

Naming the Forest Fire: Journalists Define the “Red Demon,” 1871-1933

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Wildland fire is a phenomenon of nature, but its meaning is subject to continuous redefinition by human beings. This article argues that journalists have been crucial in shaping American interpretations of wildfire since 1871, when spectacular “holocaust” fires began sweeping the Great Lakes states. Writers who initially perceived fire as purely “natural” came to realize that its presence in the landscape was related to patterns of lumbering and agriculture. After 1900, the conservation movement scorned fire as an outgrowth of a rapacious and wasteful society. The nascent forestry profession embraced a doctrine of total fire exclusion and sought to demonize fire in the public mind. Many foresters doubled as writers, producing articles that called for better fire prevention. Focusing at first on material concerns, they later defined fire as a threat to the moral, spiritual and recreational value of the forest. Through an analysis of the American Forestry Association’s membership magazine and the *New York Times*, this article argues that themes first developed by forester-writers were echoed by the daily press, helping to reshape American attitudes about fire by the time of the Great Depression.

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The residents of Phillips, Wisconsin, in the late nineteenth century were no strangers to fire. Wildfires smoldered constantly in northern Wisconsin, particularly in the hot, dry summer of 1894. So when the lingering smoke began to thicken about noon on Friday, July 27, few people apparently worried too much about it. The temperature hovered near 100 degrees, and many of Phillips’ citizens must have been dreaming of a Sunday outing to the shores of Elk Lake. Then the fire burst upon Phillips with little warning, destroying the little city in about thirty minutes. A lumber mill, a tannery and seven hundred homes were leveled. Only a few houses remained standing. About two dozen people died, many of them drowning as they tried to flee the blaze in boats. Fifteen hundred were left homeless. About 100,000 acres of the surrounding forest were blackened. The rains came hours later, turning the remnants of Phillips into a sodden mess.¹

Two hundred and sixty miles away, the telegraph dispatches reached the city room of the *Milwaukee Journal* and were set into type for Saturday’s front page. On Monday, the *Journal* editorialized on the tragedy. The “suffering of the people is intense,” the newspaper declared, but Wisconsinites had responded with an outpouring of charity. Phillips’ neighbors, “who know the power of the fire fiend by experience,” had opened their homes, and others had dispatched money and supplies. The editorial made no mention of the fire’s cause or whether it could have been prevented. It was, in the *Journal’s* accounting, a purely natural disaster that could be addressed only after it had occurred.²

Three decades later, a *Journal* editorial writer took a sharply different stance. Fred W. Luening knew the woodlands well; he loved to spend time amid the pines in ramshackle cabins, including one not far from Phillips. What he saw in the woods disturbed him. During one spring’s travels he counted three hundred fires. He soon arranged for a demonstration of firefighting equipment by three manufacturers. The event was interrupted by the outbreak of a real fire, and the firefighters raced to the scene on their motorcycles and extinguished the blaze. With his employer’s blessing, Luening became a conservation crusader, lobbying for a tax to fund firefighting.³ In his view, fire was an outgrowth of a wasteful and thoughtless civilization; it was a threat to the ideal of “permanent” forests providing sustained yield. Three-quarters of Price County, where Phillips was the county seat, was desolate “cutover” land. Stripped of its once-magnificent pines and hemlocks, it now sat scruffy and useless. Because it was swept by constant wildfires, a new forest “crop” could not take hold. Yet “conservation is only beginning to be an issue,” Luening fumed in 1925, “and the basis of all conservation – fire prevention and fire fighting – is an incomprehensible theory to the public mind.”⁴

Why the indignant tone, where there was none just thirty years before? Because the idea of wildfire grew up with the United States, changing as the nation changed. In the nineteenth century, fire was a regular companion of frontier land-clearing – indeed, a useful tool for it. What one historian calls “laissez-faire folk burning” was the simplest

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way to clear acreage for farming, and to thin out woodland underbrush to make way for grazing.⁵ "Everybody thought they had to burn over in those days," an early forest ranger recalled. "As soon as they'd cut a piece out, they'd burn it back."⁶ Blazes set for land-clearing often raged out of control. The constant fires encouraged "cut-and-run" logging, with timber companies sawing their holdings before they could burn. But once the frontier was conquered, a new class of professionals sought to rationalize land use. Law, science and administration were applied to formerly unmanaged acres. Besides farmland, tracts were set aside for forests. The new woodlands would be groomed to provide a perpetual harvest of timber, and fire had no place in this planned landscape. Fire exclusion became the key principle of industrial forestry and a central tenet of the American conservation movement. After 1910, firefighting itself would be celebrated as a superb physical and moral pursuit – an exemplar of the "strenuous life" as noble as the push westward had been a generation earlier.⁷

Journalism was a driving force in the evolving interpretation of wildfire. Nineteenth-century writers had been entranced by the fire topic, which lent itself to stories of suffering, heroism and nature's fury. In the twentieth century, conservationists urged journalists to demonize fire and to canonize those who fought it. Sometimes the argument was phrased in purely material terms. Forest protection could ensure future growth and avert a "timber famine," as conservationist Gifford Pinchot liked to call it. In the 1920s, the rational argument was supplemented by the romantic: Forests needed protection because they were a refuge for the harried city-dweller, a place of solace, recreation and spiritual renewal. The best way to promote forests was to advertise them as an escape from "the over-urbanization and over-mechanization of modern factory-civilization," one forester

declared in 1927.⁸ Numerous popular writers took up the cause, to the extent that experts ceded much of their moral territory to "sob sisters and feature writers of the Sunday supplement school," another forester complained. But foresters were perfectly capable of competing with the "purveyors of snappy copy" if they would just "throw overboard their dignity" and write in a way the public could understand.⁹

Many did just that. The U.S. Forest Service created its own public-relations branch in 1920. A number of foresters pursued the writing game part- or full-time, tossing aside technical jargon in favor of broad public appeal.¹⁰ Working on their own or for government and private forest agencies, they produced a torrent of material: press releases, newspaper and magazine articles, leaflets, billboards, even fiction, poetry, radio programs and motion pictures. Conservation-minded professional journalists, such as Milwaukee's Fred Luening, helped amplify the foresters' message. Fire exclusion was the centerpiece of the ongoing campaign. "Never was the American editor so interested in forestry," one Forest Service PR man wrote in 1926, and "the first duty of every forester is public education in forest fire prevention." The evils of fire had to be burned into the minds of the mass public, and the wanton or careless fire-setter had to be "classed with the thief and the killer, an enemy of society."¹¹ The complete elimination of wildland fire would prove an elusive (and ultimately unwise) goal. But the journalistic crusade would succeed in branding fire as a "Red Demon," the enemy of all that was good and wise in American conservation.

Prologue: The "Holocaust" Fires

The terrifying benchmark for wildfire was a series of enormous "holocaust" fires, from 1871 through 1918. Not seen before or since, the holocaust blazes were a unique outgrowth of logging methods practiced after the Civil War, especially in the Great Lakes states.

