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THE FIRE SEASON OF 1925 IN IDAHO

By Howard R. Flint  
District Forest Inspector  
U.S. Forest Service.

Sufficient variety marked the 1925 forest-fire season in Idaho to maintain the reputation of the region for versatility in that important characteristic. Probably the most outstanding features of the season were the great number

of lightning fires and the localization of the greatest danger and the longest danger season in the extreme northwest corner of the State in the vicinity of Priest Lake. Extreme fire danger was not confined to the region alone, but the danger period there was much longer and was more acute than elsewhere. Local rains, which gave relief in July and August in other places, failed to reach the Priest Lake region.

Weather records kept at the Northern Rocky Mountain Forest Experiment Station, about thirteen miles north of the village of Priest River, indicate precipitation in the amounts tabulated below, together with the normals for the same period:

	<u>April</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>June</u>	<u>July</u>	<u>Aug.</u>	<u>Sept.</u>	<u>Total.</u>
Normal	2.05	2.19	1.70	0.96	1.12	1.68	9.74
1925	1.24	2.59	1.22	0.07	0.39	1.01	6.52
Departure From Normal	-0.81	+0.40	-0.48	-0.89	-0.73	-0.67	-3.22

From the foregoing tabulation it will be noted that spring opened very favorably with a surplus of precipitation. Rains ceased abruptly about June 20 and after that date there was a heavy deficit in precipitation in the extreme northern part of the State and less of a deficit farther south. Measurements of duff moisture content at the Experiment Station indicate that the 1924 fire-danger period was longer than the one in 1925, but that there were also more periods of relief during the season in

1924. On the whole, 1925 was a bad fire season in the Idaho Panhandle.

Violent and widely distributed lightning storms occurred on July 12 and again on July 28, and in addition there were many local lightning storms on other days, mostly in the two or three days immediately following those dates. In but one other season (1920) in the past eighteen years have so many lightning fires been reported. It was the grouping of these

fires in numbers too great for the protective organizations to handle that caused most of the losses in the Clearwater River and Priest Lake localities. The total number of lightning fires for the season (1925) is far above the the average number and is the greatest number recorded in any season.

As is usual in bad fire seasons, nearly all of the damage occurred on a few critical days. July 12 to 15 inclusive were bad days, also July 30 and 31. Probably, judging from the spread of

fires, the worst days of the entire season were August 4 and 5. Considerable research work is being done with a view to forecasting accurately the approach of "fire days" to enable protective organizations to make special preparation for them.

Research work dealing with lightning storms, weather, and fuels, in their relation to forest fires, is being continued at the Northern Rocky Mountain Experiment Station with encouraging results.

STATISTICS - STATE OF IDAHO.

Fires by Causes

Fires by Classes

	<u>1924</u>	<u>1925*</u>
Lightning	870	1625
Railroads	160	43
Camp Fires	188	92
Smokers	272	82
Brush Burning	147	65
Incendiary	23	19
Lumbering	79	44
Miscellaneous	74	20
Unknown	67	39
<b>Total -</b>	<b>1880</b>	<b>2029</b>

	<u>1924</u>	<u>1925*</u>
A -	1090	1427
B -	489	453
C -	301	149
	1880	2029
A =	1/4 acre or less.	
B =	over 1/4 acre and not more than 10 acres.	
C =	over 10 acres.	
	*-- Subject to minor corrections	

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	<u>Timber Killed</u>		<u>Young Growth</u>		<u>Damage to Logs, Improvements, etc.</u>	
	<u>M. Feet</u>	<u>B. M.</u>	<u>Killed-Acres</u>			
	<u>1924</u>	<u>1925</u>	<u>1924</u>	<u>1925</u>	<u>1924</u>	<u>1925</u>
National Forest Lands	12,000	79,335	13,500	9,143	8,600	6,530
Other Lands	17,480	30,059	10,350	3,016	74,826	3,384
<b>Totals -</b>	<b>29,480</b>	<b>109,394</b>	<b>23,850</b>	<b>12,159</b>	<b>\$83,426</b>	<b>\$9,914</b>

Final figures on the cost of suppressing fires in the 1925 season are not yet available but it is now known that the total cost is somewhat in excess of \$500,000. The total damage for the season is appraised at a little more than \$370,000. The total cost and damage are, therefore, more than

\$870,000. A new departure in the forest protection work in Northern Idaho last season was the use of airplanes in the detection and control of fires. The aerial forest-patrol work was directed by the U.S. Forest Service. The Army co-

operated to the extent of loaning planes and equipment for the work. Two DeHaviland 4 B-type planes, with Liberty 420 horse power motors, were loaned by the Army Air Service, available July 1. A third plane of the same type was added later and three planes were continued in service until September 20.

The planes were used for the detection of new fires after each lightning storm, and for the scouting of large fires on which it was difficult to secure adequate information from the ground. With a skilled pilot and observer equipped with suitable maps it was found entirely feasible to determine with sufficient accuracy the location of small fires and to make good progress maps of large fires. The information was promptly placed in the hands of the ground forces by dropping to them written notes and copies of maps made in the air. Dropped messages can be very accurately placed by skilled men at almost any camp or other habitation.

No definite statement can be made in regard to the amount of money or acres of timber saved by the work of the planes. Although they worked in competition with a highly organized lookout and ground-patrol system it is certain that the planes gave first report on twenty small fires and that they gave more or less valuable information on the progress of sixty-six large fires. There were many fires in Northern Idaho each of which in cost and damage aggregated more than the entire cost of the air patrol. If, through prompt discovery, one small fire was prevented from getting into that class, the service paid for itself.

With the beginning next season of extensive railroad construction and logging operations in the Clearwater River region a new fire danger of major importance will be introduced into the forests of Idaho. It is well known that the introduction of railroads and lumbering operations very greatly

increases the danger of fire in any forest area. This truth is clearly pictured in logged-off and burned-over areas of Pennsylvania, the Lake States, and in the logged-off portions of Idaho, most of which are now in an unproductive condition.

It is essential that the timber of this Clearwater region, doubtless the most valuable body of timber in the Northwest east of the Cascades, be logged. Much of it is mature timber for which there is a keen demand and a good market. It is good business and good forestry to log it. It will be extremely bad business for the community if it is left in a more or less devastated and unproductive condition when the logging is completed. That an area can successfully be logged in Idaho without devastation is well demonstrated by the large and important operation which has been in progress for five years on the State of Idaho lands in Big Creek near Priest River. Brush has been consistently piled and burned on this area, and no fire of consequence has resulted from the operation. The small timber and material not now merchantable remains green and growing, the basis for a second cut. The new State forestry law adopted last spring contemplates such results and provides legislative machinery to secure them. Unusual vigilance and skill on the part of officials, protective organizations, and loggers will be required to keep the Clearwater region green in spite of the added dangers introduced by lumbering.

It is most encouraging to note that in spite of the severe season the number of man-caused fires in 1925 is low. Perhaps this means that people were more careful with fire than former years. Protection forces are surely becoming stronger each year. On the whole, the outlook is encouraging but efforts must not be relaxed.