

*The first foresters to practice their profession in the American West were government men. The earliest of them, a mere handful, cruised the new forest reserves for the Department of Interior. But most of them came in 1905 and after as conservation-minded missionaries of the Department of Agriculture's new Forest Service. This article on the "Forest Ranger" is presented in anticipation of the centennial of the U.S. Forest Service in 2005.*

# THE "FOREST RANGER" IN POPULAR FICTION:

1910–2000

Just over one hundred years ago, the concept of creating federal forest reserves *and* hiring federal foresters to run them was still novel. The Census Bureau had declared the American frontier officially "closed" in 1890, and with natural resource conservation gaining popularity, many Americans doubtless admitted it was a "good thing" to hire government foresters—men who soon came to be called "Forest Rangers."

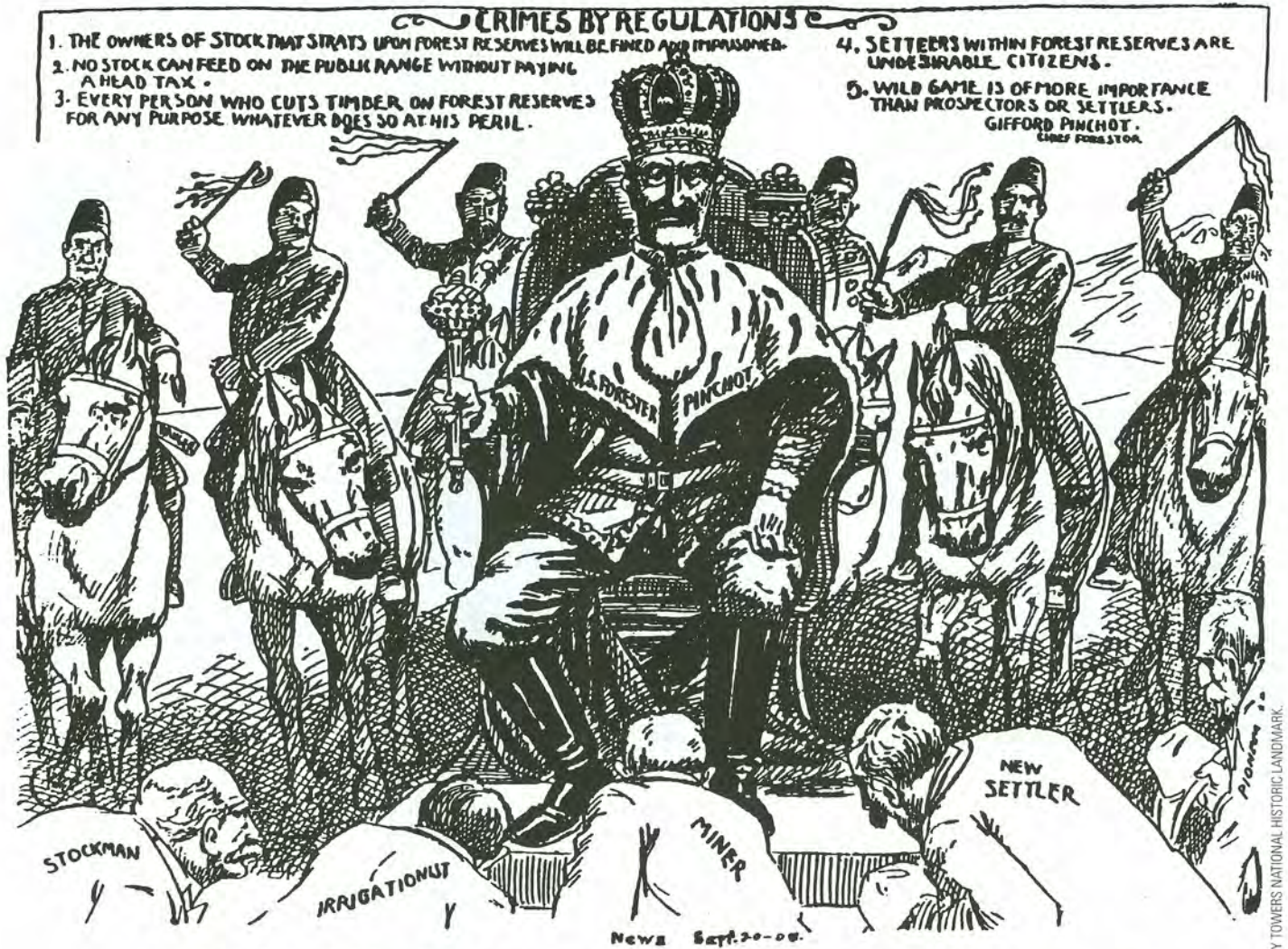
But the actual task these men faced was neither well understood by, nor did it greatly concern, most people at the time.

And in the West these first rangers, although welcomed by some in the region, elicited scorn if not outright calumnies from some members of the region's elite. Whether portrayed by a local newspaper editor as a beardless youth "with lily white hands"<sup>1</sup> or in a political cartoon as a merciless Cossack under the command of "Czar" Pinchot,<sup>2</sup> the first Forest Service ranger was often painted as an unwelcome stranger.

To remedy the ignorance of the many and to counter the conscious ill will of the powerful few, Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot and other Progressive Movement conservationists—aided by an enthusiastic and charismatic champion in the White House, Theodore Roosevelt—mounted a concerted public education campaign. Speeches, commentaries in national magazines, letters to regional newspaper editors, and publication of pro-conservation pamphlets all aimed to legitimize the new Forest Service in the eyes of the American public.<sup>3</sup>

BY JEFF LALANDE

## Czar Pinchot and His Cossack Rangers Administering the Forest Reserves



Typical anti-Pinchot cartoon, from the *Rocky Mountain News*, September 20, 1908.

*Courtesy Denver Public Library, Conservation Library Center*

“Czar Pinchot and his Cossack Rangers,” a biting political cartoon from the *Rocky Mountain News* of September 20, 1908, provided Westerners with a very negative portrayal of the new Forest Ranger.

However, probably one of the more effective paths to public acceptance, even outright admiration, of the forest ranger proved to be through the pages of popular fiction. Adopting and adapting the by-then familiar genre of the Western novel, pro-conservation writers brought a heroic ranger figure to life. By 1910, the furious national controversy that culminated in President Taft’s firing of Chief Forester Pinchot early that year had created critical mass in terms of a prospective reading audience. Pinchot’s self-proclaimed role in that scandal also provided the first ranger novels, or “Ranger Westerns,” with a familiar but dramatic plotline: the selfless champion of the people crusading against powerful, corrupt villains. And then, in the summer of 1910, the ferociously destructive Western fires that grabbed headlines all across the country gave the ranger figure an additional foe.<sup>4</sup>

The ranger who first rode into the pages of Western fiction

in 1910 helped convert countless readers to the “gospel of forest conservation,” just as he converted most of his fictional counterparts to those very same principles. In later decades, this archetypal ranger continued his role through the new media of radio, film, and television. Beginning in 1910, numerous authors, including Zane Grey, employed the new figure of the forest ranger as protagonist in their Western adult novels, “boys’ books,” and similar fiction. With praise-filled forewords and prefaces, some of these publications had the formal blessing of Pinchot and later Forest Service leaders. Although present-day literary critics might agree that few of these works possess merit as serious literature, they successfully fulfilled a more practical function. Growing in popularity after World War I and continuing on through the Great Depression and World War II, the ranger novel created for readers a distinctly positive, often



*One essential qualification of all Forest officers was the ability to take care of themselves in the woods. Early day rangers often worked alone and to take care of personal needs after a full day in the field. Rangers were notoriously underpaid, as little as \$900 per year during Pinchot's time, yet had to furnish two horses and pay grazing fees if the stock grazed on Forest service land.*

romantic, image of the ranger and his mission.

The ranger's portrayal both reflected and enhanced the legitimacy and authority that the Forest Service earned during the first five decades of the twentieth century. However, by the 1950s with the evolving mission of the Forest Service, which now included large-scale commercial timber harvest the fictional ranger often had to stretch or even contort his original role so as to advance the agency's message of "multiple use." And by the 1970s, as controversy over management of the National Forests grew ever more public and bitter, a sort of "anti-Ranger" emerged an often negatively portrayed figure of internal ambivalence, conflict, and even ridicule. Not surprisingly, then, the changing role and portrayal of the fictional Ranger in popular culture has tended to mirror the fortunes of the Forest Service over the past century.

### **THE RANGER: PIONEER AND MISSIONARY, 1910–1920**

Even before publication of the earliest Ranger novels in 1910, the sturdy forest guardian had already debuted in the pages of popular non-fiction magazines. The writer of a somewhat florid article entitled "The Forest Ranger" portrayed him as possessing great "energy, alertness, and skill," as protecting "our forests from the red-tongued fire-monster," and as living a "picturesque...wonderful woodland life."<sup>5</sup> Another author, in an identically titled piece, expanded on this romantic portrait by placing the ranger squarely within America's popular frontier myth: "With the

passing of the frontier there has gone as well the scout and the frontiersman." The reader is asked if the cowboy too will be compelled to give up his "freedom and picturesqueness" for a tame life of "pulling weeds or drying prunes?" "Only one hope is left to him," the life of a forest ranger:

*"In days to come, when the trapper, the scout, the Indian fighter, even the cowboy are all dim memories, the forest ranger will remain the last embodiment of the Spirit of the West."<sup>6</sup>*

The ranger, "this bronzed fighter of forest fires," thus becomes the crucial "link that unites a glorious past to a practical present." The article's image of the manly Progressive reformer, who combines the best of the Old West with the New, countered any negative stereotype of "the forest ranger...as a sort of wet nurse to a lot of pine saplings." The reader is told that the "new profession of forestry" most emphatically is *not*, as many people erroneously assumed, "a sort of cross between a botanical excursion and a Sunday school picnic." It is "hard work" that aims to protect the forest from the depredations of both fire and the "monopolistic lumber king."<sup>7</sup>

### **Out of the Crucible: 1910**

The fiery spectacle of the Northern Rockies' infamous "Big Blow-up" of 1910, which took over eighty lives – most of them firefighters of the new Forest Service, created heroes out of real-life

forest rangers such as Joe Halm and Ed Pulaski. The same year also brought the first fictional rangers to readers young and old.

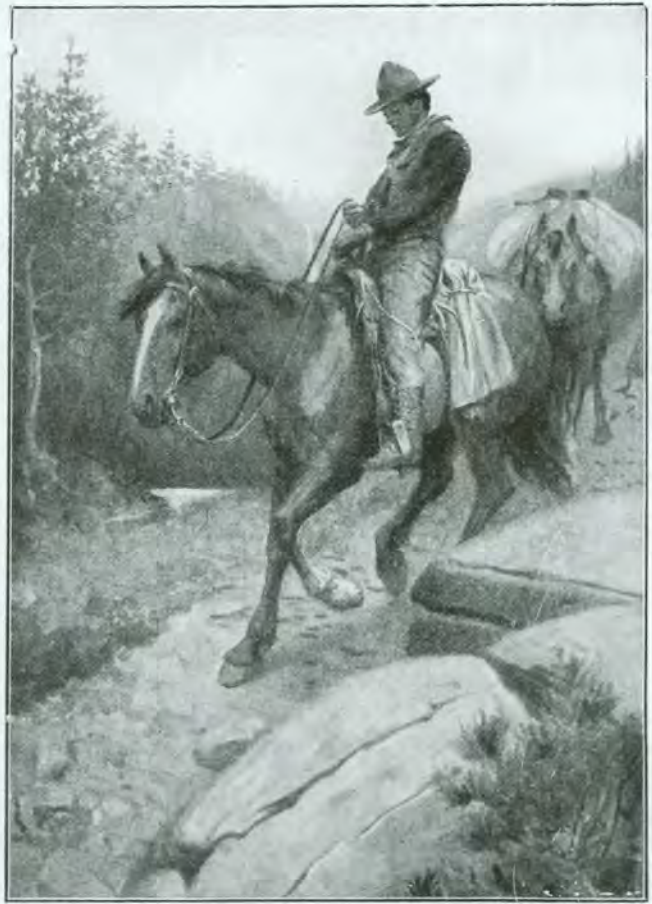
Zane Grey's *The Young Forester*, part of his Ken Ward series for boys, takes place in Arizona. Protagonist Ward, a wealthy Pennsylvania lad "just out of preparatory school" (apparently modeled on young Pinchot himself) is a tireless enthusiast of forestry. Coming to the "Penetier" National Forest for the summer to join his older friend, forest ranger Dick Leslie, Ward earnestly missionizes the conservation gospel to any and all local residents he meets. Some, like old mountain man Hiram Bent, listen sympathetically and are converted. (Speaking like a true Pinchot Progressive, the mountain man warms to the need to show "stockmen" and others that "the benefit [of National Forests] will be theirs in the long run" and that "the timber must be used, but not all used up.") Ward even imparts new insights from scientific forestry, including thinning and reforestation, to his ranger friend. Others, however, such as the avaricious lumberman Mr. Buell, at first feign interest in conservation but then plot against Ward and Leslie.<sup>8</sup>

*The Young Forester's* action includes the kidnapping of Ward and Leslie by Buell's henchmen, the duo's hair-raising escape, and a grand finale when monopolist Buell's arson fire threatens all their lives (both the lumberman and the raging forest fire are condemned as "greedy and wasteful"). Zane Grey's quick-thinking young hero saves the day by lighting a backfire, an act of fearless daring that will be repeated in many later novels of the Ranger genre. In its closing pages, the "Chief" (a thinly disguised Chief Forester Pinchot) arrives to reward Ward for his bravery. He personally bestows on Ward the rangering job of junior forester for the next summer. As the train steams out of the tiny Arizona town to return Ken Ward to Pennsylvania (and to forestry school), he hears Ranger Leslie's farewell shout ringing "like a prophecy: 'You'll be back in the forests!'"

A second novel published in 1910, *The Boy with the U.S. Foresters*, expounded the same basic theme as Grey's book. Like Grey's *The Young Forester*, written for older teenaged boys, this particular work, which includes a number of photographs provided by the Forest Service, was one in prolific author Francis Rolt-Wheeler's "U.S. Service Series." Rolt-Wheeler's books aimed at encouraging careers in the Progressive Era's expanding number of federal bureaus; others in the ten-title series included *The Boy with the U.S. Fisheries* and *The Boy with the U.S. Survey*.

Wilbur Loyle is the "Boy" of the title. Raised in the East, well-schooled but also woods wise, the energetic Wilbur's dream of a job in forestry comes true – after a personal interview in Washington, D.C. with the charismatic Chief Forester! Appointed as a summer fire guard in the Sierras, Wilbur listens in rapt attention as the Chief explains that the Forest Service gave "a fellow a chance to make good even better than in the army or the navy...in the Forest Service a chap is holding down a place of trust" where he only "makes good by working it out for himself."<sup>9</sup> The Boy's self-reliance and ingenuity rising to the challenge, he departs Washington as one of the Chief's loyal disciples, bent on converting others to the message of forestry.

In California, young Loyle meets his district ranger, a grizzled veteran of the woods named "Rifle-Eye" Bill, and his forest supervisor, a gentlemanly but firm professional named Merrit. This duo represents the typical distinction in the early Forest Service between the experienced, if not formally educated, hands hired



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I WANTED TO RUN THE MUSTANG, BUT DID NOT FOR THE SAKE OF THE BURDENED PONY

FRONTPIECE, THE YOUNG FORESTER, BY ZANE GREY, 1910.

Zane Grey's enthusiastic Ken Ward, *The Young Forester*, was among the first fictional rangers. Bringing the gospel of forest conservation to Western lumbermen and settlers, he helped form the mold for the fictional rangers that followed.

as district rangers and the college-trained foresters who served at the supervisor level. Although the distinction often persisted in later ranger novels with the district ranger sometimes filling a picturesque "sidekick" role to the supervisor, from the beginning of the genre the term "forest ranger," as employed in book titles or subtitles, serves as a popularized generic term for the heroic Forest Service man, no matter what his actual job title.