Moneyed interests, led by the railroads, gained access to the former public domain of the northern “pineries” and mowed down its timber, shipping the wood westward to build settlements on the treeless prairies. Steam power, river transport and light-gauge rail allowed lumbermen to penetrate the farthest reaches of the forest. This exploitation was devastatingly swift. About forty million acres of forest in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota was largely denuded by 1910. The wasteful and reckless logging sparked fires that killed thousands of people over five decades. Journalistic narratives of holocaust fires were a unique amalgam, too, with the telegraph facilitating widespread reporting of disasters wrought by large-scale capital, technology and greed.¹²

Each holocaust fire burned hundreds of thousands of contiguous acres; the worst of them killed hundreds of people apiece. Survivors of holocaust blazes told of hellish phenomena such as “tornadoes” of fire that roared like thunder and cremated entire communities. “When a firestorm erupts in a forest, it is a blowup, nature’s nuclear explosion,” two scholars report, “generating the same heat and devastating power as an atomic bomb.”¹³ More than one refugee had mistaken the flames for Armageddon. For reporters, the holocaust blazes made for spectacular narratives. The *New York World* sent Nellie Bly to cover the aftermath of the Hinckley, Minnesota, fire of 1894. No sooner had she set foot on the charred ground than she was scribbling stories of pathos and bravery. “It was just like the last day, with everybody trying to escape hell,” one survivor told her. Painting with her accustomed broad brush, Bly opined that the man was so traumatized that he’d be better off dead.¹⁴

The standard for holocaust blazes had been set by the Peshtigo, Wisconsin, fire of 1871, which remains the deadliest disaster by fire in American history. More than a thousand people perished in that blaze, which destroyed

a Wisconsin lumber town and a million acres of forest containing an estimated one billion trees. Survivors described devilish vortexes of flame raining from the sky. Still, press coverage of the tragedy was scant and tardy. The great Chicago fire had occurred that same night, October 8, diverting reporters’ attention. Even as fire roared into Peshtigo, the town was voiceless, because the wildfires that had simmered around it for months had melted its telegraph lines.¹⁵ Chicago’s plight was known to the world “while the fires were yet burning,” the *New York Times* reported, but “Wisconsin’s fearful and greater sacrifice” would not make the newspapers for nearly a week.¹⁶ It was a full month before *Harper’s Weekly* reported on the conflagration. Besides a dramatic double-page engraving, it offered a speculative account of what the fire must have looked like: “Bears and other wild beasts were driven in dismay from the woods, and were flying about in every direction.”¹⁷ When newspaper correspondents surveyed the damage, they described the calamity in biblical terms. Giant pines had been “mere sticks in the hands of a great power,” one reported, “slashing and whipping the earth, and then made fuel for the work of death.”¹⁸ Editor Luther B. Noyes, who had established the *Marinette and Peshtigo Eagle* just months before the blaze, was dumbfounded by the devastation. “No pen dipped in liquid fire” could begin to describe it, Noyes told his readers.¹⁹ Still, like the good booster he was, Noyes soon rallied his spirits and urged others to do likewise. Amid grim circumstances, Peshtigo had shown “a wonderful recuperative energy and a perseverance and pluck that do honor to the occasion,” he wrote in April of 1872.²⁰

The editor of Minnesota’s *Hinckley Enterprise* had taken on another familiar journalistic role – that of the town scold – in the late summer of 1894. Fires were smoldering all over the region between Duluth and Minneapolis, Angus Hay reported. Like

others, he understood fire's value in clearing land for agriculture, but it seemed the citizenry was getting careless. The blazes were destroying standing timber and hay crops. A few days later, a firestorm annihilated the town, killing more than four hundred people. This time, there was no shortage of press coverage. Nellie Bly and her colleagues rode the trains up from St. Paul to glean tales both ghoulish and inspiring. The blaze "swept down on the town like an avalanche," the *New York Times* reported, and dozens of citizens rushing toward a river were trampled and left to die. But the tragedy's most durable narrative would be one of heroism. Engineer Jim Root won immortality by ramming a train through the flames to the edge of Skunk Lake, where his frantic passengers took refuge. "Never for an instant" did Root consider abandoning his post, a correspondent wrote. Credited with saving hundreds of lives, he was showered with accolades and gifts. That autumn, a theatrical agent put Root on the New York stage for a melodrama called *A Ride for Life*.²¹

Awful as the holocausts were, nineteenth-century editors rarely used them to call for forest protection. The Hinckley fire did spur the appointment of Minnesota's first state fire warden, albeit with a paltry budget and no staff.²² The *New York World* suggested that woodland communities could avoid "dreadful calamities" by clearing firebreaks around their borders. This probably was not a helpful suggestion, because firestorms had been known to jump even water barriers of several miles.²³ The booster press always managed to see a bright side. The *Hinckley Enterprise* arose from the ashes of the 1894 blaze to declare that the flames had done the community a favor by clearing the land for farming. Nature "seemingly knew our needs" and had done "15 years work in 15 minutes," editor Hay wrote in his first issue after the tragedy.²⁴

Especially in the Great Lakes states, holocaust fires were related to specific land-

use and logging practices. Before 1900, timber was "mined" rather than grown as a crop, and fire was no hazard so long as the trees could be cut before they burned. Exploitation, not nurture, was the guiding principle of the nineteenth-century timber business. Particularly hazardous was lumberjacks' habit of heaping the forest floor with "slash," the branches and sawdust left behind when trees were felled. Such debris often piled up ten feet or more and became tinder-dry in the hot summers. Once touched by fire, it practically exploded. For settlers struggling to clear the pineries for farming, fire in the woods was omnipresent and often very useful. Burning the forest was easier than cutting it and grappling with stumps. If, as one Wisconsin forester put it, "the plow is going to follow the saw and axe," fire in the forest was hardly a threat.²⁵ One reason large fires erupted was that small ones seldom were put out. This attitude lingered into the early twentieth century. "When a fire started, nobody went to a fire, they all went the other way," another forester recalled. "Everybody figured it was a benefit to the country, just burns a lot of brush."²⁶

The tone of the narratives began to change with the fires of 1910, which ravaged three million acres in Western states and killed more than eighty people.²⁷ When a fire known as the "Big Blowup" erupted on the Idaho-Montana border, reporters took notice. The blaze generated the usual stories of hardship and valor, but with a new twist: This time, many of the heroes (and most of the dead) were government-employed firefighters. Ranger Ed Pulaski had herded a firefighting crew into an abandoned mine shaft to save their lives. He brandished a revolver and threatened to shoot any man foolish enough to flee. Pulaski was temporarily blinded by the ordeal.²⁸ The newspaper clippings also called for better fire prevention. "Some day every forest fire will be followed by a hunt for the man or men through whose negligence or incompetency it started

and escaped control," fumed the *New York Times*.²⁹ Will C. Barnes, a senior U.S. Forest Service official, monitored the press dispatches with growing satisfaction. "General public sentiment" appeared to favor "furnishing funds for the employment of more rangers," he reported.³⁰ Barnes was intimately familiar with the print media: He was a prolific freelance writer of forest nonfiction, and his outlets would come to include major magazines such as the *Saturday Evening Post*.³¹ Barnes and other foresters rejoiced in 1911 with passage of the Weeks Law, which provided federal dollars to state forestry bureaus for cooperative fire protection efforts.³²

The last holocaust fire coincided with the World War, and the destructive parallels between the two would not go unnoticed. It burst upon the lumber town of Cloquet, Minnesota, on October 12, 1918. The fire obliterated Cloquet and the settlement of Moose Lake and touched the outskirts of Duluth in the dead of night, sending thousands fleeing. More than four hundred people died, probably many more. Many backwoods families were "overtaken in helpless flight on those lonely forest trails," one correspondent reported.³³ Some victims were "baked to death" in storm cellars, while others drowned or suffocated after diving into wells.³⁴ As with warfare, it was impossible for any one witness to provide a "connected and general description of the fire," another writer noted.³⁵ It was left to the press to stitch the statistics and the survivors' tales into a coherent narrative.

