

The C.C.C. in Southern California

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THE dual purpose of the Civilian Conservation Corps is to provide work for young, unemployed men and to center their activities on forest conservation projects in one form or another.

Through the aid of this unemployment measure many plans for extensive forest conservation and improvement projects had to be formulated and set into action. Heretofore such plans were not considered feasible, or else they were looked upon merely as goals to be reached at some far future time. They had not been carried out—not only because of the economic stresses, but also because these plans would involve so tremendous an organization. Since many of the present plans were developed in a very short time, much of the work must be considered on a trial-and-error basis with corrections in the plans as the conditions warrant.

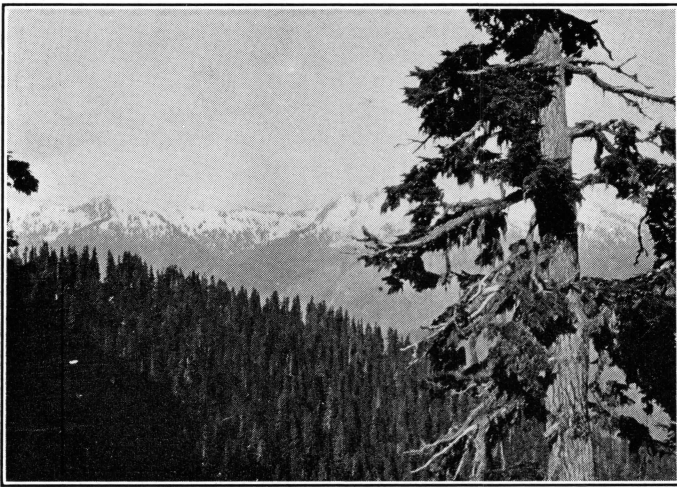
As an introduction, the Forest Service places fire protection of the National Forests as the chief objective, which has priority over all other activities. The aim of this objective is to prevent as many fires as possible and to suppress all small fires before they develop into large and destructive ones.

The National Forests of Southern California are watershed forests. The cities along the Pacific Coast, as well as the inland communities, obtain their water supply from sources which are usually located in the forests. The watershed use of the forests increases the necessity for maintaining the vegetation or present ground cover—hence fire protection. Recreation and grazing are also important uses of the forests.

The fire situation in southern California is a great problem, because weather conditions are favorable for fires during the greater part of the year: Some of the territory is inaccessible; the main cover type is brush; danger from campers and hunters is great; and lastly there is a scarcity of organized crews. In any event it becomes necessary to eliminate as many of the problems as possible and develop some system of controlling the remaining

factors. Evidently, as a means to control the existing conditions which favor the spread of fires, it would be effective to establish a fire crew system.

Prior to the organization of the C.C.C. a few permanent fire-suppression crew units had been organized to take initial action on fires; but as a whole a definite system had not been developed. A permanent suppression crew involves considerable expense. This is probably the greatest objection to fire crew units. In general fire crews make for efficient fire protection. In some cases



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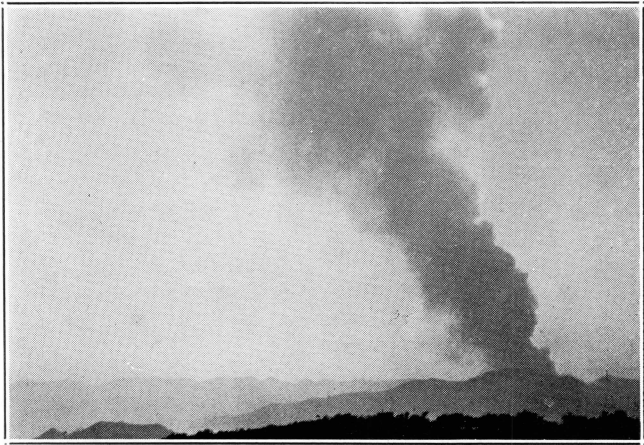
organized crews were available for fire suppression work by co-operation with organizations located on or near the National Forests.

The main objective of the C.C.C. camps in southern California was fire protection. It was a general policy of the Forest Service to have one initial fire crew in each camp. This crew was stationed in camp and was prepared to make a get-away to any fire call within three minutes. A fire suppression foreman had charge of the men—twenty-five of them, except where transportation facilities were insufficient to handle so many. The sole duty of this crew was to control fires.

The organization of the C.C.C. fire crews was a difficult problem. It was a matter of teaching the men simple fire-fighting

principles and then gradually clarifying these methods by practical experience. In the first place the majority of enlisted men were from the city and not acquainted with forest conditions. They lacked experience in their new responsibilities. In spite of these difficulties they had initiative, a spirit of livelihood, and an interest in their new life. It was quite evident that they appreciated the assistance that had been offered to them. The task of organizing the crews became less involved after the men had gained fire-fighting experience on several fires.

During the beginning of the 1933 fire season, while the crews were being organized, the policy was to place a new group of men on the fire crew each week. This arrangement did not prove very successful. Later on the tendency was toward the development of a permanent crew. It was found that a crew composed of able members was more efficient in "hitting" the fire. The general practice in all cases was to hit the fire with the initial



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crew and to follow with other crews to take care of emergencies.

The C.C.C. fire crew system during last season was by no means an efficient fire protection unit. But the development of this system will undoubtedly have some bearing on future permanent fire crews, since the existing conditions necessitate hitting the fire with an efficient initial crew to prevent numerous and destructive fires.