While riding up to Rifle-Eye Bill's ranger station, a "shack in the woods," Wilbur Loyle earnestly preaches against the evils of over-grazing to an interested cowboy. Red McGinnis, a hearty but conservation-minded lumberman, in turn teaches Wilbur the lesson of "wise use" when he compares the cutting of a mature pine to its "graduation...[n]ow its schoolin' in the forest is over, it's goin' out into the world to be...useful in some kind of way." All agree that the biggest crime in the West is waste. Rifle-Eye Bill summarizes the situation as a transition from old West to New: "Once we had to fight tooth an' nail agin the forest, an' now we've got to fight jest as hard for the forest so as there'll be enough of it for what we need."<sup>10</sup>

In the book's climax Wilbur, Rifle-Eye Bill, and Merrit fight side-by-side against a fierce forest fire set by outlaw logger Peavey Joe. Helping defeat the flames, Wilbur proudly returns East for

# THE BOY WITH THE U.S. FORESTERS



FRANCIS ROLT-WHEELER

COVER, THE BOY WITH THE U.S. FORESTERS, BY FRANCIS ROLT-WHEELER, 1910

Young lad Wilbur Loyle, *The Boy with the U.S. Foresters*, obtains his exciting job in the California woods after an opportune interview with the dynamic Chief Forester himself.

college as Supervisor Merrit salutes, "Loyle, when you're a Ranger...I want you on my forest!"<sup>11</sup>

Hamlin Garland's 1910 novel *Cavanagh*, *Forest Ranger*, subtitled *A Romance of the Mountain West*, aimed at a mature audience, but it paralleled Grey's and Rolt-Wheeler's stories in some significant ways. Dedicated "To the Forest Ranger, whose lonely vigil on the heights safeguards the Public Heritage" and featuring a hearty, chin-up introduction from the recently fired Chief Forester Pinchot, *Cavanagh* tells the story of well-educated Ross Cavanagh, a gentleman rancher who had come to Wyoming from England twenty years before and had been, in his words, "regenerated" by life in the West. No tenderfoot, he is a tested veteran, somewhat improbably not only having ridden with the U.S. Army to put down Wyoming's bloody 1890s "Johnson County War" (a conflict between feuding cattlemen) but also having served in the Rough Riders with Colonel Roosevelt. By the time the novel opens in 1909 Cavanagh, "like an Indian in his love of the open," has become district ranger on the unnamed national forest.

Although Cavanagh now resides high in the pure air of the Wyoming mountains, he must descend occasionally to the squalid little town of Roaring Fork, where he meets cultivated newcomer

Virginia Weatherford, late of Philadelphia. Most of the brawling denizens of Roaring Fork, who have poached the game and overgrazed the range of Cavanagh's forest, hate the ranger "quite cordially." But Cavanagh's respectful courtship of Miss Weatherford brings her to share his vision of the West's peaceful future: "She perceived in the ranger the man of the new order"; like the U.S. marshal featured in other frontier stories, Cavanagh is "a believer in the New West...who represents the impersonal, even-handed justice of the Federal law."<sup>12</sup>

Although author Garland (who later won a Pulitzer Prize for his gritty novels of Midwestern farm life) employed plenty of heavy-handed romantic prose in his 1910 ranger tale, *Cavanagh's* promotion of Progressive conservation's goals of efficiency and expertise are clear and unmistakable. Cavanagh serves in a sacred "cause which was able to bring together the student from Yale and the graduate...of Oxford" in conserving "the trees and streams of the mountain States against the encroachments of some of their own citizens," the selfish and venal who were "cynically bent upon destruction, spoilation, and misuse."

Ranger Cavanagh stands up to the anti-Forest Service bluster of Senator Bridges, who harangues fearful residents on "States rights and the dangers of centralization." He faces down an angry mob, braves a deadly plague to nurse a stranger back to health, and brings a murderous stockman to justice. Cavanagh possesses manly self-control, while his antagonists act impulsively and only from stubbornness and greed. Cavanagh is a visionary who *converts* the Old West to the new order so that it may regenerate itself. Near the end of the novel, Cavanagh angrily quits the Forest Service over the Chief's firing by President Taft, but he decides to return when asked to assume the supervisorship of a new national forest. In the closing line of the story, Cavanagh and his new bride, Virginia, "together...entered upon the building of a home in the New West."<sup>13</sup>

Pinchot's introduction to *Cavanagh* lent the story legitimacy and authority. Pridefully stating that, "the Service contains the best body of young men I know," Pinchot praised the narrative's "sympathetic understanding of the problems which confronted the Forest Service." He readily admitted that "the establishment of the new order in some places [of the West] was not child's play," but the ultimate victory of "Conservation policies" was occurring in large part because of rangers like Ross Cavanagh, "Western men"...who met the West on its own ground, and...won the contest."<sup>14</sup>

Ranger Dick Wayland, the protagonist of Agnes Laut's *Freebooters of the Wilderness*, fills an adult-hero role quite similar to Garland's Cavanagh: he is another intrepid crusader of 1910 in a "sage-green Service suit." Laut, author of numerous works that romanticized the fur-trade era of the previous century, brought her florid style to bear on a contemporary Western saga. Clearly modeled on Pinchot and his highly public 1909–1910 campaign against "corrupt" Secretary of Interior Richard Ballinger's handling of the Alaska coal lands situation, her Ranger Wayland fights the state "Ring's" theft of coal, as well as timber and even land (by means of "dummy" homesteaders), from the public domain.

Wayland oversees nearly 100,000 acres of Colorado's "Holy Cross National Forest." Two of his personal traits are efficiency and absolute honesty. In true Pinchot fashion, Wayland envisions "the day coming when all the vast domain of the National Forests



Forest Ranger on fire patrol duty in 1909 on northwestern Montana's Cabinet (now Lolo) National Forest. This photo was used in Hamlin Garland's, *Cavanaugh, Forest Ranger: A Romance of the Mountain West*, 1910. Such early novels promoted Progressive conservation goals founded on efficient management by trained professionals.

would...[have] not a stick of underbrush or slash as big as your finger; not a stump above eighteen inches high; all the scaled logs piled neat as cardboard boxes." Heartened by the unwavering support of a sheep rancher's young daughter, Eleanor MacDonald, Wayland takes on no less than U.S. Senator Moyese, a ruthless figure of "oily geniality, a corpulent form in a white vest," an enemy of the National Forests, and the utterly wicked head of the Ring.<sup>15</sup>

Over the course of this Ranger Western, as the bond of friendship between the ranger and the girl blossoms into true love, Dick Wayland casts his looming battle in classic Progressive terms: while the Senator fought "for the vested interests of the few," the ranger "was fighting for the...rights of the many" against "plundering plutocrats" and their "Anarchy of unrestrained greed!"<sup>16</sup>

"Loyal to the Service," Ranger Wayland rebuffs the Senator's bribe of a better-paying position. Wayland instead stood with those other fellows "in the Agricultural Department who had increased the nation's wealth by hundreds of millions a year," yet worked at "salaries less than a Wall Street Junior clerk or office girl."<sup>17</sup> Moyese, a cattle baron, uses his cynical hireling newspaperman to foment anti-Forest Service anger among gullible local residents, and then secretly pays a gang of vicious outlaws to terrorize sheepherders. Moyese's plan ends in a disastrous arson fire

and the brutal murder of four innocent men. Fearing exposure, the Senator retreats into the smoldering wilderness, where he falls over a precipice to his death. Ranger Wayland, however, knows full well that the battle "for the People" and against monopolistic greed is ever joined and never over.

Fire too was a rapacious foe. Inspired by the drama of the great 1910 holocaust, Katharine Judson set her Ranger novel, *When the Forests Are Ablaze*, in the besieged northern Idaho of that year. Published in 1912, (after the riveting Pinchot-Ballinger dispute had subsided, and the public's attention to the "anti-corruption fight" had therefore waned somewhat), human villainy is replaced by the "exultant, triumphant...roaring demon of the hills."<sup>18</sup>

Ranger Leonard Goss is "proud of his district"—over 200,000 mountainous acres of "dense forest with bridgeless streams," in part because heretofore he has successfully kept large fires at bay. Jane Myers, a strong-willed young schoolteacher from back East who has taken up a forest homestead, initially tangles with Goss over the fate of a huge but unsafe Douglas-fir growing next to her cabin. Reluctantly accepting the wisdom of Ranger Goss's decision to cut down her beloved tree, Jane becomes conscious of the "flush of health under the tan of his bronze face, [his] commanding personality and pair of keen gray eyes"; inevitably,

their initial clash leads to romantic love.<sup>19</sup>

As the parched 1910 summer brings on the Big Blowup of mid-August, Goss leads men against the distant conflagration while Jane remains at her homestead in the thickening smoke. Goss rides hard to save Jane when the blaze jumps a high ridge and nearly consumes the town of Illahee (a thinly disguised Wallace, Idaho). Chased by the advancing flames, they find refuge in a nearby pond. The following day, nothing is left of Goss's "great green-clad slopes of forest trees" but "blackness and desolation." The valiant couple marries as the embers of the great fire still glow, but the Ranger must go "back into it all....My life work is in the forests." He vows "again and again I shall have to fight the fire devils as I have this summer until Congress gives us adequate appropriations to protect the forests."<sup>20</sup>

### In for the Long Haul

Zane Grey and Hamlin Garland each wrote a second Ranger novel. However, they now dampened their heroes' conservationist zeal somewhat—Grey's in favor of a simple adventure story, and Garland's for a pure romance. In *The Young Lion Hunter*, Ken Ward, following a year of college in Pennsylvania and with his impetuous younger brother Hal in tow, returns to the Southwest to work as a summer ranger alongside chum Dick Leslie and old Hiram Bent. Forest Supervisor Birch initially protests hiring Leslie's "Eastern friend," but relents when Ken produces a letter of recommendation from the Chief, and proves his mettle in the field. Although Grey's second Ken Ward story forsakes any overt conservation theme for a thrilling tale of cougar hunts, the team of rangers continually demonstrates courage, ingenuity, and loyalty.<sup>21</sup>

Garland's *The Forester's Daughter*, published in 1914 and set in Colorado, inverted the more traditional gender roles of *Cavanagh*: Berrie McFarlane, the Forest Supervisor's spirited daughter, befriends a handsome but frail newcomer named Wayland Norcross. This well-educated but unassuming young Easterner, who has come to the Rockies to convalesce, "had never before slept beneath the open sky." Riding the high country with woods-wise Berrie and "Harvard man" Ranger Landon, the tenderfoot learns much about the Forest Service and its struggle to bring peace to the violent cattle range. Norcross first comes upon Landon at his remote ranger station, where the ranger "spurred and belted, with his cuffs turned back, was pounding a typewriter." Despite his weakened condition, Norcross determines to join the service, first as a summer fire guard, but with the goal of becoming a full-time ranger—one "who must be...willing to build bridges, fight fire, scale logs, chop a hole in a windfall, and use a pick in a ditch."<sup>22</sup> As he and Berrie help defeat Cliff Belden, a violent cattleman and Berrie's jealous suitor, Wayland Norcross steadily gathers strength from the contest. By the end of the story his father, a wealthy Michigan lumberman, has come to visit and is astounded at Wayland's firm grip and transformed physique. The elder Norcross becomes persuaded that the hoped-for union with a sophisticated but shallow Eastern girl is impossible, and he blesses his son's marriage to the forester's daughter.

In Vingie Roe's 1919 *Tharon of Lost Valley*, David Kenset, fresh from Washington, D.C., is the first Forest Service ranger to venture into California's remote Lost Valley. Here he begins "his life in the last frontier." Kenset faces off against brutal cattle king Buck Courtney, who has terrorized nearly all of the valley's small



"'Forest Service,'" he read aloud, "'Department of Agriculture.'" Well, so far as I can see, it ain't so terrifyin'. That last means raisin' things, like beets an' turnips an' so on, an' as for th' forest part, why, if he stays up in his 'fringe o' pines' I guess we ain't got no call to kick.

*In Tharon of Lost Valley, by Vingie E. Roe, 1919, Ranger David Kenset's unfamiliar Forest Service badge is the subject of concern and speculation on the part of local ranchers.*

ranchers into submission. One exception is beautiful and hard-riding Tharon Last, who becomes boss of her father's ranch after his murder by one of Courtney's henchmen, a "half-breed Pomo." Upon first meeting Kenset on the trail, Tharon notes that "he rode as if he feared nothing...that he carried no gun, that he wore a...semi-military uniform...with a dark shield...of the pine tree and the big U.S. that shown...on his breast."<sup>23</sup>

Mistrustful of government men because of Courtney's corrupting influence on the local sheriff, Tharon at first spurns the ranger's help, but Kenset's persistence eventually results in their alliance against Courtney's gang. The two win the fight, and they fall in love during the action. To Tharon Last's exuberance and impetuosity, Ranger David Kenset brings rock-like resolve and courage; it proves to be a happy match.

A few writers of this early period employed the Ranger figure as a minor character simply for picturesque effect. One example is Harold Bell Wright's 1914 novel, *The Eyes of the World*, set in the High Sierras of southern California. Although the protagonist, Aaron King, is, like Garland's Norcross, a wealthy young man from the East, he does *not* become a forest ranger by story's end. However, on a mountain ride King meets Brian Oakley, "six feet in height...deep-chested, lean, but full-muscled." From Oakley's hip hung "a heavy Colt revolver" and "upon his unbuttoned vest was the shield of the United States Forest Service." In the climax of the story, Oakley helps rescue King's sweetheart from a kidnapper. Playing only a supporting role in Wright's seemingly interminable drama, quiet-talking Ranger Oakley contrasts to the novel's more verbose main characters. In the closing of one typical scene, "with a 'so-long,' the Ranger rode away into the night."<sup>24</sup>

The earliest Ranger Westerns contain a number of at-times seemingly conflicting sub-themes; many would be repeated in later ranger fiction, for example: East Coast effeteism reinvigorated by the strenuous life in the West, while East Coast wisdom and restraint bring order to an ignorant and Wild West. These books also, quite naturally, stand as products of their time in other ways. Not only does their prose feature the often-florid style of that era, they reflect popular American social attitudes of the time. The first two decades of the twentieth century witnessed a distinctive cultural anxiety over the perceived loss (or

threat of loss) of “American manliness.” The fictional ranger is stereotypical masculinity personified. And if he is not sufficiently manly upon arriving in the West, the strenuous and redemptive ranger life soon makes him so. When *The Young Forester’s* Dick Leslie is led back to the path of righteousness by Ken Ward, he cries out thankfully, “Ken, you’ve made a man of me!”<sup>25</sup>

Contemporary racial and ethnic stereotypes are, not surprisingly, also plentiful. Natural leaders of their community, almost without exception the heroes and heroines of these novels are white, Anglo-Saxon, and of middle-class or upper middle-class background. Additionally, the Ranger protagonist often forges an alliance with a knowledgeable old-timer of pioneer Anglo-Saxon stock, whose local experience and rare wisdom prove crucial in winning the conservation crusade. Although a few corrupt wealthy whites prove nasty villains indeed, most other scoundrels (or simply those ignorant folk who prove most in need of “conversion to conservation”) typically consist of negatively portrayed outsiders: sullen Indians, cunning “half-breeds,” brutish French-Canadians, vicious Mexicans, oafish Eastern European immigrants, or others not then welcome within America’s cultural and ethnic mainstream.<sup>26</sup>

From 1910 to 1920 the forest ranger rode into the pages of popular fiction with these first Ranger Westerns. Some of these books were read and re-read over the following decades (Grey’s *The Young Forester* proved popular enough to go through several printings and be republished in 1938; it remained in print well into the post-WWII period.) A skilled outdoorsman who had admirable Western qualities such as self-reliance, versatility, and fearlessness in spades, this new Western hero also possessed expert knowledge and far-seeing vision that came from a specialized education. A new kind of hero for the early twentieth-century Western, the fictional forest ranger had helped bestow popular legitimacy upon his flesh-and-blood counterparts in the National Forests. Above all a moral crusader, the fictional ranger had arrived and had proven himself; he remained on the scene determined to stay.

### **AUTHORITY GAINED AND HELD, 1920–1945**

If the second decade of the twentieth century was the forest ranger’s “pioneer era” out on the frontier of fiction, the following twenty-five years proved to be his golden age. Now firmly established as a familiar and positive figure in Western stories, the ranger appeared in numerous books following World War I. Although still a missionary for forestry in their pages, he faced less community hostility than before; such had been the success of the preceding era’s conservation message. Still a main character, he did not always have to play a story’s central part; in the many boys’ novels of this period the ranger just as often filled an avuncular or mentor role. And, significantly, a story’s setting no longer had to be the West. Now, fictional rangers were also to be found in the forests of the East, just as the 1911 Weeks Act had brought an army of real-life Forest Service rangers to the new national forests of the Appalachians by 1920.

