twelve miles from Wallace." Pack horses were sent to bring out the injured men. The ten dead men were buried at the clearing, and a minister went out to provide a Christian burial for the victims. The rest of Bell's crew recovered at the hospital in Wallace.56

A third crew trapped in the hurricane of August 20 was one led by Ranger William R. Rock. Rock was twenty-five years old and had only been in the Forest Service two years. Weigle claimed in his report that Rock was thoroughly acquainted with the area in which he was working.

Rock had a crew of approximately seventy men on Setzer Creek about six miles northeast of Avery, Idaho. Rock's first inclination was to head for Avery when the gale struck, but a rash of new fires prevented that course of action. Instead, Rock retreated to an area that had burned over the previous day. The selection was a good one. The conglagration was so severe that large columns of smoke and debris ignited and exploded flames thousands of feet into

56 Weigle, Report, pp. 7-8.
the air. One of the men, Oscar Weigert, was so frightened by this phenomenon that he left the crew and shot himself with a pistol. His body was found the following morning by crew members who had heard the two shots the previous night, but had not realized what they meant. The rest of Rock's crew came out of the ordeal unscathed.\textsuperscript{57}

Twenty-eight men under the supervision of Ranger R. N. Debitt died on Setzer Creek near Avery on the night of the 20th. Debitt had charge of the Avery District, and on the night of the hurricane sent Charles Sullivan, deputy sheriff, to warn the men to come to Avery. All of the crews, with the exception of the twenty-eight who died, complied with Sullivan's instructions. Those men felt that Sullivan exaggerated the danger, and elected to stay in the woods. They were burned beyond recognition a few hours later. When their remains were found, they were sewn into canvas sacks and buried.\textsuperscript{58}

Ranger Lee Hollingshead had charge of a crew on the west fork of the St. Joe Big Creek. Hollingshead was twenty-two years old.

Although a young man, he has always exercised good judgement. He is conservative and had served as Forest Guard in the immediate region in which he had charge of men for two years; therefore was thoroughly familiar with the country.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{57}Weigle, Report, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{58}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{59}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 10-11.
Hollingshead's crew consisted of about sixty men on the evening of August 20. Nineteen members of the crew panicked when the gales struck and rushed off through the woods in a futile attempt to escape the flames that were bursting all around them. They found a cabin at the base of a hill and rushed into it. They remained in the cabin until the walls and roof began to collapse on their heads, and then attempted to break out of the wall of fire that surrounded the cabin. The flames consumed eighteen of them within a few feet of the cabin. The nineteenth man inadvertently wandered around through the fires for two days until he reached the St. Joe River where a crew of searchers found him. The skin on his face and hands had been burned off, and he was nearly nude. He recovered after six weeks in the hospital.

While the ill-fated nineteen men ran haphazardly through the woods, Ranger Hollingshead led the rest of the crew to a previously burned-over area, and they all survived. The following day Hollingshead went to the cabin where the eighteen died. He found, in addition to the eighteen men, five horses and a black bear that had died with the men. He was unable to identify the eighteen bodies. They were wrapped in canvas and blankets and buried.  

Ranger James Danielson had a crew of eighteen men on the Stevens Peak fire south of Mullan, Idaho. Supervisor  

60 Weigle, Report, pp. 10-11.
Weigle described Danielson as twenty-two years old, skilled in woodcraft and familiar with the region. Danielson found himself surrounded by the howling fires on the night of August 20. With no alternative, Danielson led his men to a small clearing in the forest. He ordered them to burn the bear grass in the clearing so that the fires could not burn their refuge. The men complied, but when the wild fire approached the clearing it burned over the area a second time. Danielson commanded his men to cover their faces with blankets, and stay in the clearing. All of the men received burns on their hands and faces, and one died when he accidentally inhaled the flames.

The following morning Danielson found his way to Mullan, a distance of approximately five miles. A rescue party brought the men out on pack horses, and a special Northern Pacific train delivered them to the hospital in Wallace. All of them recovered.

Another crew which suffered fatalities was that of Ranger S. M. Taylor at the Bullion Mine along the Idaho-Montana border east of Wallace. Taylor, discovering that the crew was surrounded by raging fires, ordered his men into the tunnel of the Bullion Mine. One of the men, Larry Nyson, had helped construct the tunnel and he assured Taylor that it would be a safe place. The men entered the tunnel, and all but eight penetrated the shaft a sufficient distance to pass an overhead air vent. Smoke poured down
the air shaft and suffocated the eight. The rest of the crew spent the time in comparative comfort. When they exited they found the bodies of the eight dead men. The dead were temporarily buried near the mine until the railroad trestles in the area that had burned were repaired. They were then shipped to Wallace for more formal burial.61

One of the most suspenseful escapes of the 1910 season occurred on the headwaters of the St. Joe River deep in the wilderness of the Coeur d'Alene Forest. Ranger Joe B. Halm's crew had fought fires in that remote area since the end of July, and by August 18 they had the fires controlled but not out. Shortly before August 20 Halm had reduced the size of his crew from eighty-five to eighteen men. Their base camp on Bean Creek was sixty-five miles from the nearest railroad, and the few packers that were available were unable to keep the larger crew supplied with the necessary equipment and food.

On the afternoon of the 20th Halm had left his crew to guide two packers to an unfamiliar supply camp. He then left the packers to return to his base camp. Upon returning Halm was greeted by his crew who had spotted the holocaust coming in their direction and had fled to the camp. The men were nearly hysterical and wanted to run for safety. Halm realized that their only safety rested on discipline and organization. He asserted his authority by placing his hand

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on his holstered pistol, and ordered the men to remain in camp. He then commanded each man to grab some food and a blanket, and pile what was left of the supplies in a tent and bury it. The men followed the orders. They then placed the food and a few tools on a sand bar in the middle of the creek.

By this time the full force of the hurricane was on them. The wind crashed through the forest at speeds of 60-70 miles an hour. The din of the wind and crashing trees made vocal communication nearly impossible. Fire surrounded them causing some of the men to become wild with fright. Halm had to forcefully contain one young man from dashing into the woods.

The crew then sought refuge on a gravel bar in the middle of the stream. There was no other place to hide from the onslaught of fire, debris and crashing trees. Some of the men tried to hide under their blankets, but the danger from falling snags or burned trees prevented this. The crew had their backs to a logjam that quickly caught fire. A change in the wind would have blown the flames from the burning pile of timber right into the crew. Two trees fell onto the gravel bar, but no one received serious injuries. The men grabbed buckets to throw water on the trees above them to prevent them from weakening and falling on their little island. The scene was chaotic as the men danced and dodged and fought through the evening.

Eventually the chaos and danger subsided as the
hurricane sped past to seek further victims. The men at Bean Creek had won. No one had been killed, although all were tired and sore. The crew sat in the light of burning embers; some found blankets to comfort their bodies, others hunted for tobacco, but all just waited for morning.

Halm stated that the morning of the 21st brought the first clear weather that the men had seen in weeks. Smoke no longer obscured the sky. The forest that had once been green and lush was gaunt and blackened by the events of the previous evening. The men rousted out of burrows, and began to organize their camp again. The fellow that Halm had rescued the evening before, a big Swede, slapped the ranger on the back and handed him the pistol that had been used to enforce discipline the night before. It had fallen from Halm's hip during the previous night's activity and had not been missed. "'You lost her in the creek last night. You save me my life,' he said, simply." The cook salvaged enough food from the sand bar to provide the men with breakfast. The men uncovered the tent containing the sleeping gear and tools, and prepared to resume their work.