American Forestry, a monthly magazine for foresters and their supporters, jumped on the story. It blamed the Minnesota legislature for slashing the forest patrols to such an extent that one man had to watch a million acres. The graves of the dead were "a gruesome memorial to the misplaced parsimony" of the state.³⁶ Commentary in the mainstream press was similarly harsh. The *Pittsburgh Press* called

the Cloquet fire a "national calamity" and said it probably had been ignited through "sheer carelessness" rather than by German saboteurs, as some suspected. "There was a time when the people of the west used to deal with carelessness of this sort as they dealt with horse thieves. Can you blame them?" The *Pioneer Press* of St. Paul called for a public crusade against woodland fire: "[W]ith the catastrophe fresh in mind and under pressure of an aroused public opinion there is reason to hope the folly of the past will not be repeated."³⁷

The Age of Organization

Gifford Pinchot, the founder and guiding spirit of the U.S. Forest Service, had staked much of his career on his ability to mold public opinion. In 1885, when he enrolled at Yale, there were no professional foresters in the United States. In Pinchot's estimation, the vast majority of Americans in that era "regarded forest perpetuation, if they thought of it at all, as needless and even ridiculous."³⁸ The young idealist had to get his professional training abroad. Schooled in forestry in Europe, he returned to the United States determined to establish a new and vigorous brand of public service. To publicize a private forestry demonstration at the Biltmore estate in North Carolina, he prepared a booklet and sent 10,000 copies to newspapers across the country. "[I]ts importance to the future success of forestry will be very great," he predicted of the Biltmore experiment. "Its value in practice is enormous."³⁹ Pinchot joined the federal government in 1898, leading the tiny Forestry Division within the Agriculture Department. His star would ascend with that of Theodore Roosevelt, who assumed the presidency in 1901. Like TR, Pinchot believed that the imperatives of Progressive Era government must be framed as news and aggressively disseminated to gain public support. Each initiative was heralded by a blizzard of press releases. Pinchot installed a mailing-label

machine that helped the Washington office send each broadside to thousands of addresses. He urged foresters in every district to befriend the local press.⁴⁰ “Publicity is the essential and indispensable condition of clean and effective public service,” Pinchot wrote in 1910.⁴¹ Roosevelt later estimated that Pinchot’s publicity machine had managed to infiltrate 50 million copies of American newspapers each month. This “publicity in the interest of the people” had marshaled public sentiment at very little cost to the taxpayer, Roosevelt wrote.⁴²

Pinchot, the son of a wealthy New York mercantile family, would define his new agency’s driving spirit in the American West. He recruited a corps of novice foresters – many of them Yale graduates, like himself – and put them in charge of the region’s nascent forest reserves. “[T]hese green college boys had snap and punch,” he recalled years later. “It was a delight to watch them dive in.”⁴³ The new foresters soon found themselves embroiled in battles with ranchers and homesteaders over issues of land use. Pinchot was no sentimental preservationist; he defined conservation as the “wise use” of resources to benefit human beings. But he would not stand for wasteful, disorderly development or monopoly abuse. His “boys” rode the range on horseback and administered the federal forests in line with Pinchot’s ethos. Forests could provide timber in perpetuity under selective harvest, along with flood control and recreation. Decades later, Will C. Barnes recalled that Pinchot had installed many full-blooded Westerners on the forest reserves to ease stockmen’s anxieties about a takeover by Washington. Unlike the Yale men, these hands were schooled primarily in hard knocks. One of them was a Wyoming cowboy who had been a trick rider with Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show.⁴⁴

The early foresters found a common foe in wildfire. Fire made a perfect publicity “angle” for forestry: Unlike the technicalities of

grazing allotments or timber harvest, fire was a dramatic and visceral phenomenon that readily garnered headlines. It lent itself to stories of bravery, suffering and strife. As the conservation impulse took hold, big fires took on additional meaning as emblems of waste, carelessness and the perils of haphazard development. In the Great Lakes states, where the twentieth-century holocausts killed hundreds and turned thousands more into refugees, fire provided journalists with “a clear narrative” of “folly and horror,” one historian notes.⁴⁵ Fire could be cast as an “enemy” that threatened Progressive ideals of efficiency and order. As long as fire went unchecked, the public could not enjoy the maximum benefit of its own resources. The *Use Book*, the agency handbook carried by every U.S. forest ranger, put it succinctly: Fire protection was probably “the greatest single benefit derived by the community and the nation from forest reserves.”⁴⁶ It would become the heart of the forester’s creed.

The heroism template would prove adaptable to changing circumstances. Foresters were vanguards of change; they represented the coming of law, science and administration in a formerly unregulated landscape. The forester might ride alone, but he had the power of the government behind him. Still, it was easy – and for writers, often irresistible – to portray the forest ranger as a lone operative imbued with cowboy virtues: humility, bravery and seat-of-the-pants resourcefulness. Foresters themselves appear to have engaged in conscious myth-making about their work. Forestry publications often spun yarns about solitary rangers fighting blazes single-handedly, as in this account of the “bronzed fighter of forest fires” from 1911:

It has been said that the rangers constitute the greatest fire department in the world. But the ranger’s equipment consists of no polished engines or towering ladder – it is often nothing more than a mustang pony and a pine bough or his saddle blanket.⁴⁷

Pinchot's travels in the West gained him some unusual saddlemates. One of them was Edward Tyson Allen. "Ned" Allen was a curious hybrid: Son of an Eastern intellectual, he was also a child of the West, a forester, scientist, journalist and political operative. Unlike many foresters, who became tongue-tied in formal settings, Allen, in the words of one historian, "was personable; he was erudite; he wrote and spoke with exceptional skill."⁴⁸ His father, a Yale chemistry professor, had taken his son west after the death of his wife; they settled in a remote area of Washington state. The boy was home-schooled as a teenager, studying botany at his father's side in the wilderness around Mount Rainier. He learned the reporter's craft as a cub for the Tacoma *Daily Ledger*. But the newsroom was too small to contain his ambitions. He became one of the nation's first forest rangers in 1898 and soon caught Pinchot's attention. Allen rose quickly, eventually overseeing all national forests in Washington, Oregon and Alaska. In 1909 he found his ultimate calling with the Western Forestry and Conservation Association, a private group advocating progressive forestry practices on behalf of major timber owners, such as the Weyerhaeuser interests. Allen mounted a vigorous campaign for the association, speaking and lobbying and writing press releases. He also wrote constantly for forestry periodicals and the popular press. The aim, as one associate put it, was to "get right down to the root of the matter and get a hold on public opinion." The centerpiece of Allen's campaign would be fire protection.⁴⁹

