

# PORTLAND'S FOREST PARK FIRE PREVENTION

From: History of Portland's Forest-Park  
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February 4, 1960

"Since the forest park was created, there has been but one disastrous fire. That was the fire of August 1951, which burned over 1,200 acres within the exterior boundaries, and an even greater area outside to the west."

## Fire and Fire Prevention

The US Forest Service was requested by Superintendent Buckley to prepare a fire protection plan. This was done, resulting in a very inclusive analysis of the fire problem. It included twenty-four detailed recommendations. It was written by E.H. Marshall of the Division of State and Private Forestry, dated June 8, 1950. At that time, there were 800 acres of unburned logging slash on private land between Germantown and Newberry Roads. Unfortunately, few of the recommendations in that report were acted upon promptly. The City Fire Bureau is responsible for suppression of fires, the Park Bureau for prevention and detection.

In August, 1951, a fire started north of Saltzman Road which, in the next three days, swept over about 1,200 acres inside the park and much more outside to the West. It was finally controlled with the help of manpower and equipment from Portland Fire, other city departments, Multnomah and Washington Counties, and the US Forest Service. After the fire, Messers. Cannon, Smith and Munger of the "Committee of Fifty" called on Mayor Dorothy McCullough Lee, leaving a strong letter demanding better protection. It said:

*The fire was detected very tardily, suppression action was unaccountably delayed several hours, the strategy of attack had apparently not been worked out in advance, firemen were not skilled in methods of indirect attack, crew supervision and overall supervision was inadequate.*

Soon thereafter a cooperative plan for fire control was drawn up by the Disaster Relief and Civil Defense Administration, which detailed the responsibilities and course for action of each agency (Fire Bureau, Park Bureau, Police Bureau, Public Works, Civil Defense, Mosquito Control, and Offices of Communications. This plan has been revised annually, usually after an inter-bureau conference, and has well alerted all agencies for an emergency.

Beginning in 1952, and every year since, a school to train city firemen in forest fire fighting techniques has been held under the direction of US Forest Service experts, with the cooperation of the Park Forester and the Fire Bureau. Following indoor lectures, the firemen (50-140 in number) have, in groups, been shown in-the-park methods of fire lane construction and fire suppression.

During the fire season, some of the student employees staff lookout points, one to three of which are on the east side of the river, to detect "smokes" and report them by radio.

In 1952, two 10,000 gallon water tanks and a reservoir were placed along Leif Erikson Drive for filling fire engines when needed. Several miles of fire trail have been bulldozed making some usable for emergency firefighting equipment.

Since 1951, there has been no serious fire in Forest Park, some years not even a single fire.

William "Bill" Keil was Forest Park Forester from 1952-1956. Protection from fires, and the creation of avenues for public access, were primary issues during Bill Keil's four-year tenure. Bill's priority was to oversee fire protection. The Portland Public Works Department built fire lanes for access and fire control lines.