Fire Landscapes

Historical Perspectives of Wildfire Effects on Communities and Landscapes in Western Montana

Created by: Jedd Tougas



Results of Forest Fires in Glacier National Park, Montana. Library of Congress. Photograph by Marion Post Wolcott, August 1941. The photograph shows Glacier National Park after a forest fire.

The photograph, *Results of Fires in Glacier National Park,* documents an area of Glacier National Park affected by forest fires. It is part of the Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection at the Library of Congress and was taken by Marion Post Wolcott in August of 1941.



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CHOKING PALL OF SMOKE WRAPS VALLEY IN DARKNESS

Forest Fires Obscure Sun, While Ashes Fall in Blinding Rain---Fire Zone Embraces Whole Northwest---Wallace, Ida., Burned.

A choking pall of smoke from forest fires has wrapped the valley in semi-darkness.

The most destructive and extensive chain of fires ever known is raging throughout the northwest.

Fires are burning on Lost Horse and Fred Burr canyons, subjecting the valley to a cross-fire of smoke and falling ashes.

A new fire broke out on Canyon creek Sunday and 14 men, under Forest Ranger See, left Hamilton yesterday with camping supplies to combat it.

All day yesterday and Sunday a billowing rain of ashes fell in Hamilton and throughout the valley. The air was so charged with fine incinerated particles that vision was next to impossible.

At 4:30 Sunday afternoon darkness had settled so thickly that lights were turned on in residences in Hamilton, and long before sundown the street lights were struggling dimly through the haze.

The afternoon sun was totally obscured. Under the peculiar atmospheric conditions objects appeared in an unnatural yellow glare. At night the sky glowed red with the reflection of the Thistle flames surging through the forest fastnesses.

Wallace Is Helpless Prey.

Wallace, Idaho, set in a cup-shaped canyon from which great forests retreated, was a helpless prey of the flames. Property losses aggregating $1,000,000 were inflicted, though the whole town, as at first rumored, was not destroyed. At least four lives were lost among the residents while 24 fire fighters met death and 25 more were injured. The city was saved from complete destruction by a heroic battle with the flames carried on by the city fire department, the Twenty-fifth colored infantry and the forest service employes. The fires still rage on the hills about the desolated city.

Throughout the fire belt, which embraces the forests of Idaho, western Montana and eastern Washington, many fatalities are known to have occurred, but up to last night no verified list of these was available.

Fifty Reported Dead.

Spokane, Aug. 21.—Fifty dead in and around Wallace, Idaho; property loss $1,000,000. Fire has not enlarged area burned Saturday night. Mullan probably safe, but fires threaten. Elk City reported still unburned. Four or more dead in fires near Newport, Wash. One hundred and eight men in the forestry service are missing in the St. Joe country. Taft, Mont., has been burned; Bafford is surrounded by fire; Delborgia and St. Regis are seriously threatened; Haughan, Mont., is reported destroyed. Solid line of fire from Thompson Falls, Mont., for 50 miles to Idaho line, with portions of Belknap, White Pine, Noxon and Heron burning. Conflagration rages in Gallatin forest, Montana. Thompson Falls is in peril. Arcadia, Asotin county, Washington, is threatened with destruction. Ymir, B. C., is in danger from fires which are burning in the brush. Other fires are gaining headway in that region and the situation is alarming. Avery, Idaho, is destroyed and people flocking to Tekoa.

Send Supplies to Wallace.

Saturday night the Hamilton office of the Bell Telephone company was in communication with Wallace as long as the line was open. The last message to leave the stricken city that night was sent by a lineman who climbed a pole and cut in on the line to report conditions. C. S. Kirkpatrick, the local plant foreman, worked all night preparing a shipment of telephone supplies to send to Wallace on Sunday morning's train. The shipment went by express and included a switchboard, 24 telephones and two dozen dry batteries.

The Summer of 1889.

The present forest fire situation finds a prototype in the summer of 1889, known as "the smoky summer." That was a dry season and the crops in the valley were largely saved by the dense smoke that lingered in the atmosphere throughout the last months. The smoke, old timers say, was not so thick then as now. It is said, however, that burning branches of trees were blown into Grantsdale, though no fires were started in the valley.

Burke, Idaho, Is Burning.

Spokane, Aug. 22.—Twenty persons are known to be dead as a result of forest fires within a radius of 150 miles of Wallace. The death list for the entire fire swept district of northern Idaho is certain to reach 100 and probably many more. It is impossible, at the present time, to make an accurate check of the missing.

