



# National Museum of Forest Service History Newsletter

Volume 17, Number 4

November 2005

## THE GREAT NEW ENGLAND HURRICANE OF 1938 Forest Service Assistance in Time of Disaster

**By Jack A. Godden**

*Graduate of New York State College of Forestry, Syracuse 1951 . Forest Service career 1954 thru 1987 on Cherokee, Cumberland, Monongahela, White Mountain, Shasta Trinity National Forests and Director Aviation & Fire Management Region 9, Milwaukee, WI. Godden now lives in Fox Point, WI.*

Editor's Note: Many Forest Service employees are now involved in assisting Gulf coast communities to recover from hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma. This wasn't the first response, hence the Godden article.

On September 21, 1938 one of the most destructive and powerful storms of the century slammed ashore at Suffolk County, Long Island, New York, across the "Sound", then into Milford, Connecticut. It did not weaken as it tore its way northward into New England, causing the deaths of 564 people and at least 1,700 personal injuries. A total of 8,900 homes and buildings were destroyed, over 15,000 damaged. Its coast and harbors were pounded, 2,605 boats destroyed, 3,369 damaged. Storm tides, from 14' to 25', submerged downtown Providence, Rhode Island. Sustained winds of 121 miles per hour with peak gust of 186 miles per hour were recorded.

Rainfall across the Connecticut Valley ranged from 10 to 17



**Breadtry Trail, Mt Ocoala.** Cleared by CCC. White Mountain National Forest, New Hampshire Oct. 1938 (WMNF Photo)

inches, causing walls of water 6 to 19.4 feet above flood stages in cities along the river. Windfall damaged over 600,000 acres of New England forests, the most severe damage in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. The news of the disaster and calls for assistance was sent by wire services and radio. These were the days of the Great Depression with families stressed by unemployment hardships. The WPA (Works Progress Administration) and the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) provided employment for thousands of people.

State Foresters, Town Committees, and lumbermen pinpointed the Forest Service as the most logical agency to coordinate, direct and handle the hazard reduction and salvage operations. Neither the Secretary of Agriculture nor the Forest Service had authority to borrow money, however the Surplus Commodities Corporation, a corporate agency of the Department of Agriculture, did and a special subdivision — the Northeastern Timber Salvage Administration (NETSA) was created to meet the emergency. The job was delegated to the Secretary of Agriculture, from him to the Chief of the Forest Service, Ferdinand Silcox. Earl S. Pierce of the Division of State and Private Forestry lead the Forest Service effort, followed by J.F. Campbell, who closed the Boston office January 30, 1943.

In mid October, 1938, Epehe Olliver had five years of "Rangering" under his belt on the newly established Cumberland National Forest in Kentucky before his transfer to the Greenbrier Ranger District on the Monongahela in West Virginia in July 1938. Forest Supervisor Arthur Wood told Olliver to pack his bag and leave for Boston. He did not return from this assign-

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### Museum Gift Ideas

Museum Membership

Camp Cooking,  
100 Years Cook-  
book

Museum Poster



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A Nonprofit Corporation

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The *Newsletter* is published quarterly for the members and supporters of the National Museum of Forest Service History, a non-profit corporation dedicated to preserving the history of the USDA Forest Service.

Individual	\$30
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Lifetime	\$1,000

**Membership Categories**

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## From The President

The 2005 Forest Service Retirees Reunion, held in September in Portland, Oregon, was a wonderful event and a fitting tribute to the Forest Service Centennial Celebration. Chief Dale Bosworth deserves great credit for the role he has played in recounting the agency's history thru the DVD's, books, seminars, and live exhibits that utilized Forest Service employees demonstrating various natural resource management activities on the National Mall in Washington D.C. during the Smithsonian's Fourth of July celebration and at various other locations across America.

