THE STORY OF SMOKEY BEAR ¹

By J. MORGAN SMITH ²

My job today, as I see it, is to tell you about our nation-wide Co-operative Forest Fire Prevention Program in which Smokey Bear figures so prominently. This is the Program conducted jointly by the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture and the State Foresters under sponsorship of The Advertising Council Inc.

We have a long history of forest fire prevention effort in the United States but only a short decade represented by what we consider real success. Let's go back a bit.

Before World War 2, forest fire prevention education work in the United States was carried on with varying degrees of intensity by many federal, state, and private organizations. Each group conducted its own individual program. Posters and other public information materials were lacking in eye appeal. Our shots were scattered and results were spotty. It took a Pearl Harbor to bring home to foresters and civic officials alike the need for a unified nation-wide program of forest fire prevention.

Within a short time after Pearl Harbor, state and federal forest protection agencies became alarmed at the rapid rate with which they were losing manpower to the Armed Services and defense plants. The securing of additional equipment for fighting forest fires or obtaining replacements for existing equipment presented a serious problem. With this decrease in manpower and equipment, foresters feared that the forest fire problem might soon get out of hand unless the American public could be awakened to the danger of forest fires and their co-operation enlisted in preventing them. After all, the forest fire problem in the United States is a man-made one; less than 10% of all forest fires are due to lightning. The other 90% or better are caused by human carelessness or indifference.

It was immediately recognized that it would be utterly impossible for forestry agencies to contact everybody on a personal basis, desirable as that would be. Therefore, the only solution was to try and get the forest fire prevention story before the public through existing channels for mass communication such as the radio, newspapers, and motion pictures.

Accordingly, in 1942, officials of the U.S. Forest Service took their problem to the Wartime Advertising Council. This group had just been organized by American business and the advertising industry for the purpose of placing the forces of advertising behind the war effort. After a thorough study of the problem, the Council agreed to help and the nation-wide Co-operative Forest Fire Prevention Program was born. In fact, it was the second program accepted by the Council. Other Council programs included scrap drives, sale of war

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bonds, blood donor programs, victory gardens, and similar projects. During World War 2, through the Council, American business contributed over one billion dollars worth of free advertising time and space in support of these public service programs. This gives you some idea of the scale on which the Council operates.

In order to get a program of forest fire prevention under way, the Council immediately assigned a leading advertising agency, Foote, Cone and Belding of Los Angeles, California, to set up a definite plan of action. The same true and tested methods of advertising used to sell oranges, toothpaste, and other commercial products were applied to this new product, forest fire prevention. Posters, car and window cards, newspaper ads, motion picture trailers and radio spots were created. Within a short time, through the co-operation of the Council, forest fire prevention messages were carried on radio network shows, in newspapers, and posters appeared in buses and streetcars throughout the country.

Public response to the plea for care in preventing forest fires was soon apparent. As in other programs dealing with the war effort, people were being told why forest fires should be prevented and what they as individuals could do about it. They soon began to lend a hand. Man-caused forest fires went steadily downward until 1945 when the number hit an all time-low of 124,728 fires nation-wide. This, compared to an average of 210,000 fires before the war, was truly a remarkable achievement.

However, one factor had to be considered. With millions of men still overseas, and public travel limited by lack of automobiles, tires, and gas, it was recognized that fewer people were using our forests. The real test would come when the country returned to normal and the public could again resume vacation trips, fishing, hunting and other outdoor recreation.

Fortunately, leaders in American business recognized the real public service value of the War Advertising Council and decided that such an organization had a place in the post-war years. The name was changed to the Advertising Council and its fine work continued. In addition to Forest Fire Prevention, present day programs of the Council include Highway Safety, Better Schools, Cancer, Religion in American Life, Civil Defense, Red Cross, Community Chest, and several others.

After our program had been in operation for a few years, the Council recommended that an animal character be developed through which we could tell the forest fire prevention story more effectively. Advertisers know that the two best attention getters are children and animals. Animals and forests were a natural combination. So, in 1944, as part of our program, a poster featuring Bambi, the deer, was used. This proved very popular. However, the Council pointed out that Bambi was not the answer. An animal was needed that could be humanized. Someone suggested trying a bear. Someone suggested the name Smokey. Someone suggested dressing the bear up as a forest ranger. Someone suggested the shovel. There were a number of people involved in the creation of Smokey Bear but officially we credit the Advertising Council and Foote, Cone and Belding with his creation.

The first Smokey Bear poster appeared in 1945 and was a huge success. Within the next year, or two, it became apparent that we had hit the "jackpot".

The growth of Smokey into a national figure was really phenomenal. Today, Smokey is recognized and accepted by the American public as the nation-wide symbol of forest fire prevention. This tremendous popularity of Smokey Bear is due in no small measure to the Advertising Council and American business. In 1954, American business contributed over \$8,000,000 worth of free advertising time and space in support of Smokey Bear and forest fire prevention. Let me give you an example of what is meant by free time and space. Each year, the transportation advertising industry contributes space during the months of April and September in 100,000 streetcars, buses, railroads and ferries in over 650 major cities throughout the country. We furnish the car cards but the space and labor involved in putting up the cards and taking them down are absolutely free. If we had to pay for this service, the cost would exceed \$500,000. Our operating budget is about \$200,000 so you can readily see how far we would get if it weren't for this wonderful help by business.

