



## *George Spaur*

1903-2001

The sixth state forester of Oregon, George Spaur was a distinguished forester, a decorated military officer, and even something of a diplomat. In a life that spanned nearly all the twentieth century, he participated in two wars, guided forest management in developing countries, and supervised the restoration of timberlands after Oregon's famous Tillamook Burn.

George was born on March 14, 1903, on a family farm in Douglas County, Oregon, not far from Roseburg. The farm was part of his grandfather's original donation land claim, patented in 1856. George attended public schools in Roseburg. As a high school student, he worked as an engineer's aid in the fir forests of western Douglas County, his first glimpse of a professional life in the woodlands

Spurred by his interest in forestry, George enrolled in the School of Forestry at Oregon State University (then Oregon State Agricultural College) in Corvallis, where he received his BS in Forest Management in 1925. For the next decade, George held a range of jobs, both in forestry and civil engineering. His tasks included land surveying and timber cruising.

In 1935, George returned to Oregon State to pursue a graduate degree. Awarded a teaching scholarship, George served as a graduate assistant instructor for two school years and earned his MS in Forest Economics in 1937.

Upon graduation, George immediately took a position with the Oregon Department of Forestry, working as a field assistant. His duties primarily involved working with county courts to develop plans to protect, rehabilitate and manage stripped forestlands that were reverting to county ownership through tax foreclosure. He also worked as a liaison with counties to facilitate the transfer of land to the State of Oregon to develop state forests, made possible under a law passed by the Oregon legislature in 1939.

George's work with the Oregon Department of Forestry was interrupted in September 1940 when he was called to active duty by the U.S. Army. A major in the Officers Reserve Corps, George took on the assignment of engineer instructor in the District Engineers Office in Portland, Oregon. In January 1942, shortly after the U.S. entered World War II, he was transferred to the Engineer Division of

the Ninth Army Corps at Fort Lewis, Washington. Wartime service took him to California, Louisiana, Georgia, and finally overseas.

In the Pacific Theater, George took part in the staging for the invasion of Leyte. He spent time on that island and later was on Luzon, the main island of the Philippines. Shortly after the surrender of Japan, George, now a colonel, joined the Army of Occupation on Japan's main island Honshu. While in Japan, he participated in General MacArthur's economic resource survey of the country, coordinating the work done on the island of Hokkaido. He also began work on a special study of the forestry needs and conditions of Japan. However, before the work got well under way, George fell critically ill, suffering from pneumonia, and spent several weeks in a military hospital. Once he was able to travel, the Army sent him stateside, where he was discharged in early 1946. For his outstanding service, George received the Bronze Star.

George immediately rejoined the Oregon Department of Forestry, now as deputy state forester. In addition to assisting the state forester, George took on the duties of personnel officer, implementing the recently enacted Civil Service and Public Retirement laws. He also continued his work at establishing state forests, working with the state attorney general in drafting legislation to fund the rehabilitation of non-restocking forestlands.

A key project targeted for funding was rehabilitation of some 350,000 acres destroyed by the Tillamook Burn, the most famous fire in the state's history. The main fire destroyed about a quarter-million acres in 1933, and subsequent fires in 1939 and 1945

increased the damage. In 1949, the Oregon State Board of Forestry inaugurated the Tillamook Burn Rehabilitation Program. Before the program was underway, State Forester Nelson S. Rogers fell ill and George took over his duties. In September, Rogers died and George was officially appointed state forester on December 12, with the task of implementing the Tillamook program squarely on his shoulders.

George considered his planning and execution of forest rehabilitation and protection following the Tillamook Burn to be his top accomplishment during his tenure as state forester. In addition to recovering salvage timber, he instituted a program of reforestation that included aerial seeding by helicopter – an innovative approach at the time.

On October of 1950, George's work as a forester was once again interrupted by the call to military service. He first served as the regimental commander of the 369<sup>th</sup> Engineer Amphibious Support Regiment at Fort Worden, Washington. Subsequently, the construction battalion of the regiment was sent to Camp Desert Rock, Nevada, to construct the Atomic Training Center. For six months, George also served as chief of staff at the nuclear weapons testing facility.

In July of 1952, George returned to his position as state forester, which he held until October 1, 1955. In addition to his work on the Tillamook Burn Rehabilitation Program, George's other accomplishments as State Forester included: revising the Oregon Forest Fire Code; reorganizing administrative procedures within the Department of Forestry; and seeing through the enactment of the Timber Severance Tax Law, which created the Forest Protection and

Conservation Committee and provided funds for forest research and the Emergency Forest Fire Suppression Fund.

George left his position of State Forester to embark on a career as an international forestry advisor. Hired by the newly created U.S. State Department International Cooperation Administration (later folded into the Agency for International Development), George became forestry advisor to the governing of Pakistan, a position he held until November 1, 1960. Working primarily out of Chittagong in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), George helped direct the Forest Research Institute, which worked to develop uses of some 50 pieces of hardwood that were considered to have no commercial value. For instance, under George's tenure, civit, a weed tree, was found to be ideal for the construction of tea chests, which the country had previously imported.

In Pakistan, George also supervised six U.S. forestry technicians assigned to the Research Institute and the Mechanical Timber Extraction Project. He also selected Pakistani forestry personnel to send to the United States for additional education and training. His duties also took him to Peshawar University, near the Afghan border, where he assisted in modernizing and upgrading the curriculum at the institution's Forest College.

In the Fall of 1960, George left Pakistan and took up the position of chief of the Forestry Division of the Food and Agriculture Department of the Agency for International Development's mission to the Republic of Turkey. As chief forestry advisor to the director general of the Turkish forest service, George developed a program to utilize the country's forest resources and rehabilitate

cutover, non-restocking forestlands. During his tenure, George provided advice and assistance that led to the construction of 30,000 miles of forest roads, the institution of forest protection and utilization programs, and the modernization of sawmills and logging practices. George also provided advice to the dean of the Forest College of Istanbul University and established additional training programs. During his time in Turkey, the country's reforestation efforts saw yearly plantings increase from 10 million trees to 260 million trees.

George's international work throughout the 1950s and 1960s also took him on special assignments to Thailand, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Spain and Yemen. On June 30, 1967, George retired from the U.S. State Department. However, even in retirement, he continued to be called on to provide consultation, twice conducting seminars and serving as a special consultant for the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO).

Though of humble origins, George eventually took his passion and dedication to forestry to the world stage. In expanding his horizon beyond the borders of Oregon and the United States, George ultimately made a worldwide contribution affecting millions of people on the other side of the globe.