### **Boys’ Books**

Boys’ literature, particularly books published as parts of popular ongoing series such as the “Radio Boys,” remained a prime vehicle during these years, impressing young men with the excitement and esprit de corps of the Forest Service life. Some typical

titles of the period include: Allen Chapman’s *The Radio Boys with the Forest Rangers* (1923), wherein three young friends’ knowledge of radio communication helps Ranger Payne Bentley defeat evildoers and suppress a raging holocaust (at one point fleeing from the fire, the Boys are pursued across a lake by a pack of fierce bears who try to clamber aboard their makeshift raft; the inventive heroes employ their radio battery to shock the attacking bears and escape unharmed!); James Hendryx’s *Connie Morgan with the Forest Rangers* (1923), in which wealthy young Morgan purchases Great Lakes cut-over timberland and learns crucial forestry lessons from Ranger McLaren; Percy Fitzhugh’s *Tom Slade: Forest Ranger* (1926), the story of an Eastern boy scout and ranger whose valiant effort to save a small town from fire is doomed by the residents’ own cruelty and stupidity; Allen Chaffee’s *Unexplored!: With the Forest Rangers of the Northwest* (1930), in which Ranger Radcliffe, aided by young hero Ted Smith and his chums, employs air power to battle a huge blaze; and Irving Crump’s *The Boys’ Book of Forest Rangers* (1924), a collection of brief stories about personal challenges faced by various young rangers, interspersed with chapters explaining relevant aspects of the Forest Service’s mission.<sup>27</sup> Giving official endorsement to author Crump’s fictional ranger tales is a foreword by the Forest Service’s assistant chief forester Edward A. Sherman. Invoking the ranger’s image as “watchful guardian of Uncle Sam’s” domain, Sherman stresses that “this keen-eyed, sunburned forest dweller” is the “keystone of the Forest Service arch—a picturesque and romantic figure.”<sup>28</sup>

Making an exciting appearance in the skies over the Oregon woods in the early 1920s was *Bill Bruce on Forest Patrol*. One of the “Bill Bruce, Aviator” series written by Major Henry H. Arnold of the U.S. Army Air Corps (the same officer who later, as General “Hap” Arnold, commanded the Army Air Force throughout World War Two), this boys’ story brought a courageous young ace of the Great War to the Northwest on special air patrol for forest fires. During a fishing trip on Oregon’s McKenzie River, Bill Bruce and his friend, fellow officer Bob Finch, meet none other than District (Regional) Forester George Cecil, who provides them with a quick education about the Forest Service and its mission to suppress the ravages of fire. Knowledgeable about all things having to do with the forest, Cecil not only provides tips on successful fishing and how to tell the age of a conifer, he instructs the aviators on the proper method of building a safe campfire and tells them of the calamitous effects of the 1910 Big Burn. “Recently,” he informs them, “we have managed to get the fires under control before they get anywhere near that large.”<sup>29</sup>

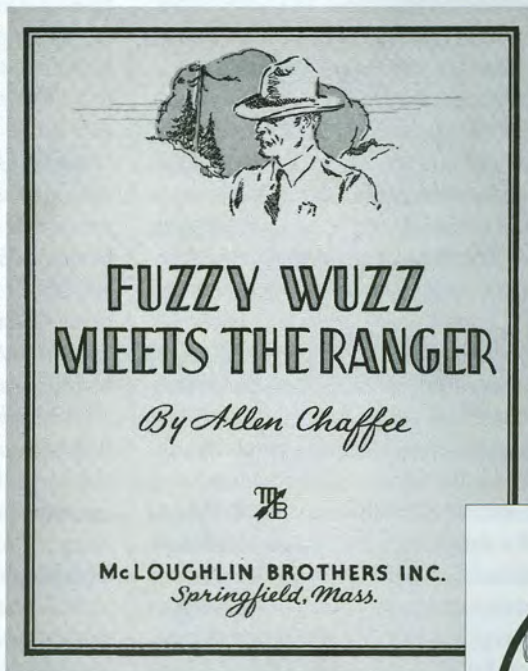
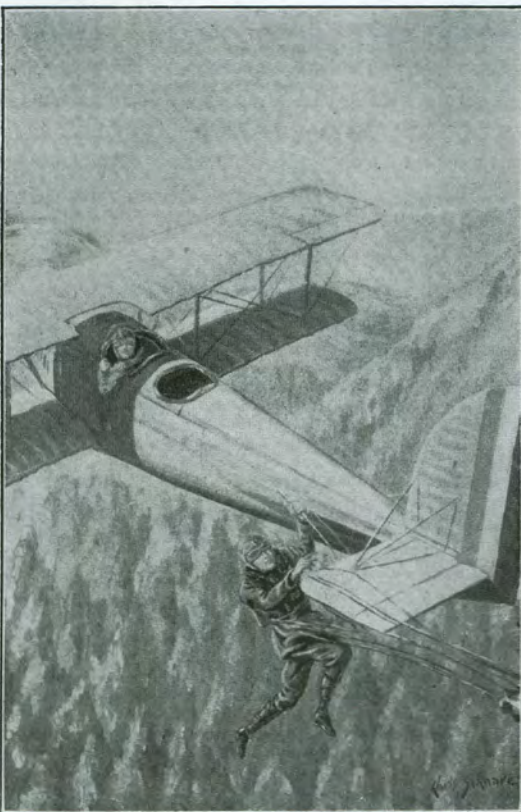
Soon the two young airmen are drafted to help fight a raging fire alongside a crew of hardy rangers. Later that summer, Bruce and Finch lead a squadron of Army aircraft back to Oregon to patrol its immense forests for fires. Many adventures ensue as the state’s woods become the tinder for a ruthless and wily arsonist. On one occasion, bedeviled by mysterious engine trouble, Bill Bruce skillfully crash-lands his deHavilland biplane into the tree-tops of the Umpqua River country, and makes his way safely through the wilderness to civilization. In the book’s climactic chapter, Bruce succeeds in spotting and tracking the escaping firebug from the air. Dropping a weighted note from his plane, which reveals the criminal’s location to the rangers below, Bill Bruce flies low over the ensuing capture to see that the fire-fiend and saboteur is none other than the evil Andre, a German sympathizer



A BLUE STREAK CRACKLED BETWEEN THE TERMINAL AND THE BEAR'S NOSE.  
*The Radio Boys With the Forest Rangers.* Page 189



TOM SAW A FIGURE FLODDING ALONG THE MOUNTAINSIDE  
*Tom Slade, Forest Ranger.* Page 110



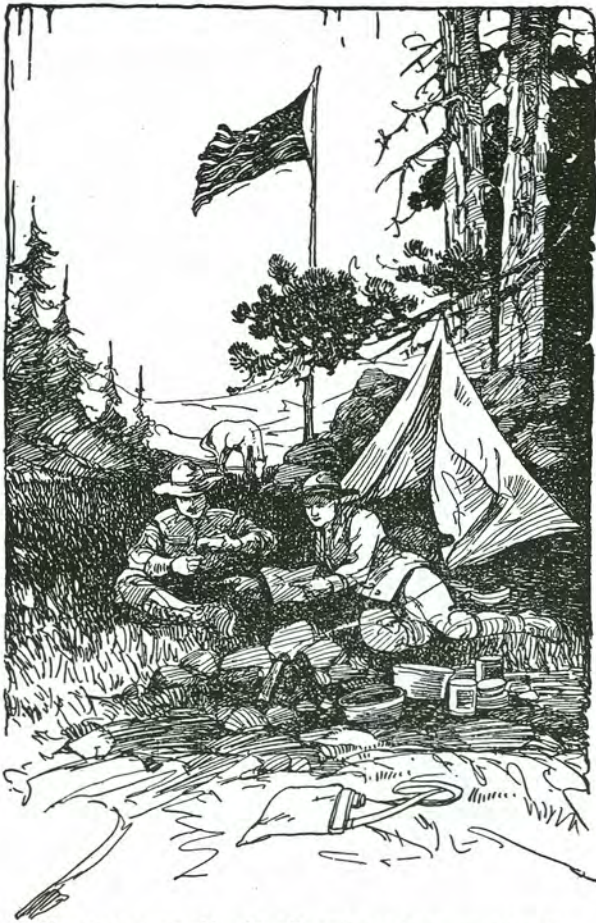
Bill worked his way backward toward the tail group.  
 (Page 231) (Bill Bruce on Forest Patrol)

Boys Books of the 1920s that featured ranger heroes included *The Radio Boys with the Forest Rangers* (top left), *Tom Slade—Forest Ranger* (top right), and *Bill Bruce on Forest Patrol* (bottom left). Younger readers met a kindly ranger through the eyes of Fuzzy Wuzz (bottom right), the bear cub.

and Bruce's long-term nemesis (of previous stories in the series).

The rangers in these 1920–30s boys' books tend to share several traits: Based on surnames and descriptions, virtually without exception they remain—like their predecessors—tall, sturdy, clean-living Anglo-Saxon types. A new element, however, is their reliance on modern inventions. Forward-thinking men, these rangers readily adopt the latest technology to protect their forests, from radio transmission or automobile transport to aircraft surveillance. Like a careful parent, they remain ever vigilant for potential dangers, of which fire is always the gravest. Many of them must “fight fire with fire,” showing their mastery over the force of raw nature by setting backfires. And the rangers' uncompromising personal integrity provokes admiration from most but enrages a greedy, bullying few; in most of the novels, it is these same villains who set the fire that provides a story's climactic scene.





"There was no rumble of traffic and street cars or other city noises to disturb or distract their thoughts."

Despite this placid scene, the novel *Ranger District Number Five* by Hunter S. Moles, 1923, (p. 59), contains much violent action as the tough rangers brought stubborn New Mexicans to heel.

### Prelude to Hollywood

The interwar period brought a continuing stream of adult ranger novels as well, but technology and gadgetry played a lesser part in their story lines. In terms of their by-now almost formulaic plot lines, some of these books foretold of the Ranger's imminent appearance on radio and film. Although these books generally repeated the same basic patterns—including earnestness and romanticism—developed in the original ranger Westerns, the hard-nosed 1923 novel *Ranger District Number Five*, by New Mexico State College administrator Hunter Moles, eschews any hint of sentimentality for a "man's story": rangers' raw courage and brute force, including gunplay, bring Forest Service law to the contested grazing lands of northern New Mexico, where the violent and "backward" Spanish-speaking natives of Ranger District #5 prove an especially stubborn challenge to conservation conversion. Under the skillful leadership of Forest Supervisor "Old Mack," the small army of tough rangers relentlessly crushes the resistance of this most recalcitrant population. A few Hispanos see the benefits of the National Forest and even aid the rangers in their battle.<sup>30</sup>

More typical of the period were *The Understanding Heart*, *Mountain Man*, and *The Ordeal of Brad Ogden*. Peter Kyne's 1926 *The Understanding Heart* is set in the "San Dimas National Forest" of northern California's rugged Siskiyou County. A newly arrived ranger, young Anthony Garland, and the tempestuous young fire lookout on Bogus Mountain, local miners' daughter Monica Dale, join forces to fight the depredations of the bullying Hercules Hydraulic Mining Company. Together they eventually bring justice to the Klamath River country. Having proven himself to the community, Garland is induced to leave the Forest Service and run for the state legislature; having proven himself to his sweetheart, he and Monica tie the knot.<sup>31</sup>



"I'm sure the men swear by you, Monica."

The earnest forest ranger Anthony Garland courts fire lookout Monica Dale in *The Understanding Heart*, by Peter B. Kyne, 1926. They team up and triumph over a greedy, reckless mining company.

New ranger Gordon Breck is the self-reliant protagonist of Harold Wire's 1929 *Mountain Man*. Breck, a college man, comes to the rough Southern Sierras cattle town of Lone Pine to avenge the mysterious murder of his wartime Army comrade Jim Cotter, a ranger who was bushwhacked in the mountains. Meeting with the approval of old-timer Ranger "Dad" Cook, Breck joins the ranger force of the Inyo National Forest. Immediately, he tangles with the brutal Tillson brothers, who flaunt the Forest Service's rules of the range and intimidate the area's smaller cattlemen. Breck also soon meets and falls in love with vivacious

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# THE ORDEAL of BRAD OGDEN

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*A Romance of the Forest Rangers*

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By

*Arthur H Carhart*



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J. H. SEARS & COMPANY, Inc.

Publishers ~ ~ ~ New York

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The Ordeal of Brad Ogden, by former Forest Service landscape architect Arthur Carhart, 1929, features the by-now nearly obligatory climactic raging forest fire scene.

Louise Temple, who has taken over as boss of her elderly father's ranch. Discovering that one of the Tillson brothers had murdered his friend, Breck pursues a goal that becomes both personal and professional: Sitting at his campfire, the hero grimly recalls that he "had entered into this forest job to fulfill a pledge," and as the "firelight picked out the badge on his shirt... a warm pride possessed him as he stared at the lone pine, flanked by the letters: U.S."<sup>32</sup> Aided by Ranger Cook, Forest Service packer Sierra Slim, and a posse of law-abiding ranchers, Breck and Louise defeat the Tillsons, but not before beating back the advance of an inferno set by the brothers; Breck's backfire saves the day. At the story's close, the ranger pushes aside the advances of a visiting urban sophisticate (an old flame) and marries Louise.

The 1929 novel *The Ordeal of Brad Ogden: A Romance of the Forest Rangers*, written by influential Forest Service landscape architect Arthur C. Carhart, presents the ranger figure as a fully developed Tom Mix-like Hollywood demi-god. Recently retired from the Forest Service, Carhart (who went on to publish other Western novels during the 1930s, but under the pseudonym Hart Thorne) remained a committed Progressive conservationist. He

portrayed his hero in a manner that provided thrilling reading while popularizing the author's (and his former agency's) values. More than most other ranger heroes of this period, Brad Ogden is akin to the white-hat U.S. Marshal of action-packed Hollywood Westerns. The handsome new supervisor of Colorado's "Pinos Altos" National Forest, Ogden must face a showdown with a bad crowd of ranchers in the Canyon Creek district. Aided by his trusty district ranger, Tillamook Thompson, and his young forest clerk Theodora ("Ted") Hathaway (who speeds along the mountain byways in her roadster), Ogden survives an outlaw's ambush, triumphs as a bronco rider in the Canyon Creek rodeo, and converts a friendly young rancher to the wisdom of forestry. He defeats the villain in a climactic and lengthy fistfight (as a fierce arson fire blazes ever closer), and even becomes the Forest Service's first smokejumper as he parachutes out of an airplane to suppress the fire—this a decade before the agency's first actual smokejumpers. Enforcing the government's grazing regulations where previous supervisors had backed down under the threat of violence, Ogden brings the unruly stockmen to heel. And like many a Hollywood Western of the time, Ogden and Theodora acknowledge their love for each other at the end.<sup>33</sup>

## Radio and Cinema Rangers

The Forest Ranger also made it onto the nation's airwaves and into its movie houses during this era. Between 1932 and 1944 the National Broadcasting Company's "National Farm and Home Hour" radio program regularly aired *Uncle Sam's Forest Rangers*. The serial, which took place on the Pine Cone Ranger District, featured the adventures of a "green" young assistant ranger, Jerry Quick, mentored by the seasoned ranger, Jim Robbins, and his wife. At the conclusion of each episode, an actual Forest Service spokesman (e.g., former Lassen National Forest supervisor L. A. Barrett) would give listeners a particular conservation message. Although a factual documentary and overtly propagandistic in nature, *The Forest Ranger*, an agency-sponsored 1944 short film produced for showing in movie theaters across the country, similarly focused on the ranger as the personification of natural resource conservation and protection.<sup>34</sup>

The ranger also appeared in cinematic dramas. *Dark Mountain*, a 1944 B picture, brings a dangerous criminal (played by Regis Toomey), on the lam from the law, to a remote ranger station, along with an innocent young woman (Ellen Drew) as his hostage; quick-thinking and steady young Ranger Don Bradley (Robert Lowery) eventually foils the outlaw and rescues the girl.<sup>35</sup> (Hollywood, like some later authors of ranger novels, dropped the ball in terms of accuracy: Although *Dark Mountain's* hero's vehicle is clearly marked with the USDA Forest Service shield, the ranger and his sidekick refer to themselves repeatedly as members of the "Forestry Service," and their headgear is the more widely recognized wide-brimmed "campaign hat" of Park Service, not Forest Service, rangers of the period.)