Allen's timing was auspicious. For one thing, the horrendous fires of 1910 would sear themselves into the public mind, creating a receptive climate for fire protection. Beyond that, foresters and timber owners were beginning to rally around the cause of fire exclusion. The cut-and-run practices of the nineteenth century were giving way to more permanent forestry efforts. Rather than

"mining" timber, lumbermen now looked to grow it as a crop. A forest was "big capital in [the] form of trees," as one Michigan forester put it, and even a fire once a decade could devastate a landholder's rate of return.⁵⁰ The Weyerhaeuser company, for example, had bought up millions of acres in Washington state after largely exhausting the pine forests of the Great Lakes states. Its huge investment could hardly be cut overnight, so fire protection became essential to the company's long-term health. The "industrialization" of forestry required systematic growth and predictable output. Foresters knew how to select and cultivate trees for maximum yield, how to protect them from pests and disease, and how to fight fire. Lumbermen, heretofore suspicious of professional foresters, would soon embrace them as natural allies.⁵¹

Sometimes, as with Allen's organization, lumbermen established private forestry groups rather than relying on government. At its core, the WFCFA was a private fire protection service that kept watch on one-fifth of the nation's timber supply, from California to Montana. It built lookout towers, telephone lines, forest trails and supply depots so that fires could be spotted, reached and suppressed in a hurry. It fielded several hundred private firefighters each summer and autumn, with more on standby. Its member companies paid yearly assessments based on acreage. "[F]ire is now regarded as dangerous only when ignored," Allen wrote in 1913, "and it is practically avoidable at an expenditure that is insignificant when compared with the values insured."⁵²

The public would not be moved by dull statistics, of course. Fire was the "strongest game" for forestry promotion because of its emotional appeal, Allen believed.⁵³ From his office in Portland, he produced all manner of publicity materials: posters, billboards, "bulletins, circulars, gummed stickers," even "match-boxes that caution users that matches cannot think." An estimated 300,000

schoolchildren were targeted with “The Ambitious Tree,” a little story “investing a tree with personality and carrying it through all its forest struggles.” The organization’s “general news bureau” sent bulletins to a thousand newspapers throughout the region. The stories were edited and set up to mimic those of the Associated Press. Allen insisted that the bulletins incorporate “real news, using it as a peg on which to hang propaganda matter.” If a journalist could be persuaded to write a story on his own, rather than printing a press release, so much the better: “He makes the money, but your doctrine appears without the discount of your own known special interest.”⁵⁴ Always, the goal was “to make forestry discussion interesting, instead of forbiddingly technical.”⁵⁵

Deconstructing the fire narrative

What is one to make of the shifting panorama of fire coverage? What are the noteworthy trends, and how did fire narratives relate to the changing economic, social and political terrain of wildland fire in the United States?

Journalistic accounts of nineteenth-century fires almost always emphasized human heartbreak and valor, along with an element of the supernatural. A quote from a dazed survivor to the effect that he thought the world was ending was almost a requirement of holocaust fire stories before 1900. After the disastrous fire year of 1910, and especially into the 1920s, the narrative became more complex. Storytelling elements – such as heroism and pathos – were supplemented with political and economic appeals containing implicit calls to action. This was an outgrowth of the realization that fires were not just products of an indifferent “nature,” but were related to patterns of human land utilization. Law, science and administration could be used to suppress fire; the real challenge was getting the public to support those efforts.

What’s most interesting is how forester-writers tried to frame the issue – first largely in economic terms, then as a matter of morals, beauty and permanence (a forerunner of today’s “sustainability”). Forester-writers of the 1920s defined the fire issue in increasingly expansive terms as they sought political salience for public forestry projects. Professional journalists took cues from the foresters, incorporating these themes into their own work. The effect was to allow the writers – and their audience – to conceptualize a complex issue in compelling terms. Several themes appear repeatedly in the fire journalism of the 1920s:

Economic and material concerns. The “timber famine” argument was especially prominent in the years just after the World War. The Rochester, N.Y., *Democrat and Chronicle*, for example, reported in 1920 that careless smokers were extracting a high price on other citizens when they tossed their cigarette butts in the woods: “Not many years ago a poor man could build a house, but to-day the price of lumber is beyond his reach.”⁵⁶ Gifford Pinchot, who feared that industrial foresters would not live up to their promises of sustained harvest, believed that the government had to compel sound management of private timber holdings. Otherwise, a “shortage of wood, with accompanying high prices” would mean “danger to our prosperity in peace and safety in war.”⁵⁷ But rallying public interest in the material argument would be difficult, as chief forester Henry S. Graves unwittingly foretold in 1919: “[T]he public is unconscious of the economic danger that is clearly menacing its interests.”⁵⁸ The *New York Times* was among many publications reciting a litany of forest products threatened by fire: softwood for home construction, hardwood for furniture, pulpwood for paper production. “The seriousness of the situation is not appreciated by the country,” the newspaper fretted in 1922.⁵⁹

Tools and tactics. The key to fire control was spotting and suppressing small fires before they could grow. For writers, the military analogy was both apt and attractive. The "enemy" had to be spotted; intelligence had to be relayed to a command center; and troops had to be deployed to extinguish the threat. Lookout towers, telephones, forest roadways, labor and firefighting apparatus were all part of the equation. For journalists, two other elements were especially alluring: aircraft and radio. L.A. "Jack" Vilas gained fame as the nation's first "flying warden," patrolling the northern Wisconsin forests in a Curtiss "hydro-aeroplane" in 1915.⁶⁰ Wallace Hutchinson, a Forest Service PR man, touted the advantages of small dirigibles in combating fire. These "pony blimps" could be used both for spotting fires and for delivering firefighters to the site of combat. "The mastery of the air bids fair to solve the crucial problem of the forest fire game – Speed," Hutchinson wrote in 1921.⁶¹ *World's Work*, a prominent voice of the Progressive movement, reported approvingly on a 1919 experiment in which War Department aircraft had patrolled six million acres of California forest. Lacking radios, the pilots sometimes would release carrier pigeons from the cockpit to deliver word of fire locations.⁶² Once radio was perfected, it was imbued with almost magical qualities, as in this description from 1931:

Smoke sighted in Buzzard Canyon!

The loud-speaker announces that fact to the forest officer.

