

VIEWS FROM THE NATIONAL FORESTS

A PHOTO ESSAY

Views from the National Forests is a leather-bound album recently added to the Forest History Society photo collection. The album was produced in the mid-1930s by the U.S. Forest Service for placement on commercial railways for passengers to enjoy while riding the train. This particular album

was placed on the *California Limited*, which ran between Chicago and Los Angeles and was owned by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway. It contains 36 images taken by numerous photographers between 1914 and 1933, with captions and information cards addressing such topics as recreation, wildlife, watershed protection, timber management, fire control, forage, and the activities of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The placement of photo albums on trains was an easy way for the Forest Service to educate the general public about its mission of “multiple use,” a concept the Forest Service had only recently articulated in a massive report to Congress, *A National Plan for American Forestry* (1933). (It may also have been an attempt by the agency to state its case to the public for not being transferred to the Department of Interior, a very real threat the Forest Service faced at the time of the album’s publication.) In what serves as the album’s introduction, Chief Ferdinand Silcox noted that by furnishing things like recreation and timber to the “30-odd million people who visit the National Forests yearly,” the Forest Service was following its “long-time” policy of providing the greatest good to the greatest number: “Conservation through use is the backbone of that policy; its object is to devote every acre and every

resource to the greatest possible usefulness in the long run.”

The album presents a mix of images, some showing picturesque waterfalls or forested vistas, while others show damage from erosion or fire. Each photo is accompanied by a caption card (also reproduced here) that ties the illustration to a key Forest Service issue of the day. The agency’s stance on these issues is made clear throughout. Some of these positions have changed—fire was the “red enemy” and “wildcats” were “varmints”—in the intervening years, while others have not. If anything, issues such as watershed protection have become even more important. Other photos are used to explain new policies, like the 10 A.M. fire policy, or to emphasize the vital role of the Forest Service in improving everyday life. As a whole, the photo album itself represents a snapshot, if you will, of how the Forest Service perceived land management issues as well as conditions on forests and grazing lands on or adjacent to national forests in the mid 1930s.

The complete album is an online exhibit viewable through the Research page of the Forest History Society’s website (www.foresthistory.org). Archivist Elizabeth Hull prepared the exhibit and one of our volunteers, Dianne Timblin, selected the images and contributed to this introduction.

BY ELIZABETH HULL, JAMES G. LEWIS, AND DIANNE TIMBLIN



STREAM FLOW

Nearly 308,000,000 acres—over one-half the forest area of the United States—exert a major influence on watershed protection.

West of the Great Plains practically every major stream, and most of the minor ones, head in National Forests, with Uncle Sam's Forest Rangers on the job of protecting timbered slopes from fire. And forty-nine large cities, with a population of more than 5 million—besides thousands of smaller communities—depend upon National Forest watersheds for their domestic water supplies.

Watershed protection on National Forests in the East, South and Middle West is also becoming a reality. For nearly 5 million acres have already been approved for federal purchase, and resources are now available for the purchase of 10 million additional acres for National Forest purposes.

Falls on Bald River in the Cherokee National Forest, Tennessee. (2-226,811)



SUB-MARGINAL LANDS

Hundreds of millions of acres once in forest have been cleared for crop production. This was a natural process in the settlement of the United States.

Since these original clearings, many areas have proven unsuited to permanent agriculture. Some have become what is now called "sub-marginal" lands.

It is estimated⁽¹⁾ that today there are more than 50,000,000 acres of cleared lands which, abandoned or idle, are now available (and chiefly valuable) for reforestation. And present trends indicate an abandonment of 25 to 30 million additional acres of potential forest lands during the next 20 years.

(1) By Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1933.

Silt deposited behind erosion-control dam built by the C. C. C. When completely filled this delta will be ready for planting. Gila National Forest, New Mexico. (4-282,637)



TIMBER

One of the major objectives of our National Forests is to help control erosion and regulate stream flow by protecting and maintaining an adequate forest cover. Another is to help insure a perpetual supply of timber.

Both objectives are met—under the long-time land-management policy of the Forest Service—through use: such use as will assure the greatest good to the greatest number in the long run.

So, since timber is a National Forest resource, it, too, is used.

Timber-clad slopes on the Columbia National Forest, Washington. (5-365,27A)

THE FIRST BURNING PERIOD

The spread of fire—in city or forest—bears direct relationship to the time which elapses between its start and when it is first adequately surrounded.

