

The Man Behind Dworshak Dam . . .

Curtis Eyes Future

By Don Walker



PLANES began to scan Curtis's forest areas in 1920's.



CURTIS today has modern compact aircraft to assist him in his work.



DWORSHAK DAM, now underway, has been a treasured dream of Curtis for many years.

EACH BIG project has a man who, rightly or wrongly is credited as the key reason for its being.

As the spillway of the Dworshak Dam begins to climb against the skyline near Orofino, Idaho, an uncommon man named Albert B. Curtis is certain to be counted among those who made it all possible. And, as most prime movers, Curtis assumes many roles in carrying out what he thinks is proper.

Bert Curtis comes through as clear and as crisp as the ring of an axe echoing through forest canyons.

He is a tall man whose stride belies his 63 years. Curtis wears glasses, is soft spoken, friendly and outgoing and possesses a razor sharp mind. His secret weapon is that he gets things done.

CURTIS IS the chief of the Clearwater - Potlatch Timber Protective Association which cares for the fire problems of timber owners in northern Idaho, an area which when plotted on a map looks like an oversize checkerboard.

The timber it looks after is a mixture of private and public ownership. No one owner is big enough to play Smokey the Bear in the area so the association was formed in 1905. It was unique then and it is today. Timber owners are assessed under a simple plan. The association divides the total cost of protection by total acres to get the cost per acre. Each member then pays his prorated share.

Prior to 1905, there was no state activity in forest protection, no United States Forest Service in Idaho, no one to protect the forests. This led to the formation of the Clearwater Timber Protective Association. Father of the idea was Theodore Fohl, a German immigrant.

Another milestone was paying men to fight fires. The state paid some of the

bills and the homesteaders paid some in 1905, and the association was born.

Fohl had his eye on a young fellow born in Salem, Ore., as the association began to grow. That man was Bert Curtis who received degrees at Lewiston Normal School and the University of Idaho. Curtis has been in land, forestry, water and resource management work since 1918.

Fohl retired in 1925 and Curtis was named chief two years later.

UNDER CURTIS, the association's aircraft fleet has grown faster and more capable. Three aircraft are used now by highly skilled men who know the country, something about the weather, fire occurrence, fire behavior, the terrain and routes of travel, the needs of fire crews and fire science. And nearly 3,000 miles of multipurpose roads traverse the region.

There are also many modern lookouts. Starting with a forest of unsurveyed trails and unknown wilderness, the association today looks over about a million acres of highly productive forest land.

But this is just one part of the story about the man from Orofino.

Rather than sit on his hands and wait for things to happen, Curtis helps create change if he thinks it is for the right reason.

For the last 16 years, he has been the mayor of Orofino. He is past president of the Idaho Municipal League and a director for a decade, has been director and trustee of the Western Forestry and Conservation Association for 12 years, past president of his section of the Society of American Foresters, chairman of the development and advisory committee of resources for the Nez Perce Indian tribe, a member of the University of Idaho Research Council, and has held other important posts that would take pages to detail.

The most recent is his