With the knowledge that his fire fighters were safe, Halm concerned himself with the fate of the packers that he had taken to the supply camp the previous day. Halm set out

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with his crew foreman to find the two packers. When they arrived at the supply camp, the two men could find no evidence of the packers. They hurried to the next supply camp, but again they found no sign of the two men. Continuing on the ranger and the foreman began to find signs of the packers: a discarded pack saddle, then another, a riding saddle, the remains of a horse, more saddles, more dead horses, but no men. Eventually the heat of the still burning ruins of the forest forced Halm and the foreman to turn back. A recurrence of strong winds again endangered their safety, and forced the men to seek shelter in a small cave. Halm and his foreman remained in the cave until the winds subsided. They then retraced their route back to the base camp. Halm vividly described his return trip:

After what seemed like hours, we crept out of our cramped quarters and retraced our steps. The storm had subsided slightly. If the remains of the trail had been littered that morning, it was completely filled now. We came to a bend in the creek where the trail passed over a sharp hogback. As we neared the top, we again came into the full fury of the wind. Unable to stand, pelted by gravel and brands and blinded by ashes, we crawled across the exposed rocky ledges. I had never before, nor have I since, faced such a gale. On the ridges and slopes every tree was now uprooted and down. We passed the grim remains of the horses and supply camps. In the darkness we worked our way back over and under the blackened, fallen trees. Fanned by the wind, the fire still burned fiercely in places. Torn and bleeding, we hurried on, hatless - in the darkness, lighted only by the myriads of fires - I picked the way, the foreman watching for falling trees. While passing along a ledge a great tree tottered above us and rent its way to earth, rolling crazily down the slope. We ran for our lives, but the whirling trunk broke and lodged a few feet above. So absorbed were we with our plight that we nearly passed our camp on
the little bar in the creek bottom.\textsuperscript{63}

Although Halm and the foreman had made their flight in darkness, they were surprised to learn that it was only 4:00 p.m. The reoccurring winds had once more filled the atmosphere with dense smoke. Shortly after returning to the base camp, the men were once more frightened by the same orange glow in the western sky that had precipitated the previous night's battle. Only this time it was the sky clearing itself of smoke to let the sun through.

The following morning Halm started his men back to civilization. They continued to search for the packers on their way out, but their search was fruitless. Halm also checked on a prospector's cabin to see if its crippled inhabitant had survived. There was no sign of the man, but the cabin had come through the disaster in good shape. The men continued their trek through the forest for a total of six days before a messenger from Wallace found them. He had been sent out to find them, preceding a search party led by Assistant Forester Roscoe Haines. It was from the messenger that Halm and his men learned of the episodes of the rest of the area. When the Haine's party later reached them they learned the fate of their packers.

The ominous winds had frightened the two men shortly after Halm had left them at the supply camp. They assembled their gear and fourteen animals and tried to run for Iron

\textsuperscript{63}Halm, "The Big Fire," p. 81.
Mountain, Montana, which was sixty miles away. Within a mile of the supply camp they decided that the string of horses only impeded their progress, so they cut the animals loose. They retained one small saddle mare and continued on. The fires raced behind, around and sometimes ahead of them, but they kept going until they reached the crest of the Bitterroot Range. The fires were unable to keep up because of the scarcity of timber on the ridge. They continued on down the Montana side of the Bitterroots until they found a cabin to stay in, put the animal in the barn and went to sleep.

Two hours later the whinnying horse wakened them. The fires had caught up to them while they were sleeping. They got the horse from the burning barn and sped on their way. One man took the horse's head and the other the tail and pushed the frightened animal on through the crashing and burning trees. "The now saddleless frightened little beast, driven on by the men, jumped over and crawled beneath these logs like a dog." Two miles from the cabin the men found some placer diggings and hid there while the inferno passed them by. They were safe. "They had crossed a mountain range and covered a distance of nearly forty miles in a little over six hours, including their stay at the cabin - almost a super human feat."\(^{64}\)

In the week that it took Halm's crew to get out of the

\(^{64}\)Halm, "The Big Fire," p. 83.
St. Joe area, the whole Northwest speculated about their fate. Halm had been a star football player at Washington State University before he joined the Forest Service in 1909. The papers capitalized on his name and reputation when neither he nor his men had been heard from during the immediate period following the events of August 20. The August 24 edition of the Spokane Chronicle pessimistically headlined "dire hope for the Halm party's outcome:"

"STAR ATHLETE BELIEVED A FIRE VICTIM

Joe Halm, Formerly Football and Baseball Man, With his Party, Lost in the Fire Saturday Night at Big Fork Not Heard from Last Four Days" 65

The calamity of August 20 attacked towns as well as the men in the forests. Wallace, Idaho, the rich mining town of 6,000 residents, sat dead center in the path of the winds and fires. 66 Situated on the Coeur d'Alene River at the confluence of five canyons, Wallace was a veritable fire trap. An airborne flaming branch started the first fire in Wallace at around 9:00 p.m. The winds quickly fanned the fire throughout the east end of the town. 67 The fires that had devastated the Placer Creek Canyon, where Ranger Pulaski and his crew sweated out their ordeal, raced after the

65 Spokane Chronicle, August 24, 1910, quoted in Hult, Northwest Disaster, p. 196.
66 Daily Missoulian, August 21, 1910.
67 "Eyewitness Account of Mr. Lawrence Worstell," File #1650, Wallace Station, Coeur d'Alene National Forest. Hereafter cited as Worstell.
burning brands, over the hills flanking the canyon entrance on the southwest of Wallace, and added to the nearly hopeless situation in Wallace. The velocity of the wind is indicated by the fact that the fires jumped over the major section of the town and hit at the east end even though they approached from the southwest.

Pandemonium broke loose in the town. Men, women and children ran frantically through the streets. Families became separated. Men who faced arrest fled for their lives. Wallace Mayor, Walter Hanson, had ordered every available man to aid in the starting of back fires at 6:00 p.m. Those that refused were subject to imprisonment. The fire department bravely tried to establish lines beyond which the fires could not advance, but had to retreat in the face of the danger. Communication with the outlying areas broke down as the fires destroyed telephone and telegraph wires.

People ran for the railroad yards where trains had been made up to facilitate such an emergency. The first trains left on the Oregon Railroad and Navigation (O, K & N) line for Kellogg and Spokane. There was another train with no engine on the Northern Pacific tracks. An engine arrived with a caboose from Maltese. The conductor intended to

68 Testimony of Mr. W. H. Barrett, Daily Missoulian, August 22, 1910.
69 Daily Missoulian, August 21, 1910.
70 Ibid.
71 Hult, Northwest Disaster, pp. 132 & 138.
hook up the train, but he stopped at a water tank and the train caught on fire. The engine and caboose then proceeded to evacuate the patients and staff of the Providence Hospital at the extreme east end of the town. The train crew allowed some of the waiting public on the engine and caboose after the hospital patients and staff were safely aboard. Women and children got on first, so that the men were forced to find any available space. They quickly climbed on top of the caboose, the fuel tender, the engine and anywhere they could find room. The small train, with an estimated seventy-five people aboard, headed east into the flaming Mullan Canyon. At Mullan they hooked up to a train of boxcars, took another two-hundred people on, and continued east across Look Out Pass into Montana. More people boarded at Taft and Saltese. All the way into Missoula the train picked up frightened people. 72

While many fled Wallace for points east and west, others stayed to fight for their businesses and homes. One of those who stayed later expressed contempt for the deserters. 73

The fire department and the remaining citizens fought the fires the rest of the night. At midnight Mayor Hanson declared martial law, and the troops that had earlier evacuated Placer Creek patrolled the streets to prevent looting

72 Daily Missoulian, August 22, 1910.
73 Worstell.
of the homes and businesses that had been abandoned. By morning the fires in Wallace began to dissipate, and the danger of a general conflagration lessened. Two-thirds of Wallace was saved, but an estimated million dollars worth of damage was done to the eastern one-third of the city that did burn. In addition to the physical monetary damage, the fires killed two men in Wallace: one an unidentified man who burned in the Michigan Hotel, and the other, John Boyd, a citizen of Wallace who died attempting to save his pet parrot from his burning home.

The fire storm that had already destroyed large sections of three national forests and a town hurdled up the Mullan Canyon, crossed the divide into Montana and spread into the Lolo and Cabinet National Forests. By some quirk of nature, the flames did not destroy the town of Mullan. Ranger Roy A. Phillips was in charge of one-hundred fifty civilian fire fighters and a contingent of United States Army troops on the east slope of the Bitterroots near Saltese. In his official report he stated that his crew was startled at about 9:30 p.m. by a burning brand that landed near their camp. Two men from the camp put out the fire. At around midnight the night cook aroused Phillips to explain that he was

74 Hult, Northwest Disaster, pp. 147 & 166.
76 Daily Missoulian, August 22, 1910.
alarmed by a railroad whistle. Phillips did not know it at the time but it was the relief train from Wallace blowing the whistle intermittently to warn the men in the woods of the rapidly approaching danger. The train, however, did not pick up Phillips' crew, and the men were left to their resourcefulness to avoid death.

