



Protecting National Forests National Importance

1942



Albert Staehle draws the first Smokey

1944



Young Bear Cub found alive in Tree & named "Smokey Bear"

1950

First Wartime Slogan – BAMBI



1943

Changed Slogan to: Remember... Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires."



1947

The Story of Smokey Bear— the longest running public service advertising campaign in U.S. history!

by Catherine Koele, Wisconsin DNR Wildfire Prevention Specialist



In the spring of 1942 during the Second World War, shells from a Japanese submarine exploded close to the Los Padres National Forest in Southern California. Forestry officials were afraid that future attacks might start widespread forest fires. Protecting national forests became a matter of national importance because firefighters and able-bodied men were overseas fighting the war. As a result, the USDA Forest Service organized the Cooperative Forest Fire Prevention Campaign with the help of the Wartime Advertising Council.

At first, wartime slogans such as "Forest Fires Aid the Enemy" were used on forest fire prevention posters. In 1943, Walt Disney gave permission to use the image of "Bambi" on fire prevention posters for one year. The "Bambi" poster was a success and proved that using an animal as a fire prevention symbol worked.

On August 9, 1944, a bear was picked as the nation's number one firefighter. Illustrator Albert



Steve Nelson and Jack Rollins wrote a song

1952



Smokey Bear died

1976



Celebrated 65th Birthday - New Slogan "Get Your Smokey On" Smokey's image computer enhanced

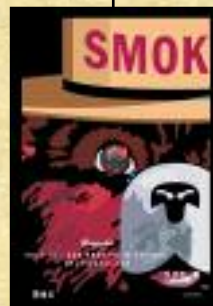
2009

20 cent Stamp made in Smokey's Honor



1960

Changed slogan to "Only You Can Prevent Wildfires."



2001

Stahle draws the first Smokey. Posters and various prevention materials were sent all around the country promoting fire prevention with "Smokey" as the new mascot. The bear was named after "Smokey" Joe Martin the former assistant fire chief of the New York City Fire Department. The campaign's original catch phrase was "Smokey Says—Care Will Prevent 9 out of 10 Forest Fires." However in 1947, it was changed to "Remember... Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires."

During the spring of 1950 in the Lincoln National Forest of New Mexico, a wildfire was started by someone who was careless with a match, cigarette, or campfire. A young bear cub found himself caught in the burning fire. He took refuge in a tree, and while managing to stay alive, his paws and hind legs were badly burned. Warden Ray Bell, one of the firefighters who retrieved him was so moved by the little bear's bravery; he named him "Hotfoot Teddy" but then soon after renamed him "Smokey Bear" after the bear in the national campaign posters.

News about this real bear named Smokey spread across the nation, and he was soon given a new home at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. The living symbol of Smokey Bear, he played an important role in spreading messages of wildfire prevention and

forest conservation. To promote the fire prevention message, the real "Smokey" bear cub made several stops on his way to Washington D.C. where he eventually made his home at the National Zoo. Smokey died in 1976 and was returned to Capitan, New Mexico, where he is buried in the State Historical Park.

As a result of the publicity and success of the campaign, Congress soon after passed the Smokey Bear Act taking him and his saying "Only you can prevent forest fires" out of public domain and placed them under the Department of Agriculture, the National Association of State Foresters and the Ad Council. The Act provided for the use of collected royalties to help fund forest fire prevention and to protect Smokey's image from exploitation.

In 1952, Steve Nelson and Jack Rollins wrote a song, which to this day has created much confusion with his real name; in order to maintain the correct rhythm, the writers added the word "the" between "Smokey" and "Bear." Smokey's true name is "Smokey Bear" however the song refers to him as "Smokey the Bear."

In the 1960's, Smokey's popularity grew with children as they continued to visit him at the zoo and



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write letters to him. In fact, he even had his own address and zip code established. Costumes were made and birthday celebrations occurred on every August 9th. Even a 20-cent postage stamp was made in his honor.

Smokey has had great success over the years, educating the public on preventing fires; almost too much success. Most recently in 2001, Smokey changed his famous slogan again from "Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires" to "Only You Can Prevent Wildfires." This change helped differentiate between the good fires vs. the bad fires. The vast, sweeping wildfires of 150 years ago have been significantly decreased. As a result, resource managers are forced to use fire on a much smaller scale to mimic the historical benefits of these burns. Prescribed burning is the use of fire under specified conditions. With proper timing, prescribed burning controls many undesirable woody plants and herbaceous weeds, while stimulating desirable plants, improving wildlife habitat, and reducing the potential of property damaging wildfires.


Smokey has been making appearances nationally in Wisconsin at local fairs and parades for decades. In 2009, he celebrated his 65th birthday with a new campaign, "Get Your Smokey On." The campaign targets those who may be presented with situations where a fire could potentially start to take the necessary and responsible steps in preventing that ignition from happening. Even Smokey's image has been computer enhanced to reflect a more modern and technologically advanced Smokey that children of the video game era can better relate to.

Being the third most nationally recognized character behind Mickey Mouse and Santa Claus, Smokey Bear continues to bring his fire prevention message to stewards of our natural resources at any age. While his image and famous saying may have slightly changed over the years, the message of personal responsibility remains the same. For more information on ways you can prevent wildfires, visit Smokey's website at

www.smokeybear.com or check the fire danger in Wisconsin, visit www.dnr.wi.gov/forestry/fire. ▲



SPARK YOUR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WILDFIRE PREVENTION



- Always operate with a proper UL approved spark arrester
- Keep your machine well-maintained and free of debris
- Perform welding, grinding, and refueling on mineral soil
- Have a fire extinguisher, it could make all the difference!

For the local fire danger, visit dnr.wi.gov/forestry/fire

