

Biographical Sketch of Lyle Ford Watts (1890-1962)

By Frank J. Harmon

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Lyle Watts, seventh Chief of the Forest Service (1943-52), was born November 18, 1890 near Clear Lake, Iowa, and studied forestry at Iowa State College, Ames, receiving his B.S. degree in 1913. He later received M.S.F. and honorary D.Sc. degrees there. As a student he had two summer jobs with the Forest Service, which he joined upon graduation, remaining in it for over 38 years, virtually his entire career, both in field research and land management work.

He was soon put in charge of timber survey work in Wyoming and Utah, then directed nursery tree planting in Idaho. He served as supervisor of three National Forests in Idaho, 1918-26, then as assistant chief, forest management, Intermountain Region, 1926-28. For 15 months he organized and headed the school of forestry at Utah State College, Logan, then rejoined the Forest Service as senior silviculturist for the experiment station at Ogden, directing watershed studies. In 1931 he became director of the experiment station at Missoula, Mont., supervising a broad range of research studies.

In February 1936 Watts was appointed North Central Regional Forester at Milwaukee, Wis., during a period of largescale establishment and expansion of National Forests in that region. Three years later he took the same post for the heavily forested Pacific Northwest Region at Portland, Ore. In the fall of 1942 he was special assistant to Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard for farm labor activities. On January 1, 1943 he became Chief of the Forest Service, serving during the critical war and postwar period when many special forest product and planning projects were undertaken.

Watts was ^{an} earnest advocate of State, private, and Federal cooperation to assure more efficient and less wasteful timber harvesting methods by operators

on privately owned land, backed up by Federal regulation as a last resort. However, Federal regulation never became law, and in this respect he was unsuccessful as had been his like-minded predecessors, Gifford Pinchot, Henry Graves, Ferdinand Silcox, and Earle Clapp. Nevertheless, conditions gradually improved through State laws and the good example of some major firms. Watts also helped get much important cooperative legislation passed that advanced forestry nationwide, particularly technical services to landowners.

Watts himself regarded his major accomplishments as Chief as a more than 20 percent reduction in cattle grazing on national forest lands in 10 years despite fierce opposition, a balanced increase in timber cut up to sustained yield levels, to meet greatly increased postwar demands, and a policy of selecting vigorous and capable young men for leadership positions aimed at retaining the agency's forward-looking, aggressive tradition. Watts also helped start international forestry work under the United Nations, for which he received an award from France. He died June 15, 1962 in Portland.

References:

Biographical file of press releases, History Section, Forest Service.

"They Never Retire," American Forests, 60:7 (July 1954), pp. 13, 52-54.

"He Guards a Forest Legacy," The Sunday Oregonian, Portland, Ore., February 21, 1943, p. 6.

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Lyle F. Watts (1890-1962)

7th Chief of the Forest Service, 1943-1952

Lyle Ford Watts was born in Cerro Gordo County, Iowa, in 1890. He was a graduate of the Iowa State College school of forestry earning both the B.S. in forestry in 1913 and the master of forestry degree in 1928. He entered the Forest Service in 1913 in the Rockies. In 1928, he left the Forest Service to serve for a year to organize the school of forestry at Utah State Agricultural College (Utah State University now). After reentering the Forest Service in 1929, he served again in the Rockies, then to become regional forester in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and later in Portland, Oregon. In 1943, he was appointed chief of the Forest Service.

Watts served as chief during much of the turbulent war years. Yet with the obvious progress being made in the war effort, his attention turned to planning what the national forests and the Forest Service would be like after the war. He and his staff quickly realized that the national forests should be opened up to development that was scientific and orderly. The aftermath of the war saw many of the GIs going back to college, with the fields of professional forestry and engineering taking many candidates through to graduation. Watts encouraged the Forest Service to hire these new graduates to assist in the development of forest road systems and intensively managed, sustained yield forests.

Watts oversaw the expansion of the federal role of cooperators with the various states and private industry in the fields of forest fire protection, pest control, tree planting, woodland management and harvesting, wood-product marketing and processing, grazing, and so on. Watts was a member of the technical committee on forestry and primary forest products of the United Nations Interim Commission on Food and Agriculture in 1944 and 1945.

Lyle F. Watts wrote: "Forest conservation involves much more than the growing of crops on forest lands to supply raw material in one form or another for an ever-growing list of uses. Forestry must be coupled with the social and economic welfare of rural communities, especially in regions primarily dependent upon forest industries. Improving forest productivity should mean a great deal to rural America in augmenting the income of farm folk, maintaining pay rolls in small communities, and sustaining the tax base to support local government functions."