From Wallace comes reports that the town of Burke is in flames and certain of destruction. The fire rangers in that territory are so exhausted that no effective battle against the flames can be made. The 300 residents of the town are in flight toward Wallace.

The negro soldiers of the Twenty-fifth infantry regiment who have done heroic service and saved many lives and much property in the vicinity of Wallace, are now resting, having been engaged in continuous battle against flames from Saturday afternoon until early today.

Forest Ranger Gulaski reports to Supervisor Weigle that six of his men are dead, five having been smothered in the War Eagle tunnel, where the entire crew took refuge.

Ranger Bell reports 12 dead, three permanently blinded and 13 with broken legs.

Governor Hastens to Scene.

Learning of the critical situation near Libby, Governor Norris left Helena for that place Sunday night to take command of the state's fire fighters and extend whatever assistance he could. The governor lost no time after getting the report.

Helena Troops Fight Fire.

Companies E and F, Fourteenth infantry, arrived at Fort William Henry Harrison at 4:30 o'clock last night, via the Northern Pacific, from the army maneuvers at Anchon Lake, Wash., whence they had been recalled on urgent duty in the forest fire zone at Lake McDonald and in the Glacier national park.—Helena Independent.

THE GOSPEL OF WORK.

Work has a moral as well as an economic value; lifeless corrodes the character. When one is doing nothing the consciousness of the fact annoys him, and he endeavors to find some excuse; and as there is no reasonable excuse his vision becomes distorted by the effort to find even a plausible explanation of his refusal to render service to society. Carl Hilty, the Swiss author, says that happiness is only possible when one is engaged in some regular work which occupies this time, employs his mind and satisfies his conscience, and no one can doubt the truth of the statement. God never intended man to be a drone and man can not expect to enjoy life or the respect of those whose respect is worth having if he is not able to show that his existence adds something to the world's activities, to the world's wealth, and the world's welfare.—Selected.

MOVING A. C. M. CO. CAMP.

At a late hour last night word came to Hamilton that the George Harper logging camp on Lick creek was fleeing before the flames. The camp was being moved as fast as possible. This is an A. C. M. Co. camp and employs 45 men. All the company's employes are fighting fire.

MONEY IS PROVIDED FOR CARNIVAL

FOURTH OF JULY FUND DEVOTED TO STREET EVENTS DURING COUNTY FAIR.

The unused Fourth of July fund, amounting to $180, will be devoted to providing street events during the Great Ravalli County fair. At a meeting of the Fourth of July committee in the chamber of commerce last evening this decision was reached, and a committee consisting of W. O. Fisk, F. V. Hoagland and M. L. H. Odea was appointed to provide for amusement.

The committee expects to secure a carnival company to come to Hamilton for the three nights of the fair.

BRIDGE COLLAPSES AT STEVENSVILLE

RIVER BRIDGE SINKS UNDER STRAIN OF COMPARATIVELY LIGHT LOAD.

The bridge across the Bitter Root river at Stevensville collapsed under the strain of a wagon loaded with brick Saturday morning and is now out of commission. A 20-foot span of the bridge was put out of use.

J. M. Johnson was driving the wagon when the bridge sagged suddenly and dipped to one side. E. H. Blakeslee was riding with him. The wagon slid to the edge but was prevented by the railing from falling into the river. A ford has been established near the bridge.

BUTTE AND EMERGENCY TEAM TOIL THROUH DROLL CONTESTS

In the smoke-wrapped ball park last evening, the Hammond ball team, or part of it, sacked the second game with the M. J. Bs. of Butte by the score of 15 to 3. The contest was a good bit of a travesty on the great national pastime, and dragged to its slow end to the accompaniment of manifold slights on the part of the audience.

Wilcox, the slim salesman who held the locals to three hits Sunday, was clubbed off the hill in the seventh. His place was taken by Beaton, a dilatory south-paw, who perhaps doesn't pretend to be a pitcher. A diverting feature of the game occurred in the fifth, when, with one gone, Marx executed what was believed to be a double, and the locals started to the bench, while Whiteman started to complete the circuit, giving rise to a bare-handed stunt between Gertz and Marx. After a lengthy parley the game was resumed and Butte scored two.