The outstanding success of the Centennial Celebration provides a clear message of public support for the development of the National Museum of Forest Service History. The annual meeting of the Museum Board of Directors was held in Portland to a large crowd of retirees and Forest Service leadership that included Chief Dale Bosworth and Deputy Chief National Forest System Joel Holtrop.

Max Peterson introduced Bob Model, President of the Boone and Crocket Club who will serve with Max as co-chair for the National Museum Capital Campaign. Financial support will be solicited from national and local natural resource related industries, business leaders, organization foundations, and research and cooperative forestry user groups.

The most important supporters are Forest Service people both active and retired. Forest Service visible leadership, support and active financial participation in support of the Museum are vital to its success. Although financial and other resources vary, everyone should participate at some level. The museum is registered as a 501(C)3 by the IRS so all donations are tax deductible as allowed by law.

The capital campaign goal is approximately \$3 Million for planning and constructing a building and infrastructure and \$1 Million for an endowment to assure financing for a small staff of trained museum officials to manage the complex. The museum effort is designed to complement and not supercede other local or regional museums.

Much progress is being made and I thank all members for assisting us in completing a successful capital campaign.

Sincerely,  
Gray Reynolds

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## Year-End Donations Needed

Max Peterson and Bob Model announced the start of the Museum capital campaign at the Portland Reunion this last September. The goal of our capital campaign is to raise \$3 million needed for construction and \$1 million for endowment. Funding the on-going operations of the national Museum of Forest Service History (NMFSH) during the capital campaign is challenging.

The on-going operations of NMFSH museum programs and membership services require about \$75,000 annually. The major expenses are: Curator \$25,000; Office/Mail/Copying \$4,000; Utilities \$3,600; Insurance \$2,000; Membership Services \$2,500 and the maintenance of the Museum site \$2,000. Dues and donations support museum operations.

In 2005 we have made significant strides. Curator Beth Humble along with several volunteers made good progress cataloging the historic items donated to the museum. Once cataloged, computers can aid our search for valuable historical information. We opened the Bungalow cabin to visitors and sponsored an evening public program about a 1915 era Ranger complete with horse and mule. In addition, we supported the effort to begin the capital campaign.

Consider making a tax-deductible donation to the NMFSH if you haven't this year. We thank all the members who have made unrestricted donations and capital campaign donations. As a 501(c)(3) organization, your contributions are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

Thanks to all members for helping to preserve and interpret the conservation history of our nation.

ment until September 1941.

The earlier 3.6 billion board feet timber damage estimate for the hurricane was revised to 2.6 billion board feet with a professional assumption that: "nearly 70% or 1.6 billion board feet (enough to build a half million dwellings) could be salvaged provided it could be processed before the values were wiped out by decay or insects". Or it could be burned up in potential forest fires. Immediately that fall and winter the Fire Hazard Reduction program begun - Olliver's first assignment was working with local and State officials in Putnam, Connecticut. With the hazard reduction work was the salvage of merchantable logs and products. NESTA purchased logs directly from private landowners and contracted sawmills to process the logs.

Olliver said "labor for the work at the start was WPA laborers, since we had not received any money from Congress. Later, with funds, there would be twenty-man crews and fifty-man Forest Service crews and camps." Olliver was glad to have the WPA laborers put to work "benefiting the towns and townspeople. Permission was needed from each landowner before doing any work. Because of the large size of the damaged trees this was no problem". The first winter WPA crews, "piled and burned" slash. By March, 1939, over 16,000 WPA. and 5,000 CCC enrollees were working on Hazard Reduction. With the number of resulting axe cuts and personal injuries by inexperienced woods workers Olliver was selected as a Safety Officer. After three moves in Connecticut, with thought of some permanence, he moved his furniture (and family) to Newton, Massachusetts from Durbin, WV.

"When the flow of blood from axe cuts had been stemmed, next came the chemical burns at sawmills. There were 270 sawmills in operation, some dip vat operators were not following instructions, rubber gloves were not being used, with bare hands and the solution was running down their arms, burning the skin and causing huge blisters". Olliver designed a new Safety Poster: "Failure to Obey Safety Instructions Will Result In Dismissal"; it quickly resolved the safety issue.