The mid-1940s Republic Pictures low-budget serial *King of the Forest Rangers* featured Larry Thompson as Forest Service Ranger Steve King, who provides law and order to a remote mountain community threatened by the plots of a greedy archaeologist and his murderous gang. Wearing a broad-brimmed white cowboy hat and a Hollywood-designed military-style uniform that includes riding breeches and boots, the sidearm-packing Ranger King survives a huge forest fire and experiences many hair-raising



The 1942 film *The Forest Rangers* with Fred MacMurray, Paulette Goddard, and Susan Haywood, was dedicated to “these courageous men and their splendid organization—the United States Forest Service.”

escapes from death during the course of the dozen episodes, but at no time does he unfurl the banner of conservation. Paramount Pictures’ far more lavishly produced 1942 Technicolor release, *The Forest Rangers*, featured Fred MacMurray as Ranger Don Stuart of the rugged “Bolderoc National Forest,” Paulette Goddard as tenderfoot Eastern girl Celia Huston, Susan Hayward as wisecracking sawmill owner Montana (“Tana”) Mason, and Regis Toomey as Frank Hatfield, an aviator who flies smokejumpers for the Forest Service. By story’s end, the treacherous Hatfield proves to be the mysterious arsonist, and Celia bests rival “Tana in winning the Ranger’s heart; she proves to have true grit, even rescuing her courageous smokejumping husband—entangled in a tree’s branches—from the flames during the climactic forest fire scene. Although dedicated to “these courageous men and their splendid organization—the United States Forest Service,” it is a confused, contrived, and ultimately ridiculous film. In its portrayal of the ranger (earnest, competent, and courageous) and its pairing of fire and fire-setter as fiendish villains, both echo key themes of the period’s ranger novels. *The Forest Rangers* is like other cinematic efforts of the period, but the film forsakes any forestry message for pure melodrama.<sup>36</sup>

### In the Green-Shirted Battalion

By the time of World War II, the Forest Service had successfully established itself as a widely recognized organization, one with a genuinely popular identity and mystique. During the war its rangers were called upon to support the nation’s defense in a number of ways, from providing unprecedented amounts of National Forest timber to staffing Pacific Coast fire lookouts year-round to search the skies for Japanese aircraft. Curiously, the ranger novels published during the war years did not evoke this emergency transformation; instead they harkened back to the Forest Service’s romantic origins three to four decades earlier. It was left to the Hollywood production *Dark Mountain* and to non-fictional popular accounts such as *Green Kingdom* to subtly portray the ranger as part of America’s arsenal of defense. The opening dialogue of *Dark Mountain* contains many references to the home-front war effort, from food rationing to the Ranger Don Bradley’s fire fighting as a heroic parallel to combat. The murderous villain is a war profiteer and hijacker; the ranger hero defeats this cunning enemy, sending him to a just reward in an explosive car crash into a tree.

In *Green Kingdom: The Way of Life of a Forest Ranger*, written for high school students as one of several works in the “Way of Life” Series, under the editorial direction of historian Walter Prescott Webb, the college-educated ranger is the “key man” of the whole Forest Service enterprise. Described as the equal of any lawyer, doctor, or engineer, he is a true professional who has “elected to make the welfare of growing trees his life work.” Brought to it not by any hope of a large salary, the ranger has “thrown in his lot with the out-of-doors; with the solemn silences of the great woods; with the wild creatures of the thicket.” This didactic little book became the mold for numerous official or semi-official Forest Service “career-path” and similar public information publications from the 1950s into the 1970s.<sup>37</sup>

Published in 1940, *Green Kingdom* only indirectly acknowledged forestry’s role in the looming conflict. The uniformed, patriotic ranger serves the nation in an “army of skilled and knowing men.” Although at times he still must “tighten up on the hard-to-handle westerners who are used to doing as they choose,” the true nemesis is fire: “Facing the enemy,” the physically-fit forest ranger’s “night-and-day battle with the red demon” is repeatedly likened to combat. However, like the fictional works of the war years, *Green Kingdom* also reminded the reader of the stirring founding myth of America’s past: The life of a forest ranger appeals to “many American boys” because Americans “are instinctively pioneers. . . descendants of venturesome spirits who broke away from European countries and carved an empire out of an untouched continent.”<sup>38</sup>

E. M. Steele’s 1943 “career” book for young men, *How to be a Forest Ranger*, gave more overt emphasis to the ranger as an officer in America’s army of democracy. Acting Chief of the Forest Service Earl Clapp provided an introduction that combines Pinchot conservationism with patriotism. Steele paints the ranger as “bronzed with sun, his body muscular and healthy from a constant outdoor life,” and wearing “his green ranger’s uniform. . . the ranger presents a striking picture.” The author states that the ranger “is in the army too—the army of Uncle Sam’s Forest Service” that defends “America’s forest land from any and all enemies.” The ranger “works hand in hand with the other men in uniform”; likewise compared again and again in the book’s pages

# GREEN KINGDOM

WILLIAM ATHERTON DU PUY



THE WAY OF LIFE SERIES

*Aimed at an audience of high-school-age readers, the non-fictional Green Kingdom: The Way of Life of the Forest Ranger, 1940, portrayed the ranger in a by-now traditional mode; the life of a ranger appealed to American boys because of their rugged, pioneer heritage.*

to the pioneer of old, he is “a man of the outdoors, ready to ride or walk miles in any kind of weather.” Steele mentions the Forest Service’s role in fighting forest fires that may be set by Axis enemies, as well as its mountain-top Aircraft Warning Service look-outs along the Pacific Coast. Smokejumpers, described as “Flying Foresters,” are the elite airborne troops in the war against fire. Meanwhile, on the ground, the “green-shirted battalions” of forest rangers combat America forests’ “silent and deadly” enemy: the stealthy army of destructive insect pests “boring from within like Fifth Columnists.”<sup>39</sup>

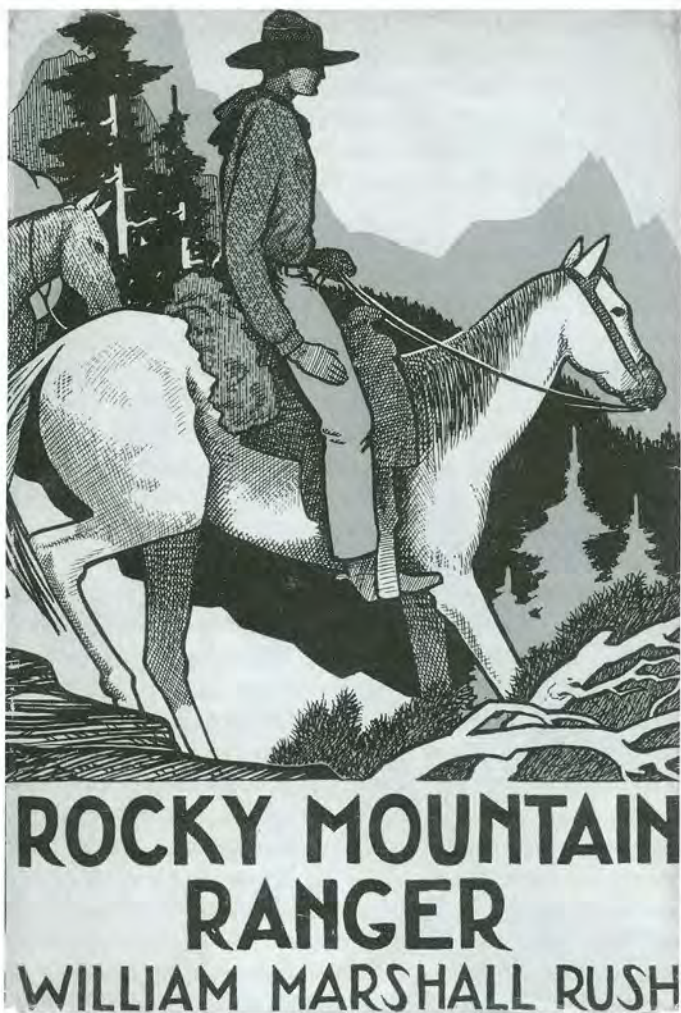
Montgomery Atwater, in his 1941 novel *Flaming Forest*, did employ terms for some chapter titles that alluded to broadly military combat such as “Volunteers,” “Surrounded!”, “Victory,” and “Mopping Up.” Still, the story turned on the by-now classic ranger-versus-arson-fire tale. Young Hank Winton has come to a Montana dude ranch with his father, a powerful but progressive and just-folks U. S. Senator. Hank is enthralled by the impressive sight of Forest Service ranger and packer John Stemple,

leading his packstring down from the mountains of the “Evergreen National Forest,” and attaches himself to Stemple at every opportunity. Stemple, the central figure of the novel, must cope with arsonist fires and unjust accusations of incompetence. Faced with flaming death during the climatic fire chapter, Stemple heroically rescues a besieged crew of young Civilian Conservation Corps firefighters and then falls behind, overcome by the smoke. Before the embers begin to cool Hank Winton goes out to find his mentor and brings him to safety.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps because the fictional ranger could not hope to compete in dramatic stature with the soldier, sailor, or airman of the war, the few ranger novels of this period returned to the Forest Service’s more compelling and conflict-filled early years. The forest ranger figure of the early 1940s remained essentially identical to that of the ranger at the century’s dawn. Elizabeth Flint’s 1943 sober and well-written novel, *The Pine Tree Shield*, tells the story of Ranger Hugh Kent through the voice of his loyal wife. Starting out in the cut-over timberland of northern Minnesota of 1909, Kent becomes one of Pinchot’s young foresters. Fighting against the ignorance of the benighted residents of squalid Iron Range towns, Kent worships the Chief, the “millionaire with a mission” who had launched the Forest Service in 1905: “I want to be among its builders,” he tells his visiting schoolteacher fiancée. Hugh Kent also struggles against the stubbornness of unimaginative, “by the book” forest supervisors. But both husband and wife remain committed to the outfit: “Hugh’s badge lay on the table while he dressed for work... a bronze shield with a pine tree up the center flanked by a U and an S... I pinned it on the pocket flap of his khaki shirt, regretful that I could not have put it there the first time he wore it.”<sup>41</sup> Kent becomes an experienced and respected field man, turned away from deserved advancement because of his reluctance to play the bureaucratic game. By story’s end, during the mid-1930s, Ranger Kent leads a crew of green, frightened CCC boys against a huge fire and suffers severe lung damage. Tragically, he contracts pneumonia while on assignment in the wilderness some months later and dies.<sup>42</sup>

Both *Rocky Mountain Ranger*, a 1944 novel by William Rush, and *Forest Ranger*, a 1945 work by Mark Layton, likewise brought readers back to the 1910s, each book following the story of a young would-be ranger who faces great challenges, conquers his own doubts, and proves himself worthy of wearing the Forest Service badge by novel’s end. Kirk Douglas, a ranch hand new to the West, is the *Rocky Mountain Ranger*. Enthralled with tales of the first forest rangers, he eagerly takes and passes the ranger’s exam, and is assigned to an assistant ranger job in Montana. There Douglas weathers the vacillation and abuse of an incompetent forest supervisor, J. Hapwood Porter, stands up to blustering sheepman Peter LaRocque, the ruthless president of the state woolgrowers’ association, and earns the hard-won respect of legendary old-time ranger John Barnes. Douglas, a wilderness and wildlife advocate, fulfills his determination to keep sheep out of the highest ranges—“that all of it be dedicated to elk, deer, moose, and other wild creatures of the forests and meadows.”<sup>43</sup>

*Forest Ranger*’s John Duncan is a Wyoming rancher’s son who has come to see his family’s grazing methods as short-sighted and ultimately self-defeating. Despite his father’s scorn for “government jobs,” Duncan admires the men of the new Forest Service he’s heard about. He leaves Wyoming for a ranger job in Montana’s Yellowstone River country, where he finds rangers



Both the 1944 *Rocky Mountain Ranger* by William Rush (cover shown) and the 1945 *Forest Ranger* by Mark Layton brought readers back to the 1910s with stories of a young would-be ranger who faces great challenges, conquers his own doubts, and proves he is worthy of wearing the Forest Service badge.

akin to the life of a pioneer. Along with the customary villain, winning the girl's heart, beating the town bully, climactic arson-fire, and ranger's backfire chapter, *Forest Ranger* also features John Duncan giving a Pinchot-like speech to locals on the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run. The forests, he proclaims, have "room for miners, timbermen, guides, hunters, stockmen and all of the wild animals too. That is, that's what they will mean, if they're handled right." He even guides ranchers into reaching consensus on range use based on their long-term interests. After Duncan saves the town from the blaze and is greeted by his former foes as a hero, he "sure now knew where his frontier was... he went out... mounted and rode toward his forest."<sup>44</sup>

The Ranger Westerns of this period were produced during a remarkable quarter-century when the federal government's role in natural resource conservation and land management grew exponentially during Herbert Hoover's "New Era", the dramatic and numerous new programs of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal (during which the Forest Service even promoted a role for itself as centralized authority over private timber harvest, to howls of outrage and charges of "socialism" from industry), and the

unprecedented if temporary "command and control" economy of the war years. Although conflict with anti-conservation forces remained a key theme in many fictional accounts of the 1920–1945 period, by this time the forest ranger had acquired not only sufficient legitimacy and authority, but also numerous local allies to prevail in these contests.

### CHALLENGES OF THE POSTWAR "COMMODITY ERA," 1945–1970

The fearless, earnest "bronzed Ranger" of fiction written between 1910 and mid-century had successfully evangelized the new conservation movement's gospel of efficiency and professional expertise. His victory was, at least in part, due to being a crusading expert and something of a pioneer, one who personified the traditional manly values of the Old West. This remained true through portrayals of the war years and even after. However, a "new" Forest Service took shape following the war. During the postwar housing and lumber boom of the 1950s and 60s, the Forest Service, at the urging of Congress, exchanged its former "custodial" role of simply protecting the nation's forests from depredations of man and fire for a new one of intensive sustained-yield forestry and aggressive commodity production. Thousands of miles of newly built logging roads snaked up into and through the forests; clearcuts and other industrial timber harvest practices on mountainsides marked an end to the early rangers' trackless forest primeval.

From its beginnings, the Forest Service's ultimate mission had, of course, *always* aimed at efficient economic use of the forests. The postwar boom at last brought the opportunity and necessity of putting these long-held agency goals of public forestry into practice. With the Great Depression fresh in mind, the agency promoted the social-economic benefits of "community stability" for Western sawmill towns that would result from long-term, sustained-yield timber harvest; the Cold War consensus provided further impetus to draft the national forests into America's ongoing battle for supremacy on the international scene. But, much of the Forest Service's transformation also resulted from simple institutional self-preservation and adaptation in the face of a fierce postwar revolt of Western economic interests and their anti-New Deal Republican representatives in Congress. This early "sagebrush rebellion" of the late 1940s and early 1950s was the first truly serious challenge to the agency's mission, even its very existence, since the Pinchot era. The battle helped push the fictional ranger along into his challenging new career as a spokesman for commodity-focused multiple-use management of the national forests.<sup>45</sup>

### Old Enemies, New Fights

Some literary traditions persisted in the ranger genre. Fire remained an archenemy. If fighting the searing 1910 fires, fires both historical and fictional, had helped forge the popular character of the early forest ranger, the fatal and controversial Mann Gulch Fire of 1949 (in which twelve smokejumpers and one other Forest Service firefighter perished within sight of Montana's upper Missouri River) refocused popular attention on this foe.<sup>46</sup>

The credits for the 1952 film *Red Skies of Montana* open with a firefighting scene similar to one from a World War II propaganda movie: Battalions of dusty firefighters march toward a

For The First Time!  
The Human, Heroic Saga  
Of The Flame-Defying,  
Parachuting

**SMOKE JUMPERS!**

"When you're married  
to a man in this  
business, you watch  
and wait...and pray!"