Phillips took some of his most trusted men to the tracks to bring back water barrels which were there for emergency use on the wooden trestles. When they returned the men in the camp were headed out of the woods in the direction of a tunnel at Borax. Phillips described the sight that demoralized the crew. "The fire by this time was an awe-inspiring spectacle, the whole horizon to the west was aflame and the noise caused by the falling timber was terrific." The fierce winds renewed life to the controlled fires to the east so that Phillips' crew was cut off from escape in that direction. Phillips persuaded the men that the camp was safer than the tunnel. He herded the men back and organized them. They set back fires to meet the conflagration from the west. The suction of the main fires accelerated the back fires so that they met about one to two-hundred yards from the camp. The heated air currents blasted cinders, smoke and hot air over the men. None of Phillips' crew was killed or permanently injured, and only one came close to death. He thought that he was blinded, and attempted to take his own life.\footnote{Koch, "History," pp. 11-12.}
As in the Coeur d'Alene Forest, the winds and flames raised havoc with the towns of the Lolo Forest. They destroyed Taft, Haugan and De Borgia, all small towns on Montana's St. Regis River. Saltese, another small town, would undoubtedly have burned had it not been for the efforts of a Northern Pacific Railroad crew and Lolo Ranger F. Haun. They managed to save the town by lighting back fires and forming a bucket brigade. The N. P. crew sacrificed the company's property at the west end of the community in order to concentrate their efforts on the major part of the town. Little help was given by the residents of Saltese who had all evacuated earlier.78

None of the fire fighters died in the Lolo Forest. However, one Taft resident who stayed behind when the rest of the town left on the trains for Missoula, was severely burned and died. He received medical assistance from Saltese. The medics bandaged the injured man's burns, and left him in the care of a friend. The friend got drunk and accidentally ignited the bandages with a match, and the man died as a result. This was the only death in the Lolo Forest.79

A correspondent of the Daily Missoulian described the conditions in the St. Regis Canyon after the hurricane.

> Above here the situation is indescribable. With the exception of the sites of Saltese and Henderson, nothing has escaped the flames between the


79 Daily Missoulian, August 23, 1910.
summit of the divide and Buford. There are reports which we got at Borax yesterday that the west side of the slope is in just as bad shape down to Mullan, which, we hear, is safe.

Everywhere there has been fire. In many places it yet burns. You see fire and you smell fire and you taste fire. Eyes are red and weeping, hands are blistered and clothing is burned full of holes by the flying embers. Vast sheets of flames run up the hillsides and long columns of flame rush in ugly charge in to the gulches and through the canyons.

And the stretches of forest in this reach of more than 50 miles are either smoking ashes and charred trunks of raging furnaces of flame. At night the sight is awful in its magnificance. All day the smoke rolls up in vast volume. We have not seen the sun for two days, since we entered this zone of fire.80

The Cabinet National Forest, which bordered the Lolo on the north, also felt the effect of speeding winds and wild fire. Three large fires crossed the divide at different places and entered the Cabinet. The fire that wrecked wallace and the towns of the St. Regis swept north into the Cabinet, crossed the Clark Fork Valley, jumped the river, and finally ran itself out in the Kootenai Forest of northern Montana. "Two fires swept out of the North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene, one from Trail Creek and one from the extreme head of the river." Each fire burned a path across the Clark Fork Valley, and left a path of destruction in its wake.81

Four fire fighters died at Swamp Creek near Tuscor, Montana, when the fierce winds and fires caught a crew led

80Daily Missoulian, August 23, 1910.
by Cabinet Forest Ranger Roy Engle on the 21st. Engle and his crew had been in the Swamp Creek area fighting fire when Forest Ranger H. S. Kaufman, who was in charge of the entire area, received word of the approaching danger. He sent word to Engle to get his crew out of the woods. Engle and his men started down the Swamp Creek Canyon toward the Clark Fork, but the fires cut them off. They retreated up the Canyon to seek safety at a large rock slide area where there was little combustible vegetation, but did not make it. The fire caught them, and they had to seek refuge on a smaller rock slide. Some of the men burrowed into the rocks to avoid the heat and smoke. Five of the twenty-five man crew hysterically scrambled up the mountain into the trees to escape. One returned when the fires hit the woods, and the flames consumed the other four. Most of the remaining men received burns, and many were temporarily blinded by the smoke, heat and cinders. On the morning of the 22nd they found their way out to the Clark Fork. 82

The hurricane of August 20 and 21 spent itself in the Kootenai Forest of northwestern Montana. The Kootenai had suffered great damage in the earlier months, but its most serious burns occurred on the 21st and 22nd. The town of Libby which had so smugly denied reports of its burning in July, came dangerously close to doing just that in late August. Soldiers rushed to assist in the Kootenai, but there

was little they could do to control the blazes. Fire fighters abandoned lines that had held all summer. As many as three-hundred men left the divide between the Cabinet and Kootenai Forests when the hurricane struck. The fall rains finally extinguished the fires in early September.

Two other forests in Idaho suffered fatalities in late August. These were the Pend Oreille and the Kaniksu. Although neither forest was a direct victim of the hurricane winds and fire storm that had so viciously devastated their neighboring forests and towns, heavy winds and uncontrolled fire did much damage to the two Idaho forests.

Two fire fighters lost their lives in the Pend Oreille on August 19. Strong winds from the East fanned fires across the divide from the Cabinet Forest and trapped the crew of W. E. Lamont in the DeFaut Gulch near Cabinet, Idaho. Forest Guard William T. Breshear, who had charge of the entire area around Cabinet, went to warn Lamont of the danger. He ordered the crew of ten men to a small clearing, which was their only chance of survival. There was a small spring in the clearing from which the men got enough water to dampen their blankets and cover their bodies from the heat and debris. Two of the men panicked, threw off the blankets and ran into the forest only to die a few yards from the clearing. A relief crew found the rest of the men still unconscious the following day. They revived them and took them out of

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83 Daily Missoulian, August 23 & 24, 1910.
the woods.\textsuperscript{84}

Three homesteaders lost their lives in the Kaniksu Forest of northern Idaho. Like the Pend Oreille the Kaniksu burn was not the result of the hurricane of the areas to the South and East. However, the Kaniksu was heavily homesteaded, and although no other fatalities occurred, a number of homesteaders lost their homes and possessions.\textsuperscript{85}

Weather conditions precipitated the fires of 1910 and weather conditions put them out. On August 22 the humidity unexpectedly rose and the winds calmed. On the 23rd light rains began to fall in most of District One. Snow fell on some of the higher forests.\textsuperscript{86} The \textit{Daily Missoulian} reported rain in the Missoula area on the 23rd, and on the 24th snow approached the town from the East. Temperatures dropped throughout the western Montana area.\textsuperscript{87}

Although the weather aided the fire fighting efforts in the last week of August, the rain was not sufficient to completely put out the blazes. Under the leadership of District Forester Greeley the crews were reassembled and the prosecution of the fighting efforts continued. Between the 24th and 31st, the men in the woods carried on the fight. The fall rains then came in abundance, the crews were let go.

\textsuperscript{84}Koch, "History," p. 15.
\textsuperscript{85}Ibid., p. 16.
\textsuperscript{86}Ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{87}\textit{Daily Missoulian}, August 24, 1910.
and the fire season came to an end. 88

The events of August 20 and 21 placed extraordinary pressures on the areas that suffered little damage. Missoula and Spokane took in literally thousands of people that had fled the fire-blighted areas. In Missoula the Salvation Army, the Masonic Lodge and the Chamber of Commerce quickly assumed the leadership in providing for the homeless and destitute. The City, through the offices of the Chamber of Commerce, established a relief fund to gather clothing and money to take care of the refugees. By August 23 contributions exceeded $3,000. Many of the residents took in people with whom they had no prior acquaintance. 89

The refugees brought another problem. Thieves, bums and con-men drifted into town. Many of them had been fire fighters hired out of Spokane, Butte and other cities in the Northwest. The Missoula police force put on an additional one-hundred men to assist in the emergency. The mayor issued a proclamation warning the citizens of the menace of beggars, thieves and other undesirables. 90 By the end of the week the problem had decreased as the refugees began to go home.

The breakdown of communications between towns and between the men in the woods and the forestry officials led

89 Daily Missoulian, August 22 & 23, 1910.
90 Ibid., August 23, 1910.
to exaggerated reports of the destruction and death rates caused by the fires of August 20 and 21. The Daily Missoulian attempted to keep its reports within reason, but due to the inability to get reliable information, the paper printed reports that later proved false. The New York Times relied on information from the wire dispatches in various towns throughout the West, and printed sometimes exaggerated and inconsistent reports.