Although the scorer registered several jobs in the error column, nothing was accomplished before the third. McQuaid singled. Richmeyer succeeded and Williams hit for three bases, scoring Mac. Snyder singled, scoring the two-fay captain. Raferty went to first on a pass, but Gertz breezed and Gebeau was thrown out at first, retiring the side.

Clever base stealing by McQuaid in the fourth netted another run. He went to first on a single and stole second on Nelson. While Rich struck the shortstop purloined the third station, throwing a cloud of dust on Schoen as he slid in. Rich flew to center field, and McQuaid beat the ball home. Williams was safe at second on an overthrow by Hogan and stole third. Snyder was passed, and while he threatened the second station keeper, forcing Nelson to peg, Williams registered on a wild throw to the plate.

Three successive errors by Raferty placed Wilcox, Nelson and Whiteman on bases in Butte's half of the fifth. Beaton then singled, bringing Wilcox home. Here was inserted the fluke double by Marx, an amusing bare-handed comedy and general crabbing. The game renewed Schoen hit for two bases, Nelson and Whiteman making the visitors' full count.

In the sixth, after McQuaid banned Rich and Williams singled. With Rich on third Snyder aided to left field, scoring Croesus. Raferty then brought Williams and Marx over the plate. Singles by Gertz and Gebeau, who caught the contagion, then scored Raferty. It was a genuine joy-wheel.

In the seventh the shameful slaughter was resumed. McQuaid singled and beat his way to third. Rich hit safely and McQuaid scored when Butte was unable to catch Williams' pop-up. A single by Marx then brought Rich and Old Eli over the plate.

Beaton relieved Wilcox, Butte's all-star man, in the eighth. Gebeau went to second on a hobble. McElroy, who went in for Blakeslee, was hit by a pitched ball. McQuaid singled, scoring Gebeau. Then Richmeyer hit one to the fence, making three cushions and pushing McElroy and the short stop over the rubber. Here there were no outs and the prospect for a big session was good. A short fly by Snyder brought Croesus home and then the side was retired amid the sighs of a much-enduring crowd.

The tabulated score shows:

M. J. B.'s

	AB.	R.	H.	PO.	A.	E.
Nelson, c	5	1	0	12	0	0
Anderson, 2b	5	0	0	1	2	1
Whiteman, lf	5	1	1	1	0	0
Beaton, rf	4	0	1	0	0	0
Steck, 1b	4	0	1	7	0	0
Schoen, 2b	4	0	2	2	1	1
Hogan, ss	4	0	0	0	1	0
Murphy, cf	4	0	0	1	0	0
Wilcox, p	4	1	0	0	2	0
Totals	39	3	5	24	6	2

Hamilton.

	AB.	R.	H.	PO.	A.	E.
McQuaid, ss	6	4	2	1	1	0
Richmeyer, lb	6	2	3	6	0	0
Williams, cf	6	4	2	2	0	0
Snyder, lb	5	0	2	8	0	0
Marx, c	6	1	3	8	0	0
Raferty, 2b	4	1	2	5	2	1
Gertz, 3b	5	0	2	1	2	1
Gebeau, p	4	1	1	0	2	1
McElroy and Blakeslee, rf	3	0	0	1	0	0
Totals	47	15	19	27	8	3

Score by Innings.

M. J. B.'s	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	—3
Hamilton	0	0	2	2	9	1	2	4	1	—15

Summary.

Three-base hits—Richmeyer, Williams. Two-base hits—Steck, Whitenan, Beaton, Marx. Struck out—Hy Gebeau, 1; by Wilcox, 3. Hit by pitched ball—Beaton. Base on balls—Off Wilcox, 4. Stolen bases—By Hamilton, 11. Umpire—Holt.

M. J. Bs. Win Sunday.

The M. J. Bs. of Butte took Hamilton into camp in the opening game Sunday by the score of 7 to 3. Smoke nearly gave a premature end to the contest when, in the fifth inning, the visitors

(Continued on Page Five.)

EARLY MORNING FIRE AND INSUFFICIENT PRESSURE.

Fire at 1 o'clock this morning destroyed a barn in the rear of Clara Smith's home on Third street. Prompt action by the fire department prevented the flames from spreading.

Owing to insufficient pressure, the department was handicapped from doing effective work. Water was running on the lawns all over town, much of it needlessly, and it would have been impossible to quench a bad fire.