June 9, 2007

From: GORDON WATTS, SON of LYLE WATTS

Lyle Watts was Forest Supervisor of the old Idaho National Forest, with headquarters in McCall. We lived there from 1/16/1922 to mid-summer 1926. I was only seven-plus years old when we moved to Ogden, so my memory is not great about lots of things then.

Winters were long and often pretty tough. Payette > Lake froze up so deep that one business in McCall was going out on the lake, cutting big blocks (25-50 pounds) of ice, storing them in an ice house, and selling them to townspeople later in the year.

There were lots of horses and only a few early model cars. I can't remember when we got a car, but when we moved to Boise in mid-summer 1926, we had a Willys-Knight sedan. The highways were pretty primitive then – it took us two long hard days to get from McCall to Boise. McCall had a Winter Sports Carnival each winter. It was held partly across the lake, and folks were taken there and back on big 4-horse sleighs.

I remember that the Forest Service there had a motor-cycle with a side-car as part of its transportation system, which I had a ride in once. Otherwise, I can't remember anything about vehicles there. The mail to some back-country places went on sleighs pulled by two horses which had special small snowshoes on their feet. Am wearing down, so will close for now and send this.

The True Story of Smokey Bear

Chartwell's bookkeeper, Linda Bookout, enjoys a unique claim — she's related to Smokey Bear! In 1950, Linda's grandfather, Lyle F. Watts, was chief of the U.S. Forest Service. In the Lincoln National Forest in New Mexico, a careless person started a devastating fire that left a badly burned bear cub the only survivor in the burned out forest. Firefighters carried the little cub from his fire ravaged home, and forest rangers, veterinarians and wardens nursed him back to health. The small cub began to heal and soon became known as "Smokey." As part of the U.S. Forest Service's forest fire prevention campaign, Watts put a ranger hat on Smokey and declared him the official poster bear of the U.S. Forest Service!



Lyle Watts with Smokey Bear.

Grant

MAN RISKED HIS CAREER ON A BEAR

AT THE HEIGHT OF HIS Forest Service career, K.D. Flock risked it all on a bear.

Flock, now a 90-year-old Boise resident, was Supervisor of the Lincoln National Forest in New Mexico when a forest fire in the spring of 1950 stranded a newborn black bear cub in a charred tree.

The bear's paws were blistered from the heat and his mother was nowhere to be found. In a matter of days, Flock turned the cub into a national celebrity as the Forest Service's first living "Smokey Bear" in 1945.

"We wanted to make him an emblem dedicated to the youth of America," said Flock, an articulate, straightshooting Forest Service retiree who lives at Hillcrest Retirement Center.

The National Advertising Council created Smokey Bear as a fire prevention symbol.

After U.S. servicemen saved the 11-pound bear cub from the fire, Flock and Ray Bell, the pilot who flew the bear to safety, brainstormed on what to do.

Bell took the bear home to his 5-year-old daughter and kept it in captivity.



Meanwhile, newspapers publicized the story of saving the bear. And that's when Flock got the idea that the Forest Service could enhance the fire prevention campaign with a living bear placed in a Washington, D.C., zoo.

But his boss said, "Forget it, it's a crazy idea."

That didn't stop Flock. He appealed to the agency's Chief, Lyle Watts, who told him, "OK, take a chance."

Flock secured a donated Piper Supercub plane and had a Smokey Bear logo painted on its side for flying the cub to Washington. But when it came

time to take off, he couldn't find the bear at the Bell residence.

"The little girl had hid the bear in the washing machine," Flock recalled.

The bear's fame spread as the small plane stopped every 250 miles to refuel on its cross-county journey to Washington.

Smokey took up residence at the Washington National Zoo. He reached 300 pounds as an adult and attracted 4 million visitors annually. A staff of seven people answered Smokey's mail. He even had his own zip code.

Flock confesses to sitting on a park bench watching kids react to the bear. "They just kind of stood there in awe," he said.

The aging Smokey was officially retired at a ceremony in 1975 and died November 9, 1976, at the age of 26. "That's about twice as old as bears live in the wild," Flock said.

Other black bears have replaced the original Smokey Bear.

(From an article by Stephen Stuebner, The Idaho Statesman, June 16, 1991.)

The photo above, which is undated, shows a Smokey Bear photo-background scene—the idea was to have people poke their heads through the hole in the fiberglass scene, so that a photographer could take candid photos of the famed bear and his fire-prevention pal. The photo backdrop cost \$1,945 each.



