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Forestry Arizona Style
Ray Dirksen

The summer of 1975 found me in the heart of Geronimo County, Coronado National Forest, Douglas Ranger District, in southeast Arizona. I was quartered, along with a native population of desert rodents, at the remains of one of the forts built by the U.S. military in an effort to capture Geronimo and his band of renegades. Fortunately I did not run into any vengeful Apaches. I did chase some local history and learned that “the lifeline of the woods” (to quote Dr. Thomson) in Arizona can do more to make a person lost than saved. I spent one afternoon with the district ranger searching for three separate section markers, which on one occasion was a 2 by 3 foot sandstone rock marked by an X in the northeast corner amidst a field strewn with comparable rock.

On the more serious side, I was a member of a fire crew, with recreational cleanup and fire prevention work occupying non-fire time. During the two months I was there, I was on three small fires (largest was 1 acre) all resulting from lighting striking trees. As a result, I saw more action behind a shovel cleaning fire pits than digging fire lines and more time scanning the roadside for litter from the garbage truck than scanning for fires from the helicopter.

One final point for all those unbelievers, yes Virginia, there are trees in Arizona. In fact the trees at 5,000 feet can make Holst Tract look quite poor, and at 8,000 feet huge Mexican white pine, lodgepole pine and some gambel oak predominated in majestic stands—not to be outdone by any Iowa forest. The problem is that most of this is not merchantable since the trees grow on slopes of 100 percent or more.