He presses appropriate buttons, twirls the dials of his radio set, and a flying squad is dispatched without delay to exterminate the red enemy creeping through the hills.⁶³

Novelty. In a post-frontier society, the woodland setting itself was a source of interest for journalists. Coupled with the danger and drama of firefighting, it made for a gripping

story. The human factor made it even better. At least two writers, for instance, reported on the doings of Lorraine Lindsley, a "girl of the mountain-top" who worked as a fire lookout on Medicine Bow Peak in Wyoming. From her perch above 12,000 feet, she relayed fire data by telephone and once led authorities to a pack of moonshiners whose still was belching smoke in the forest.⁶⁴ In "Minnesota's last wilderness," in the far north on the border with Canada, "the administration of the forest is based on the use of the canoe," another journalist wrote. "In canoes the fire fighters go to the fires." These hearty souls were "among the last of the real woodsmen."⁶⁵

Morality. After Cloquet, fire increasingly was identified as a malevolent force, and the fight against it was outlined in moral terms. If all citizens would respect nature, "the sardonic smile of satisfaction now gracing the face of the Fire God will disappear," the *Detroit News* editorialized in 1922.⁶⁶ Fire was portrayed as a "black death" that "laughs with curses of glee at man's puny defense."⁶⁷ Similarly, the simple human carelessness that often started fires was elevated to the level of malice, even evil. To foresters, the public's apparently cavalier attitude toward waste and ruination bespoke a deep rottenness in the American soul. "[T]o set fire to forest wealth and let it burn unheeded, is nothing short of criminal," forest PR man John Guthrie wrote in 1928.⁶⁸ The American Forestry Association sent educational teams into the South to campaign against the "inbred" regional custom of "firing the woods" to make way for grazing. In motion pictures exhibited to children, Southern woods-burners were equated with murderers.⁶⁹ Conversely, a healthy forest was seen as harboring almost limitless potential for producing healthy human beings. Camping, hiking and other woodland pursuits were touted as offering spiritual refreshment and a welcome break from city life.

Heroism. The bravery template was especially durable. Applied in the nineteenth

century to settlers and townsfolk, it was equally useful when describing professional forest firefighters after 1900. Stewart H. Holbrook, who would make a career of writing about fire, found the firefighting experience to be starkly like that of war, with men huddled in trenches as the "frenzied monster" approached. "I think I hear the boom of far-away cannon; it is the crash and thud of great trees falling."⁷⁰ Peril was the forest ranger's constant companion, at least to hear writers tell it. The "constant mental strain of impending danger" was just part of the job.⁷¹ William Kreutzer, a veteran ranger, told an interviewer that he carried a .44-caliber revolver to fend off bears, mountain lions and the occasional desperado. He reportedly once fought fire for seventy-two hours without sleeping.⁷²

Appeal to women, children and youth. Ovid M. Butler, who joined the American Forestry Association as its house editor in 1923, campaigned to widen the scope of forestry journalism. Butler had read Edward L. Bernays' book *Crystallizing Public Opinion* and was fascinated by its premise that the "public mind" could be willfully shaped. To manufacture support for government forestry programs, writers had to reach out to men, to women (who had gained the vote in 1920) and also to the next generation. The forest, Butler wrote, "is a never-failing subject of human interest, provided it is translated in popular and human terms."⁷³ He overhauled the AFA magazine to provide a softer focus, supplementing the workaday articles with nature lore, poems and children's stories. Tellingly, he changed its name from *American Forestry* to *American Forests and Forest Life*.⁷⁴ E.T. Allen wrote an Arbor Day recitation in which six children pleaded for fire protection lest the careless person destroy "his own children's hopes." It ended with a character named "Future" blowing out a match and stomping it into the ground.⁷⁵ Wallace Hutchinson, one of the most prolific of the forest PR men, created the "Ranger Bill"

character for children's stories. Ranger Bill was a "true Westerner," patrolling the woodlands on horseback and "rounding up" outlaws who dared to set fire to "Uncle Sam's forests."⁷⁶ The character later would take to the airwaves on NBC radio's "National Farm and Home Hour."⁷⁷ The salutary effects of the forest could extend into young adulthood, too, building good citizens as wayfaring youths replicated their ancestors' encounter with the wilderness.

Effects on wildlife. Hunters, anglers, bird-watchers and hikers could all deplore fire's effects on animal life. Thus the phenomenon was harnessed as a tool for selling the anti-fire message. Federal press releases warned that alkaline ashes from fires could destroy trout streams and that the deliberate burning of marsh land by farmers every spring was ruining nesting grounds for waterfowl.⁷⁸ Wallace Hutchinson, in a "Ranger Bill" story, told of a "Noah's-ark procession" of creatures fleeing a blaze: chipmunks, rabbits, mink, deer, coyotes and a grizzly bear.⁷⁹ The image of frightened, frenzied wildlife would be repeated constantly. Chase S. Osborn, the former governor of Michigan, even reported seeing swarms of agitated butterflies trying to escape a blaze. "We must become a Nation of fire wardens," he wrote.⁸⁰

Beauty and permanence. As the 1920s wore on, writers increasingly stressed the value of less-tangible forest products: scenery, recreation, and the potential for human solitude and spiritual renewal. "We cried 'timber famine' so long and loud that we almost grew to believe it ourselves, although we knew all the time in reality this was largely a catch phrase," Wallace Hutchinson wrote in 1931. Forestry instead had to be cast as "an intimate and personal problem in the life of the average citizen."⁸¹ Writer-ecologist Aldo Leopold believed that the public, once infused with "a certain moral and esthetic competence," would reject fire because it rendered the forest lifeless and ugly.

Conservation, he wrote, was not so much a problem of large-scale engineering as it was of tutoring individuals to appreciate nature, and thus to protect it.⁸² “Permanence” could mean a place for one’s children and grandchildren to enjoy, but the term also could be deployed in an economic sense. Milwaukee’s Fred Luening wrote of “permanent forests” managed to provide timber in perpetuity, with “permanent lumber cities in place of transient, declining lumber camps or towns.”⁸³ Gifford Pinchot, echoing a theme from his Forest Service days, declared that conservation was manifestly a project of human development. Managed forests could sustain orderly, prosperous communities, as opposed to abandoned and hopeless boom towns with their “tumble-down houses and grass-covered streets.”⁸⁴ Fire exclusion meant more than growing trees. It also meant growing prosperous, efficient and permanent places for people to live.

The fire picture, 1919-1933

“Forest fire warfare,” as Ovid Butler called it in 1935, was an ongoing struggle, but by the early 1930s forester-writers were beginning to assemble a narrative of progress. The Cloquet disaster of 1918 had been the last of its type. As wasteful and haphazard logging practices waned, so did the threat of holocaust fires. The 1920s had seen the building of a state and federal fire-suppression apparatus – forest roads, telephone lines, lookout towers, and an expandable work force – that could spot and douse fires efficiently. Now the chief task was to extend that system to hundreds of millions of acres that still lacked protection.⁸⁵ At the same time, fire tales focused less on material concerns and more on the intangible benefits of the forest. Adopting what Butler liked to call a “psychological” tone, foresters and their allies in the press began to speak of the woods as a seat of beauty, recreation, human renewal and contentment. “It may well be that we are entering upon a ‘forest-minded’ period, in which trees will have a spiritual as well as

economic part in the lives of communities and families,” the *New York Times* editorialized just after Franklin Roosevelt took office.⁸⁶