20th  
CENTURY  
FOX

**RED  
SKIES OF  
MONTANA**

Filmed in the last wild outpost  
of America in flaming color by  
**TECHNICOLOR!**

**RICHARD WIDMARK**  
**CONSTANCE SMITH** · **JEFFREY HUNTER**

...Richard Boone · Warren Stevens · James Griffith · Joe Sawyer  
Directed by SAMUEL G. ENGEL · JOSEPH M. NEWMAN · HARRY KLEINER  
Based on a Story by ART COHN

**SEE!** The greatest fire  
in screen history  
blaze before your eyes!

**SEE!** The Smoke Jumper  
"Dig In" to  
escape burning death!

**SEE!** The vicious pick-  
axe fight in the  
face of fiery disaster!

**SEE!** Giant trees  
explode with  
volcanic thunder!

**Exhibitor's Campaign Book**

Similar to real-life ranger-heroes during the 1910 Big Blow-up, cinematic Forest Service smokejumper Cliff Mason (played by leading man Richard Widmark) saves his fire-besieged, panic-stricken crew in 20th Century Fox's *Red Skies of Montana* (1952).

blaze reinforced by bulldozers, heavy-duty trucks, and other equipment. Based loosely on the 1949 Mann Gulch tragedy, *Red Skies* features Richard Widmark as smokejumper crew boss Cliff Mason. Dropped onto a lightning blaze near Bugle Peak, Mason and his men become trapped by the flames and lose radio contact with their base. Mason, the only survivor, is later found stumbling through the hot ashes, badly burned and incoherent. Compared to previous cinematic ranger efforts, *Red Skies* is a compelling film, well-written and well-acted. Guilt-ridden and amnesiac over his apparent failure at Bugle Peak, Mason must face not only the uncertainty of his colleagues but his own deepening self-doubt. A brooding psychological study, *Red Skies* brings ultimate redemption for Cliff Mason when he is dispatched to a second fire. Outgunned by the fierce flames, his crew panicking, Mason faces down his own fear and that of the terrified crew. Like Ranger Ed Pulaski of old, Mason forcefully takes commands of his men and bravely ensures their survival as the fire overruns them. By movie's end, tangible evidence is discovered that proves Mason had neither failed nor abandoned the doomed crew at Bugle Peak.<sup>47</sup>

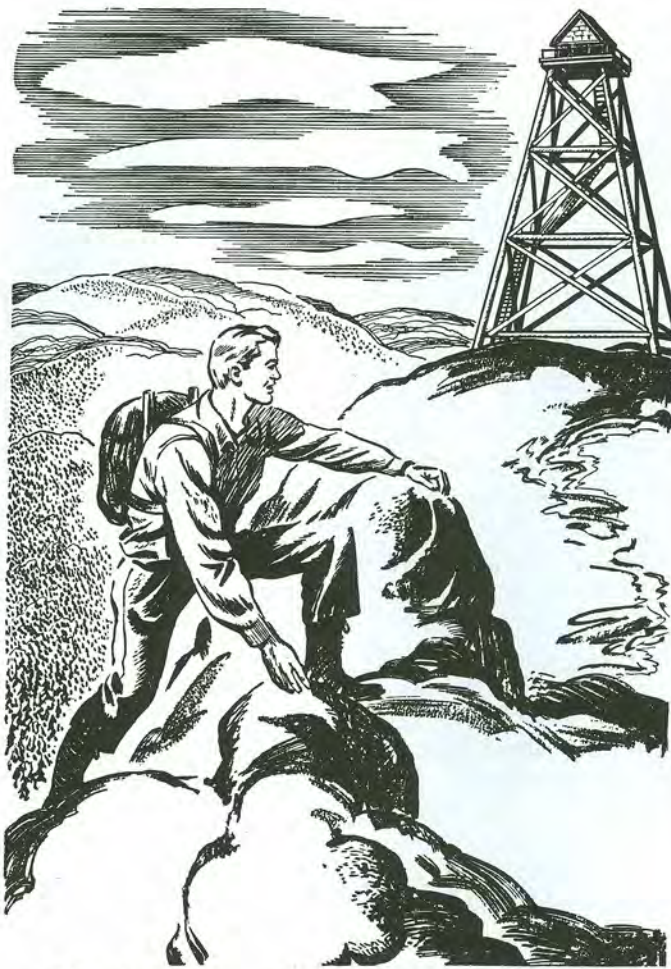
Mark Boesch's 1954 young-adult novel *Fire Fighter* brings some-

what-pampered Ohio lad Steve Dalton to Montana's "Cougar National Forest" on a mission to establish his independence from a dominating outdoorsman father. He joins a Forest Service fire crew where, under the tutelage of veteran Red Anderson, Steve learns the ropes and soon proves himself as a firefighter. Despite bouts of homesickness, Steve Dalton eventually thrives during a winter spent trapping in the mountains. No longer a callow youth and now brimming with self-confidence, he accepts a challenging new job the next summer as a fire lookout. Steve's mother and father come to visit; climbing up the dizzying lookout tower, they are both impressed with the change in their son. He has become a man. Steve will return to Ohio at the end of the fire season, ready to embark on his life as an adult.<sup>48</sup>

Montgomery Atwater produced a number of Ranger Westerns during the postwar years. At the opening of Atwater's 1947 *Hank Winton, Smokechaser*, young Hank is still filled with enthusiasm from his previous summer's excitement in the woods (as portrayed in Atwater's 1941 *Flaming Forest*), and is eager to become a Forest Service man. But Ranger John Stemple is reluctant: "What [Hank] got last summer was the movie version of forestry—fearless rangers battling the red enemy—headline stuff." "He doesn't know the grind of it," the ranger continues, "year after year—cutting trail, splicing telephone lines, making out reports" and the worst part: "working your heart out in summer, starving all winter because the politicians won't put up enough money to keep a crew all year."<sup>49</sup> Still, Hank is hired onto the "Evergreen National Forest's Three Rivers Ranger District," not simply because he's the son of a U.S. Senator, but because he had proven himself a hard-working and promising young hand. First serving as a lookout, Hank wrestles with self-doubts and meets crucial personal challenges while on the summit of Sliderock Mountain. Later Hank becomes a crew boss on the fireline (where he stands up to a bullying logger who wishes to prolong the fire for the sake of a fatter paycheck), and finally he graduates into the elite ranks of smokejumpers.

Some story narratives included both fire and the intense post-war battle over management of the national forests' cattle range. Writer/conservationist Arthur Carhart returned to the ranger genre in 1952 with *Son of the Forest*. Also written for teenaged readers, the novel's hero is Jim Craighead, son of Glenn Craighead, who's been assigned to the Ragged Hills Ranger District of Colorado's "Shavano National Forest" and given the tough assignment of standing up to powerful anti-Forest Service stockmen like Webb Stone. Although his father arrives *persona non grata* among most local people, Jim manages to make friends with Della, daughter of a local small rancher, and Pete, who's father is a Greek-immigrant sheepman (signaling a departure from previous works, ethnic stereotyping is absent from Carhart's book, and Pete emerges as a loyal ally to Jim).

Interpersonal relations grow complicated in *Son of the Forest* when Celia, Webb Stone's daughter, reluctantly also befriends young Craighead for his bravery in saving her beloved dog from a cougar. Wilson and Randy Mack, members of a stubborn and law-breaking ranching family, become Jim's nemeses. The Mack brothers set an arson fire in the story's climax and, similar to Carhart's *Brad Ogden* novel of two decades before, Jim Craighead, faces both the Mack brothers in an punishing fistfight. The fire also places the Ranger Craighead and wealthy rancher Stone shoulder-to-shoulder on the fireline, and they owe each other



Sliderock stood on spidery legs, high above the broad summit of naked rock

During the 1940s and 1950s, novelist Montgomery Atwater depicted a number of hardy young rangers for adolescent readers, among them Hank Winton, *Smokechaser*, 1947 (p.83).

their lives. But Jim wonders, “the fire was one thing, the fight over the range something different...[w]ould courage and dedication carry his father through the trial” soon to come?

Both father and son prove their mettle. To the astonishment of onlookers, the ranger and the cattleman shake hands and ride off together as friends to the stockmen’s meeting to bring peace and fairness to the range. In the novel’s closing lines Jim Craighead stretches his arms wide in joy and exclaims that the forest-cloaked hills are “his country.”<sup>50</sup> However, the story’s traditional, upbeat ending is due in part to compromise between the Forest Service man and the influential rancher, a figure who is no longer portrayed as simply selfish and stubborn.

Another teen-audience novel that directly addressed the real-life ranger/rancher conflicts of the early 1950s was Montgomery Atwater’s *Rustlers on the High Range*. In his introduction, Atwater calls the book “a tale of the mountain cattlemen, who are so used to fighting for everything they possess that occasionally they fight even a friend.” Finishing up his first year at the University of Montana, rancher’s son Don Buckley is packing his things to head home for the summer. His good-natured roommates, Hank Winton (the hero of two of Atwater’s previous novels) and Jim Dade, both earn their summer money as Forest Service smoke-

jumpers. Don invites his new friends to visit the ranch that summer, and Hank replies with a smile, “Aw, cut it out... You’re a cattleman, we’re Forest Service stiff. You’d probably sic the dogs on us!” This exchange leads to a heart-felt reply from Don defending and explaining the ranchers’ outlook.

Later, the two smokejumpers do visit Don’s ranch, sent to the Shining Mountain District by the regional forester on a special mission to help end the dangerous ranger/rancher feud. While older Forest Service men and ranchers stubbornly snort and butt heads, the three young friends come to see that both sides have merit, and their cooperation—at first the subject of ridicule by both sides—becomes a model for their elders. At the close of *Rustlers of the High Range*, after Jim and Hank (aided by a Forest Service helicopter) courageously help Don foil a gang of rustlers, Don’s rancher father (president of the local cattlemen’s association) tells the two smokejumpers, “You might take a message back to your people...tell them that as far as we’re concerned, the range war is washed up.”<sup>51</sup> Again, as in *Son of the Forest*, the sharing of danger by ranger and rancher leads to compromise and peace. Indeed, by the mid-1950s Western cattlemen’s post-war uprising against the Forest Service had largely played out.

### Multiple-Use Advocate

While the national forests underwent increasing development, the 1950s and 1960s likewise saw a proliferation of educational and promotional works about the Forest Service aimed at young people. As with *Green Kingdom* before, the forest ranger served as the personification of the agency; he is the central character in virtually all of these publications. Although this essay does not attempt to incorporate these many non-fiction works into its study, it is worth noting here that the ranger’s duties in these books increase in both number and complexity from years past. The lone, self-reliant forest ranger in wide-brimmed hat of earlier years has now given way to a large cadre of rangers, often wearing hardhats, who work together as a team to provide a wide range of goods and services to the American people. One example: building new campgrounds and many other recreational facilities has become a big job for the rangers, featured prominently in these postwar books (as has dealing with the resulting vandalism). Additionally, many tasks associated with intensive forest management, from laying out timber sales to growing crops of seedlings for reforestation, have assumed a far more prominent role than before. Still, Progressive-era conservation philosophy remained at the heart of this narrative evolution. At first merely implicit in the 1950s, the agency’s new motto of “multiple use” became a repeated mantra of these publications by the 1960s.<sup>52</sup>

Montgomery Atwater employed “multiple-use rangers” in several of his youth novels. Both *Ski Patrol* (1943) and *Avalanche Patrol* (1951) feature eager, young Forest Service men who take on the outfit’s new job of snow ranger—rescuing lost skiers and preventing deadly avalanches at the proliferating National Forest ski areas. Although a murder is central to its plot, in *Avalanche Patrol* the ignorant, wasteful ranchers (or loggers, or hunters) of earlier novels have been replaced by ignorant, foolish ski bums who are heedless of the danger they bring to themselves and others in avalanche country. Brad Davis, the new snow ranger at Snowhole Ski Area, uses both forcefulness and patience to bring them around even as he helps solve the murder mystery.<sup>53</sup>



"In Your Service," an official Forest Service public relations pamphlet of 1955 projected a new, "multiple-use" ranger, one who would also enter the pages of fiction during the postwar period. This photo was used in the publication.

The Forest Service produced its own semi-fictional promotional film, *Rainbow Valley: The Story of a Forest Ranger*, in 1954. It repeated but updated the multiple-use theme of the agency's 1944 film, *The Forest Ranger*.<sup>54</sup>

Animal characters, typically dogs, became important heroes in some ranger fiction during the postwar years. Modeled on Hollywood's popular Rin Tin Tin, the loyal animal, while aiding its busy and sometimes embattled human companion, helped the Forest Service tout the benefits of multiple use to America's children. Published in 1949, the novel *Ranger: A Dog of the Forest Service* features Ranger, a coal-black Labrador retriever, as tenderfoot fire-guard Buzz Hampdon's comrade. In his preface, author Colonel S. P. Meek, who produced a lengthy series of dog books (including *Jerry: The Adventures of an Army Dog* and *Franz: A Dog of the Police*), laments that the "romance [of the ranger life] belonged largely to the bygone day," and that the present ranger had become something of a busy "executive," among whose primary activities are seeing to the needs of an army of campers as well as "making and supervising timber sales and...the work of loggers."<sup>55</sup>

Set in avuncular Ranger Bill Easton's "Smokey River Ranger District" of the "Calegon National Forest" (modeled on the Zig Zag Ranger District of Oregon's Mt. Hood National Forest), the story follows the adventures of Ranger and Buzz, whose ambition is to become a full-fledged Forest Service ranger. They rescue a drowning man from the flood waters of Smokey River, investigate and solve a string of burglaries at the forest's summer-home cabins (owned by wealthy and often thoughtless city-

dwellers), undertake a grueling ski trip to do the annual snow survey for the following year's water-supply forecast, and help save a lost skier on the slopes of Mt. Evans.

Ranger and Buzz, now promoted to assistant ranger, spend the next summer cruising timber, "determining the volume and value of standing timber" in an area selected for logging, as well as "estimating the cost of the roads needed to give access to the area." They also supervise "the setting out of thousands of Douglas fir seedlings from the Forest Service nursery," and at summer's end—in an obligatory nod to ranger tradition—they battle an arsonist's fire and capture the crazed culprit. The Forest Service rewards the pair for their fine work when Bill Easton informs Buzz that he has been given charge of the nearby Kaitlaw Ranger District: "'The Kaitlaw Ranger! Me, Buzz Hampdon!' Emotion surged in him until he thought he would burst from sheer happiness and pride."<sup>56</sup>

The beloved collie Lassie had achieved animal stardom through the pages of a popular novel, a major Hollywood film (starring young Elizabeth Taylor), and then a long-running television series during the 1950s. Lassie began serving a new master, the Forest Service, in the 1960s. Featured in a new television program and in an agency-authorized series of books aimed at 11- to-13-year-olds, Lassie and Ranger Corey Stuart tangle with outlaws or pull in the reins of selfish abusers of public land, all the while spreading the message of multiple use. In *Lassie: The Wild Mountain Trail*, Ranger Stuart's new assignment takes the pair to the Southwest's "Blue River National Forest," where the nearby little

town of Black Rock is withering from economic hard times. Young local boy Paul Carter first makes friends with Lassie and then meets the ranger: “The man getting out of the station wagon was tall and well built. The forest ranger uniform with its big Stetson seemed a part of the man himself.”<sup>57</sup> With Paul as a key helper, Lassie and Ranger Stuart safely apprehend a mentally unstable hermit prospector whose arson fires are ruining the cattle range and threatening the town’s watershed.

In *Lassie: The Secrets of the Smelters’ Cave*, Ranger Stuart, now on New Mexico’s “Perdoso National Forest,” at first copes with malicious vandalism to his remote guard station while elsewhere Lassie picks up litter tossed by thoughtless picnickers. They then face off against powerful ex-Senator Chilton, who despises the Forest Service; Chilton is blocking the agency from building a road into the mountains near his private estate out of a selfish desire to preserve his privacy. Touring the area in his Jeep, the ranger promotes the road to local people as a boon to recreational development, one that will help their economy, and—with Lassie breaking the ice—he even persuades old Dimasio Sandoval, owner of a small piece of an ancient Spanish land-grant, to let the road pass through his property. Facing intense political pressure from Chilton, Stuart must meet with current U. S. Senators Denoff and Bolden on the matter. Senator Bolden, who allows that he’s “personally...always been in accord with the multiple use management of the National Forests,” demands to know why the Forest Service is pushing this particular road. Ranger Stuart patiently describes the Perdoso’s overloaded campgrounds and crowded conditions; the Forest is not the private playground of Chilton and a few others. Stuart asks Bolden rhetorically, “What [about] the two hundred thousand people of Midway, just thirty miles from here?...Like all other people of the United States, they’re part owners of the Perdoso National Forest.” Dimasio Sandoval, dignified and generous, steps in: “I will not be one to deny to others the beauty that has been free to me all my life. Let [the camping public] come and stay for a day, a week...in the great cathedral of the mountains.”<sup>58</sup> The road is built, thereby bringing the greatest good to the greatest number in the long run.

Corey Stuart, with Lassie’s help, brings his interpersonal skills to bear on the hordes of unruly snowmobilers in *Lassie: Lost in the Snow*. Their thoughtless antics endanger others and themselves. Despite petty harassment and intimidation, the ranger works with a key group of responsible users to establish reasonable and enforceable rules, and together they succeed in bringing relative peace and quiet to the snow-covered mountains of the “Wapiti National Forest.”<sup>59</sup>

Lassie and Ranger Corey Stuart served in the non-fiction works as well. In 1967, the pair teamed up with Smokey Bear, icon of the Forest Service’s public fire-prevention program since 1945, in the “Forest Ranger Handbook,” a heavily illustrated pamphlet pitched to older grade-school children. Lassie and the Ranger introduce conservation concepts by means of a “forest ranger talk” glossary (out of at total 27 terms defined, sixteen deal with timber harvest and one relates to fire) and the Forest Service’s “Multiple Use Tree,” with its five major branches—water, range, recreation, wildlife, and wood. Smokey, with Lassie at his side, gives tips on “how to build a safe campfire.” One quiz answer points out that “conservation is the **wise use** of **all** our natural resources so that we can literally ‘have our cake and eat it, too.’” The booklet, which marks a departure from earlier

## FOREST RANGER HANDBOOK

by COREY STUART and LASSIE



*From 1964 to 1969, fictional Ranger Corey Stuart teamed up with Lassie in a variety of books and comics to wrangle with outlaws, vandals, and abusers of the public land. They were also featured in the 1967 Forest Ranger Handbook, that espoused the benefits of “multiple use” to youth of the day.*

works by including women in the ranks of the agency’s natural resource professionals, pointedly ends with “The Difference Between the Forest Service and the Park Service”—illustrations that compare the distinctive uniforms of the two kinds of rangers, and Ranger Stuart’s discussion of their differing missions: managing “lands of many uses” versus preserving “great outdoor museums.”<sup>60</sup>

The Forest Service and the Park Service, virtually since the latter’s creation in 1916, had often been competing—sometimes fiercely competing—organizations, particularly over their respective share of the federal land base, but also for funding and popular support. By the postwar years, the Forest Service literally had lost considerable ground to the Park Service: in parks like the Grand Canyon, the Olympic Mountains, and Grand Teton.<sup>61</sup> But, perhaps just as ominous, as the Forest Service ranger evolved into a multiple-use ranger, a fictional *park* ranger in the 1950s began to try on the worn boots of the traditional, popular protector of the forests of old. The “Jim Forest and Ranger Don” series of the late 1950s paired an adventurous seven-year old boy with his uncle, a “forest ranger” on “Big Pines Forest,” but from his distinctive uniform and hat to the very agency name stenciled on his truck there is no doubt: Ranger Don is a Park Service



This is the forest ranger.  
 His name is Ranger Don.  
 He has to watch over  
 Big Pines Forest.  
 He watches over all the things  
 that live in the forest.