The stories about Wallace, Idaho, reflected the poverty of solid information. On August 21 the Missoulian devoted most of its first page to the situation in Wallace. The headline read, "Forest Fires In Merciless Sweep Destroys Towns In Coeur d'Alene." In large print under the headline the Missoulian stated that Wallace was "doomed." Further down the front page the Missoulian paper stated, "Prosperous Young City of Idaho Is Almost Completely Wiped Out By Fires From Surrounding Forests, Practically Only One Building Left In The Town." In the context of the front page story the Missoulian stated: "Wallace is believed to be destroyed; there has been no communication directly with the city since 11 o'clock [the 20th]. The New York Times reported on the 21st that "At 10:30 o'clock [the 20th] the whole town was on fire."

The fate of the men in the woods was the subject of much journalistic speculation and inaccurate reporting. Although the Missoulian attempted not to inflate the figures,
the reports were so hysterical that it proved impossible to live up to their intention. The Missoulian did not, however, print large numbers of unverified deaths, but it did report deaths of individuals or small parties who later showed up safe. The policy of attempting to print only verifiable deaths was stated by the Missoulian on August 24,

... Comes now the saddest feature of the terrible experience of four days. The roll call of the fighters in the woods will, it is feared, show many empty places in the ranks, but there should not be any jumping at conclusions as to the number of fatalities. Yesterday there were dispatches sent out which reported hundreds of rangers as dead; these stories are absurd; the bands of fire fighters were scattered over wide areas and there has not been time to hear from all the districts. There were one or two instances yesterday which show that many of these missing men are likely to turn up; in one 165 men reported dead, emerged from a tunnel where they had been sheltered since Sunday. There will be other cases of this kind.

The New York Times, relying on second hand information at best, reported inflated death rates or feared deaths. On August 22 the Times reported 180 men were feared dead. The August 24 edition of the Times stated that officials in Spokane feared 300 fighters were dead, and that 900 men had not been heard from. With regard to the same dispatch from Spokane, the Daily Missoulian stated on August 24:

The United States forest supervisors in Idaho and Montana are unable to get into communication with 900 of their rangers, but it may be that many of them are unharmed. The most sensational rumors of loss of life continue to be circulated, but it is impossible to verify them, and it seems likely that, aside from losses among the national rangers, the

91Daily Missoulian, August 23, 1910.
number of dead in the three states will not exceed 100. Late this afternoon, a list of known dead compiled in Spokane contained only 30 names.

On August 25 the New York Times reported that the death list was under 100, but on the 26th it jumped the number to 203 dead of whom 199 were in Idaho and Montana. On August 28 the Times reported that Chief Forester Henry S. Graves stated the death rate would be between 90 and 100. The final death rate in Idaho and Montana was 85 humans, of whom 72 were temporary employees of the Forest Service.92

The breakdown in communications had one other startling effect on Montana. Governor Edwin L. Norris left Belton on a relief train for Libby when the hurricane hit in that area. The fires destroyed the telephone and telegraph wires between Libby and Helena, and the State was out of touch with its chief executive. He could only be reached by sending a wire to San Francisco, where it would be relayed to Seattle, then to Spokane, and finally to Libby.93

The 1910 burns ruined great stretches of timber reserves of the United States. Neither the Forest Service nor the state governments ever made definitive estimates of the


93Daily Missoulian, August 23, 1910.
total damage, but from "conflicting, incomplete and inaccurate" reports summary estimations were made. The District One forests suffered burns on an estimated 2,595,635 acres. The timber damage estimate placed the loss at 5,408,641 million or roughly 5,500,000 million board feet. In addition the states suffered burns on an estimated 521,184 acres. Translated to board feet of timber, the figure was 2,241,119 million board feet or roughly 2,500,000 million board feet. Therefore, the total damage to land and timber from the 1910 fires was approximately 3,000,000 acres and from 7 to 8 billion board feet of timber.\(^9^4\)

In monetary terms the value on the damages suffered in the District One forests was placed at $13,470,906.\(^9^5\) On October 25, 1910, the Great Falls Tribune reported that the damage to forests in Montana and Idaho represented 1-2% of the "total stand of forest timber" in the nation. In more graphic terms, the fires destroyed enough timber "to build an estimated 50 to 55,000 four-room houses."\(^9^6\)

Such a figure is too huge to be readily comprehended. Haul that amount of lumber by freight train, and figuring 35,000 board feet per car, it will fill 257,143 railroad cars. Make these cars up into our longest freight trains of 150 cars each and you have 1,714 trains in motion - or one continuous train 2,400 miles long, stretching from Seattle to

\(^{9^4}\) Koch, "History," p. 20.

\(^{9^5}\) Ibid.

\(^{9^6}\) U.S. Forest Service Press Release, "50th Anniversary of the 1910 Fires," History File, Northern Region, U.S. Forest Service.
Chicago to St. Louis, Missouri. In 1910 such a supply would have lasted the entire United States for the next fifteen years.97

The forestry officials of the federal and state governments made more accurate estimates of the loss of human lives in Montana and Idaho. The final figure of deaths was estimated at eighty-five. Seventy-eight were federally employed fire fighters, and seven were civilians. Seventy-five men lost their lives in the Coeur d'Alene Forest area; seventy-two were fire fighters, one was a prospector, and two were killed in the Wallace burn. Four fire fighters lost their lives in the Cabinet Forest; the Pend Oreille Forest lost two fire fighters. In addition, one civilian died at Taft, Montana, and three homesteaders died in the Kaniksu Forest near Newport, Idaho.98

The problem of clearing up the claims for death and accident benefits occupied the forestry officials as late as April, 1912. Claims for injury, property losses, hospital expenses, death benefits, wages, reimbursement for time lost while injured, and relief for dependent relatives forced men like Ranger Pulaski, the hero of Placer Creek, to investigate the hundreds of claims made against the government. Congress paid the claims in 1912. The amount paid to the injured totalled $5,450. That amount covered the expenses of 116 men, all but 15 of whom, were hospitalized in the Coeur d'Alene

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97Hult, Northwest Disaster, p. 204.
98Koch, "History," p. 20.
area, most of them in Wallace.\textsuperscript{99}

The bodies of the men who had been buried in the woods at the sites of their deaths were later recovered and placed in cemeteries in Wallace and St. Maries, Idaho.\textsuperscript{100}

The disaster in Idaho and Montana had a more direct effect on the other states than the loss of timber which the more remote areas could not immediately feel. The smoke from the fires spread across the nation as far as the eastern seaboard. On August 26 the \textit{New York Times} reported that smoke and cinders from the fires in Idaho and Montana were seen over Boston. Ruby El Hult stated:

\begin{quote}
In Butte and Helena, Montana; in Bismarck, North Dakota; in Casper, Wyoming; in Pierre, South Dakota; in the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul; in Sheboygan, Wisconsin; in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan; in Watertown, New York; and Calgary, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal, Canada, sun and daylight were shut out so completely as to cause artificial light to be used by day.\textsuperscript{101}
\end{quote}

The smoke also spread west out over the Pacific. The Dumferrline, a British ocean vessel, reported that she was unable to take observations for ten days because of the presence of smoke in the atmosphere. The Dumferrline was five-hundred miles out of San Francisco.\textsuperscript{102}

The 1910 burn directly affected the future of fires

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{99}File \#1380, Wallace Station, Coeur d'Alene National Forest. Hult, \textit{Northwest Disaster}, p. 206. \\
\textsuperscript{100}Hult, \textit{Northwest Disaster}, p. 206. \\
\textsuperscript{101}Ibid., p. 203. \\
\textsuperscript{102}\textit{New York Times}, August 26, 1910.
\end{flushright}
in District One. The burned-over areas presented high prospects for future fires. "It is not at all improbable that the burned area since 1910 has been twice as great as would have happened if the 1910 fires had not occurred."

An estimated thirty to forty percent of the area burned in 1910 has since reburned, and the presence of large snags and dead timber from the summer of 1910 has contributed to those reburns. 103

Although many areas that suffered huge losses of timber in 1910 have since grown back, the new timber has in many cases been of inferior quality than that which was originally there. Brush and large stands of lodgepole pine have replaced extensive stands of white pine, larch and fir. 104

In addition to the subsequent fires and the replacement of high quality trees with inferior ones, the problem of soil erosion occurred where it had never previously been a hindrance.