The tone of fire articles shifted markedly between the end of the World War and the beginning of the New Deal. The contours of this change are evident in a close reading of the leading popular forestry magazine (*American Forestry*) and an agenda-setting national newspaper (the *New York Times*).⁸⁷ *American Forestry* (later *American Forests and Forest Life*, then simply *American Forests*) might best be called an “affinity journal.” Its publisher, the American Forestry Association, was a citizen conservation group founded in 1875. (Reflecting its parentage, *American Forestry* was a membership magazine, not a professional or scientific journal; that role belonged to the *Journal of Forestry*, published by the Society of American Foresters.) As a bridge between the forestry profession and the mass public, *American Forestry* would be a proving ground for development of popular ideas on forest issues. Leading forester-writers such as E.T. Allen, Wallace Hutchinson and Aldo Leopold honed their approaches there. In many cases they were advocating the economic tenets of industrial forestry (of which fire exclusion was paramount), but they had to phrase their arguments in ways the public would find appealing. Hence the increased emphasis on nature, beauty and “permanence” exhibited by the beginning of the 1930s. A poem from 1931, for example, invited readers to enter the forest and experience the “immemorial calm of this temple not made with hands.”⁸⁸ Even a straightforward policy initiative could be repackaged in moral terms. The Great Depression, which saw millions of rural acres fall into public ownership through tax delinquency, offered a “golden opportunity” for “permanent productivity” on formerly idle lands, the magazine said in an editorial.⁸⁹ The opportunities clearly were spiritual as well as economic. The AFA helped create the Civilian

Conservation Corps, and *American Forests* ran a constant stream of articles lauding this "great national movement to build men and forests." By combining military discipline with the rejuvenating effects of the outdoors, the CCC had apparently limitless capacity to turn big-city toughs into upstanding citizens.⁹⁰

Editors at the *New York Times* were reading *American Forestry*; indeed, they quoted the magazine on numerous occasions. The change in the newspaper's forest-fire coverage over time is strikingly similar to that of the magazine. Both publications increasingly framed their stories in terms of morality; beauty and permanence; and appeals to women, children and youth. This seems to suggest that the magazine's writers, most of whom were engaged with forestry's policy apparatus on a daily basis, were helping to set the agenda for the less-specialized daily press. The *Times*, for example, repeatedly portrayed the CCC as a character-building organization that was reforming the lives of unemployed urban men: "The majesty of nature is somehow calming young nerves that had been made jumpy by enforced idleness and by knocking about city streets."⁹¹ "Continued production of forest crops" could ensure the "permanence" of forest settlements, the paper opined, but the forest's biggest value lay in its capacity to rehabilitate the "pale, emaciated inhabitants of the crowded city."⁹² Forests, in this view, could grow healthy people and stable communities, not just timber.

Words would not extinguish forest fires, of course. From 1925 to 1929, nearly 10 percent of the entire forest area of the United States would burn each year; most of that damage was in unprotected lands in Southeastern states where new growth was struggling to take hold.⁹³ Acreage touched by fire actually would increase into the early 1930s, with 53 million acres burning in the United States in 1931 alone. After that, better fire detection and suppression would slowly reduce the total acreage burned, along with the size of the

average fire. The organizational and journalistic crusade for fire control would continue as well. Smokey Bear, the omnipresent ursine icon of fire control, would be created by the Ad Council in 1944. About the same time, the forestry profession's cherished doctrine of total fire exclusion would be debunked. Fire exclusion actually fed future fires by allowing a buildup of forest undergrowth. It turned out that periodic "controlled burning" was a better way to build healthy woodlands. Fire was not so much a "demon" as a natural phenomenon, which – in measured doses – could have a beneficial and symbiotic relationship with the forest.⁹⁴ Over time, foresters' fire creed would change from one of exclusion to one of containment and management.

Each increment of change had to be negotiated – with Congress and the legislatures, with public policy-makers and private landowners, and with the broad public. Beyond its physical substance, wildland fire would be whatever the American people made of it. Journalists were part of the dialogue – indeed, the key actors through which fire's meaning would be defined through the decades.

Notes

- ¹ "A Score of Lives," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 28, 1894.
- ² "The Terrible Forest Fires," *Milwaukee Journal*, July 30, 1894.
- ³ "Death Comes to Luening," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 4, 1960.
- ⁴ F.W. Luening, "Are the Lake States Satisfied?," *American Forests and Forest Life* 31:384 (December, 1925), 721-724, 764. In an ambitious project, Luening set up a "timber camp" near Phillips in 1930 and hired a party of experts to help him "cruise" the land and assess the state's policies for issuing logging permits. They found piles of brush "likely to burst into flame at the first touch of match or spark," as well as "needless slaughter" of state-owned forests. Luening reported on his findings in a series of bylined articles. See, for example, F.W. Luening, "State Forest Tracts Ruthlessly Denuded," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 19, 1930.
- ⁵ Stephen J. Pyne, *Year of the Fires: The Story of the Great Fires of 1910* (New York: Viking, 2001), 9.
- ⁶ C.L. Harrington interview with Philip A. MacDonald, n.d. [c. 1960] in Box 4 of the Philip A. MacDonald papers, Wisconsin Historical Society Area Research Center, Stevens Point.
- ⁷ Stephen J. Pyne, *Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 241.
- ⁸ Ward Shepard, "The Necessity for Realism in Forestry Propaganda," *Journal of Forestry* 25:1 (January, 1927), 11-26.
- ⁹ Henry E. Clepper, "Publicity: Forestry's Neglected Handmaiden," *Journal of Forestry* 30:6 (October, 1932), 709-713.
- ¹⁰ Erle Kauffman, "Progressive Publicity in Forestry," *American Forests and Forest Life* 34:410 (February, 1928), 93-95.
- ¹¹ Jno. D. Guthrie, "The Public Relations of Forestry," *Journal of Forestry* 24:2 (February, 1926), 114-128.
- ¹² James Kates, *Planning a Wilderness: Regenerating the Great Lakes Cutover Region* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 1-2, 131-145.
- ¹³ Denise Gess and William Lutz, *Firestorm at Peshtigo: A Town, Its People, and the Deadliest Fire in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 101.
- ¹⁴ "Nellie Bly at the Fires," *New York World*, September 7, 1894.
- ¹⁵ Gess and Lutz, *Firestorm at Peshtigo*, 9, 54-55, 70-71, 88.
- ¹⁶ "The Great North-West Fire," *New York Times*, November 20, 1871.
- ¹⁷ "Forest Fires in the West," *Harper's Weekly*, November 25, 1871.
- ¹⁸ "The Wisconsin Fires," *New York Times*, November 13, 1871.
- ¹⁹ Gess and Lutz, *Firestorm at Peshtigo*, 133.
- ²⁰ Gess and Lutz, *Firestorm at Peshtigo*, 196-197.
- ²¹ Daniel James Brown, *Under a Flaming Sky: The Great Hinckley Firestorm of 1894* (Guilford, Connecticut: Lyons Press, 2006), 20-21, 87-102, 181, 204; "Hundreds Perish in Forest Fires," *New York Times*, September 3, 1894.
- ²² Brown, *Under a Flaming Sky*, 211.
- ²³ "The Northwestern Fires," *New York World*, September 4, 1894. Airborne embers from the Peshtigo fire set ablaze the rigging of a schooner anchored two miles from land. Gess and Lutz, *Firestorm at Peshtigo*, 135.
- ²⁴ *Hinckley Enterprise*, December 18, 1894, quoted in Brown, *Under a Flaming Sky*, 203.
- ²⁵ C.L. Harrington interview with George F. Kilp, 1960, transcript at Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison. Kilp was one of Wisconsin's first industrial foresters.