And the first burning period—between start of the fire and 10 A. M. next morning—is the critical period for forest fires. If fires can be controlled within that time, they can be kept small and inexpensive: if not, size, damage and costs increase by leaps and bounds.

So, to keep forest fires small, quick and accurate detection must be followed by prompt "get-away" and rapid travel on the part of smokechasers and fire-fighting crews.

Unloading saddle and pack stock after a quick run to the end of the road. From here, each mule will be packed with loads which average 225 pounds. Photo taken near Remount Station, Lolo National Forest, Montana. (14-266,922)



THE FIGHT

Against the red enemy—fire—is often a long grueling one.

And always, unless the fire is caught while small, that fight is a dangerous one. Lives, even, are occasionally lost; from rocks rolling down steep mountain slopes: from weakened trees which snap, then fall without warning: from rushing flames which occasionally trap even experienced men.

Blackened forests, dirty and swollen streams, dead deer and other wild game, ruined camp spots—these are but some of the results of carelessness with fire in our forests.

A smoke-chaser in action. Catching a fire while it is still small. Shasta National Forest, California. (15-285,278)



FORAGE

A major resource, forage on the National Forests, is so protected and administered as to maintain the supply and provide the largest possible contribution to permanent economic and social welfare.

National Forest forage makes those contributions through use by domestic stock and wild game.

Use of forage by domestic stock is of vital importance on many Western Forests. For here are communities whose prosperity is dependent upon the production of livestock. And that livestock is, in turn, dependent upon National Forest forage for from 2½ to 8 months out of every year.

This view illustrates the relationship between forested slopes and cultivated valleys. Vicinity of the George Washington National Forest, Virginia. (17-244,373)





WILD CATS

—are classed as "varmints" because they prey upon wild game. They are wary creatures and offer a real fight, even when treed by well-trained dogs.

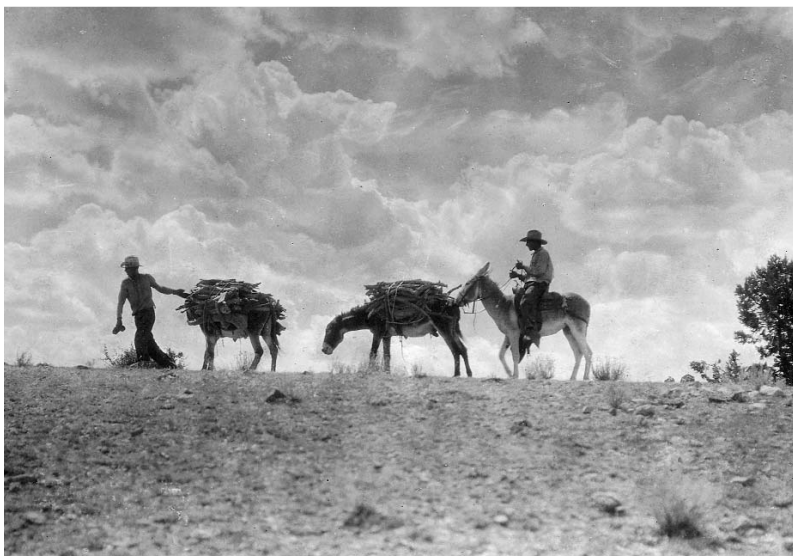
Wild cat in a tree. Gila National Forest, New Mexico. (22-224,057)



RECREATION

Of all the uses of our National Forests and their many resources, recreation is the most popular. And somewhere within those Forests is that which you most desire for your vacation; modern resorts in charming mountain settings, tourist camps, free public camp grounds, summer homes (and sites for more of them), municipal and other camps, or primitive areas without roads, hotels or modern improvements. So plan, soon, to find the place at which you have longed, for years, to spend a week, a month, or a summer.

Hikers in Austin Pass. Panorama Dome in the background. Mt. Baker National Forest, Oregon. (34-204,569)



YOUR FORESTS

—call. Follow, if you will, that call. Forsake for a fortnight, the hustle and bustle of everyday life: explore their by-ways, mountain streams and timbered wildernesses: visit, again, a National Forest.

For the National Forests are your Forests. And we who protect and administer them for you, bid you welcome. Come, then, and let us give an account of our stewardship.

Only—when you come, please be careful with fire.

A scene from the Southwest. Gila National Forest, New Mexico. (36-233,573)