It is advised that all users of city water turn off their hoses at 6 o'clock in the evening as a matter of precaution against fire. Should a destructive blaze break out it would gain such headway before this drain on the mains could be stopped that the city might be destroyed.

In Missoula this rule, by order of Mayor Logan, is being rigidly enforced and extra policemen have been appointed to patrol the city and watch for incipient fires. Anyone using water after the prescribed time is subject to immediate arrest.

It is expected Mayor Flaherty will put the same rule in operation during the dry season.

DEFINITE FORM IS GIVEN LABOR DAY CELEBRATION

Day's Activities Are Outlined at Meeting of Committees---E. D. Noonan Orator of the Day---Ball Game for State Championship.

Definite form was given the big Labor day celebration planned by the Hamilton labor unions at a meeting of the sub-committees held last night in the city hall. C. B. Irvine presided and P. D. Greene acted as secretary.

The day's activities will start with a parade at 10 o'clock. Each of the locals will be represented in the procession and the business houses, fraternal organizations and others are expected to participate.

Following the parade Attorney Edward D. Noonan of Hamilton will deliver the oration of the day.

In the afternoon a ball game between Hamilton and some fast state team, possibly Dillon or Billings, will meet in a game for what is advertised to be the "state championship of Montana." It is not known whether this title will be settled by that time.

Field sports and horse races will provide entertainment after the ball game. The detailed program of these events will be reported at a meeting of the sub-committees Thursday night.

Band music and a grand Labor day ball at Burns' hall at night will complete the day's festivities.

The committees having the celebration in charge are as follows:

Committee of the day—C. B. Irvine, Isaac Wylie and Fred J. Potter.

Sports—Harry Smith, Pearl Bullock and E. Hammond.

Amusement—D. V. Milliken, D. S. Gardner and Lewis March.

Advertising—D. V. Milliken, Lewis March and P. D. Greene.

AS TO CONVICT LABOR.

It is quite evident that the state prison board does not intend to clash with union labor in its plan to employ convicts on state work. Representatives of trades and labor unions conferred with the members of the prison board at Helena and the matter of convict labor was discussed in an intelligent way, thoroughly, without acrimony and with satisfactory results generally. The union delegates expressed themselves in a way indicative of satisfaction that the members of the board desired to do the right thing in the matter. The board has submitted its plan to union labor and gives its views in a dignified and apparently fair way. It is the purpose of the state to employ convict labor on state work, not to employ it where it can possibly come into competition with union labor. Convicts will be put to work on contract highways, on buildings used exclusively by the state, in the manufacture of articles to be used exclusively by the state and perhaps in a factory for the manufacture of binding sacks and twine.

To the average person it appears that the convicts should be employed. The law provides that they serve time at hard labor. Ever since the establishment of the penal institution in Montana convicts have been denied the privilege of exercising at hard work, excepting the few who built the penitentiary walls and annexes. Humanity demands that convicts be put to work wherever and whenever possible. No fair-minded person thinks for a minute that it would be a good thing for Montana to put the prisoners at work competing with union labor. The fact is, there is much that ought to be done which cannot be done with free labor for the reason that there is no money available for the work. Particularly beneficial to the state would be better roads and the counties, because of lack of funds, cannot build all the roads that present needs demand. It is believed that union labor and the state will meet on the high grounds of fairness and come to a satisfactory conclusion regarding the important matter of convict labor.—Red Lodge Republican-Picket.

YOUNG PEOPLE WED.

Miss Augusta Knaak was married Saturday to Charles H. Wolffs at the bride's home near Woodside. Justice E. C. Whaley performed the union. Both young people are residents of Woodside. Mr. Wolffs until recently was engaged in the fruit and confectionery business in Butte, but has bought his father's farm and expects to conduct that henceforth. They will receive congratulations from many friends.

WANT IRRIGATION DISTRICT.

G. S. Satterlee came down from Conner Sunday. Yesterday Mr. Satterlee was looking up the law known locally as Senate Bill No. 18, with a view to organizing an irrigation district to cover about 2,500 acres of land on Conner bench. All the streams are now very low and the necessity of storing the flood waters by means of reservoirs for the late months of summer is becoming apparent to all.

CORVALLIS NEWS NOTES.

Corvallis, Aug. 22.—Urban Keen and wife left Friday for an outing at Medicine springs.

Rev. Mr. Burlison filled his regular appointment at Darby Sunday.

Charles R. and J. R. Jackson are guests at the home of J. R. Rawlins.