²⁶ C.L. Harrington interview with Henry Freund, 1960, transcript at Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison. Freund was the first state forest ranger in the Rhinelander district in northern Wisconsin.

²⁷ David Carle, *Burning Questions: America's Fight With Nature's Fire* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002), 18-19.

²⁸ E.C. Pulaski, "Surrounded by Fire," in Ovid Butler, ed., *Rangers of the Shield: A Collection of Stories Written by Men of the National Forests of the West* (Washington, D.C.: American Forestry Association, 1934), 77-81.

²⁹ "Topics of the Times," *New York Times*, October 26, 1910.

³⁰ Pyne, *Year of the Fires*, 182. Besides the Western blazes, 1910 also was marked by severe fires in the Great Lakes states.

³¹ See, for example, Will C. Barnes, "B'ar Stories," *Saturday Evening Post* 197:23 (December 6, 1924), 14, 153, 157-158. Barnes may have had the most interesting background of any Forest Service operative. He had won the Medal of Honor for service at Fort Apache, Arizona, in the Indian wars, and he was a longtime rancher before joining the Forest Service. He would become famous for helping to preserve the breeding stock of longhorn cattle, the Western icons that otherwise might have vanished. Friends said Barnes' magazine stories, particularly those written long after the fact, tended to inhabit the mythical nether world between fiction and nonfiction. See *Apaches and Longhorns: The Reminiscences of Will C. Barnes* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982).

³² Pyne, *Year of the Fires*, 257. Cooperative firefighting efforts would be expanded by the Clarke-McNary Act of 1924.

³³ E.G. Cheyney, "The Holocaust in Minnesota: A Greater Hinckley," *American Forestry* 24:299 (November, 1918), 643-647.

³⁴ "500 Lives Lost in Forest Fires," *New York Times*, October 14, 1918.

³⁵ J.F. Hayden, "The Great Minnesota Fire," *American Forestry* 24:299 (November, 1918), 648-652.

³⁶ "Editorial: Minnesota's Forest Fire Disaster," *American Forestry* 24:299 (November, 1918), 652-654.

³⁷ The Pittsburgh and St. Paul opinions are quoted, along with several others, in "Press Comments on the Forest Fires," *American Forestry* 24:299 (November, 1918), 654-655.

³⁸ Gifford Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1998), 1. This Pinchot autobiography was originally published in 1947, the year after his death.

³⁹ Gifford Pinchot, *Biltmore Forest* (Chicago: Lakeside Press, 1893), 43.

⁴⁰ Char Miller, *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2001), 158-159.

⁴¹ Gifford Pinchot, *The Fight for Conservation* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1910), 119. The national forests were placed under control of the U.S. Forest Service in 1905, with Pinchot as chief. Pinchot was forced out as chief forester in 1910 after a bruising political battle with the Taft administration. He later was governor of Pennsylvania. He would be influential in forestry affairs for the rest of his life.

⁴² Stephen Ponder, "Federal News Management in the Progressive Era: Gifford Pinchot and the Conservation Crusade," *Journalism History* 13:2 (Summer, 1986), 42-48. See also Ponder, "Gifford Pinchot: Press Agent for Forestry," *Journal of Forest History* 31:1 (January, 1987), 26-35; and Ponder, "Executive Publicity and Congressional Resistance, 1905-1913: Congress and the Roosevelt Administration's PR Men," *Congress & the Presidency* 13:2 (Autumn, 1986), 177-186. As Ponder notes, not everyone in Congress would view the Roosevelt administration's publicity efforts as being purely public-spirited.

- ⁴³ Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground*, 147.
- ⁴⁴ Will C. Barnes, "Winning the Forest Range," *American Forests and Forest Life* 36 (July, 1930), 398-400, 466.
- ⁴⁵ Pyne, *Year of the Fires*, 73.
- ⁴⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, *The Use Book: Regulations and Instructions for the Use of the National Forest Reserves* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1906), 95.
- ⁴⁷ E.R. Jackson, "The Forest Ranger," *American Forestry* 17:8 (August, 1911), 445-455.
- ⁴⁸ Charles E. Twining, *George S. Long, Timber Statesman* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 114.
- ⁴⁹ U.S. Forest Service biographical file on E.T. Allen, Forest History Society, Durham, N.C.; "Interesting Westerners," *Sunset* 37:3 (September, 1916), 29; Twining, *George S. Long*, 115; Pyne, *Year of the Fires*, 48-49. Allen had a brother, G.F., who also became a forester. One associate remembered that E.T. Allen had a lifelong fascination with mythology, which helps explain his gifts as a storyteller. Richard E. McArdle to Frank J. Harmon, October 20, 1982, in USFS biographical file.
- ⁵⁰ Russell Watson, "Memorandum for Mr. Stoll – Forest Fires," in Box 3 of the James Oliver Curwood papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (hereinafter referred to as Curwood papers). Watson was a University of Michigan forestry professor. Albert Stoll Jr. was secretary of the Michigan Conservation Commission.
- ⁵¹ Pyne, *Fire in America*, 184-198.
- ⁵² E.T. Allen, "Conservation That Pays Its Way," *World's Work* 26:3 (July, 1913), 310-315.
- ⁵³ Pyne, *Fire in America*, 167.
- ⁵⁴ Allen, "Conservation That Pays Its Way"; E.T. Allen, "Method of Forestry Campaigning," *American Forestry* 18:10 (October, 1912), 635-643.
- ⁵⁵ E.T. Allen, "Men, Trees, and an Idea: The Genesis of a Great Fire Protective Plan," *American Forests and Forest Life* 32:393 (September, 1926), 529-532.
- ⁵⁶ "Campers Watch the Sparks and Save the Woods," *Literary Digest* 66:5 (July 31, 1920), 63-66.
- ⁵⁷ Gifford Pinchot, "The Lines Are Drawn," *Journal of Forestry* 17:8 (December, 1919), 899-900. Pinchot's vision of compulsory forest management would not come to pass; instead, such initiatives in the 1920s would be cooperative and voluntary.
- ⁵⁸ "Forestry Head Is Campaigning for Conserving American Timber," *Oshkosh (Wis.) Northwestern*, July 16, 1919, clipping in Box 562 of the Gifford Pinchot papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- ⁵⁹ "Raging Forest Fires," *New York Times*, July 30, 1922.
- ⁶⁰ "Jack Vilas," typescript in Box 6 of the C.L. Harrington papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison. The stunt yielded "a great deal of good clean publicity," Vilas recalled.
- ⁶¹ Wallace Hutchinson, "Pony Blimps for Fighting Forest Fires," *American Forestry* 27:334 (October, 1921), 618-619.
- ⁶² "Forest Patrols of the Air," *World's Work* 39:2 (December, 1919), 177-184. In the early 1920s, when radios were still bulky and unreliable, many writers celebrated the humble pigeon as a carrier of forest-fire bulletins. The birds' homing abilities gave "welcome assurance of victory over the red peril," the Forest Service said. "Pigeons Carry Messages Quickly from Forest-Fire Fighters," U.S. Department of Agriculture press release, January 8, 1922, in USFS clipping file "Fire Fighting," Forest History Society, Durham, N.C.
- ⁶³ "Making Broadcasters of Forest-Fire Protection Scouts," *Literary Digest* 111:1 (October 3, 1931), 35.

