

# WHAT PROTECTIVE CO-OPERATION DID

By E. T. ALLEN

Forester of the Northwestern Forestry and Conservation Association

(The success with which the affiliated private fire protective associations of the Pacific Northwest met the difficult situation thrust upon them by the menacing fires throughout the region makes a remarkable showing. Scarcely less noteworthy is the fact that this success was due, first, to the example of the Forest Service, whose methods are closely followed by the associations, and second, to a liberal policy of spending money in order to get results. The private co-operators spend from one to ten times as much on fire protection alone as the Government spends for the entire administration of the national forests.—Ed.)

## PRINCIPLES OF PROTECTION

The Pacific Northwest suffers from fire exactly in the measure that as a whole or locally it ignores the two basic essentials of prevention—respect for fire laws and preparedness for emergency.

Excepting the comparatively few caused by lightning, every forest fire results from malice or avoidable carelessness. Either is criminal, prohibited by laws entitled to the respect and enforcement accorded laws against theft or murder. With means of securing such respect and enforcement, we should have little fire trouble.

Every fire, however caused, is small enough at first to be easily put out. With an adequate force of trained, vigilant men, furnished proper transportation, means of communication, and equipment, fires in the forest do not become forest fires. Patrol is essential, and is effectual in the measure of its organization and facilities.

These proven axioms are recognized by the Forest Service, which proceeds accordingly, as far as wholly inadequate funds permit, in protecting the national forests.

Outside the national forests these axioms are not recognized, or at least not applied, by state or public to a degree even approaching that necessary to protect lives, property, and public welfare generally. This lack of defensive preparation results in tremendous injury to

the community every year, and in abnormal years, of which 1910 is only one example, invites irretrievable disaster.

## PRIVATE ASSOCIATIONS

While the interest of private owners in forest protection is no more direct or great than that of the community, it is more promptly realized. In the Pacific Northwest, especially in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon, private owners of forest land have consequently gone even farther than the Government, and very much farther than the states or the public, in the installation of protective systems. Their methods are practically identical with those of the Forest Service, making patrol the main point, supplemented by fire fighting, trail and telephone building, etc. The expense is largely borne by co-operation, pro rated on the basis of acreage owned, although many owners do much independent work also.

There are about ten of these co-operative associations, among the largest being the Cœur d'Alene, Clearwater, Pend Oreille, and Potlach Timber Protective Associations in Idaho; the Washington Forest Fire Association, and the Oregon Forest Fire Association. They affiliate for many central purposes in the Western Forestry and Conservation Association, which is a grand lodge for all such organizations and for conservation associations in the five states from Montana to California.

In Idaho the state itself is a member of all associations, paying its full share per acre for state lands embraced. Washington does not share the expense of patrol, but helps defray the expense of additional day labor for actual fire fighting.

This work by the private owners gives the very highest efficiency in patrol and fire fighting. They are not limited by statute or appropriation bills in providing adequate funds and using them to meet emergencies. Being interested only in the best results, and technically familiar with conditions, they get good men and practical supervision. They spend from one to ten cents an acre for exclusive fire work during the fire season, while the Forest Service has to spread a cent or two over all sorts of administrative work for the whole year.

The private owner, however, is practically helpless in enforcing the punitive laws which are very generally regarded with contempt, because there is little state machinery for enforcing them, and here lies one of the greatest dangers to property and life outside the national forests.

#### WHAT THE CONDITIONS WERE

To come now to the specific conditions of the season of 1910:

When it became apparent that unusual drought was bringing a grave situation, the private patrols were gradually increased and every effort was made to reduce the hazard. The Western Forestry and Conservation Association had repeated warnings published in every newspaper in the Northwest. Letters were sent to loggers and others, urging every precaution in the woods. Circulars, posters, and other publicity matter were circulated widely. All this had undoubted great effect, but did not, of course, remove the general carelessness with fire that prevails where the fire laws are not respected.

