

Module – The Fires of 1910

Overview

Objective: Students will view a documentary of the fires of 1910 and develop an understanding of where fire management began.

Purpose: Reviewing the history of fire management will help us understand where our business comes from and help us decide where we want it to go.

Method: Students will watch a video and participate in a group discussion.

Content: The Fires of 1910, featuring Stephen Pyne, and Timothy Egan



1910 Timeline



Your facilitator may choose to use the following timeline as discussion points.

1901 - Theodore Roosevelt becomes the U.S. President.

1904 - The Yale School of Forestry graduates the nation's first foresters.

1905 - The inaugural year of the Forest Service. Gifford Pinchot is appointed to Chief Forester.

1908 - Ranger Ed Pulaski is hired by the Forest Service in Wallace, Idaho at the age of 38. Roosevelt declines re-election. William H. Taft becomes President.



1910 - Before the Blowup

- Taft fires Pinchot for insubordination.
- In August, President orders over 1800 soldiers to assist with firefighting efforts in the Northern Rockies bringing the total amount of firefighters to 10,000.
- August 17th, *The Missoulian*, reports the town of Wallace, Idaho made a desperate attempt to create rainfall by igniting dynamite for sixty straight hours, but with no success.

- The Blowup

- August 20th, 1910 - The wind begins to blow several hundred fires located throughout the region, into five or six massive fires. Hurricane force winds of over seventy miles per hour, roared throughout the mountains, blowing through firelines and towns. Marshall law is declared by the mayor of Wallace.
- Evacuation trains loaded with thousands of scared people from the towns located along the tracks, went through flames and over burning bridges while escaping to Missoula, MT and Spokane, WA.

- After the Blowup

- The fires make the news worldwide. Ash from the fire was deposited across the Atlantic.
- Rain and snow fell effectively ending the fire season.
- Public sentiment shifted towards the Forest Service.
- Congress commits millions of dollars to help with forest rehabilitation and future fire suppression efforts.
- Individual firefighter compensation had to be applied directly to Congress.

Fatalities

(list does not include all fatalities from fire)

- Ed Pulaski's crew on Placer Creek - 6 firefighters + 2 horses
- John Bell's crew at Beauchamp homestead – 10 firefighters
- Debbitt's crew at Setzer Creek - 28 firefighters
- James Danielson's crew at Steven's Peak - 1 firefighter
- S.M. Taylor's crew at the Bullion Mine - 8 firefighters
- William Rock's crew at Setzer Creek - 1 firefighter
- Lee Hollingshead crew on the West Fork of Big Creek -18 firefighters + 5 horses

Ranger Ed Pulaski never received any compensation for his injuries that plagued him for the rest of his life. He did later win an essay contest with his account of the fires titled “Surrounded by Forest Fires”. He used the prize money for more medical treatments. Pulaski retired after over twenty years with the Forest Service.

His legacy lives on through the tool he developed, the Pulaski, which firefighters across the nation continue to swing every fire season.

Recommended Reading

“The Big Burn”

by

Timothy Egan

**“Year of the Fires: The Story of the Great
Fires of 1910”**

by

Stephen J. Pyne

Special thanks to

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And

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