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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, April 1, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "GOOD MANNERS IN A NATIONAL FOREST." Information from the Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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The beginning of April brings the urge to get into the open, and many of us are thinking of spending a day or a week-end soon in a nearby National Forest. Last year about 23 million people took advantage of the free recreation facilities in our 154 National Forests. Residents of about 37 States can reach a National Forest within a day's drive. Some only motor through; others stay long enough to eat a picnic lunch in a shady spot where rustic tables and benches, out-door stoves, and pure clean water are provided. Thousands of others stay for several days, a week, or much longer, camping out in the special areas set aside for the purpose.

In these camping areas they find cleared ground for pitching a tent and parking an automobile. There is often free firewood, always good safe drinking water and comfortable sanitary arrangements. They pay no fees. They enjoy the recreations of the surrounding forest, which undoubtedly include hiking and mountain climbing, possibly swimming and fishing, horse-back riding, study of wild life. The only requirements in using a National Forest are: Avoidance of damage to the forest, observance of State game laws and sanitary regulations, cleanliness about camp, and care with fire.

For the most part visitors comply with these simple requirements. Is it not extraordinary that there should be a few out of all the thousands who come, who leave their good manners at home with their office clothes? Who, in an excess of holiday spirit, perhaps, forget that others are also turning to the forest for rest, beauty, and tranquillity? Most of us, when we go away from home, have had enough of "picking up" after our families. We do not want to see, much less tidy up, the papers, rubbish, bottles or tin cans left behind by other campers. We wish to drive along lovely scenic roads at leisure, without being crowded by fast driving cars of thoughtless holiday makers. We do not go to the forest for night life. In other words, we assume that other people's zest and vacation spirit will expend itself in the day-time. And most of all, perhaps, we do not wish to be entrapped in a forest by a fire caused by carelessness.

In inviting vacationists to visit the National Forests, the U. S. Forest Service as host asks only what it terms "outdoors good manners" on the part of its guests. Like good manners anywhere, this means consideration for the rights and feelings of others, and for their safety. It also means giving thought to the preservation of beautiful forest lands so that many others may enjoy them, too.

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Here is what the Forest Service has to say on the subject: "As the forests form the watersheds of the streams from which many communities derive their water supply, it is required that campers and other visitors take precautions against stream pollution, and leave their camp grounds in sanitary condition. (This means disposing properly of all rubbish, too, in the fireplaces or trash burners provided for the purpose.) It is vitally essential that every precaution be taken against starting forest fires. Fire is the greatest single enemy of the forests. The average annual number of forest fires in the United States during the past 5 years is placed at 155,000, and the average area swept by fires each year stands at 41,000,000 acres. (41 million acres.) The annual damage runs to many millions of dollars. The outstanding fact about forest fires is that 90 percent of them are man-caused, largely the result of carelessness."

So the Forest Service provides every camper and visitor with its six good rules for preventing man-caused fires. The first concerns matches. Be sure your match is out after lighting a fire or starting to smoke. (Smoking is permitted in some areas, but not everywhere. Find out if there is any restriction before you light up.) One way to be sure your match is out is to break it in two before you throw it away.

The second rule is care with tobacco and smoking generally. Be sure that pipe ashes and cigar or cigarette stubs are dead before throwing them away. Never throw them into brush, leaves, or needles.

The third rule is about making camp. Before you build a fire, scrape away all inflammable material from a spot 5 feet in diameter. Dig a hole in the center and in it build your camp fire. Keep the fire small. Never build it against trees or logs or near brush. In some of the forests a permit to build a fire is necessary. In others fireplaces are provided.

Rules four and five -- never break camp until your fire is out -- dead out. Stir the coals while soaking them with water. Turn small sticks and drench both sides. Wet the ground around the fire. If you can't get water, stir in earth and tread it down until it is packed tight over and around the fire. Be sure the last spark is dead.

And rule six is never to burn slash or brush in windy weather or while there is the slightest danger that the fire will get away.

Pretty good rules, it seems to me. And it's just as advantageous for each of us, as well as for the other fellow, if we follow them carefully. And if there are growing boys and girls in the family who enjoy camping in the National Forests as part of their vacation, it's a fine thing to start now to impress these forest fire rules upon them, as well as the "good manners" that cover camp cleanliness and sanitation.