Hale W. Smith of Lansdale, Iowa, is visiting at the N. C. Whitney home.

Mrs. Lena Gleason of Stevensville is visiting her mother, Mrs. J. Carlisle.

Miss Mabel Wagy came up from Missoula to spend Sunday with relatives.

George Wilson returned home Friday from a visit with his sister at Sun river.

Charles Rohrer and J. Y. Frogge left Friday morning for an outing at Medicine springs.

Mr. and Mrs. Pate Kelly of Hamilton are guests at the Jasper Frogge home this week.

Mrs. Honey Bohan is chaperoning a party of young people at Medicine springs this week.

Mrs. M. E. Taylor returned to Corvallis Thursday after making a tour of the Yellowstone park.

Mr. and Mrs. Levi LaClaire of Spokane were visiting Mrs. Claire's mother, Mrs. Nancy Simmons.

John Hamlin of Seymour, Iowa, arrived in Corvallis Saturday for a visit with his aunt, Mrs. James Barr.

James Barr is erecting a modern six-room cottage for Charles Hamline on the latter's lots on the west side of town.

Will Tarry, chief money order clerk of the Butte postoffice, is spending his vacation here, visiting his father, James Tarry.

Miss Adele Richardson and niece, Miss Phyllis Johnson of Spokane, are visiting at the William Pierce home, near Woodside.

Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Fleming and children, former residents of Corvallis, arrived Thursday after several months' stay at Duluth, Minn.

John M. Cobb and son John Black as was printed by mistake in the last issue of this paper, is the owner of a handsome five-passenger Ford automobile.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Myers and son, and nephew, Brosius Goodan, left Thursday for Lamar, Colo., where they will visit for a few days before proceeding to their home in Missouri.

The regular meeting of the Yeoman lodge was held last Wednesday evening and 17 names were submitted to vote. For 30 days each member of the order is a deputy and the young lady procuring the most new members will be presented with a gold watch.

LOOK WHO'S HERE—WALLEY

S. R. Walley, the singer who wheedled Miss Minnie Barley out of $100, has turned up in Spokane. Miss Barley has learned of his whereabouts and will attempt to collect her money. As she has no written evidence of debt, this will be difficult. She is employed at the Western cafe.

[Choking Pall of Smoke Wraps Valley in Darkness](). *The Western News*, August 23, 1910, page 1. Library of Congress, Chronicling America Historical Newspapers.

Use the first seven paragraphs that end with a description of the red glow the fires caused in the nighttime sky. The Western News, Hamilton, Montana, August 23, 1910. Front page. The article describes the conditions of the 1910 wildfire season in the

Bitterroot Valley. It describes falling ash, smoke, reduced visibility, and efforts to fight the fire.

A newspaper article published by *The Western News* in Hamilton, MT, on August 23, 1910, titled *Choking Pall of Smoke Wraps Valley in Darkness*. It describes the fire's effects and the efforts to fight it during the 1910 wildfire season in Western Montana.

Contextual Paragraph

Forests and communities in western Montana have long been shaped by fire. Fire can change the land and create challenges for people living and working nearby. The effects of fire can also continue long after the flames are gone. To understand this relationship, we can look at accounts of fires and photographs of the landscapes they altered. These records reflect different places, times, and perspectives. A newspaper account from the Bitterroot Valley in 1910 and a photograph taken in Glacier National Park in 1941 provide two views of Montana’s historical relationship with fire.

Key Questions

1. What evidence of forest fire can you find in the image by Marion Post Wolcott taken in 1941 of Glacier National Park?
2. What conditions did the 1910 newspaper article describe in the Bitterroot Valley, and how did people respond to the fires?
3. What can the photograph from 1941 tell us about the effects of wildfires on the landscape? What can’t be determined about the long-term effects of fire from the photograph alone?
4. How did the wildfires in 1910 affect daily life in the Bitterroot Valley? Use specific evidence from the newspaper article to support your answer.
5. Compare the two sources. What different information does each source provide about the impacts on people and the environment of wildfire? Support your explanation with details from both sources.
6. What other information, historical or scientific, would help us understand how wildfires have affected Montana landscapes and communities? Explain what additional evidence would be useful.

Assessment

1. Using both primary sources, explain how wildfires affected communities and landscapes in Montana in the early twentieth century. How do these sources help us understand the effects of fire? Use specific evidence from both sources to support your response.