5

During the multiple-use era of the 1950s to 1970s, the Ranger Don series for children, as with some other stories of the period, blurred the identity of the forest ranger with that of the park ranger. This included Jim Forest and Ranger Don, by John and Nancy Rambeau, 1959, (p. 5, above) and Ranger Don and the Forest Fire, by Robert Whitehead, 1978.

ranger. Published for very young readers, the Ranger Don figure continued to appear in books published into the 1960s and 1970s, always as an explicit hybrid of forest and park ranger.<sup>62</sup>

A foreshadowing of Park Service poaching in the forest ranger's territory came with *Sierra Ranger*, a 1954 novel for teenaged boys. The story is vintage ranger fiction: Doug Moran, the protagonist, is a college lad who must prove himself on the fireline and elsewhere, to experienced older hands like Lash O'Hara. An aspirant to rangerdom, Doug nearly single-handedly captures a gang of crooked contract firefighters who have been setting blazes throughout the forest. The setting, however, is Yosemite National Park, and Doug Moran has his sights on becoming a park ranger. Aside from the Lassie and Ranger Don books, *Sierra Ranger* was among the last ranger stories of any kind published for the next twenty years.<sup>63</sup>

By the late 1950s and 1960s, rumblings of dissent over new agency practices, particularly clearcut harvesting of National Forest timber, were being voiced by citizens from the Monongahela Valley of the Appalachians to the Bitterroot Valley of the Northern Rockies. Nevertheless, in terms of his broad legitimacy and authority, the forest ranger was probably at the

top of his game during the postwar years, enjoying the fruits of a popularity earned during the preceding decades. In a classic 1960 administrative study, *The Forest Ranger*, scholar Herbert Kaufman examined the reasons for the Forest Service's notable success as a decentralized bureaucracy. Kaufman's focus was the agency's "forest ranger" (i.e., district ranger), the figure who—as an "executive, planner, and woodsman"—played the pivotal role in implementing the organization's goal on the ground.<sup>64</sup> Although Kaufman did not address the point, at least some part of the ranger's success likely resulted from his fictional counterpart's popularity and influence during the previous half-century.

After 1970, as part of an ongoing trend that brought assaults on the legitimacy of America's political and business establishment, the Forest Service too came under public attack for a variety of reasons and from a number of quarters. Since 1980, it has become increasingly beleaguered by forces from both ends of the political spectrum. The fictional ranger, too, came under attack.

### THE RANGER BESIEGED, 1970–2000

The closing decades of the twentieth century, a period that some Americans historians have come to call the "postmodern era," brought a seeming cacophony of competing, conflicting voices to issues of natural resource management and federal land management. The traditional credo of Progressive conservation came to be seen by many as an empty husk. With this situation came a steady loss of authority, real and perceived, by the appointed custodian of the National Forests.

Scholarly administrative studies of the Forest Service during this period speak of the agency's vacillation and its increasing "delegitimation." The shrinking of the agency's authority resulted in part from the action of forces that are situated both above the organization (i.e., Congress's contradictory mandates and its selective budgetary constrictions, executive-branch political appointees' "micromanagement" of policy implementation) and below it (e.g., a continuing barrage of lawsuits that slow or completely halt work on the ground).<sup>65</sup>

Ranger fiction after 1970 tended to mirror the ranger's real-life situation. The forest ranger's unhappy lot is reflected in the precipitous decline from earlier periods in the number of ranger novels published, as well as in the often uncomplimentary nature of the ranger's dwindling fictional portrayals.

### Attacked from the Left and Right

Set in northern New Mexico, John Nichols' 1974 comic novel *The Milagro Beanfield War* turns previous ranger portrayals upside down. Instead of a hard-bitten Anglo bringer-of-order or an empathetic and wise representative of the government, the Forest Service ranger in the dusty Hispanic town of Milagro is Carl Abeyta, a local boy "gone bad." Ranger Abeyta is an important figure, albeit one with a small part in the narrative. Abeyta joined the Forest Service for self-advancement, turning his back on the needs of his own community in order to curry favor with the higher-ups of the agency, a bureaucracy that meekly upholds the domination of wealthy Anglo landowners and corporations over the struggling Hispanic irrigators and sheepmen. His predecessor in the Milagro ranger job, now Forest Supervisor Buddy Galbadon, is a similarly feckless figure.

Even Smokey the Bear plays an unsympathetic role in Nichols'

story: "As everyone knows, Smokey the Bear is the symbol of the United State Forest Service," an organization that for nearly a century has been "the greatest landholder in Chamisa County, although most of the land it held had once...belonged to the people of Milagro." Because the Forest Service consistently favored "Ladd Devine the Third, big timber and mining companies, and out-of-state hunters" over the "poor people of Milagro," the locals tended to "look upon Smokey the Bear as a kind of ursine Daddy Warbucks, Adolf Hitler, colonialist Uncle Sam, and Ladd Devine all rolled into one." When the "war" begins, they proceed to carve traditional wooden "santos" figures of Smokey the Bear, which they pierce with nails and leave as magical talismans/warnings at the ranger station.<sup>66</sup> But Ranger Abeyta, something of a bumbling fool and a moral coward, must do his master's bidding. As powerful rancher Ladd Devine directs the Forest Service to shut off the long-dry irrigation ditch that now brings "pirated" water to old Joe Mondragon's beanfield, the citizens of Milagro Valley, likened by author Nichol to Vietnamese peasants, begin to take non-violent guerilla action. Carl Abeyta blusters, blunders, and becomes the buffoon. In the end, the townsfolk triumph over greedy Devine and the truckling ranger.

Although the Forest Service is barely mentioned in the final two novels of Nichols' "New Mexico trilogy," set in the same area and featuring some of the same characters as *Milagro* (instead other government agencies, from the FBI to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, come in for satiric treatment), it remains present in the narratives' background as an unsympathetic and faceless bureaucracy.<sup>67</sup>

As America's post-1970 environmental movement gathered steam, some increasingly radicalized environmental groups took on the Forest Service using extralegal and illegal actions, such as tree-spiking and tree-sitting. They were inspired in part by writer and environmental activist Edward Abbey. Abbey's two most influential novels, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) and *Fire on the Mountain* (1961), largely ignored the Forest Service in favor of heaping scorn on local law enforcement agencies, as well as the Department of Interior, the Army Corps of Engineers, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the U.S. Air Force for their despoilation of the Southwest's landscape. Like Nichols' book, activists affiliated with Earth First! also portrayed Smokey Bear as a tool of rapacious corporations in cartoons and satirical writings. The Earth First! movement's literature further labeled and lampooned forest rangers as incompetent "Freddies," a term of derision derived from the leading man of the corny 1942 movie *The Forest Rangers*.<sup>68</sup>

On the opposite end of the political spectrum, the few fictional accounts produced by conservatives similarly hammered on the ranger. Although such novels evidently are lacking, the modest-budget 1979 film production *Mountain Family Robinson* proved popular with small-town audiences in the rural West. Written and produced by Arthur Dubs, owner of the Medford, Oregon-based "family film" company Pacific International Enterprises, the movie forms the final episode in his "Wilderness Family" trilogy. The Robinson family, Skip and Pat, and their teen-aged daughter, Jenny, and younger son, Toby, have escaped from Los Angeles to fulfill their dream of building a life in the Rocky Mountains wilderness.

Located on an old mining claim far from the nearest roads or civilization, the Wilderness Family Robinson carves a self-sufficient homestead against a scenic backdrop of glorious mountains and



*Mountain Family Robinson*, a low-budget film of the 1970s, portrayed the Forest Ranger (the shadowy figure in sunglasses looming above the hardy family) as a relentless bureaucrat bent on enforcing cruel regulations.

lakes, and they form bonds of special friendship with the deer, raccoons, a black bear, and an eagle. The portrayal of the natural world is romantic and anthropomorphic, in the mold of older Disney films. Lovable old-time sourdough Boomer provides plenty of comic relief. Predators such as cougars and grizzly bears are the villains who periodically threaten the family, and a frenzied pack of hungry wolves even attempts to force its way into the Robinson's snow-bound log cabin to make a meal out of the family. One after another, wilderness idyll is followed by wilderness trauma. And then, in the words of the promotional summary for *Mountain Family Robinson*, the "family now faces...the United States Forest Service...the unbending bureaucracy of the United States government."

Nearing retirement, Forest Ranger Bill Brooks spies the Robinsons' unauthorized cabin during a final helicopter patrol. He lands and gruffly informs them they must prove up on their mining claim or leave the wilderness. Ranger Brooks, rigid and relentless, becomes the family's nemesis. For him, the Robinsons are that one last chore to complete satisfactorily before he retires

from the Forest Service. Towards the end of the story, upon rudely handing the Robinsons an official final order to leave their home and then taking off in his helicopter, Brooks' craft malfunctions and crash lands nearby. Skip saves the ranger from the burning wreckage and carries him back to the cabin, where the family nurses the ranger back to health. Reluctantly, grudgingly, and with some persuasion by Boomer the prospector, Brooks finally relents. Turning a blind eye to government red tape and regulations, he agrees with a conspiratorial wink that the family's mining claim is valid, and that the Robinsons may stay.<sup>69</sup>

Out of the satirical and critical works of the 1970s and 1980s emerged a kind of "anti-ranger," a ranger whose original positive portrayal had been turned on its head: a bumbling and vindictive bureaucrat who might best be removed from the scene.

### The Shrinking Ranger

Concurrent with the harsh fictional portrayals by its critics, the Forest Service and sympathetic writers responded feebly by producing a scattering of bland works, aimed primarily at young children. The Forest Service's innocuous "Junior Forest Ranger Handbook" of 1980 was simply a very slightly updated reissue of a 1961 publication; it featured Smokey the Bear on its cover and throughout its twenty-three pages. Included in the 1980 version are illustrations of ethnically diverse Forest visitors who provide readers with examples how to and how not to be careful with fire in the woods. For older readers the agency simply revised slightly and reissued its 1955 *In Your Service: The Work of Uncle Sam's Forest Rangers*, itself virtually unchanged in tone and message from the Forest Service's 1944 short film, *The Forest Ranger*.<sup>70</sup> The agency's days of effective and sustained missionizing through a variety of popular publications appeared to be about over.

*Protectors of the Wilderness: The First Forest Rangers*, a brief and heavily-illustrated children's book published in 1978, aims to retell the heroic tales of old, from Pinchot's battle with "the interests" to Ed Pulaski's battle with fire. Gary is a young firefighter who because of his impetuosity is known to others as "the lone ranger." Old Forest Service veteran Oscar takes Gary under his wing and relates the proud history of the outfit through a series of stories. Gary learns to be a team player, while the narrative explains the agency's multiple-use mission and points out that young women, too, are now making government forestry a career. The story ends with the statement that "caring for the nation's forests is hard work, so to be a forest ranger you have to really care."<sup>71</sup> Taking a slightly different approach is the grade-school-level book *A Day in the Life of a Forest Ranger*, published in 1980. It follows Ranger Lee Schaar during an action-packed day in the forest—helping a Youth Conservation Corps crew build a lakeside dock, tranquilizing a pesky black bear that has frightened a family of campers, supervising some loggers harvesting National Forest timber, and dousing the flames of an escaped campfire. "Soon darkness will fall silently on the forest, marking the end of another day in the life of a forest ranger."<sup>72</sup>

Of the few ranger novels published during the past three decades that are set during the contemporary period, even fewer feature the ranger as hero. Those that do so tend to be murder mysteries that simply employ a forest setting and a ranger protagonist. The conservation message, be it for preservation or multiple use, is muted. Pat Stadley's 1970 *Autumn of a Hunter* brings wealthy businesswoman Martha Cope and her husband,

Gifford, on a hunting trip to the High Sierras district of Assistant Ranger Peter Burton. Burton foils Gif Cope's plot to murder his wife for her fortune.

Following the critical and commercial success of author (and National Park Service ranger) Nevada Barr's series featuring park ranger-sleuth Anna Pigeon, imitators came forward with additional Forest Service mysteries.<sup>73</sup> Written by former Forest Service employee Stephen MacDonald, *Bitterroot, A Novel of the Forest Service, Gold, Murder, and Mercy* is "dedicated to all the personnel of the United States Forest Service, past and present." This 1999 vanity press publication recounts a convoluted story of greed and violence. The drama springs from the discovery of a long-hidden gold cache on a remote ranger district and the ensuing plots. Dedicated young forester and father Joe McCulloch ends up murdered, and many years later his son tracks down the murderer. MacDonald's narrative includes bits of Forest Service "color," but the ranger figure is rapidly eclipsed by the complicated storyline.<sup>74</sup> Author Lynda Douglas initiated a promised "Forest Service mysteries" series in 2002 with *Deadfall: A National Forest Mystery*, which is set in southwestern Oregon's Siskiyou National Forest. In 1979 members of a drug ring murder Forest Service man Eric Campbell; his young daughter Claire is found injured and alone in the wilderness. The plot revolves around Claire's dangerous attempt to reclaim her identity and find the guilty party.<sup>75</sup>

An exception to the escapist direction of the above examples, one piece of recent fiction served in some measure to rebut institutional challenges to the Forest. Stan Tixier, who retired in the late 1990s as regional forester of the agency's Intermountain Region, wrote *Green Underwear* (an insider's reference to Forest Service pride). Published in 2001, this (post) modern-day ranger novel is set in the Elk Creek Ranger District of the "Rio Verde National Forest," an area wisely managed by Ranger Larry Weaver, who is a besieged but patient proponent of practical multiple use of the forests. Although recalling the earnest ranger novels of earlier decades, the story also serves to criticize the stubbornness of "environmental extremists" and the Clinton-Gore administration's meddling in agency policy-making.<sup>76</sup>

Another very recent literary effort by a retired Forest Service employee, Gilbert Davies's 2003 *The Forest Ranger Who Could*, confines itself to the nostalgic 1905 to 1912 years. From inspecting remote "June 11" homesteads to tangling with timber thieves, hero-ranger Buck Stonewall's "high adventures and...rip-roaring life" in the Lakefield District of the "Maahcooatche National Forest" actually catalogs numerous everyday tasks. The pioneer ranger's successful courtship of country schoolteacher and post-mistress Edna Lawrence provides some personal backdrop to the novel's detailed recounting of early-day Forest Service fieldwork.<sup>77</sup>

One might expect that a novel about the West's "timber wars" of the 1980s–1990s, which broke out largely in the Pacific Northwest's National Forests and other federal lands over issues of enforcing the Endangered Species Act, would feature a government forester in some sort of role, however minor. But this was not the case in Jeff Golden's 1999 *Forest Blood*. Golden's novel takes place in the logging town of Lewis Falls near southwestern Oregon's "Lewis National Forest" (a setting inspired in part by the actual community of Butte Falls and the nearby Rogue River National Forest). Politicians, environmentalists, corporate sharks, mysterious tree-splitters, and aggressive journalists all play

*The Life and Times of a U.S. Forest Ranger*

# Green Underwear

*A Novel*

Stan Tixier

Foreword by R. Max Peterson, Chief Emeritus, U.S. Forest Service

*Green Underwear*, 2001, by Stan Tixier, recalls the earnest ranger novels of earlier decades as it provides a primer of a ranger's everyday labors during the last decade of the twentieth century. A work of fiction, but based on real events, *Green Underwear* leaves the reader with the perspective of the career professional. It depicts the forest ranger behind a desk with a computer as well as on a horse looking over the range.

their parts, with the town's loggers caught in the middle. But any question over how to manage the Lewis National Forest is missing from the story's pages. Instead, third-generation Lewis Falls logger Jack Gilliam finds himself the pawn in a battle between ardent preservationists and a ruthless corporate buccaneer, who has acquired Jack's employer, Lewis Corporation, in a hostile takeover so as to liquidate its timber assets and move on. The only Forest Service man to appear in the story, albeit indirectly, is an unnamed young timber cruiser, fresh out of Oregon State University's forestry school. Looking "like Dudley Doright in his green khaki uniform, all pompadour and chin," he is considered a slightly ridiculous figure by the locals.<sup>78</sup> In *Forest Blood*, the forest ranger is absent, and the Forest Service is oddly non-existent.

