

Use of Telephone Lines in Fighting Fire

(From American Forestry.)

In fire-fighting a minute may mean millions. To realize the truth of this statement one has only to inspect a trained fire department, used to guard the lives and property, in any city. Most of us are more or less familiar with their time-saving devices; we have admired the splendid horses taught by months of patient labor to spring to their places at the sound of the gong, have seen them harnessed to the truck in the time it takes to press a button, and have observed men drop to their places from the floor above. All this training and expense to save a minute's time in the battle against the fire-demon, in a city where man has used his utmost ingenuity to build so as to thwart the ravages of this element.

Compared with such a well organized system the (U. S.) Forest Service methods seem crude indeed. One man with an axe and shovel guards from 100,000 to 200,000 acres of timberland, worth from \$500,000 to \$5,000,000. In the greater part of these forests nature seems to have invited their destruction by strewing the ground with a carpet of dry leaves and resinous needles, and covering the branches and trunks with moss that, when dry, burns almost as quickly as gunpowder. For one man to attempt, single-handed, to check a conflagration under such circumstances seems worse than foolhardy; and yet, let it be told to the credit of the tribe who wear the Forest Service badge, that when necessity demands they pit their strength and cunning against the flames, and sometimes, aided by night dews and bulldog endurance, win out. The Forest Service records could reveal many such cases of which the public has never heard. It is only when

the battle has been lost and the fire becomes a public menace that the matter gets into print.

It is obvious that chances are all against conquering a fire of any magnitude under these conditions; consequently, every human endeavor is used to prevent the starting of such conflagrations. During the dry summer months a ranger's waking hours are spent in patrolling the routes frequented by travelers, to extinguish neglected camp-fires, and in searching his district with a field glass from some lookout point, to detect the first faint column of smoke that means the beginning of a forest fire.

With so much territory to cover, it is a physical impossibility to have all parts of the district under his supervision at all hours of the day. There will come a time when several fires will start at once. The causes are various; sometimes they are set by lightning from the electrical storms that are common in a mountainous country; more often they are due to carelessness of campers or tourists; occasionally they are started wantonly by some person who objects to the arm of the law, as represented by the forest ranger, reaching back into the wild places; again, it may be that an unextinguished match, or a spark from a pipe or cigarette is dropped in the dry humus, as the hunter or prospector wanders in places remote from the generally traveled trails. The spark ignites the slow-burning duff, which smoulders perhaps for days unseen, the thin smoke being lost in the blue of the spruce tops above it; slowly it burns its way to the resinous roots or mossy trunk of some conifer; the mountain breeze fans it to a flame;