- ⁶⁴ "Interesting Westerners," *Sunset* 48:6 (June, 1922), 26-27. See also Huber C. Hilton, "Woman's Place Is in the – Mountains!", *Outing* 80:1 (April, 1922), 295.
- ⁶⁵ Donald Hough, "The Canoe Fire Department," *Outing* 79:3 (December, 1921), 107-109.
- ⁶⁶ "Michigan Forest Fires," *Detroit News*, January 31, 1922, clipping in Box 1, Curwood papers.
- ⁶⁷ "Editorial: Fire or Forests?," *American Forests and Forest Life* 32:393 (September, 1926), 542.
- ⁶⁸ John D. Guthrie, "Fire in the Sanctuary," reprint from *Outdoor America*, August, 1928, in U.S. Forest Service clipping file "Forest Fires," Forest History Society, Durham. N.C.
- ⁶⁹ "Southern Forestry Educational Project," n.d. [c. 1931], typescript in Box 57, American Forestry Association papers, Forest History Society, Durham, N.C.; Erle Kauffman, "Camera! Foresters Turn to Grease Paint and Powder to Further Educational Work in the South," *American Forests and Forest Life* 35:10 (October, 1929), 619-622, 648; Ovid Butler, "Office Memorandum: Trip on Account Southern Forestry Educational Project," November 6, 1929, in Ovid Butler manuscript file, Forest History Society, Durham, N.C.; "Filming 'Burnin' Bill,'" *American Forests* 37:6 (June, 1931), 330-331; W.C. McCormick, "The Three Million," *American Forests* 37:8 (August, 1931), 479-480.
- ⁷⁰ Stewart H. Holbrook, "Fire in the Bush," *Century* 112:5 (September, 1926), 572-576. Holbrook would write the first book-length history of American wildfire, *Burning an Empire: The Story of American Forest Fires* (New York: Macmillan, 1943).
- ⁷¹ A.C. McCain, "Patrolling the Forest Hinterland," *American Forests and Forest Life* 36 (July, 1930), 419-420.
- ⁷² Alfred Pittman, "Adventures of a Forest Ranger," *American Magazine* 100:2 (August, 1925), 56-59, 94, 96, 98.
- ⁷³ O.M. Butler, "The Profession of Forestry and the Public Mind," *Journal of Forestry* 23:5-6 (May-June, 1925), 446-450.
- ⁷⁴ The name later was shortened to *American Forests*.
- ⁷⁵ E.T. Allen, "The Forest Pleaders," in John D. Guthrie, ed., *The Forest Ranger and Other Verse* (Boston: Richard G. Badger / Gorham Press, 1919), 163-164.
- ⁷⁶ Wallace Hutchinson, "The Guardian of Uncle Sam's Forests," *St. Nicholas* 49:9 (July, 1922), 918-921.
- ⁷⁷ U.S. Forest Service biographical file on Wallace Hutchinson, Forest History Society, Durham. N.C.
- ⁷⁸ "Forest Fires or Game," U.S. Forest Service pamphlet, n.d. [c. 1923], "Burning Over Waste Lands a Menace to Wildfowl," U.S. Department of Agriculture press release, February 14, 1923, both in Box 7 of the Aldo Leopold papers, Series 9/25/10-4, University of Wisconsin Archives, Madison.
- ⁷⁹ Wallace Hutchinson, "Trapped by the Red Terror," *St. Nicholas* 49:12 (October, 1922), 1292-1295.
- ⁸⁰ Chase S. Osborn, "The Story of a Forest Fire," *Outlook* 123:6 (October 29, 1919), 236-237.
- ⁸¹ Wallace I. Hutchinson, "Public Relations: What Have We Bought and Where Are We Headed?," *Journal of Forestry* 29:4 (April, 1931), 474-483. Another author agrees that the "timber famine" argument was used somewhat disingenuously by foresters in the 1920s and was echoed loudly by "popular writers." America would not run out of wood. Instead, as timber became more scarce, industries would substitute different materials – such as concrete, steel and, eventually, plastics – in everything from skyscrapers to automobiles. Michael Williams, *Americans and Their Forests: A Historical Geography* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 440-441.

⁸² Aldo Leopold, "Wild Followers of the Forest," *American Forestry* 29:357 (September, 1923), 515-519, 568.

⁸³ Luening, "Are the Lake States Satisfied?," 723.

⁸⁴ Gifford Pinchot, "The Blazed Trail of Forest Depletion," *American Forestry* 29:354 (June, 1923), 323-328, 374. Pinchot broke with many of his colleagues in the battle over public vs. private control of forest lands. He and others would argue that such duties were best handled by government. Miller, *Gifford Pinchot*, 289-293.

⁸⁵ Ovid Butler, "The War Against Forest Fires," *American Forests* 41:9 (September, 1935), 464-469. Butler estimated that the United States had about 600 million acres of forest land, about a third of which had no organized fire protection.

⁸⁶ "Forestry-Minded," *New York Times*, March 31, 1933.

⁸⁷ For this study, the author located and read 47 fire-related stories in *American Forestry* for 1919 and 43 in the renamed *American Forests* for 1933; as well as 25 such stories in the *New York Times* for 1919 and 50 for 1933. Many other stories for the years in between, in these and other publications, also were examined.

⁸⁸ James Hay Jr., "In the Forest," *American Forests* 37:6 (June, 1931), 326.

⁸⁹ "A Great Opportunity," *American Forests* 39:7 (July, 1933), 309.

⁹⁰ Erle Kauffman, "'Roosevelt' – Forest Camp No. 1," *American Forests* 39:6 (June, 1933), 251-254, 270.

⁹¹ Dorothy D. Bromley, "The Forestry Army That Lives by Work," *New York Times*, July 23, 1933.

⁹² "Oregon and Washington Timber," *New York Times*, January 18, 1931; "Conservation," *New York Times*, March 3, 1933.

⁹³ U.S. Forest Service, "The Forest Situation in the United States: A Special Report to the Timber Conservation Board," January 30, 1932, in Box 27, Society of American Foresters papers, Forest History Society, Durham, N.C.

⁹⁴ Williams, *Americans and Their Forests*, 481-483. Stewart Edward White, a popular novelist, had suggested the efficacy of controlled burning in a 1920 article in *Sunset* magazine, but his arguments were doused by vociferous objections from foresters. Carle, *Burning Questions*, 27-31.