Such streams as the St. Regis River showed the effect of the 1910 burn for many years by irregularity of flow and severe washing and scouring of banks. Such steep canyons as the North Fork of the Clearwater and the Lochsa have been badly denuded of soil, leaving great expanses of bare granite rock. 105

And finally, the fires of 1910 introduced the bark beetles which ultimately attacked not only the dead but the

103 Koch, "History," p. 22.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
live timber. The result has been the "loss of many million feet of white pine." 106

The 1910 forest fires had a long range effect on the economies and ecology of the Northwest. The legislative impact on the Nation was more immediate.

106 Koch, "History," p. 23.
CHAPTER IV

Federal Legislation and the Role of the Fires

The 1910 fires produced three significant results on the national level: Congress increased the appropriation for permanent improvements in the national forests; it provided a fund to be used in the event of "extraordinary emergency"; and the Senate passed the Weeks Bill which established federal forest reserves in the East and provided for cooperative forest fire control between the national and state governments.

In 1911 Congress increased the appropriation for permanent improvements in the national forests nearly two-fold, and the increase went into effect in 1912. Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson and Chief Forester Henry S. Graves both credited the 1910 fires with the increase. Wilson stated:

... They [the 1910 fires] furnished an invaluable test, under an ordeal of the utmost severity, of fire-fighting methods and needs, and also stimulated the men of the Forest Service to strain every effort in a determined attempt to prepare for the occurrence of similar conditions. By nearly doubling the appropriation for permanent improvements, Congress made available funds which were greatly needed for extending and supplementing the trail and telephone systems and for equipping lookout stations.1

Referring to the lesson of the 1910 burn Graves stated:

The fires of 1910 were invaluable as a lesson. They made clear what are the most difficult problems of fire fighting under existing conditions, to better the existing organizations ... Congress recognized the need of better protection by increasing the Forest Service appropriation for the fiscal year 1912, so as to make available an additional $225,000 for permanent improvement work, $135,000 for protective work and fire fighting ... 2

The 1911 appropriation for permanent improvements in the national forests had been $273,634.42. The increase in 1912 made that amount $499,158.55. 3

Congress also provided for an emergency fund as a result of the impact of the 1910 burn. The amount appropriated for emergency work was $1,000,000. 4

On March 1, 1909, John W. Weeks, Congressman from Massachusetts, submitted a proposal to the House for the creation of federal forest reserves in the East and for establishment of federal-state cooperation for the protection of forests from fires. 5 Weeks' proposal was the latest in a long line of legislative attempts to create the eastern

3 Ibid., p. 352.
4 Ibid., p. 369.
reserves, although the cooperative aspect of the bill had a shorter history. All of the earlier attempts for the eastern reserves had failed because of insufficient support and the parliamentary skills of the opponents.6

The demands for the eastern reserves preceded the Weeks Bill by over twenty years. Individuals and organizations had sponsored attempts to create national forests in the southern Appalachians as early as 1885. In 1900 similar organizations formed to support the same measure in the White Mountains of New England. The two groups merged in 1906, and all subsequent proposals included both areas.7

The federal-state fire cooperative section (section 2) was included in the Bill to pacify the conservative members of the House who opposed the idea of the federal government purchasing land to create national forests. Charles F. Scott, Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture, had sponsored a measure in 1908 which stated the same principal. The Scott Bill, H.R. 21986, passed the House with wide support from the opponents of the forest reserve system and from the advocates of a strong forest reserve system who viewed the Bill as the only practical way to advance forestry legislation.8

8 Congressional Record, 60th Cong. 1st sess., May 21, 1908, Vol. 42, pp. 6687-6705.
Weeks adopted the cooperative provision of the Scott Bill in his amendments to the Brandagee Bill. 9

In 1908 the opponents of the eastern forest reserve measures challenged the constitutionality of the federal government purchasing land in the East to create forest reserves. 10 The House Judiciary Committee ruled on April 20, 1908, that any reserve in the East could only be established to protect the navigability of the rivers in the area. 11 That ruling led to a national debate over whether or not forests did, in fact, affect navigation.

The House Committee on Agriculture began hearings on December 9, 1909, "On Bills Having For Their Object The Acquisition of Forest And Other Lands For The Protection Of Watersheds And Conservation Of The Navigability Of Navigable Streams." The hearings quickly became the arena for the scientific debate over the effect that forests had on stream flow. Lieutenant-Colonel Hiram M. Chittenden of the Army Corps of Engineers represented the minority of scientific opinion which stated that forests had only a negative effect on stream flow and navigation. Chittenden's opinions were

9 Congressional Record, 60th Cong. 2d sess., March 1, 1909, Vol. 43, pp. 3514-3515.

10 All the existing national forests had been reserved from the public domain.

stated in a paper that he presented before the American Society of Civil Engineers in September, 1908. His paper was included in the hearings, although he did not personally testify.\textsuperscript{12}

G. F. Swain, Professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, rebutted Chittenden's arguments. Swain testified before the Committee on Agriculture that forests did exert an influence on stream flow and a very positive one at that. He further stated that he personally knew no engineers who would agree with Chittenden's contention.\textsuperscript{13}

The result of the hearings was that the Committee split on its interpretation of evidence presented before it. The majority, which included John Weeks, felt the evidence indicated that forests were necessary for the sound maintenance of navigable rivers. The minority of the Committee, led by Chairman Scott, accepted the Chittenden version.

The Weeks Bill then went to the House.\textsuperscript{14} After a two


\textsuperscript{13}Hearings, 1909, p. 49.

hour debate on March 1, 1909, the House voted on the proposed Weeks Bill, and passed it by a vote of 157 in favor, 147 opposed.\textsuperscript{15} The sectional nature of the vote revealed where the opponents and advocates were strongest. New England provided the strongest support for the measure, the Southern States followed New England, and the Middle States were the weakest of the supporting sections. The Rocky Mountain States followed by the Central States were strongest in their opposition.\textsuperscript{16}

The Weeks Bill then went to the Senate which had earlier passed the Bill (S. 4825) before Weeks amended it. The western senators immediately filibustered the bill.\textsuperscript{17} It was sent to the Senate Committee on Forest Reservations and Protection of Game.\textsuperscript{18}

The Weeks Bill, as submitted to the Senate, had some undesirable sections that Weeks recognized had to be eliminated before the Senate would pass the Bill.

There were, respectively, the sections providing for a pattern of public regulation or control over private lands and utilizing gross receipts from existing National Forests to finance the proposed acquisition program. Accordingly, these vulnerable items were

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Congressional Record}, 60th Cong., 2d sess., March 1, 1909, Vol. \textsuperscript{43}, pp. 3566-3567.

\textsuperscript{16}For a concise analysis of the March 1, 1909, vote on the Weeks Bill see \textit{Conservation} Magazine, June, 1909, pp. 348-357.

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Congressional Record}, 60th Cong., 2d sess., March 3, 1909, Vol. \textsuperscript{43}, pp. 3749-3751.

\textsuperscript{18}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 3751.
eliminated and a revised 'Weeks' Bill, H.R. 11798, otherwise similar to House revised S. 4825, was introduced on July 23, 1909, by Congressman Weeks in the first session of the 61st Congress. The House referred the newest Weeks Bill (H.R. 11798) to the Committee on Agriculture where the debate was renewed regarding the influence of forests on stream flow and navigation. The Committee held hearings on February 23 and March 1 and 2, 1910.20

The opponents of the measure relied heavily on the Chittenden report the second time, but reinforced his argument with the statements of other scientists and engineers. Willis L. Moore of the United States Weather Bureau argued the same points as Chittenden, and further concluded that forests had little influence on precipitation in addition to not influencing stream flow and navigation.21 Captain Edward N. Johnson of the Army Corps of Engineers also testified on February 2, 1910, that the existence of forests on the watersheds of the Tennessee River little affected the navigability of that river.22

19Cooperative Forest Fire Control, p. 6.

20Ibid., p. 9.


