



Ernest L. Kolbe

1903-1978

It was said of Ernest L. Kolbe, a forester for most of his life, that he spent so much time in the woods he loved that he had pitch running through his veins.

“There’s nowhere he’d rather be than among the pines,” said a timber management publication of him in 1957. “When tied down to his desk for a few days by the chores of a chief forester, Ernie gets restless as a guy in the Wayward Wind song...”

In a career that spanned forty-six years, Kolbe had many opportunities to spend time in the woods he loved. But he also had considerable influence on the use and future use of those forests, serving as District Forestry Engineer of the Western Pine Association and later as Director of Forestry Services for its successor, the Western Wood Products Association. In addition, he left retirement to become the

successful Executive Director of the Western Forestry Center in Portland in 1970.

Kolbe’s professional life began after he was graduated from the University of Minnesota in forestry and earned a Master’s Degree in that field from Cornell University in 1928.

On July 9, 1928, Kolbe arrived in Portland and began work as an assistant statistician for the Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Experiment Station of the U.S. Forest Service. In the first three years, Kolbe was chief of a party surveying cutover lands in Eastern Oregon and Washington. He believed that experience to be invaluable in his later role with the Western Pine Association.

It was during these years, too, during the days spent outdoors that Kolbe learned to cook, a favorite hobby the rest of his life.

From 1930 to 1940 he served as acting silviculturalist in the Pine Region for the Forest Service. In those years he founded and developed the Pringle Falls Experiment Forest near Bend. He also served as dendrologist of the Wind River Arboretum. Kolbe counted his work with E.T. Allen during these years as a rare professional experience. Kolbe moved to California in 1940 and for two years worked on flood control projects for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Eventually, he was given responsibility for all flood control projects there.

World War II meant some changes in Kolbe's professional life. He was transferred to Gauyule emergency Rubber Project in Los Angeles early in the war to work on rubber-growing experiments.

He left government service in 1944 and accepted a position as Forest Engineer for the Western Pine Association working out of Klamath Falls. He did a great deal of traveling. In 1948 he moved to Portland to become Chief Forester for the Association, which included a twelve-state area.

He had begun to earn professional distinction. "A good chief forester has to be a man of many words, which are marked with action," said one publication of him. "He's the prophet of tree farms in the Western Pine Region." His Tree Farm Evangelism, which by now foots up to a million words, has resulted in a most enthusiastic region-wide adoption of the timber crops idea by private owners of forestland. Ernie considers any group of one or more as a proper audience for a tree farm plug.

"Withal, he manages to get in many good licks also on behalf of forest protection from insects

and other natural pests. He is one of the founders and continues to be reelected chairman of the Northwest Forest Pest Action Council, a cooperative group that lives up to its name and has become a tower of strength in its field. He serves on numerous committees and is especially proud of the work of the Western Pine's state forest practice committee."

Kolbe retired in 1968 and worked occasionally as a forestry consultant. But his retirement was short-lived. He became Executive Director of the Western Forestry Center in 1970. He is often credited with having successfully established the Center as an objective educational force.

He was born September 21, 1903, in Glencoe, Minnesota, to the Rev. Ernest and Rose Kolbe. His father was a minister of the Lutheran Church at Glencoe. He was a life-long member of the Lutheran Church.

Kolbe guided many forest policy and advisory committees and was highly respected as chairman of the Northwest Forest Pest Action Council between 1948 and 1967.

He was also active in the Society of American Foresters, the Keep Oregon Green Association, and the Keep Washington Green Association.

Known by hundreds who considered themselves close friends, Ernie had a special warmth and rapport with people. Analytical and observant, Ernie combines his intellect with a rare humor that won him friends from all walks of life. He was their perfect choice

of the Western Forestry Center Board of Directors to guide the fledging organization as Executive Director from 1970 to 1974. His singularity of purpose in laying the foundation for this objective educational force was infectious to those who worked with Ernie, and encouraged much volunteer work, not only among foresters but others also.

Those who knew Ernie well came to understand him as a very private person who gave generously of himself to assist others. He will be remembered by close associates as a unique man...an inspirational man.

He and his wife lived on a holly and filbert farm near Wilsonville until his death on June 1, 1978, at the age of 75.

Kolbe's professional life was a long and fulfilling one. As one publication said of him:

"A man of many words, he matches them with action. His loves are his cooking and his farm, though he counts forestry and the Association work as truly the most pleasant business he could have chosen."