NO LONGER ON THE FRINGE: THE WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE AS HISTORY

by Stephen J. Pyne

When the American Society for Environmental History decided to hold its annual meeting in Boise in March 2008, it seemed a fitting occasion to bring together two groups—the wildland fire community and that community of historians interested in environmental matters. Here, it seemed, was an ideal opportunity to bring history’s firepower to bear on fire’s own history in a workshop organized by ASEH. Boise is home to the National Interagency Fire Center—the nation’s support center for wildland firefighting—and attendees toured the center as part of the workshop.

The intent was to gather different voices than those usually heard within the agencies’ choir. We sought historians of the American West, of urban fire, and of the global fire scene as well as journalists who had interested themselves in fire and its history. We wanted fire scientists to speak not only to the definition of the problem but also to its intellectual and institutional history. We wanted them to speak in their voices, realizing that a personal essay might throw more sparks than academic and technical prose. Thanks to the Forest History Society and funding from ASEH, we are publishing those essays in this special issue of Forest History Today.

Several sponsors agreed to help us. The Joint Fire Science Program includes the Wildland-Urban Interface within its mandate and generously stretched its mission to embrace history and provide funding. There are limits to what it can contribute for meetings, however, which was less than what the session required. Thanks to Jack Cohen, the Missoula Fire Lab of the U.S. Forest Service made up the difference. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service videotaped the presentations and broadcast them on the ASEH website. We thank them all. I wish to acknowledge also the indispensable role of Lisa Mighetto, executive director of the ASEH, who held this sometimes fractious collection of interests together before and after the workshop, and helped coordinate between the contributors and Jamie Lewis of Forest History Today.

New from the Forest History Society...

Forest Aesthetics, translated from the 1902 German text by Heinrich von Salisch, provides a window into the origins of forestry and landscape design. With its publication, von Salisch became the central promoter of aesthetics and forest health in an era of economic forestry and clearcutting.

Foresters will marvel at the similarities of problems and situations between Central European forestry of the late 19th century and late 20th-century American forestry. Landscape management and design students and professionals will get an insight into the development of their art through von Salisch’s frequent references to landscape artists like William Gilpin, Prince von Pueckler-Muskau, and others of that period. But mostly, any student, teacher, landowner, or land manager interested in natural resources management will find jewels of forest history in the author’s philosophy and practical applications.

To order, contact the Forest History Society at 919/682-9319, or order online at www.foresthistory.org.

“This book brings to English readers direct encounter with original concepts of forest aesthetics. Through this translation, a great thinker and practitioner speaks across time and space to organize and guide integrated management of today’s multiple demands on forest and open-space resources.”

—Bruce K. Ferguson, Franklin Professor of Landscape Architecture School of Environmental Design, University of Georgia