22The author was unable to acquire the Report of the Hearings, so his only source on this part is the rebuttals to the Johnson and Moore testimony given in American Forestry Magazine. L. C. Glenn, "Tennessee River Improvement and Sedimentation," American Forestry, July, 1910, pp. 419-422.
The advocates of the eastern reserves had also built up their arsenal of scientific opinion to increase their chances of passing the Bill. Professor L. C. Glenn, Professor of Geology at Vanderbilt University, testified before the Committee that forests had a favorable effect on the navigability of streams. When Captain Johnson testified after Glenn, *American Forestry* Magazine, which favored the proposed reserves, gave Glenn a chance to criticize Johnson's statement. Glenn did this in the July, 1910, issue. When Moore testified and later submitted a paper to the Committee, *American Forestry* presented three reviews of the Moore Report, "The Influence Of Forests On Climate and Floods." All three reviews of the Moore report were highly critical.\(^{23}\)

in 1905.24

The Minority Report represented the views of seven members of the Committee, including Chairman Scott, an enemy of the proposed legislation. It, like the Majority Report, cited considerable scientific opinion. In addition to the statements and reports of Chittenden, Moore and Johnson, the Minority Report cited the testimony of various other officers of the Army Corps of Engineers.25

Reported favorably out of the Committee on Agriculture, the Weeks Bill went once more before the House for a vote. On June 24, 1910, the House voted 130 in favor to 111 opposed.26 The sectional nature of the vote remained essentially the same as it had been in 1909. One exception was the South where the vote was almost split evenly, but the ayes had one more than the nays.27

At the same time the House considered the Weeks Bill, the Senate engaged in another eastern forest reserve bill - the Gallinger Bill, S. 4501. Senator Gallinger


25Ibid.


introduced S. 4501 on June 22, 1910, and the Senate voted for consideration of the Bill on June 23. That vote was not for the passage of the bill, but only for further consideration. Nevertheless, the consideration vote did reflect sentiment toward an eastern forest reserve bill. The Rocky Mountain-West Coast vote revealed that the senators from that area were not nearly as hostile to the idea as their counterparts in the House had been toward the Weeks Bill. They voted ten to five in favor, with three not voting.

The Weeks Bill, H.R. 11798, came to the Senate on June 25, 1910. That body agreed to substitute the Weeks Bill for the Gallinger Bill, S. 4501. Since it was near the end of the session, the Bill received little support from the president who wanted greater attention paid to his more urgent legislative concerns. In addition to the lack of executive support, the Bill came under severe attack from Senator Theodore E. Burton of Ohio and Senator Francis G. Newlands of Nevada. Those men led an effective filibuster, which resulted in the session ending before action was taken.

29 Ibid., June 23, 1910, pp. 8820-8826.
by the Senate. The advocates of the Weeks Bill received consolation in the fact that the Senate did promise to vote on the measure on February 15, 1911, early in the next session.\(^{33}\)

Before the Senate resumed in the 61st Congress the advocates of the Weeks Bill propagandized the issues involved throughout the remainder of the year and into 1911. *American Forestry* Magazine, the journal of the American Forestry Association, was one of the strongest supporters of the eastern forest reserve measures. It published numerous articles and editorials advocating the passage of the Weeks Bill during the entire year of 1910 and into 1911. *American Forestry* constantly warned the friends of the measure to work, be alert to the efforts of the opposition and to pressure the Senate into passing the law. In August, 1910, it stated:

> There is a strong feeling among many people who know the legislative ways of Washington that there is no intention of passing this bill; that enough is to be done at each session to pacify troublesome constituencies, and that the measure, having been used as a football between the houses, will be allowed to quietly 'fall through the slats' at each session.\(^{34}\)

In November *American Forestry* again urged the passage of the Weeks Bill by stating:

> The present measure, the Weeks Bill, is not perfect. Bills that have been through the fires of legislative strife and the chill of legislative compromise

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\(^{33}\) *Congressional Record*, 61st Cong., 2d sess., June 25, p. 494.

seldom are, but it has many merits from the legislative point of view. It represents the best form of legislation practicable at this time; it should be passed by the Senate without alteration or amendment. 

The American Forestry was not the only publication concerned about the fate of the Weeks Bill. The New York Times favored the Bill in August, 1910. In a chastisement of Congress the Times stated:

This is a fair sample of the way Congress attends to its business (referring to the filibuster and postponement of the Senate vote on the bill). Mr. Ayres (State Forester of New Hampshire) justly characterized the Forestry Bill as 'a sane and conservative measure carefully thought out by many minds during many years of agitation.' Every important civic, commercial, and scientific body in the country has pronounced itself squarely for the measure. But Congress in its gross labors is no longer truly representative.

Other newspapers in the East were concerned with the outcome of the Weeks Bill. The American Forestry Magazine cited in its editorials many examples of support from the newspapers.

It is encouraging to note that the press has begun the campaign for the enactment of this measure. The Boston Journal points out the pressing character of the need of such legislation, saying: 'Everybody who knows the conditions in the eastern and southern forests knows that there is absolute necessity for measures to check their destruction without delay.'

Mr. J. C. Welliver, in the Baltimore News, says: 'In behalf of the Appalachian project it is urged that time is pressing. Unless steps are soon taken, there will be no forests left to preserve in the Appalachians, because their trees are being cut away...


about as fast as men and money and skill can make it possible.'

The Boston Globe says: 'At the present rate of cutting, the forests on the high slopes of the White Mountains will be gone in a few years.'

Immediately following the terrible summer of 1910, the Second National Conservation Congress was held at St. Paul, Minnesota, on September 5-8, 1910. Among the speakers were the most well known names associated with the conservation movement: Theodore Roosevelt, President William Howard Taft, Gifford Pinchot, Henry C. Graves, Pinchot's successor in the Forest Service. A number of state governors also spoke, as did several private citizens.

Theodore Roosevelt spoke out on the need for the Appalachian White Mountain Bill and the Weeks Bill:

... but the fight to create the Southern Appalachian and White Mountain Forests in the East is not yet over. The Bill has passed the House and will come before the Senate next February. The people of the United States, regardless of party or section, should stand solidly behind it and see that representatives do likewise.

Roosevelt then connected the need for the proposed forests with the Montana and Idaho fires. He stated:

If any further proof were needed that forest protection is a national duty, the recent destruction of forests in the West by fire would supply it. Even with the aid of the Army added to that of the Forest Service, the loss has been severe. Without


either it would have been vastly greater. 39

President Taft, less assertive than Roosevelt, paid recognition to the 1910 fires, but did not mention the desirability or undesirability of the Weeks Bill. He stated before the Second National Conservation Convention that the States should assume the chief responsibility for the conservation of forests, and that federal legislation was unneeded except in two areas:

I have shown sufficiently the conditions as to Federal forestry to indicate that no further legislation is needed at the moment except an increase in the fire protection to national forests and an act vesting the Executive with full power to make forest reservations in every State where Government land is timber covered, or where the land is needed for forestry purposes. 40

Editorial response to the proceedings in St. Paul reflected the two opposing views that were manifest in the meeting. Referring to Roosevelt's speech, the Daily Missoulian editorialized:

... The address of Colonel Roosevelt, which was delivered yesterday is in striking contrast with the Taft speech; it leaves no room for doubt as to the position of the speaker. Of all the speeches which Mr. Roosevelt has made on this present western tour, this is the best in our estimation. There is not the radicalism in the Roosevelt speech that some of the extremists had hoped for; it is firm and positive, but it is conservative as well.

... The reasons which Mr. Roosevelt gives for opposing the plan suggested for state control as against federal regulation of these matters, seems to us to be amply satisfactory. 41

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39 Second Conservation Congress, p. 86.
40 Ibid., pp. 21-22.
41 Daily Missoulian, September 7, 1910.
In contrast to the *Daily Missoulian*, the *New York Times* preferred the Taft approach to the problems of conservation.

Mr. Taft made a refreshing address at the Conservation Congress yesterday. To read it is like listening to the cool, intelligent conversation of a sensible man on a matter as to which he is informed, after having one's brain wearied by loud vociferation from persons of passionate convictions and an overwhelming sense of their own importance.42

The editorial comments of the speeches of the members of the Second National Conservation Convention became increasingly in line with the editorial policies regarding the impending election of 1912. The *New York Times*, particularly, commented on the drift within the Republican Party between Roosevelt and Taft. Editorially, the *Times* supported the more cautious Taft, and criticized the political reemergence of former President Roosevelt. This carried over to the conservation movement and affected the attitude of the *Times* toward the New Nationalism of Roosevelt and the Weeks Bill.