In addition, the services of Foote, Cone and Belding are free. The Council estimates the value of this advertising agency's contribution at \$40,000 per year. Foote, Cone and Belding has planned our annual program on this basis since 1942. We produce and distribute all materials such as posters, car cards, TV trailers, radio platters, newspaper ads, blotters, bookmarks, stamps, etc. However, we do not pay for space or time—that is all contributed.

In 1952, because of Smokey Bear's popularity and standing with the boys and girls of our country, Congress found it necessary to pass unanimously a special law protecting his name and character from unauthorized use or misuse. A violation of the Smokey Bear law is a violation of the U.S. Criminal Code. A most interesting feature of this law is the provision whereby the Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to issue licenses for the manufacture and sale of commercial Smokey Bear products provided (1) the product is in good taste; (2) that it carries a forest fire prevention message; and (3) that all money collected through commercial licensing is used for furthering the nation-wide Co-operative Forest Fire Prevention Program.

To date, about 30 Smokey products have been licensed including the Smokey teddy bear, wallets, belts, T-shirts, scarves, ash trays, blue jeans, hats, books, comic books, automobile cigarette snuffers, songs, records, etc. All manufacturers pay a 5% royalty on the wholesale selling price of each product. To date, royalties on the sale of Smokey merchandise have totalled over \$100,000.

Of course, the main purpose of this phase of our program is not primarily the money that can be earned. It was undertaken largely because it afforded an excellent opportunity to get into the home through the children. When you reach the children you reach the adults as I will show later on.

During the past few years, Smokey has received many honors. He is an honorary member of the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, 4-H Club, School Safety Patrol, Order of Eagles, Maryland League of Sportsmen and Oregon Green Guards. He is an honorary State Forester of Florida and honorary Fire Chief of the Washington D.C. Fire Department. Many schools have adopted him as their official mascot. Last October, the citizens of International Falls, Minnesota, built a 26-foot statue of Smokey Bear in that city.

Funds were raised through sale of Smokey Bear "booster" buttons. So much for the fanfare. What is this program actually accomplishing?

There are two measures with which we can evaluate the effectiveness of this Cooperative Program:

1. Cold blooded statistical facts.
2. Warm blooded human reactions.

First, the cold blooded statistics. For the five-year period prior to World War 2, we experienced an average of 210,000 forest fires a year with a burn of 30,000,000 acres (this is equal in size to the state of New York). For the past five years, including 1954, there was an average of 178,364 forest fires a year. Area burned last year was about 8,000,000 acres. This drop has been achieved in spite of the fact that human use of forested areas has increased 100% over that of pre-war levels. Historically in the United States, up until 1942, the more people in the woods, the more forest fires. This is not true today. If there had been no improvement in this respect, we would probably be experiencing over 300,000 forest fires a year based on pre-war trends. Since 1942, we have had some of the worst fire weather ever, so the improvement has not been due to lessened fire danger. Incidentally, this improvement has not been due solely to the Smokey Bear Program. Much of the credit must go to the state Keep Green Programs sponsored by the American Forest Products Industries and similar local programs. However, through the channels for mass communication which have been made available to the Smokey Bear Program by the Advertising Council, the American public is seeing, hearing, and reading more about the need for preventing forest fires than ever before.

Now for the warm blooded human reactions to Smokey and his message.

Two years ago, we started the Smokey Bear Junior Forest Rangers. Membership is open to any boy or girl who takes the Conservation Pledge and who promises to help Smokey prevent forest fires. Each member receives a personal letter from Smokey, membership card, certificate, blotter, bookmark, copy of the Smokey The Bear song, and stamps. Largely as a result of this project, Smokey receives over 1,000 letters and cards a day. He has received as high as 4,500 letters and cards in a single day. Although most of Smokey's mail comes from boys and girls, you would be surprised at the number of letters received from parents telling about Smokey's influence on their children and how in turn the youngsters are making them toe the mark in practicing fire safety.

These few letters will give you some idea of Smokey's power:

One father, writing about his son said, "Smokey is surely his favorite with fire prevention rules fully followed. In fact, we're scarcely allowed to light a cigarette or strike a match even in the house. Yours is a commendable project!"

A mother wrote: "Enclosed is a card for one Junior Forest Ranger kit for Leslie who is nine years old. It was for his birthday party that I bought a Smokey Teddy Bear. Leslie takes Smokey with him everywhere, even to school, and all the children in his room made drawings of Smokey.

"Now this is what I would like to tell you. Leslie is as rough and tough as any little nine year old and he doesn't like to go to school or do his lessons, but since Smokey came, he has been writing stories about Smokey.