Although June and July continued hot and dry after an unusually dry spring, and the danger during these two months had been equal to that of the ordinary entire season, the associa-

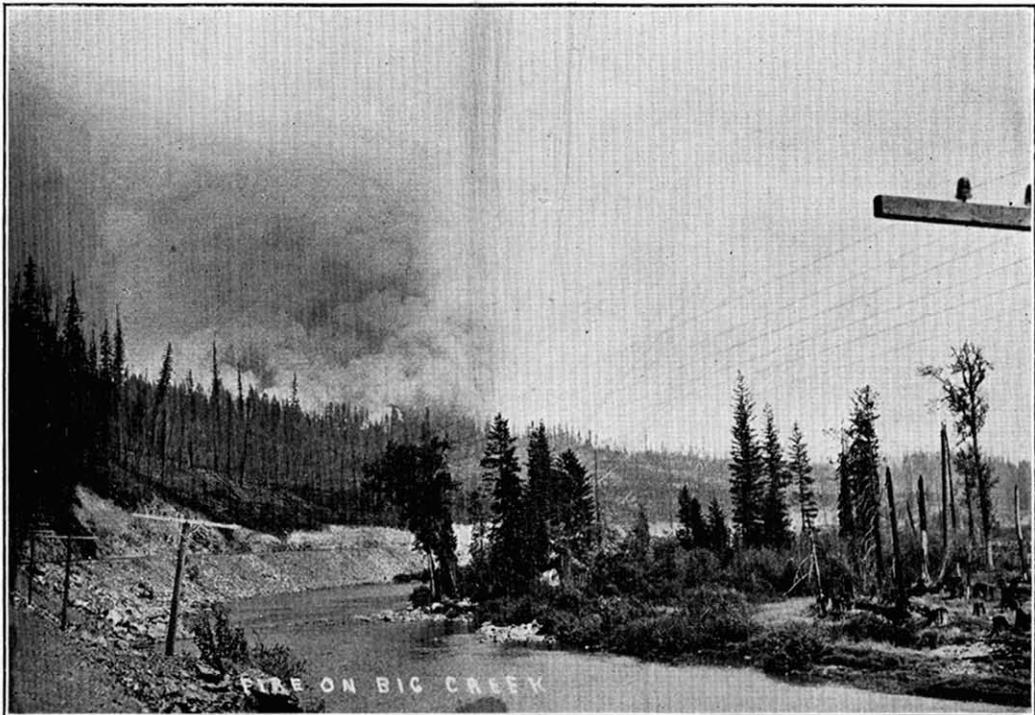
tions extinguished hundreds upon hundreds of fires in their incipency and practically prevented any loss within their territory of millions of acres. But finally, in August, there prevailed throughout the Northwest strong winds which, with the forests already like tinder, fanned every fire that could not be reached at once into a serious conflagration.

An army of private patrolmen was by this time in the field, exerting every effort. The four Idaho associations had from 30 to 50 regular men each, the Washington association 125. Besides these, additional and independent patrols comprised several hundred more. Fire fighters were freely employed to check and hold fires that became serious.

But as conditions became worse, the systems broke at a few of their weakest places, and almost always for one of two reasons—persistent violation of the fire laws or juxtaposition of unprotected lands. It was an utter impossibility, especially after the force was taxed to the utmost where life and property was particularly in danger, to meet all the new fires that bust out as a result of public indifference.

#### THE RESULTS ACCOMPLISHED

Nevertheless, effort was never once remitted, and the associations, like the Forest Service, massed all the men they could hire wherever they were most needed, without regard for fine distinctions of ownership. Menacing fires were fought, although on the lands of men who had refused to protect them. The same credit is due very many owners who worked independently. In western Washington \$200,000 was spent during the season for private fire work. The Cœur d'Alene association alone spent about \$50,000 in Idaho, having as high as 850 men in the field, and its neighbors in proportion. The Washington association had 1,200 extra men. Oregon owners were less perfectly organized, so exact figures are not yet available, but doubtless spent \$100,000.



Fire at St. Joe, Idaho, from a Distance of Four Miles

It is impossible to give any reliable estimate of the total loss at present, particularly in Idaho, for reports are constantly being changed by more careful investigation. First estimates seldom include possibilities of salvage where timber is not destroyed. Two important facts may, however, be stated with conviction: First, that the losses were few and insignificant when the area involved is considered; and, second, that had it not been for the timber owners' effort the contrary would have been true and the Pacific Northwest would have suffered a calamity past conceiv-

ing of. The really bad fires can be counted on the fingers, while those extinguished, which under the conditions that prevailed would otherwise have been as bad or worse, number by thousands.

It is sometimes believed that the lumberman is the enemy of forest preservation and should be compelled to greater duty to the public. Whether or not this is true elsewhere, in the Pacific Northwest he is doing more for the cause than any one else, and the problem, if the cause is to succeed, is to get the public to perform its own duty.