On October 12, 1910, the *Times* editorialized:

The conservation of 'strategic areas' of watershed forests in the White Mountains and in the Southern Appalachians is also an interstate matter. [This matter] can be well and amply taken care of by the States immediately concerned, acting initially through the House of Governors. In his address to the Governors at Washington, Mr. Roosevelt showed how these could be guarded by the States through the simple exercise of their police powers, without the expense of condemnation and purchase, with all the advantages of development under private ownership. He quoted approvingly this ruling of the Federal Supreme Court: 'The State as quasi sovereign and

representative of the interests of the public has a standing in court to protect the atmosphere, the water and the forests within its territory, irrespective of the assent or dissent of the private owners of the land most immediately concerned.* But how far from this sound doctrine has the 'New Nationalism' swept Mr. Roosevelt.

Two weeks later the New York Times again attacked the New Nationalism of Roosevelt as well as the Forest Service for its inability to contain the fires of Montana and Idaho.

The Times also attacked Gifford Pinchot, the former Chief Forester, for his part in the creation of the Forest Service. On October 26, 1910, the Times stated:

Mr. Pinchot is largely responsible for the creation of the national forests. During the long years in which he and Mr. Roosevelt were stewards of the public welfare at Washington, why did they not make their 'efficient' federal machine work to provide a system of fire protection? To say that Congress was negligent is to confess that the federal machine is not efficient. ... Yet according to both these advisers of the Nation, we can get conservation best by buying up private ... forests equivalent in area to many States and entrusting their welfare to a bureaucratic central government.

American Forestry Magazine responded to the New York Times' attitude in characteristic fashion. It made the following statement regarding the editorial of October 26:

The argument of the Times overshoots its mark and returns upon its author. In the first place, the fire protection record is far better in the national forests than anywhere else in the country, except in certain limited sections where the lumbermen have banded together and adopted Forest Service methods. In the second place, it has been the failure of the legislative branch of the government, owing to the obstructive tactics of representatives and senators to the national forest policy, that has limited the efficiency of the national protection work by refusing to satisfy manifest needs of the forest service. It pleases
Mr. Roosevelt's enemies to represent him as a dictator, but he wasn't by any means. We hold no brief for any person or political theory, having larger work to do, and we suggest that if the Times will also clear away political and personal prejudice from its discussions of this subject it will do better. 43

These then were the crosscurrents of opinion and counteropinion that the Nation reflected when the Senate began the vote on the Appalachian and White Mountain Forests.

The Senate resumed the debate on the Weeks Bill on February 15, 1911. The opposition to the measure led by Senator Theodore E. Burton of Ohio and Senator Weldon B. Heyburn of Idaho attempted to make several amendments, but their efforts failed. The Senate passed the measure by a vote of 57 to 9. 44 The Bill was sent to the President and he signed it into law on March 1, 1911.

The sectional nature of the Senate vote on the Weeks Bill reflected that the Western States had changed from senatorial favor to overwhelming enthusiasm for the measure. Colorado, Utah, Nevada, California, Oregon, Washington and Montana all voted unanimously for the Bill. Only Wyoming and Idaho of the Rocky Mountain and Coast States had senators opposed on the final vote. Senator Heyburn of Idaho paired himself against it, and Senator Clarence D. Clark of Wyoming voted against it. The analysis made by one historian of

this phenomenon neglected the terrible fires of the previous summer, and led to a cynical conclusion of the Western vote:

... It is hard to explain the attitude of some of the western senators toward this bill. One explanation suggested is that these men thought if they could secure the creation of some reserves in the East, they could make the East sick of the reservation policy, and thus secure the abolition of the western reserves. It might easily be suspected that some of the western senators had been pacified with some sort of a political trade - a trade on some irrigation scheme, or on the wool tariff, or on some one of a dozen other things; but men who were in close touch with the proceedings in Congress have insisted that there was no political trade. Perhaps it is more reasonable to assume that the western senators, felt they had no particular reason to oppose this measure since it applied to another section of the country.45

Another analyst of the vote on the Weeks Bill suggested that the difference between the vote in the House on June 24, 1910, in which the western representatives opposed the measure and the vote in the Senate on February 15, 1911, was the result of the fire season of 1910.

The change of heart so evident among the Western senators is most logically attributed to the experiences of August and September, 1910 - a lesson from which the House members had not profited when they voted in the month preceding the holocaust.46

The second analysis is the more feasible. However, it fails to account for the fact that ten senators favored the Gallinger Bill before the summer. Nevertheless, it is reasonable that the fires persuaded six senators that urgent

action was needed. The action was the passage of the Weeks Bill.
CHAPTER V

Montana Legislation and the Role of the Fires

The State of Montana's response to the 1910 fire season failed to follow the example set by the federal government. The Legislature enacted no new laws or amendments to existing laws that would have improved the system of fire protection. In the area of private-state cooperative protection the State failed to assume leadership when the millions of acres of private lands went unprotected. Finally, the State, by not providing more active protection systems, lost some of its power to administer monies that the federal government provided under the Weeks Law.

Although the State, per se, indicated that the fires of 1910 were unimportant, the private land owners of Flathead and Lincoln Counties improved the Northern Montana Forestry Association's ability to carry on the fight against fires. The response of the N.M.F.A. was the sole positive reaction to the summer of 1910.

In contrast to the Legislature's reluctance to improve the fire protection scheme, Governor Edwin L. Norris, State Forester Charles Jungberg and a Governor's Commission on Conservation advocated amendments to the General Land Management Act of 1909 designed to improve the State's ability to
wage more effective protection against the danger of forest fires. Governor Norris sent a special message to the Legislature on January 25, 1911, advocating specific changes in the existing laws. The message recommended that the State be divided into specific fire districts with fire wardens for the fire season. Second, the Governor suggested that railroads traversing State forest lands be required to provide spark arrestors on all engines, and that the railroads be forced by law to make fire clearings of fifty feet on each side of the rights-of-way. Third, Governor Norris advocated that private timberland holders reimburse the State for costs accrued while fighting fires on private land. Finally, the Governor recommended a permit system for slash and brush burning during the fire season.

Representative Byrnes of Lewis and Clark County drafted the desired legislation, but the Steering Committee in the House of Representatives killed the measure. State Forester Charles Jungberg asserted that the large private timberland holders were responsible for the defeat of the

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3 Ibid., H.B. 217, p. 708.
measure in the Steering Committee. In the Second Biennial Report of the State Forester, Jungberg stated:

After the appalling horror and fearful losses of the year 1910 it was natural to suppose that with the opening of the season of 1911, there would be fair prospects for an amendment to the state forestry laws and that there would be no difficulties encountered in passing measures whereby these losses might be checked to some extent. However, interests that hold the chief part of the timber, outside of the national forest (s), brought pressure to bear and defeated all forest legislation.

The Legislature's failure to provide an effective fire protection law affected the State in another way. Under the auspices of the Weeks Law, Montana received an annual allotment of $3,500 in federal money by matching a similar amount for fire protection on navigable river sources. Since Montana had no legal means of improving its fire protective system the money that it expended both from the federal allotment and from the State matching fund went to pay part of the [State] Forester's salary and expenses, the assessment for protection in the Northern Montana Forestry Association, the balance (sic) of the $3,500 going for salaries of extra patrolmen hired by the State and Forest Service, who work under the direction of the Forest Supervisors but who patrol outside of, and adjacent to the National Forests.

This arrangement had a two-fold effect on Montana's fire protective system. First, it obviously used funds for one purpose that should have been going for another. Instead of making permanent improvements on State lands to insure

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4 Second Biennial Report of the State Forester, 1911-1912, p. 17 (no place, no date).