How to sell 250 million board feet of air-dried lumber produced by the 270 mills became the problem in early 1939. It had to be graded to meet Northeastern White Pine Lumber Manufacturers' Association standards. Ephe was assigned as Training Officer to qualify lumber graders. He used a 50-man Hazard Reduction camp in Lempster, New Hampshire for the training site. He and one professional grader set up a training outline for groups of ten graders every two weeks, then ten graders in one week became possible, until 90 graders were certified by an Association Grader. "In small concentration yards, working 24 hours a day with two graders for each 8-hour shift —



**North South Road Following Pulpwood Removal, May 1939, White Mountain National Forest, NH**  
(WMNF Photo)

not only would these graders handle the 250 million board feet now ready but also the remainder of the total 600 million board feet that was salvaged."

Within two years the Hazard Reduction and Salvage were complete, sawmills were finally finishing up except for a few ponds in New Hampshire with 13 million board feet of logs in storage. "The wood borer had ruined all the logs not salvaged. You could hear them boring in the logs. With the War coming on and a ready market for all the lumber; it (the 600 million board feet of lumber) did save the lumber market in New England. No large fires developed with the Hazard Reduction. It helped timberland owners get a reasonable price for their logs. It provided jobs for laborers and the CCC for the duration. The project was completely justified and not too many things were done wrong". In September 1941 Olliver was transferred to the Cumberland National Forest as a member of the Supervisor's Staff with headquarters in Stearns, KY.

The summary prepared by NETSA in July 1943 listed 651 million board feet of wood products salvaged — nearly 89 million sold in the form of logs, 533 million sawn and marketed as lumber and 30 million feet of pulpwood sold. Over eight million dollars were paid 13,000 landowners, mostly farmers, for their logs. The government received \$15,000,000 from sale of logs and lumber. NESTA salvage and hazard reduction costs totalled \$16,269,300. "Woodlots were left in better condition for growing future crops, provided jobs for many persons other than landowners, gave a boost to the economy when business was at a low ebb, provided seasoned lumber needed and were used in the country's preparation for war."

*References: Personal interview and memoirs - "Reflections of My Life as a Forester" by Ephe M. Olliver; and archival records of the Forest History Society and Harvard Forest. (Additional 1938 Hurricane facts on page 5)*

## The Last Cattle Drive

**By Don Williams**

*Retired 1979, Region One, Regional Office Fire and Aviation and now lives in Dewey, AZ*

I was 17 years old when I went to work for the Bitterroot National Forest in 1944. The Bitterroot National Forest then administered the Moose Creek Ranger District. A.B. Gunderson was Ranger. Bob Henderson was the Second Alternate Ranger in charge of the old Beaver Creek Station where I was assigned.

I was the trail crew foreman for one of two trail crews on the Bear Creek end of the Selway Primitive Area (now Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness). One evening Sid asked me if I wanted to go with him to visit Phil Shearer, a homesteader. I agreed – so we walked to his place. Phil was sitting on his front porch and greeted us as we walked up. We shook hands and he offered us a chair. Both Sid and Phil rolled their Prince Albert smokes in brown paper. After about an hour of sitting and smoking in silence, Sid finally said, “Phil, you talked too damn much”, so we walked back home to Bear Creek. That was the way they visited and enjoyed each other’s company.

That fall, in early September, Bob Henderson asked me if I would be willing to help Phil Shearer take his cattle out to Darby (MT) by way of Bear Creek, Paradise Creek to Belle Lake and down Rock Creek to Lake Como.

It took about 4 – 5 days. In the evenings, around the campfire, Phil would loosen up and talk a little. He told me about marten trapping and making bootleg whiskey. He said the Revenuers tried many times to catch him packing out whiskey to the Bitterroot Valley. Phil would leak out word he was coming out Bear Creek to Lost Horse and he would go out over Elk Summit out through Paradise. Said he made about \$5,000 between the whiskey and trapping. He would then go to Butte and rent a room in the big whorehouse. He brought all

the supplies he needed for the winter and then spent all of the rest of the money enjoying his booze!

