

The Fire Fighter's Profession

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The modern forest officer, whether ranger or firewarden, is accorded great respect and responsibility because of his highly trained and specialized public service. Few men except naval and aviation officers, who also must combine practical experience with technical knowledge and trained intelligence, are expected to be so proficient with hand and mind alike. Out of a service which a few years ago was not even skilled labor, and was assigned to any inhabitant of a forest region, has developed a profession of forest fire prevention which requires all the abilities of a thorough woodsman, knowledge of many engineering sciences, successful command of men, and a talent for law enforcement and enlisting public co-operation.

This new profession has been able to develop largely because improved organization of private and public fire forces has created both rivalry and co-operation among those with joint problems to solve. It has been stimulated by the very fascination to an active and inventive class of men of its ever-widening field, challenging them to devise new methods and equipment and to keep abreast of invention in other fields in order that such may be seized and adapted. Telephony, heliography, meteorology, aviation, topography, range-finding—these are but some of the sciences which have been made part of methods for detecting and controlling forest fires, to say nothing of the mechanical perfection of equipment and the systematizing of feeding, transporting and handling men under the most adverse circumstances. To educate the public into greater care with fire, new trails have been blazed into the fields of psychology and publicity. The technique of forest legislation and the processes of enforcement is an essential knowledge. Finally, there is the actual fighting of fire, never the same, defying all rules, profiting by all previous experience but calling always for new and decisive reasoning.

Ranger Specialists

The most rapid development of fire prevention knowledge will be obtained by the engaging of each officer in specialized study of the subjects which interest him most, and his contribution of the results to his colleagues at meetings and in reports. But the development of maximum efficiency in actual field application requires that every officer study the progress along all lines. As the successful surgeon or engineer keeps abreast of everything done in his profession, from time to time adding his bit, so does the successful forest officer. It is this spirit which advances the profession in value and public estimation, thereby insuring its support, and which increases the opportunity of each individual member to gain reputation and financial return.

Relation to Public

Much has been said of the proper relation of the forest officer to the public. As a rule greatest stress is laid on his personal relations. He is enjoined to be tactful and helpful; to educate his neighbors in the importance of forest protection to every citizen, to reduce fire hazard so as to have fewer fires to fight, to teach compliance with law so punishment will be unnecessary, to be popular in order to win voluntary co-operation. All of which is so well recognized nowadays as important that few if any forest officers need it repeated to them. None know it better than they do. Enough is seldom said, however, of the assistance in gaining such community influence which lies in making the job stand for the professional competence described in the foregoing pages.

People respect, and usually admire, a man who has authority because he understands a difficult subject. No matter how superior the passenger may