5 State Forester's Fiscal Report, Year Ending November 30, 1915, pp. 5-6 (no place, no date).
better protection in the future, the money was used to pay salaries and local assessments. Second, because the Federal Forest Service supervised the men hired with the Weeks Law money, the Forest Service, in effect, managed State money. State Forester John C. Van Hook who replaced Charles Jungberg in 1914 recommended the obvious solution:

In order to secure the full benefits of the Weeks Law appropriation Montana should have an organized fighting force authorized by law. The State Forester would then have supervision over all men employed, handle all accounts and be responsible for the protection of the timber of the State.°

The Kalispell area provided Montana's one positive response to the 1910 forest fires. The Northern Montana Forestry Association, a paper organization in 1910, became an active force in fire protection following the 1910 season. On May 11, 1911, representatives from the Forest Service, the State Forestry Office and private land owners in Lincoln and Flathead Counties met in Kalispell to strengthen the organization. Under the terms worked by the parties present at that meeting and subsequent ones, the federal government promised to pay a proportionate acreage expense provided that the Forest Service supply its own patrolmen. The State Forester agreed to pay a pro rata of expense for patrolling and fighting fires. The private concerns agreed to pay a one-half cent per acre expense for patrolling and fighting fire. The Northern Montana Forestry

6State Forester's Fiscal Report, Year Ending November 30, 1915, p. 6. (no place, no date).
Association hired a Chief Fire Warden, A. E. Boorman, and five fire wardens for the four summer months from June 6 to October 6.\(^7\) The Anaconda Mining Company and the Northern Pacific Railroad, with extensive holdings in the area, did not join the N.M.F.A. until 1912. The Forest Service attempted to persuade the Lumber Department of the Anaconda Company to join the organization. F. A. Silcox, who replaced Greeley as District Forester in District One, felt that A.C.M.'s participation in the Northern Montana Forestry Association was essential because "they \(^{[A.C.M.]}\) are not at the present time, under the cooperative agreement with the Service, bearing their proportionate share cost of the fire protection."\(^8\) Silcox forwarded the Company's objection to Chief Forester Henry S. Graves:

The objection the Company has to joining the Association is that they do not care to delegate the authority to expend money for the Company. I have suggested to Mr. Toole \(^{[John R. Toole, A.C.M. Executive in the Lumbering Department]}\) that this can be checked so closely that the Company should feel no fear on this score. By appointing one of the Company's men, a Forest Service man and a member of the Association on the fire committee of the Association and by having the bills of the Association properly audited, there should be no reason why the A.C.M. should object to joining.\(^9\)

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\(^7\)Minutes of the Northern Montana Forestry Meetings, May 11 & May 22, 1911.


\(^9\)Ibid., p. 6.
The Anaconda Company and the Northern Pacific Railroad did join the N.M.F.A. in 1912, which significantly strengthened that organization. The Northern Montana Forestry Association then became the leading example of cooperative fire control in Montana. ¹⁰

In 1914 the State Forester, John C. Van Hook, lamented the Legislature's reluctance to appropriate funds so that the State could take the lead in organizing cooperative protective associations on the 3,500,000 to 4,000,000 acres that remained unprotected against forest fires. Van Hook stated:

Montana is sorely in need of a definite appropriation which will authorize the State Forester to appoint and pay fire wardens for the unorganized territory in cooperation with the private owners. I do not believe the State should go to the extent of forcing any private owner to pay for fire protection unless a majority of the owners in any district are willing to do so. In that case, the State should have the authority to force the minority to pay their proportionate share. Experience indicates that the State can not afford to go very much faster than public opinion. I believe, however, that if the State is authorized to take the initiative and to assume a proper share of the burden, the private owners in the unorganized territory will be glad to contribute towards the general scheme a reasonable sum in accordance with the proportionate areas. ¹¹

Montana's response to the forest fires of 1910 was negative at best, with the single exception of the Northern Montana Forestry Association. The Legislature failed to respond to the lessons of the holocaust of 1910, and by


¹¹ Third Biennial Report of the State Forester, 1913-1914, p. 31 (no place, no date).
implication and deed indicated that it was of little consequence to the future of the State.
CONCLUSION

The 1910 forest fires in the Northwest, particularly in Montana and Idaho, directly influenced the passage of the Weeks Law of 1911. Section 2 of the Weeks Law established a system of federal-state cooperation against the threat of forest fires on forested watersheds of navigable rivers. The Weeks Law also made it possible for the federal government to expand the national forest system beyond the confines of the public domain. This Law was a major step forward in a system of national forestry, and the format that it established, particularly the cooperative feature, became the pattern for ensuing federal legislation.

Congress passed the Clarke-McNary Act of 1924 which expanded the philosophy of the Weeks Law. The wording of the Weeks Law that restricted the cooperative program to forested watersheds of navigable rivers gave way to a broader interpretation in the 1924 Law. All watersheds of navigable streams, forested or not, came under the protection of the Clarke-McNary Law. More significantly, the Clarke-McNary Act included privately owned forest lands as well as state lands. This feature of the Law provided a far reaching impetus to the privately owned timber firms, and gave them encouragement to participate in the fire protection system.
that the Weeks Law had done for the states.

The Clarke-McNary Act increased the fire protection scheme that the Weeks Law initiated. More significantly, perhaps, it reinforced the cooperative approach to forestry matters which has subsequently been applied to a variety of other problems. Since 1924 Congress has enacted cooperative legislation dealing with forest pest control (1947), forest management (1950), watershed protection and flood prevention (1954) and forestry research (1962). Thus, the federal government has increased its concern via legislation for a host of forestry problems. The format of the legislation has evolved from the Weeks Law of 1911. The 1910 fires, therefore, have influenced an entire philosophy of forest legislation up to the present.

In Montana the Legislature did not respond to the 1910 fire season. Through the years, however, Montana has enacted forestry laws for the development of a better fire protection system. In 1918 the Montana Council of Defense, a war-time legal body designed to aid the war effort, issued Orders 9 and 15 which prohibited slash burning from June through September except by permit. The Legislature enacted these orders into law in 1919. In 1925 the Legislature enacted a law to establish state forests for use and watershed protection - similar in purpose to the national forests. The State Legislature provided laws for compulsory fire patrol on private land and mandatory slash disposal in 1927.
In 1939 Montana revamped the entire state forestry program. A State Board of Forestry became the leading body on matters pertaining to forest problems. The Act of 1939 also created fire districts, and held absentee land owners liable for protection costs. Thus, by 1939 Montana had effected many of the points which Governor Norris advocated in 1911.

The private forestry land owners in Montana have since responded to protection needs. Three private cooperative organizations formed in the years 1921-1922, but only the Blackfoot Forest Protective Association is still active. Formed in December, 1921, the B.F.P.A. assumed the leadership for fire protection in the Big Blackfoot and Clearwater drainages. Today the Blackfoot Forest Protective Association and the Northern Montana Forestry Association are the only private cooperative associations in Montana.

The progress that has been made on the federal level in forest fire legislation is traceable to the 1910 burn. Montana's laws were not affected by that disastrous summer although the Northern Montana Forestry Association became active as a result. Nevertheless, the State has enacted legislation in the intervening years which have been effective in lessening the fire hazard.

Perhaps William Greeley summarized the evolution of forestry legislation since 1910 best by stating:

There is still too much smoke in the woods. But we have moved far in the know-how and organization protection since the August skies of 1910 were
blackened out over the Bitterroots.¹

APPENDIX I

Death List - 1910 Fire
Coeur d'Alene National Forest

PULASKI'S CREW

William Learmouth
Joe Fern or Ferro
Harry Hanson
Richard Woods
August Berger
Louis Shoman

DEBITT CREW

(Identified dead)
George Smith
George A. Blodgett
James Kerr
Harry Jackson
L. Ustlo
James Donahue
Frank Sanders
Patrick Grogan
William Casey
Larry Levar

(Bell's Crew)

Joseph Beauchamp
Roderick Ames
Upton B. Smith
William J. Elliott
George W. Cameron
Tony Butcher
Chris Omiso
Jean Viettone
Dominick Bruno
C. Buck

(Taylor Crew)

Walter Beaman or Beamair

(Aaron Benton)
Louis Holmes
Thomas Welch
S. D. Adams
Leslie Zellers
Val Nicholson
Larry Ryson
Ernest Elgin
Appendix

HOLLINGSHEAD CREW
(Unidentified dead)
Gus Johansen
W. Flynn
Chris Christianson
Joe Denton
Sam Hull
L. Johnson
Edward Frye
John Hoss
Harry Smith
J. Stevens
J. Harp
James Denton
Glenn Taylor
K. Anderson
E. Smith
3 unidentified men, names unknown

ROCK CREW
Oscar Weigert

Cabinet National Forest

ENGLE CREW

George Strong
George Fease
E. Williams
A. G. Bourette

Pend Oreille National Forest

BRASHEAR CREW

J. Harris
J. Plant

OTHERS

James G. Boyd, Wallace, Idaho
Unidentified man, Wallace
Lumberjack from Taft, name unknown, Saltese, Montana
Con Roberts, St. Joe River headwaters
Mrs. Ernest Deinhardt, homesteader, Newport, Wash.
George R. Campbell, homesteader, Newport
William Ziegler, homesteader, Newport

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