When we crossed the divide at Belle Lake there was a large fire burning. We took the cattle down Rock Creek about a mile to camp for the night. The Ford Tri-motor dropped 8 jumpers on the fire. The next day we trailed the herd the 16 miles to Lake Como where other friends met Phil. I went on to Darby and about 0300 the next morning led a 25-man crew back up Rock Creek to Belle Lake. That was the last time I saw Phil Shearer.

*Phil Shearer, a homesteader, built a home and ranch buildings on the Selway River, Idaho in the Selway Primitive Area (now Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness). Shearer sold his place to the Forest Service. Shearer Airfield is located in the old meadows. .*

### Note from the Curator

Although the Museum would like to accept all objects and books offered to us, we have found we have too many duplicates of the some objects.

Beth N. Humble asks that you contact her by phone 406 541-6374 or email her at [Bethnmfsh@hotmail.com](mailto:Bethnmfsh@hotmail.com) before sending any physical donations. But please remember that object in your attic or basement might be an item we don’t have and would love to have for our collection.



Herder Billy Marshall Driving Cattle to the Ruby River Headwaters  
Beaverhead National Forest, Montana 1943  
Don Nelson Sr. Collection 2004.75.47

## Additional 1938 Hurricane Facts

Forest Service employee involvement – R-9 was asked to send 6 employees; next requests were sent for 30 employees (18 were from R-7). A total of 125 employees were assigned to the project.

Personnel from all regions (except R-10) were involved including personnel from the Forest Products Laboratory, Prairie States Forestry Project, and the Chiefs Office.

Graders and scalers were hired from the Jr. Foresters Civil Service eligible list.

White Mountain National Forest impacts - 200 million board feet of down trees; 150 miles of telephone line down and 1,000 miles of trail blocked.

Hazard Reduction Work Force — CCC 3,900 and WPA 16,000 enrollees

Camps Utilized: 40 Forest Service CCC camps and 19 DA (Dept. of Agriculture) camps and 9 Park Service CCC camps

*Reference: Report of the U.S. Forest Service Programs Resulting from the New England Hurricane, 1943 Olliver Collection 2004.79.9*

## New Forest Service History Memorials

**William T. Dresser Memorial** donations by Arthur J. Carroll, Doug Leisz, and Joseph V. Flynn

**Jim Unterwegner Memorial** donation by Robert Williams

**Victor Parent Memorial** donation by Wallace and Druice Otterson

The National Museum of Forest Service History offers Forest Service History Memorials for those wishing to honor or memorialize people who worked for or with the Forest Service, living or deceased.

For a minimum \$100.00 donation, we will collect the biography and a photo and maintain that record in our Forest Service History Memorial Book and on our web site. The Memorial Grove of trees at the National Museum of Forest Service History has also been planted in honor and memory of the people listed in the Forest Service History Memorial.

For more information contact the Museum.

## Next Newsletter

### Firescope Program

Bob Irwin describes how a seven-County fire-only challenge came to be a national, and international "all-risk" emergency management system.

With Forest Service leadership and with the assistance of other agencies in southern California, the Firescope Program developed the Incident Command System (ICS), Unified Command, and the Multi-agency Coordination System (MACS).

## Capital Campaign Gifts

Members & Friends	\$ 42,604
In-Kind Gifts	\$ 1,593
Forest Service, USDA	\$ 500,000
Total	\$ 544,197

## Welcome New Members

8/4 to 11/4/05

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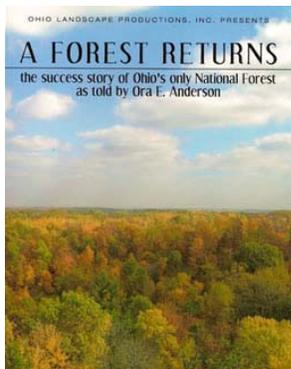
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DJ&A , P.C.



