



U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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FIRES IN TIMBER DESTROY
MUCH VALUABLE WILD LIFE

The conservation of forested areas and particularly their protection from fire must go hand in hand with the conservation of most game, in the opinion of the Biological Survey of the United States Department of Agriculture. Shelter and food are necessities in the lives of the majority of animals and birds. Decrease one or both of these vital elements, which are supplied to a large degree in our forests, and the numbers of valuable wild creatures are correspondingly diminished.

Forest fires not only destroy the forest but eliminate the necessary food and shelter. The belief that burning over in certain localities is beneficial because it promotes a new growth of grass, ignores the fact that the grass thus obtained does not compensate for the destruction of trees and the shelter and food required by animals. Partridges in particular suffer from forest or brush fires. When their favorite places are burned over and their food and shelter are gone they are obliged to seek new localities and face new dangers.

Indiscriminate setting of spring fires in the Southern States dislodges deer, opossums, raccoons, foxes, squirrels, rabbits, and other animals and endangers ground-nesting birds in the timber, such as the woodcock, pheasant, wild turkey, and whip-poor-will. The woodcock is in some danger of extermination at the present time and deserves all possible protection. In seasons of drought, forest fires even invade marshy places and drive out fur-bearing animals as well as waterfowl and shorebirds. Many think that burning results merely in temporary inconvenience to the game, and may not realize that the food of many birds is largely the seeds and berries of the year before. Burning the brush also eliminates for months all shelter from natural enemies.

Burning of the ground cover in forests of longleaf and shortleaf pines kills the young trees as they emerge and results in thin, straggling growth. The burning of timber and other ground cover which should absorb and retain moisture also accelerates the run-off and affects the stream flow at different seasons to such an extent that the supply of fish may be materially decreased.

During forest fires, game and other wild animals may be surrounded by flames and killed outright. If they succeed in escaping to adjoining areas they come into direct competition for food and shelter with the game already on that area and the chances of survival are lessened for all.