THE ORGANIZATION AND INTEGRATION OF INDUSTRIAL AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES FOR FIRE CONTROL IN MANAGED FOREST UNITS

The following three articles were presented as part of a panel discussion at the 1959 Annual Meeting of the Canadian Institute of Forestry at Prince George, B.C. The chairman was **R. G. McKee**, Deputy Minister of Forests of the Province of British Columbia. Speakers were **M. G. Isenor**, **J. A. D. McDonald**, and **W. B. Gayle**.

THE PRE-TRAINING OF FIRE SUPPRESSION PERSONNEL

By **M. G. ISENROR**¹

If we picture very briefly the sequence of events on a small fire which develops into a big fire, perhaps we will get an insight into the value of trained personnel. Let us consider that the hazard is high and a fire is reported by a lookout early in the morning. A sawmill is operating not far from the fire and the Ranger takes the sawmill crew, logging crew and tractors with him to the fire. The fire is hot and spreading fairly rapidly on the ground. It is apparent that the present crew cannot handle the fire and 50 men and two tractors are requested by radio. They arrive early in the afternoon and by early evening the fire is surrounded and slop-overs and spot fires are being controlled. Just about now, a wind comes up, the fire crowns and runs two miles before the Ranger can throw his hard hat down and jump on it.

This fire has now reached the point which most fire fighters remember best and refer to when they are telling their friends about it later. I'm sure you've all heard phrases such as "you've never seen such a mixed up mess!" or "That Ranger didn't know whether he was coming or going." I think the term *organized confusion* describes it best because although confusion reigns for a time, organization grows out of it remarkably quickly.

Up until the fire escapes, every minute and all energy has been devoted to fire suppression. The fire is relatively small and compact, the original crew is still working, the fire has only been burning a short time so that no supply shortage has developed. By pushing himself hard, the Ranger has been able to direct the Cats, place the fire fighters, tell them briefly what to look for and do and direct the fire fighting along the line. He has not taken time to get other men to do these jobs for him because he cannot take the time to explain the work to anyone else. He is gambling that the fire can be held during the first work period and it is a good gamble normally since a very small percentage of fires do manage to escape.

The test of good organization is the ability to expand from an initial attack crew to a 300-400 man crew smoothly.

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One man cannot accomplish this—a large supervisory staff is necessary.

To get back to our fire: 1. Everyone has been working hard for a long time (the Ranger, harder than anyone) and when the fire gets away, a terrific "let-down" results. 2. The men remember that they have only had one meal of sandwiches that day; they want and need a hot meal. 3. The men are tired and begin to think about blankets for the night. 4. The Cats are out of fuel and one has broken down—a welder is required.

In short, everyone on the fire has a problem or a requirement and each individual wants action from the Ranger on his problem right now. Thus there is confusion.

Now just what kind of an organization is needed—how many key men are involved?

The positions above the dotted line may be considered of prime importance and the value of having pre-trained men available to fill them is obvious. When you are choosing your men for the various positions, you will of course place them where their knowledge is of most benefit. You will for instance employ a man who has worked with tractors and knows their requirements as Machine Boss. The training they require, then, will not be in the fundamentals of their jobs, but in organization and procedures on a fire—time keeping, ordering supplies and equipment, etc.

The Forest Service cannot provide sufficient men to fill these positions so they must be drawn from the ranks of the reliable fire fighters—in other words, the Forest Industry. What problems are there to overcome in setting up a co-operative plan and how can we best go about training?

I don't feel that there are too many great problems—certainly none that cannot be overcome since the Industry here has already exhibited a great deal of co-operation along these lines.

I think the prime requirement is a series of informal meetings between Industry and the Forest Service, to familiarize each with the concerns and difficulties of the other. It would not take many meetings to convince everyone that both groups are composed of reasonable people willing to compromise and work together on a common problem.

As far as the mechanics of training are concerned, the foundation has already been laid in this area with the inception of the Fire Control Course in Prince George last winter. The response was excellent and a very good program was presented. I think that a specialized series of training courses could be given, in conjunction with the main course, dealing with the details of the individual key positions. Arrangements could also be made to move personnel onto any large fire that occurred for *short* periods of on-the-ground observation. To keep everyone up to date with new procedures and developments, regular meetings at reasonable intervals could be held in the Ranger Districts.