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### Recent Repository Donation

**A Forest Returns:** the success story of Ohio's only National Forest. Ora Anderson, 93, was a journalist living in Southeastern Ohio during the Great Depression. He recalls the conditions and events he witnessed that led to the establishment of the Wayne National Forest and our evolving relationship with the land. Anderson tells the history of the rebirth of forests during a 30 minute DVD presentation. The museum received the oral history from producer Jean Andrews of the Ohio Landscape Productions, Inc. To purchase visit [www.ohiolandscape.org](http://www.ohiolandscape.org) web page.

## Membership Application

Fill out, detach, and mail to: National Museum of Forest Service History, P.O. Box 2772  
Missoula, MT 59806-2772

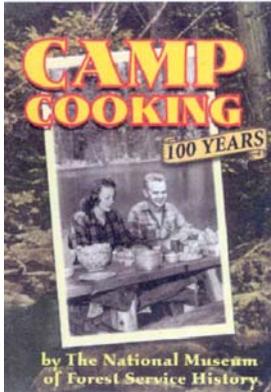
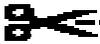
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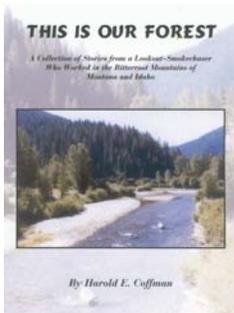
### Membership Categories Annual Dues

Individual	\$30 or more	Sustaining	\$300 or more
Family	\$55 or more	Organization	\$100 or more
Contributing	\$150 or more	Life	\$1000 or more



## Museum Bookstore

**“Camp Cooking, 100 Years”** The Intermountain Region and the National Museum of Forest Service History are sponsoring a heritage cookbook. This camping cookbook features recipes for Dutch oven meals, open-fire cooking and other methods used in the early days of the Forest Service, along with photos documenting these activities of the past. The book (192 pages) is filled with photos and history. \$12.50.



**“This is Our Forest”** by Harold E. Coffman. A collection of stories from a 1940s era lookout-Smokechaser who worked in the Bitterroot Mountains of Montana and Idaho. \$10.00

**“Trimotor and Trail”** by Earl Cooley. Experiences of smoke-jumper pioneer and a district ranger in northern Idaho and Montana. The 1949 Mann Gulch smokejumper disaster is analyzed. \$12.00

**“Guardian of the Headwaters”** by Monte Dolack: A print dedicated to the men and women of the Forest Service on the 100th Anniversary of the USDA Forest Service, 2005. \$25.00 unsigned, \$45.00 signed and numbered. Postcards available.



**“Conservation Motifs”** Poster by Bob Neaves, Hamilton, MT: Features images of Teddy Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, Aldo Leopold, Bob Marshall, Smokey, and John Muir. \$12.00 Greeting cards with envelopes available.

**“They Hired Out To Be Tough” Booklet:** A short history of the FS published by the NMFSH. \$3.00

Send check or money order only to: National Museum of Forest Service History, P.O. Box 2772, Missoula, MT 59806. Questions—please call (406) 541-6374 or email: [nationalforest@montana.com](mailto:nationalforest@montana.com).

All prices included shipping & handling.  
Please allow 3 weeks for delivery.

Trimotor & Trail

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[www.nmfs-history.net](http://www.nmfs-history.net)



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Gifts and pledges may be paid by cash/check or by gifting securities (Stocks and bonds). For securities, please call the Museum Office (406 541-6374) or write the Museum Office for transfer instructions. In accordance with IRS regulations, **your gift is fully tax-deductible.**

All donators will be recognized in a commemorative booklet available at the Museum. Donors giving \$1,000 or more will be recognized on the Wall of Honor in the Museum lobby.