

COMMUNITY RALLIED IN FIGHT TO QUELL 1964 FOREST FIRES 8/27/96

Fortunately, we do not suffer the same conditions that precipitate the violent firestorms so common to the western states. The potential exists, but we are seldom faced with the almost yearly dilemma they confront.

The last woods closure I remember was in 1964, from July 3 to July 14 and again from October 17 to November 20. The first period was punctuated with several small ground fires smoldering away in the duff and leaf litter. Three more dramatic fires preceded the closure on October 17.

A fire destroyed the Sam Hill Camp on Little Moose Lake on August 10. The following afternoon a forest fire was discovered on Rose Mountain overlooking First Bisby Lake. This proved to be the most challenging fire I have ever been involved in.

Prolonged dry weather, dense spruce fir cover and high winds all contributed to make the above statement a fact. Its location on the top of the mountain, on the far side of the lake, at the end of a steep foot trail helped clinch it.

By the time men and tools were able to reach the fire, it was late in the day and it was growing by leaps and bounds. The dense cover made it almost impossible to cut a fire line. The one tool we desperately needed was late in arriving on the scene. The tool was a chain saw and they were nowhere near as prevalent or as dependable as they are today. The first two saws to arrive on the scene both met an ignominious fate. The chain came off of the first saw and no wrench was available to put it back on the bar. Saw number two was finished on the first pull when the rewind rope broke. In those days we had one saw in the district to be shared by seven Rangers. Needless to say, it was never where it was needed.

The wind would gust and the fire crowned toward the line and everyone had to run for cover. We had holes burnt in our clothing and six of us were treated the following day for inflammation of the eyes. The first Indian backpack of water never reached the fire. We drank it.

Eventually, we began to prevail when enough men and equipment joined the fray. The biggest help arrived along with a cold front that roared in close to 4 a.m. It was a thunderous downpour that drenched both men and flames.

A third woods fire near Carter on September 14, was the last fire on any significance. It was in spruce and balsam slash, but quick detection and response from the Old Forge Fire Department made short work of a serious situation.

Rene Heroux had three pieces of heavy equipment near the fire that sped up the fire line construction.

Outstanding cooperation between the fire services and the public all combined to effectively check any more outbreaks.

History repeats itself, so we are sure to face similar conditions and just as surely the community will respond. The new technology and the same spirit will be there to counter it when it happens.