

Fire Menace to State Forests Held in Check by Telephones

Used by Rangers for Contacts With Fire-Fighting Forces Stationed at Strategic Points in 26,000 Square Mile Area

In the big task of protecting 26,000 square miles of forest in the state from fire, the telephone plays an exceedingly vital role, according to Kinne F. Williams, Supervisor of Forest Fire Control of the New York Conservation Department.

"Modern forest fire control practice is dependent upon swift communication," Mr. Williams explains. "And nothing but the telephone provides this."

"A forest fire breaks out deep in the woods. From his watch tower on a hilltop, perhaps miles away, an observer sees the smoke. Before him is a map.

"It is the duty of the New York Conservation Department to protect 26,000 square miles of forest from fire. Without the telephone, its work would be slow, fires would spread further and a vast acreage of forest would be lost."

"From early Spring, before the snow has entirely disappeared, until Fall, when it has returned, men are on duty on sixty-seven of the prominent peaks scattered through the forested area of the State, watching night and day for a light, or a hazy finger of smoke, to point out the location of an uncontrolled forest blaze. Comfortably protected from biting winds in a glass en-



Typical fire observation tower used by State forest rangers. Upper left: Ranger with telephone in observatory.

In a moment he has judged the approximate location of the blaze. He telephones and instantly the fire-fighting force at the other end of the line is on its way to the scene of the trouble.

"Let us suppose the telephone never had been invented. What would the towerman do after discovering a fire? He might send up a flare, fire off a gun or set out for the nearest settlement by whatever means of locomotion might be at his disposal. In any of these events there would be great uncertainty. The flare might not be seen, the gun might not be heard, or his journey to the nearest settlement might be long and slow."

"The telephone is heard because there is always someone there listening for its ring. There is, it is true, a chance that it might fail in an emergency, but it seldom does. The fire might be along the line of the telephone wire and break off communication. That has happened, but in such cases, usually the next observation station has also seen the blaze, with the result that the message gets through anyhow."

"In the last Summer the New York State Conservation Department has added an airplane to its fire detection service. The plane may fly over areas in which observers are few and far apart, detect blazes out of sight of the observer. But here again, the telephone plays its part, because the aviator, until a two-way radio system is installed on his plane, which has not been done as yet, flies on to the nearest emergency landing field and from there telephones his fire news."

closed shelter raised on steel frame work above all obstructions, the observer may stay at his post even when flames are close to him. His range of vision extends for many miles. He has on his shelf a strong field glass, which extends his view even further. Most important of all, at his elbow is a telephone.

"He must be able to distinguish an innocent campfire from a conflagration. Any smoke, however, draws his gaze and he keeps on watching it, waiting to see if it is spreading. If it remains steady he dismisses it from his mind. If, however, the smoke grows just a little denser, or a flash of flame appears, his hand reaches for the telephone.

"Scattered through the forests are nearly 100 rangers, each with his station and telephone. Under their jurisdiction, to be called if needed, are 2,000 fire wardens, each also with his telephone. At all headquarters are shovels, hoes and hose. Through the forests are streams, and where there are none, water holes have been dug near springs, which are usually water filled. At many headquarters there are automobiles, equipped with fire fighting apparatus. Some have gasoline pumps."

"Within a few minutes after receiving a message that a fire is raging, a ranger may summon his wardens by telephone and then drive off in his truck to pick them up or to meet them if they have apparatus of their own. They are on their way to the fire with almost the speed of a city fire department."

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Hints For Homemakers
By Jane Rogers



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