The forest ranger began his career in American fiction as a new kind of Western hero, one born of the marriage of Progressive Movement ideals with traditional frontier imagery. He helped impart popular legitimacy to the young Forest Service, and, as that agency's authority steadily grew, the ranger figure

increased in stature and recognition as well. By about 1960, the fictional ranger had reached the apogee of his literary career. Then began what became an onslaught of public criticism for the Forest Service. The ranger figure—since 1970 increasingly portrayed as an ineffective bureaucrat—became a casualty of this tumultuous period. Currently, environmental groups typically paint the Forest Service as nothing more than the willing tool of the "special interests"—the timber industry and other commodity producers—and call for "zero cut" and "cattle-free" national forests. Meanwhile, conservative Western senators call for commodity-focused "local control" of the national forests, and libertarian ideologues propose their outright privatization. Adding insult to injury, the agency's long hard battle against fire—the high point of many a Ranger Western—is now seen as having been fought far too well, eventually resulting in dense, brush-choked, and ever-more combustible forests throughout the West.

Nevertheless, as the Forest Service approaches its centennial (2005), there doubtless remains a deep reservoir of popular support for the "National Forest idea," and considerable respect for the ranger who helps transform that ideal into reality. During his second century, it seems certain that the forest ranger—both real-life and fictional—will have some rocky trails to ride.

## RECLAIMING THE RANGER LEGACY

Two critically acclaimed and widely read authors produced works of post-1970 fiction that can be included, if a bit loosely, in the forest ranger genre: Norman MacLean and Ivan Doig. Their ranger tales, MacLean's short story "USFS 1919: The Ranger, the Cook, and a Hole in the Sky" and Doig's novels *English Creek* and *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, give respite from the generally dismal lot of the fictional ranger during this period; they impart a firm sense of the old ranger ideal, a portrayal that has appealed to large numbers of present-day readers. This success is due in large measure, of course, to the skills of gifted and accomplished storytellers. Just as importantly, perhaps, MacLean and Doig penned the only works of the recent period that take place back during the sunrise and morning of the forest ranger's ride, the years from 1905 until World War Two. Rather than nostalgic caricatures of the conservation missionary, however, their characters are both simple and complicated, heroic *and* all too human.

MacLean's and Doig's rangers derive from the personal experience of each writer, both of whom grew up in western Montana, that setting of so much early ranger fiction. This fact doubtless gives their characters an authenticity and depth that is missing from many earlier ranger stories. Keeping in mind those two qualities, of authenticity and depth, this essay closes with brief reviews of MacLean's and Doig's work. Their rangers may best serve as touchstones for forest rangers both fictional and real during the National Forest System's challenging years ahead.

"USFS 1919: The Ranger, the Cook, and a Hole in the Sky" is one of Norman MacLean's two other short stories in his 1976 *A River Runs Through It, and Other Stories*. The storyteller employs an easy humor in his remembrance of the late summer of 1919, half a century earlier, when he was a boy of "seventeen and the Forest Service was only fourteen." He works on the four-man trail crew for Bill Bell, ranger and lead packer on the Elk Summit Ranger District of the Selway National Forest. The crew's summer in the remote high country had been a tough one, a

“world of hoof and foot and the rest done by hand.” During a season of fighting fire and blasting trail, the boy has come to idolize Bill Bell, a man who can navigate a string of fifty horses and mules through the mountains. Although soon enough one “could scarcely be a lookout without a uniform and a college degree,” in 1919 none of the crew, including Bell, had even been to a college—“They still picked rangers for the Forest Service by picking the toughest guy in town.”

*Bill was built to fit his hands. He was big all over. Primarily he was a horseman, and he needed an extra large horse. He was not the slender cowboy of the movies and the plains. He was a horseman of the mountains. He could swing an ax or pull a saw, run a transit and build trails, walk all day if he had to, put on climbing spurs and string number nine telephone wire, and he wasn't a bad cook....Bill called [his horse] Big Moose, [who] was brown and walked with his head thrown back as if he wore horns.<sup>79</sup>*

Although “with a rope he was an artist,” was “the best packer going,” and “could handle big crews of fire fighters as if he personally owned them and the Bitterroot Mountains,” Bell is miserable at cards. The ranger regularly loses every game he plays, from cribbage up at the ranger station to high-stakes poker down in the saloons of Hamilton. The story begins with the boy, squinty-eyed with jealousy, having taken a visceral dislike to the crew’s “spoiled” cook, a talented card shark whom the ranger—“nature’s gift to the local gamblers”—had shrewdly hand-picked with the intention of settling scores with the tin horns of Hamilton. To save the cook from possible harm, Bell temporarily exiles the hot-tempered lad up to a distant mountain-top fire lookout to cool off for a couple of weeks. This strategy works.

Later, at the close of the season, all of the crewmembers vow to go down together to Hamilton and “clean out the town.” “I don’t know why, but it always happens...that when you work outside a town for a couple of months you get feeling a lot better than the town and very hostile toward it,” explains the narrator. “The town doesn’t even know about you, but *you* think and talk a lot about it.” And so, the tale’s main turn comes when Bell’s crew, flush with their summer’s pay and spoiling for a fight, enters Hamilton’s Oxford Saloon for the big poker game. A big pot of money, some dirty dealing by one of the locals, and an ensuing brawl provide the story’s climactic tension and action. But the core of “The Ranger, the Cook, and a Hole in the Sky” is the narrator’s wry nostalgia for the summer of 1919, at the close of which Bill Bell asks the boy if he’d want to be on his crew the following summer.

*I went looking for words like “privilege” and “honor” and ended up with, “It’s a deal.” “It’s a deal,” he replied.... We belonged to no union, no lodge, and most of us had no families and no church. In late spring, we had landed jobs in a new outfit called the United States Forest Service which we vaguely knew Teddy Roosevelt had helped to get going and which somehow made us feel proud and tough and always looking for trouble of some sort, like fires, dynamite, and rattlesnakes on mountains too high to have any.... Here I am half a century later trying to tell you about it.<sup>80</sup>*

Ivan Doig’s 1984 *English Creek*, like MacLean’s short story, revolves around the coming of age of a teenaged boy. The novel,



### USFS 1919: *The Ranger, the Cook, and a Hole in the Sky*

And then he thinks he knows  
The hills where his life rose . . .  
—Matthew Arnold,  
“The Buried Life”

I was young and I thought I was tough and I knew it was beautiful and I was a little bit crazy but hadn’t noticed it yet. Outside the ranger station there were more mountains in all directions than I was ever to see again—oceans of mountains—and inside the station at this particular moment I was ahead in a game of cribbage with the ranger of the Elk Summit District of the Selway Forest of the United States Forest Service (USFS), which was even younger than I was and enjoyed many of the same characteristics.

Norman MacLean’s short story “*The Ranger, the Cook, and a Hole in the Sky*,” in *A River Runs Through It*, 1976, brings an understated authenticity to the forest ranger figure.

which takes place during the summer of 1939, was the first of the author’s “Two Medicine country” trilogy to be written and published; chronologically, however, *English Creek* actually forms the second part of Doig’s series. The story is narrated by Jick (John Angus) MacCaskill, the younger son of Lisabeth and Varick “Mac” MacCaskill, native Montanans who come from local sheepherding families. Mac is the current ranger on the English Creek Ranger District of northwestern Montana’s “Two Medicine National Forest,” straddling the Continental Divide up against the southeast flank of Glacier National Park. Mac grants his enthusiastic son’s wish to demonstrate his maturity with a month’s job away from home, doing the annual sheep count up in the mountains. But there Jick will be under the watchful eye of an old family acquaintance, Stanley Meixell. Twenty years before, Mac, after a stint in the Army during World War I, had joined the Forest Service. Totally unknown to Jick, Stanley Meixell had been the original ranger on the district; Meixell had first met Jick’s father, Mac, when Mac was a young boy, and had later hired him onto the Two Medicine. Jick senses that although some mysterious parting of the ways between the two had led to bad feelings, still, some years later, the two men obviously respect each other. To young Jick, unaware of any of their past history, his father is the ranger and Stanley is simply a seldom-seen local character with no connection to the Forest Service.

Ranger MacCaskill had stayed with the outfit, enduring the pay cuts and mushrooming responsibilities of the Depression. Despite the occasional silly bureaucratic demands of the Regional

Office in Missoula, Mac loves the Two Medicine Forest and he loves his job. As Jick puts it:

*My father was a man born to the land, in a job that sometimes harnessed him to a desk, an Oliver typewriter, and a book of regulations. A man caught between, in a number of ways.... The Forest Service itself was an in-between thing, for that matter. Keeper of the national forests, their timber, grass, water, yet merchant of those resources too. Anybody local like my father who "turned green" by joining the USFS now sided against the thinking of a lot of people he had known all his life, people who considered that the country should be wide open, or at least wider open than it was, for using.... A good many of the guys more veteran than my father dated back to the early time of the Forest Service, maybe even to when it originated in 1905; they tended to be reformed cowboys or loggers or some such, old hands who had been wrestling the West since before my father was born. Meanwhile the men younger than my father were showing up with college degrees in forestry and the New Deal alphabet on their tongues.<sup>81</sup>*

Despite the regular transfers mandated for most other rangers, Ranger MacCaskill had remained on the English Creek district so many years because of the imperious Regional Forester. Major Kelley, "the Pope in Missoula, so to speak," wanted "that tricky northernmost part of the Two"—surrounded as it was by Glacier National Park, the Blackfoot Indian Reservation, and private stock ranches—to "be rangered in a way that wouldn't draw the Forest Service any bow-wow from the neighboring" governmental staff, "in a way that would keep the sheepmen content and the revenue they paid for summer grazing permits flowing in," and especially "in a way that would not repeat the awful fires of 1910, or the later Phantom Woman burn." This Mac had done.

As Jick's summer progresses, his curiosity about the evident tension between his father and Stanley Meixell grows. To Jick's shock, it turns out that the seemingly dependable older man is a "behind the bush bottle tipper." And later, under constant prodding, Stanley admits to Jick, "I was the ranger that set up the boundaries of the Two Medicine National Forest." Jick is thunderstruck:

*In any Forest Service family such as ours, lore of setting up the national forests, of the boundary examiners who established them onto maps of America as public preserves, was almost holy writ. I could remember time upon time of hearing my father and the other Forest Service men of his age mention those original rangers and supervisors, the ones who were sent out in the first years of the century with not much more than the legal description of a million or so acres and orders to transform them into a national forest. "The forest arrangers," the men of my father's generation nicknamed them.... Famous, famous guys. Sort of combinations of Old Testament prophets and mountain men rolled into one.... But, that Stanley Meixell, wrong-handed campjack and frequenter of Dr. Al K. Hall, had been the original ranger of the Two Medicine National Forest, I had never heard a breath of. And this was strange.<sup>83</sup>*

For Jick, more strange revelations, as well as tests of personal judgment and courage, occur over the course of the searing hot summer. A fistfight with a sneering bully at the rodeo dance, his brilliant older brother's incomprehensible decision to forego col-

lege for an early marriage and life as a ranch hand, an exhausting month working on a haying crew, his first serious sweetheart, and then, in August, after a spectacular lightning bust, comes a big fire, one to rival the storied Phantom Woman fire. Jick's mother reluctantly allows him to join his father's fire crew of inexperienced CCC boys and boozers from Great Falls, but only as the "flunky" for the fire-camp cook, Stanley Meixell. The situation becomes desperate for Mac as the Flume Gulch fire inexorably jumps fireline after fireline. Unbidden, one evening Meixell offers his experienced advice to a worried Ranger MacCaskill: don't try to contain the fire down in the dangerous canyon in order to meet the agency's strict "10 a.m." fire suppression directive; "rules are rules," the older man says, and "fools are fools." Meixell quietly but firmly urges a different strategy, an audacious backfire on the high grassy slope—one that offers both better odds of stopping the fire and the strong possibility, if success is not achieved, of the fire burning the entire forest. Mac mulls over the advice that night—the fate of his Forest Service career hinges on the result—and then implements it the following morning, despite the vehement protests of his assistant ranger. Meixell's backfire, a very tricky proposition, stops the Flume Gulch fire.

Afterward, Stanley tells Jick about his time as ranger and fireboss on the Phantom Woman burn, a fire that he had let "get away," due to his thirst for booze while on the fireline. Young Mac, facing the gut-wrenching decision, turned in his mentor and friend for this failure; as a result, Meixell was dismissed from the Forest Service. Having learned a lot of things that summer, Jick MacCaskill returns to high school in the fall of 1939. In the novel's epilogue, after having seen combat in the Pacific, Jick comes home. Meixell had gone off during the war to work in the shipyards at Portland, never to be heard from again. As he heads off to forestry school in Missoula, Jick is left with his memory of the last time he had ever seen Stanley Meixell: the first forest ranger of the Two Medicine was still in fire camp just after the Flume Gulch burn; patiently cooking for the exhausted fire crew, he was stirring a pot of gravy.

Doig's later novel, *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, comes first in his trilogy's sequence. Although much of it is the tale of two Scottish immigrant families to the Two Medicine country, the Barclays and the MacCaskills, the Forest Service and Stanley Meixell make their first appearance about midway through the story. By way of following the trail of the fictional forest ranger full circle, it is a good story with which to end this essay.

It is 1907, and a young Stanley Meixell, wearing the Forest Service shield on his shirt pocket, rides up to the ranch house of Angus MacCaskill and his impressionable eight-year-old son Varick (i.e., young Mac, who would go on to become a ranger himself); Meixell, a new man in the country, has come to tell the MacCaskills and their neighbors about the new national forest. "Your badge isn't one I'm familiar with," says Angus skeptically, "What, have the trees elected you sheriff?" "Not exactly the trees," replies Meixell with a polite smile, "a character named Theodore Roosevelt." "I'm what's called a forest ranger," he explains. "But actually it ain't just the trees I'm supposed to be the nursemaid of," Meixell continues in his steady fashion, "it's the whole forest, the soil and water, too, a person'd have to say." Upon being told that sheep will still be allowed to graze on the national forest's summer range, Angus demands, "if we can still use the range, why bother to—Mr. Meixell, just what in holy hell is it

you and President Teddy have in mind for us?" "The idea isn't to keep the range from being used," replies the ranger evenly ("as if it was a catechism"), "it's to keep it from being used to death." Later, Meixell quotes the President approvingly: "I hate a man who skins the land." The young Varick closely observes the lengthy exchange between his father and the lean stranger with a badge. Noticing his son's worshipful gaze at the departing ranger, Angus thinks to himself: "When I glanced around at you, I found you had taken a new interest in your hat...wearing it low to your eyes as the forest ranger did."

