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Failure of Our Duty Blocks Nature

By F. G. Kilp, Forester, Nekoosa Edwards Paper Co.

It's too late,—they should have done that a long time ago,—how are you going to stop the fires from burning them up?—they are too small to live,—you will be dead before they are cut for pulpwood.

These were some of the remarks and questions fired at the planting crew and myself last May while planting Jack Pine seedlings for the Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company on sixty acres of barren, sandy land which parallels the Wisconsin River south of Nekoosa, Wisconsin.

Of all the questions asked and remarks made possibly only one appeared to annoy me and that one was, “You will be dead before they are cut for pulpwood.” Yes, perhaps I will be dead, but I am planning to see the day when the trees are large enough to be cut for pulpwood. If I am dead some one else will do the cutting.

As long as people think it is too late and they will not live and it takes too long for them to grow, how are we going to expect our State Governments to become more interested in a forestry program?

Genuine interest and cooperation on the part of all people living close or within a forest region is absolutely essential and necessary to check and kill the rampages of the Red Wolf. The Izaak Walton League, The Fish and Game Club, Chamber of Commerce, Associations and other organizations discuss and believe in forestry without a doubt, but does the average percentage of true sincerity run high within the membership of these organizations, especially in the forest regions? This seems somewhat like an unfair question to ask and yet there must be reasons based on experience for asking such a question.

In all my experiences of fighting forest, field, and marsh fires, only once that I can recall to memory did an organization respond to a fire alarm. In Douglas County, Wisconsin, fifteen miles south of Superior a bad fire threatened the Patterson State Park in the fall of 1920 and the Superior Chamber of Commerce Association sent hundreds of volunteers and plenty of lunch to help stop the fire which almost swept on to the park. The effort was rewarded with suc-
cess and the fire stopped just outside of the park boundary except in one place where it burned over a few acres.

I know of a Jack Pine forest area in Central Wisconsin where the fires occur every year destroying the future timber wealth, scenic beauty, game and game cover, and yet the volunteer efforts you would expect from organizations with a conservation key note and whose membership witnesses the smoke and reflection day and night of the Red Wolf’s destruction in this region never respond to the sad and pleading calls of their future game supply and young forests. This part of Wisconsin once so plentiful with prairie chickens, grouse, and partridge, listens to the Sportsman’s discussions of a closed season to replenish the supply. These same conditions prevail in other parts of Wisconsin in the forest regions and without a doubt in other states supplied abundantly by nature with forest regions.

The general run of opinion to remedy our decreasing game supply is a smaller bag limit, a closed season, introduction of foreign game, do away with the automatic gun, advance the open season of the deer to a later date to stop the use of the automobile, and numerous other suggestions from Sportsmen all hoping and striving to prove their line of thought to be right. Yes, these suggestions when put into effect all help but if our fires keep on running uncontrolled over thousands and thousands of acres, it will only result in temporary help and the true and fundamental cause of a decreasing game supply is passed up again. The Dirty Red Wolf is the greatest game hog and killer we can conceive of and uses the cruelest methods to catch its prey. We know of but one who turns him loose, Man, because he is responsible for over 90 per cent of all forest fires.

Think of all the partridge and prairie chicken mothers who perish in fires each year, especially in spring when on the nest. The eggs partly hatched and the young birds a few days or weeks old that are burned to a crisp. The young and old rabbits slowly suffocated by smoke and running crazy into the fire. The young deer caught in the wing of a fire and upon turning back find themselves surrounded by fire only to be suffocated, slightly roasted and then become a food supply for crows and wolves. Think of the young sapling and second growth forests, the cover nature provided for the perished game, killed and only a blackened landscape left behind; a place where you seldom find the hunter until after nature repairs the damage and again furnishes plenty of game. It seems to me the time is ripe to stop the curse of the forest fire and see what effect it will have
on our game supply, and game cover. Let us drop the experiments of introducing foreign game and try good logic to bring back our game and young forests for its protection.

Let us living in the forest regions group together in parties, take our sprinkly cans, rakes, and shovels, when we hear, scent, or see the Red Wolf and run him clear out of the country. Yes, and the people remote from the forest regions can help us in seeking more appropriations from their State Legislatures and Congress for forest planting and fire protection. We all have to cooperate and do our part if we want the game and forests to return to our old stamping grounds. The foresters and game wardens cannot do it alone, and we are cowards if we desert our duty to God's great helping hand, Nature.