"I think it is well worth the price to see Leslie try to write and spell. I am

sending you part of a story he tried to write and also a drawing. It's badly spelled, but to us it's wonderful because it is the first time he has ever tried without a fuss so you can see why we are so pleased with Smokey."

A little girl informed Smokey: "I am helping you prevent forest fires by watching my daddy when we are out riding in my car. If my daddy throws a cigarette out the window, I fine him 10c, but if we are near a woods, I fine him 25c. My daddy is using his ashtray quite a bit now."

A recent letter read as follows: "Dear Smokey: Mommy is writing this letter for me because I would like to be a Junior Forest Ranger. My name is Barry Witner and I am two years old. My cousin was also a member of your club and a very faithful one. Sorry to say he passed away one month ago from leukemia. His name was Rodney Sharp, five years old and he took Smokey the teddy bear to heaven with him as he slept with him every night. I hope you will send me a card as I want to help you as my cousin Rodney did."

Smokey ends his letter to the Junior Forest Rangers as follows: "Remember—every forest fire we stop now means more trees, water and wildlife, and outdoor playgrounds for you in the years ahead!

"Ask your teacher why this is true. Let's go, Ranger!"

We know that the youngsters are taking Smokey's letter to heart. Each day's mail brings an increasing number of requests from teachers for materials. It is interesting to note that in addition to forest fire prevention material, they are asking for material on forest conservation in general. It is our feeling that in the years ahead, through Smokey, we are going to sell forest conservation as well as fire prevention to the American public. For example, the new Smokey Bear comic book has stories on wildlife management and watershed management in addition to forest fire prevention.

A recent newspaper editorial on Smokey closed with this paragraph:

"We think you're going at this thing the right way Smokey. Win the admiration and sympathy of the boys and girls. Once you've educated them, you have a lot of the battle won for they will grow up to be your friends and helpers. When they learn that a forest fire not only kills game but destroys resources and eventually impoverishes a country they will do something about it, Smokey."

DISCUSSION

FOLLOWING PAPERS BY DR. G. W. I. CREIGHTON AND MR. J. M. SMITH

J. L. VanCamp:

We in Canada have been very interested in having a Canadian forest fire symbol such as Smokey Bear. Mr. Beall was formerly the chairman of a national committee on forest fires of the National Research Council. I had the privilege of speaking to this committee last spring of the possibilities in this connection. The committee were favorably impressed, but as yet there has been very little progress. We can either borrow the Smokey Bear campaign from the United States or have a 100 per cent Canadian campaign. Eight or nine suggestions are being investigated—ranging from Smokey Bear to a typical freckle-faced Canadian boy.

G. W. Mundy:

In your Smokey Bear campaigns do you find it of advantage to relate any

statistical facts with Smokey in your advertising, or is Smokey related to fire prevention only in a general way?

Smith:

No, in the comic books and other publications about Smokey, facts are given. We publish a book of statistics which is included in our kit for advertising agencies. In other publicity we try to present the facts and figures in a readable way.

G. A. Kingston:

I am glad to hear that Nova Scotia has a program to reduce the number of fires caused by blueberry pickers. Once an area has been burned, people are inclined to want to keep it that way, as the blueberries are much more plentiful on burned-over land. Mr. Creighton also expressed the hope that people who start forest fires will someday become recognized as social outcasts. I don't think this is going to be too easy nor too desirable. I consider fires in the city pretty much in the same light as those in the bush. They are accidents. Take the man who burns down a house accidentally and three or four people are killed by the fire. Perhaps he was careless, but he is not considered a criminal. I think the Smokey Bear approach is a good one to win public opinion over to the importance of preventing these fires from starting.

Smith:

In the Southern United States incendiary fires are a big problem. Twenty years ago if a ranger were to take a man to court for setting a forest fire the case would likely be thrown out. Now public opinion is changing and there are more convictions.

E. H. Garman:

In British Columbia last year most of the 764 fires were ascribed to campers, whereas in the past years smokers have been the main cause. The reason for this shift in causes is that last year was quite wet in British Columbia with the result that campers became more careless. I am sorry that we do not have a representative here from the protection staff of the British Columbia Forest Service, as we have what we consider to be a first rate protection service. I might mention that in our Forest Service we have a meteorologist who has been loaned to us by the Department of Transport. He gives us our long range weather forecasts. He is also doing research work in lightning fires. A study was made on the effects of freezing on hazard sticks. Some of the industrial users of these sticks have been in the habit of getting them out before the freezing weather is over. It was found that the freezing made no difference. They also tried out the value of quarter-inch hazard sticks but found they were not satisfactory as the weathering factor was too high. They used three-inch sticks in an effort to measure the build-up of hazard in the larger materials on cut-over areas. The results of this study have been delayed due to the lack of high hazard periods during the past two years. In British Columbia the demand for a fire danger index has grown. There were 500 sets of sticks in use last year, three-quarters of which were used by the industry. Another feature of our service which may not be unique but which is of interest, perhaps, is that there were sixteen fire suppression crews, each of ten men, used last year. They were placed in positions where fires were likely to occur—within reach of roads. They were able to attack 83 fires, which remained under five acres in extent.