*I registered then...that from the instant he reached down to shake your hand, you looked at Stanley Meixell as if the sun rose and set in him. And I already was telling myself that you had better be right about that.*<sup>84</sup> □

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## NOTES

1. *Couer d'Alene* (Idaho) Press, 3/3/1906.
2. Plate 95, in: Char Miller and Rebecca Staebler, *The Greatest Good: 100 Years of Forestry in America* (Bethesda, MD: Society for American Foresters, 1999), 41.
3. The standard history of the Forest Service, up through the 1960s, is: Harold K. Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service: A History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976); Steen's history ends on an upbeat note that has not been borne out by subsequent years. A recent effort, published by the agency, is Gerald W. Williams, *The USDA Forest Service—The First Century* (Washington, DC: USDA Forest Service, 2000). A pictorial review is William W. Bergoffen, *100 Years of Federal Forestry* (Washington, DC: USDA Forest Service, 1990). Focusing on the origins and the earliest years of the Forest Service are: Harold K. Steen (ed.), *The Origins of the National Forests* (Durham, NC: Forest History Society, 1992) and Alfred Runte, *Public Lands, Public Heritage—The National Forest Idea* (Niwot, CO: Roberts Rinehart, 1991). See also Char Miller (ed.), *American Forests: Nature, Culture, and Politics* (Lawrence, KN: University of Kansas Press, 1997).
4. For Pinchot's personal recollection of the 1905 to 1909 period, see Gifford Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1974). For a detailed history of the 1910 "Big Blowup" and its impact on Forest Service policy and organizational culture, see Stephen J. Pyne, *Year of the Fires: The Story of the Great Fires of 1910* (New York: Viking, 2001). See also the editor's introduction in Hal K. Rothman (ed.), *I'll Never Fight Fire with My Bare Hands Again: Recollections of the Forest Rangers of the Inland Northwest* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1994). Rothman's book is a highly readable compilation of early twentieth-century ranger memoirs from the Northern Rocky Mountains region.
5. H. L. Jones, "The Forest Ranger: His Life, Duties and Responsibilities," *Overland Monthly* 40(November 1902): 439–446.
6. E. R. Jackson, "The Forest Ranger," *American Forestry* 17 (August 1911): 445–455.
7. *Ibid.*, 447.
8. Zane Grey, *The Young Forester* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1910), passim.
9. Francis Rolt-Wheeler, *The Boy with the U.S. Foresters* (Boston: Lothrop, Lee and Shephard, 1910): 3, 10.
10. *Ibid.*, 127 and 102.
11. *Ibid.*, 317.
12. Hamlin Garland, *Cavanagh, Forest Ranger* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1910), 46. Another fictional forester modeled on Pinchot was portrayed in *Jack Ballington, Forester* (Philadelphia: John C. Winton Co., 1911). However, Ballington, scion of a wealthy Southern family, became an independent consulting forester for private timber owners in Tennessee after obtaining his forestry degree in Germany; he never wore a ranger's badge and never went West.
13. *Ibid.*, 301.
14. *Ibid.*, vii–viii.
15. Agnes C. Laut, *Freebooters of the Wilderness* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1910): 355–356, 53.
16. *Ibid.*, 138 and 352.
17. *Ibid.*, 59.
18. Katharine B. Judson, *When the Forests Are Ablaze* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1912), 338. Judson authored *Myths and Legends of California and the Old Southwest, Myths and Legends of the Pacific Northwest*, and similar "picturesque" regional works.
19. *Ibid.*, 152.
20. *Ibid.*, 345 and 377. See also Pyne, *Year of the Fires*, passim.
21. Zane Grey, *The Young Lion Hunter* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1911). Perhaps inspired by Grey's novel, Herbert Carter set his *The Boy Scouts Through the Big Timber* (New York: A. L. Burt and Company, 1913) in the Far West. Carter, author of a series of books about a fictional New York troop of Boy Scouts, brought his adventurous Scouts on a hunting trip to the Rocky Mountains. A tenderfoot becomes lost, a dishonest "French-Canadian half-breed" named Pierre causes the boys much grief, and a forest ranger helps save the day.
22. Hamlin Garland, *The Forester's Daughter* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1914), 85.
23. Vingie E. Roe, *Tharon of Lost Valley* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1919): 87, 177.
24. Harold Bell Wright, *The Eyes of the World* (Chicago: The Book Supply Company, 1914).
25. Historical examination of turn-of-the-century America's concern over gender roles, specifically anxiety over the "erosion" of masculinity, is fairly recent. See: Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), especially Chapters 1, 4, and 5; E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); and for Western writing in particular, Krista Comer, "Literature, Gender Studies, and the New Western History," In: *The New Western History: The Territory Ahead*, Forrest G. Robinson, ed. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997): 99–134. The subject of early Forest Service careers as a response to the perceived "crisis of masculinity" was discussed by Lucinda M. Long in her presentation "You Can Cut More Trees with a Pencil than an Ax: Masculinity, Professionalism, and the

- Creation of the Forest Service," given at the Annual Meeting of the Pacific Coast branch of the American Historical Association, Portland, 1997, a copy of which, to date, this author has been unable to obtain.
26. The focus on manliness and the concern with the threat of unruly "non-whites" both continued into many of the Ranger novels of the post-World War I period. One example: In Irving Crump's *The Boys' Book of Forest Rangers* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1924): 9, 56, forestry is promoted as "work for real men, the kind of men who are willing to face any hardships, who can stand up under any sort of punishment, who can take the grueling work with a smile and who are willing to spend hours and days in sleepless toil battling forest fires or hiking through timbered wilderness." One ranger in the story is challenged by a "crusty, crafty" sheep rancher who seems to have a grudge against the Forest Service. And worst of all [he] employed a motley crew of Italians, Poles, and half-breed Mexican sheep herders, who were just as disagreeable."
  - By far the most overtly racist of the Ranger novels is Hunter S. Moles's *Ranger District Number Five*, published in 1923, at the height of traditional white America's anxiety over perceived "race suicide" and the consequent need for racially and religiously based "One-hundred-percent Americanism." On northern New Mexico's remote and rough Ranger District Number Five, the benighted Hispanic population is made up of ignorant, lazy, "brown" peons who are cowed by a greedy, tyrannical, and Forest Service-hating *patron*, Ortega. Ranger Casper, an Army veteran recently returned from fighting "dirty little Filipinos," opines that "it is a shame that these dirty little greasers should occupy this paradise. This is what I call a white man's country." (p.24). Later in the story, Ranger Hardy expresses satisfaction that the locals are now beginning to "have a wholesome fear a' what the flag represents. They're just naturally afraid o' a white man anyway. It's the nature o' the breed. They're an inferior race. It's the same the world over—I've seen 'em all,—black, yellow, brown, red, any old color; they're all afraid o' a white man." (p.77).
  27. Allen Chapman, *The Radio Boys with the Forest Rangers* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1923); James B. Hendryx, *Connie Morgan with the Forest Rangers* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1925); Percy K. Fitzhugh, *Tom Slade: Forest Ranger* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1926); Allen Chaffee, *Unexplored!: With the Forest Rangers of the Northwest* (Springfield, Mass: McLoughlin Bros., Inc., 1930); Crump, *The Boys' Book of Forest Rangers*. During this same period Chaffee became one of the first authors to write Ranger-theme stories for very young children. Chaffee's books, each with a bear cub as the main character (who is befriended by the kindly Ranger), included *Chinook: The Cinnamon Cub* (Springfield, Mass: Milton Bradley Co., 1924); *Fuzzy Wuzz Meets the Ranger* (Springfield, Mass.: McLoughlin Bros., 1937); and *Snooks: The Bear Cub* (Springfield, Mass.: McLoughlin Bros., 1937).
  28. E. A. Sherman, in Crump, *The Boys' Book of Forest Rangers*, n.p.
  29. Maj. Henry H. Arnold, *Bill Bruce on Forest Patrol* (New York: A.L. Burt Co., 1928), 17. Although published in 1928, the book contains plentiful evidence that it was written and set in about 1920–23, at which time Arnold was stationed in northern California and the Army's forest-fire air patrol was in full swing. From 1919 to 1925 Oregon's District Forester was in fact George H. Cecil.
  30. Hunter Stephen Moles, *Ranger District Number Five* (Boston: The Spencerian Press, 1923).
  31. Peter B. Kyne, *The Understanding Heart* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1926).
  32. Harold Channing Wire, *Mountain Man* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1929), 99.
  33. Arthur C. Carhart, *The Ordeal of Brad Ogden: A Romance of the Forest Rangers* (New York: J. H. Sears and Co., 1929).
  34. Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service*, pp. 213–214; USFS RG 95, Entry 54, National Archives; USDA Forest Service, *The Forest Ranger*, 1944.
  35. *Dark Mountain*, Paramount Pictures, directed by William Berke, 1944.
  36. *King of the Forest Rangers*, Republic Pictures, directed by Spencer Bennett and Fred Brannon, 1946. *The Forest Rangers*, Paramount Pictures, directed by George Marshall, 1942.
  37. William Atherton DuPay, *Green Kingdom: The Way of Life of a Forest Ranger* (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Co., 1940), 7.
  38. *Ibid.*, 8–9, 32, 41, and 46.
  39. E. M. Steele, *How to Be a Forest Ranger: Careers in Conservation* (New York: Robert M. McBride and Co., 1943). A far more straightforward publication resulting from the previous world war was "Forestry Pursuits: For Disabled Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines, to Aid them in Choosing a Vocation" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919). Although health and sturdiness is required for a ranger job, stresses this publication, some disabilities do not disqualify an injured veteran for some other positions, such as a fire lookout.
  40. Montgomery M. Atwater, *Flaming Forest* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1941).
  41. Elizabeth Canfield Flint, *The Pine Tree Shield: A Novel Based on the Life of a Forester* (Doubleday, Doran and Co.: Garden City, New York, 1943): 27.
  42. An even darker novel of the period was Kenneth Sydney Davis's *In the Forests of the Night* (Houghton Mifflin Co.: Boston, 1942). The brilliant but flawed hero, forester William Kendall, works for the U.S. Land Management Service in the Rainy River bog country of northernmost Minnesota, where poverty-stricken farming families are being resettled off of the old cutover lands. The infidelity of Kendall's wife and his deepening alcoholism end a meteoric career. Presaging novels of later decades, both *The Pine Tree Shield* and *In the Forests of the Night* present a far more mature, complex, and nuanced ranger than had heretofore appeared in fiction.
  43. William Marshall Rush, *Rocky Mountain Ranger* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1944), 222. Rush is the first author of a ranger novel to make an explicit case for wilderness preservation; Forest Service wilderness policy development had first begun to take shape during the late 1910s and early 1920s, and had matured during the 1930s with Bob Marshall's U-Regulations; see: Steen, *The U.S. Forest Service*: 110–113.
  44. Mark Layton, *Forest Ranger* (New York: M. S. Mill Co., 1945), 245.
  45. For a review of the Forest Service's postwar conflict with ranchers, see: Paul W. Hirt, *A Conspiracy of Optimism: Management of the National Forests since World War Two* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1994): 82–130.
  46. For a gripping but judicious narrative of the Mann Gulch Fire and the ensuing controversy, see Norman MacLean, *Young Men and Fire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); for an equally compelling scientific analysis of fire behavior at Mann Gulch, see Richard C. Rothermel, "Mann Gulch Fire: A Race That Couldn't Be Won," *General Technical Report INT-299* (Ogden, UT: USDA Forest Service Intermountain research Station, 1993).
  47. *Red Skies of Montana*, 20th Century Fox, directed by Joseph M. Newman, 1952. Richard Widmark's character is loosely based on smokejumper foreman Wag Dodge, one of the three survivors at Mann Gulch.
  48. Mark J. Boesch, *Fire Fighter* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1954).
  49. Montgomery M. Atwater, *Hank Winton, Smokechaser* (New York: Random House, 1947), p.13. Atwater began his writing with the tale of another young ranger, *Flaming Forests* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1941).
  50. Arthur C. Carhart, *Son of the Forest* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1952).
  51. Montgomery M. Atwater, *Rustlers on the High Range* (New York: Random House, 1952), 210.
  52. Examples of educational/promotional efforts from this period are: C.

- B. Colby, *Tall Timber: The Work, Machines and Men of the U.S. Forest Service* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1955); the agency's own *In Your Service: The Work of Uncle Sam's Forest Rangers* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955; reissued, slightly revised, in 1965 and 1971), as well as its made-for-television documentary film *Rainbow Valley—The Story of a Forest Ranger* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Agriculture, 1954); "The Forest Ranger: Yesterday and Today," *American Forests*: 61 (March 1955): 46–64; Wayne F. Hyde, *What Does a Forest Ranger Do?* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1964); and Montgomery M. Atwater, *The Forest Rangers* (Philadelphia: MacRae Smith Co., 1969). This last one is among the first such publications to recognize that women had a professional role to play in the Forest Service. Most of the privately published books acknowledge direct Forest Service involvement in their production. Such publications have continued to roll off the presses; a more recent example is: David Paige, *A Day in the Life of a Forest Ranger* (Mahwah, NJ: Troll Associates, 1980).
53. Montgomery M. Atwater, *Ski Patrol* (New York: Random House, 1943); Atwater, *Avalanche Patrol* (New York: Random House, 1951).
  54. Forest Service, *In Your Service*, 2.
  55. S. P. Meek, *Ranger: A Dog of the Forest Service* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1949): viii–ix.
  56. *Ibid.*, p. 179–180 and 225. Although some of Meek's writing is at a high school level, the nicknames of other Forest Service characters in the novel (e.g., Buzz, Ding, Spud, Mac, Pillbox) seem aimed a more youthful audience.
  57. L. G. Edmonds, *Lassie: The Wild Mountain Trail* (Racine, WI: Whitman Publishing, 1966), 52.
  58. Steve Frazee, *Lassie: The Secret of the Smelters' Cave* (Racine, WI: Western Publishing Co., 1968): 86, 91, and 206. The books respectful treatment of Dimasio is, of course, a significant shift from the Hispanic portrayals of *Ranger District Number Five* forty years previous.
  59. Steve Frazee, *Lassie: Lost in the Snow* (Racine, WI: Western Publishing Co., 1969). Lassie aided Ranger Corey Stuart in several comic books as well. The first of the Top Comics Lassie series was "The Shadow at Ghost Town" (Wrather Corporation, 1967), in which the duo are stationed on a National Forest near the government's secret missile test range; they capture a gang of spies and saboteurs.
  60. "Forest Ranger Handbook, by Corey Stuart and Lassie" (Wrather Corp., 1967). Although he can certainly be considered an anthropomorphized "ranger" figure, Smokey Bear is not discussed further in this essay. For a detailed narrative history, see: William Clifford Lawter, Jr., *Smokey Bear 20252* (Alexandria, VA: Lindsay Smith Publishers, 1994).
  61. See Hal K. Rothman, "A Regular Ding-Dong Fight": The Dynamics of Park Service-Forest Service Controversy during the 1920s and 1930s." In: *American Forests: Nature, Culture, and Politics*, Char Miller, ed. (Lawrence, KA: University of Kansas Press, 1997): 109–124.
  62. At least six Jim Forest books were published. Two examples are: John and Nancy Rambeau, *Jim Forest and Ranger Don* (San Francisco: Harr Wagner Publishing, 1959), and the Rambeaus' *Jim Forest and Dead Man's Peak* (San Francisco: Harr Wagner Publishing, 1959). Of the eight books in the later Ranger Don series, the one most representative of the classic ranger genre is Robert Whitehead, *Ranger Don and the Forest Fire* (Westchester, IL: Benefic Press, 1978); most of the Ranger Don books were also published in Spanish.
  63. Peter Thompson, *Sierra Ranger* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1954).
  64. Herbert Kaufman, *The Forest Ranger: A Study in Administrative Behavior* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, published for Resources for the Future, 1960).
  65. For example: Alan J. Horton, "Inside the Forest Service: Kaufman's Forest Ranger Revisited," M.A. Thesis, Public Administration Program, Lewis and Clark College, Portland 1992; Alex Antypas, "The Dynamic of Legitimation and the Case of the U.S. Forest Service: A Theoretical and Historical Discussion," Institute for Resources in Society, University of Washington, Seattle, 1995.
  66. John Nichols, *The Milagro Beanfield War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974): 191–192. A film version of *Milagro Beanfield War* was later produced and directed by Robert Redford.
  67. John Nichols, *The Magic Journey*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Wilson, 1978); John Nichols, *The Nirvana Blues* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Wilson, 1981).
  68. The term "Freddies" is also believed by some to have been an Earth First! acronym for "forest rape endlessly done, done in endless succession." An older and gentler Western ranchers' nickname for Forest Service men, which remains in use, is "Piss-fir Willies"; originally "Piss-fir Woolies." "Woolies" was, of course, originally a ranching term for sheep; in this case, it referred to the early-day rangers' green wool uniforms, use of the adjective "piss fir" apparently derived from Western ranchers' disgust for the dense stands of young white fir that encroached upon the open pine stands and meadows soon after the Forest Service began to suppress fires aggressively.
  69. *Mountain Family Robinson*, Pacific International Enterprises, Inc., directed by John Cotter, 1979.
  70. Glenn A. Kovar, "Junior Forest Ranger Handbook," (Washington, D.C., USDA Forest Service, 1980); USDA Forest Service, *In Your Service: The Work of Uncle Sam's Forest Rangers* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971).
  71. Teri Crawford, *Protectors of the Wilderness: The First Forest Rangers* (New York: Contemporary Perspectives, Inc., 1978): 48
  72. Paige, *A Day in the Life of a Forest Ranger*: 30.
  73. Nevada Barr's half-dozen or so Anna Pigeon mysteries include *Track of the Cat* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1993), *A Superior Death* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1994), and *Blood Lure* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2001), each of them set at a different national park.
  74. Stephen E. McDonald, *Bitterroot: A Novel of the Forest Service, Gold, Murder, and Mercy* (Ogden: SM & Associates, printed by Morris Publishing, Kearney, Neb, 1999).
  75. Lynda Douglas, *Deadfall: A National Forest Mystery* (Claremont, CA: Oak Tree Press, 2002).
  76. Stan Tixier, *Green Underwear* (Springville, UT: Bonneville Books, 2001).
  77. Gilbert W. Davies, *The Forest Ranger Who Could: Pioneer Custodians of the United States Forest Service, 1905–1912* (Hat Creek, CA: HiStory ink Books, 2003).
  78. Jeff Golden, *Forest Blood* (Ashland, OR: Wellstone Press, 1999), p. 5.
  79. Norman MacLean, *A River Runs Through It, and Other Stories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976): 128. "The Ranger, the Cook, and a Hole in the Sky," a 1995 "made-for-television" movie version of the story, featured Jerry O'Connell as the seventeen-year-old MacLean and Sam Elliott as Ranger Bell.
  80. *Ibid.* p. 207 and 214.
  81. Ivan Doig, *English Creek* (New York: Atheneum, 1984): 34–35.
  82. *Ibid.*, p. 54–55.
  83. *Ibid.*, p.99.
  84. Ivan Doig, *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* (New York: Atheneum, 1987): 233.