



Research Brief for Resource Managers

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The 1836-1929 Fire History in Angeles National Forest

Mendenhall, W. M. 1930. Angeles National Forest: History of past fires. Unpublished report on file at the USFS Supervisor's Office, Angeles National Forest.

By listing all the known Angeles National Forest fires between 1836 & 1929, William Mendenhall's laundry-list document accidentally captures the popular change in attitude toward picturesque mountain fires. As people witnessed incredible erosion and flooding over the years, the direct result of conflagration, they overwhelmingly demanded government intervention and got it.

Most all of the fires were the direct result of human ignitions, things like hunters' campfires, smokers, well rig sparks and sheepherders clearing for forage. The first conviction for accidentally starting a fire is listed in the text as 1901 from a campfire. Information sources include Dana's book, *Twenty Years Before the Mast*, The Hartford "Courant" (1869), the L.A. Evening Express (1872), the S. F. Bulletin (1881) and the San Francisco Chronicle (1892), as well as the Angeles National Forest records after 1905.

Early on, the fires of the 1870's were remembered somewhat fondly. The "tongues of flame licking the Sierra Madre" were considered beautiful at night and not of much concern. Typical of the period, two Texas cattlemen were known to annually ignite big fires without consequence. This continued until a very wet winter in 1884, when the Southern Pacific Railroad lost its entire infrastructure to flooding. In response to the disaster, purposeful burning was discouraged, and even accidental ignitions punishable.

Management Implications

- These historic Angeles National Forest fires were almost all caused by people. At first, these ignitions were tolerated, but as people witnessed more flooding & erosion, they clamored for government intervention.
- B.F. Allen was federally appointed Forest Agent for Arizona, New Mexico and California. His appointment was in response to the people's outrage at erosion and flooding after three fires denuded chaparral slopes in 1896.

In the particularly dry year of 1896, the lightning-ignited Arroyo fire took six weeks to burn 11,000 acres. Two other campfire-ignited fires burned as well. All of these led to flood damage in both Arroyo and Dalton Canyons for the next two years. The damage created "a storm of protest regarding protection of the reserve." In response, the federal government appointed B.F. Allen as Special Forest Agent for Arizona, New Mexico and California, and gave him a fire suppression budget.

Mendenhall's record is particularly spotty before 1905 while the Forest was still known as the San Gabriel Timberland Reserve. 1905 was the year the Reserve's name was changed to Angeles National Forest and it became a Federal Bureau managed by the United States Forest Service under the Department of Agriculture.

SERIOUS FIRES

ANGELES NATIONAL FOREST

1905 - 1929

Year	No. of Fires	Acres	Principal Cause for Year	Cost	Remarks or Principal Fire of Year
1905	5	506	Broken Transmission Line	\$ 122.16	5 Officers, 25 Volunteers on the five fires
1906 (i)	6	2183	Oil Well Sparks	147.70	Little Tujunga, 2000 Ac.
1906 (o)	36	6955	Brush Burners	125.00	
1907 (i)	6	220	Campers	195.00	Largest fire 100 Ac. in West Fork San Gabriel
1907 (o)	24	1430	Brush Burners	11.35	
1908 (i)	9	4049	Brush Burners	1286.98	La Canada Fire, 3000 Ac. 180 men - 5 officers.
1908 (o)	6	270	Brush Burners	- - -	One 200 Ac. fire in San Gabriel Wash
1909 (i)	13	2687	Brush Burners	1747.33	640 Ac. North Fork San Gabriel
1909 (o)	7	3656	Brush Burners	17.75	3500 Acre fire at Pacoima from S. P. R. R.
1910 (i)	11	263	Brush Burners	341.51	100 A. Cloverleaf Canyon
1910 (o)	6	4205	Brush Burners	105.41	3500 A. mouth San Antonio
1911 (i)	9	921	Brush Burners	1588.63	296 men - 13 officers on all fires for year
1911 (o)	4	79	Brush Burners	- - -	Outside fires paid for by Los Angeles County
1912 (i)	10	5174	Campers	7213.72	3000 Ac. Devils Canyon
1913 (i)	12	4338	Brush Burners	4832.64	4000 Ac. Sunland Fire
1913 (o)	2	12	Smokers	11.41	22 Men - 2 Officers
1914 (i)	16	1734	Smokers	3655.54	Evey Canyon, 1600 Ac. Outside fires insignificant.
1915 (i)	28	97	Campers and Smokers	939.98	30 Ac. largest fire; Brown Flat
1915 (o)	5	343	Brush Burners and Smokers	52.73	200 Ac. near Newhall Tunnel
1916 (i)	16	885	Smokers	668.46	300 Ac. Sheep Mountain Lightning
1916 (o)	5	1623	Smokers	182.36	1500 Ac. Tunnel Fire
1917 (i)	13	802	Brush Burners and Campers	3897.31	500 Ac. Hastings Ranch
1917 (o)	3	76	Brush Burners	50.00	- - - -
1918 (i)	18	533	Smokers	1252.64	355 Ac. Pacoima Canyon
1918 (o)	2	53	Smokers	10.57	- - - -
1919	13	126000	Brush Burners and Smokers	100593.08	San Gabriel 60,000 Ac. Ravenna, 75,000 Ac.

The Angeles National Forest
 "Serious Fire" record, 1905-1919