

# Emergency Work Program Started By Law in 1933

By JIM FISHER

Twenty five years ago March 31, the United States Congress acted on the request of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and created the Emergency Conservation Work program, later changed to the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The purposes of this program were given as to relieve distress, to build men, and to promote the conservation of our natural resources.

Because of President Roosevelt's personal interest in the CCC, its development was rapid. On April 17, 1933, the first of nearly 4,500 camps was occupied. This was Camp Roosevelt in the George Washington National forest of Virginia, where 25,000 young enrollees were introduced to the CCC.

## Employed 3 Million

During the nine brief years of its existence, the CCC employed nearly three million young men, war veterans, Indians, and territorials. It has been estimated that this organization, unique in the history of conservation throughout the world, advanced such fields as reforestation and erosion control by from 25 to 35 years. To an onlooker, it must have appeared that the nation was attempting to make up for its years of neglect and wastefulness of natural resources with one supreme effort.

The accomplishments of the CCC reads like the diary of Paul Bunyan. They planted more than 2½ billion tree seedlings, constructed 6½ million erosion control dams in gullies, cleared 21 million acres of tree diseases and pests, constructed 126,000 miles of roads and 38,000 bridges, and perhaps most important of all, spent nearly 6½ million man-days fighting forest fires. This fire fighting labor alone is equivalent to the constant work of 17,000 men for a solid year, on an eight-hour day basis.

Since 2½ billion seedlings is almost too large a number to imagine, it can be better expressed to Rogue valley residents as the number of seedlings that could be planted at the standard six-foot intervals inside the area extending from the Greensprings summit north to Union Creek, west to near Canyonville, south to Cave Junction, and east to the Greensprings summit.

## Built Towers

In their "spare time", the CCC built lookout towers, campgrounds, telephone lines, and firebreaks. Administration buildings for the U. S. forest service and other governmental agencies also were constructed.

To perform these enormous tasks, President Roosevelt appointed Robert Fechner as director of Emergency Conservation Work. James J. McEntee later succeeded Fechner. Representatives of the Secretary of War, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Interior, and the Secretary of Labor assisted the director by serving as an advisory council. Congress established an initial fund of \$10,000,000 to finance the organization of the conservation program.

The advisory council first decided that the CCC enrollees would consist largely of young men who were unemployed. A portion of their earnings would be allotted to their families. Other qualifications required of CCC enrollees were American citizenship, age limitation of 17 to 23, single status, and inability to complete schooling if still in high school.

## Initial Period

Each enrollee enlisted for an initial period of six months. The enrollee could reenlist for six-month periods up to a maximum of two years. Following the issuing of clothing and other equipment, the new CCC enrollee was assigned to one of the 4,500 camps. Camps were operated in national forests, national parks, on the public domain, on farm lands, or in wildlife refuges.

The average CCC enrollee was 19 years old and had completed 8½ school grades. He allotted \$15 of his monthly

\$30 paycheck to his dependents. He had been jobless for ten months before entering the CCC. After serving a year with the CCC, he found work elsewhere, often using the knowledge and skills he had acquired during his enlistment.

Each of the camps was administered by military personnel. The actual project

work was planned by civilian camp superintendent assigned by the different conservation agencies. These agencies included the U. S. forest service, the U. S. national park service, soil conservation service, bureau of reclamation, bureau of land management, fish and wildlife service, and many state agencies concerned with the conservation of forests, wildlife, and other natural resources.

## Main Camp in Area

In the Medford area, the main CCC camp assigned to the state forestry department was Camp Wimer, located north of Rogue River near the Pleasant Creek Guard Station site.

Lou Amort, now chief engineer for the state forestry department, served for a time as assistant supervisor and chief engineer at Camp Wimer. He recalls that the work accomplished by the Camp Wimer enrollees included the construction of 43½ miles of truck trail near Savage creek, King mountain, Daisy mine, Battle mountain, Evans creek, and Jack creek.

They also built the forestry department's headquarters at Grants Pass and the older buildings at the Medford headquarters. Approximately 60 miles of telephone line, 10 miles of trail, and other department stations including McLeod guard station were also constructed. The Camp Wimer crews cleared 160 acres of snags and assisted state crews in fighting many local forest fires.

## Crews Sent

When the Smith River and Bandon fires burned thousands of acres in Northern Oregon and along the coast, Camp Wimer crews were sent to help fight them. Only a cement foundation block in an empty field remain of Camp Wimer.

Doyle Stockton, present assistant district warden at the forestry department's Medford headquarters, began his fire protection career as a fire crew member on a CCC crew stationed at the Medford headquarters in 1935. Other crews were located in side camps at Riddle, Placer, and Sand creek under the forestry department's direction.

The U. S. forest service directed CCC work from camps located at Medford, Applegate, Carberry, Oregon Caves, Moon Prairie, Elk creek, Evans creek, Union Creek, South Fork, and Lake of the Woods. Many other small "spike camps" were established as needed.

## Construct Park

Camp Prescott was used as a camp for CCC crews constructing Prescott park on top of Roxy Ann. The Medford camp was located near the Medford fairgrounds. The last building was only recently removed when the new National Guard armory was constructed.

Jack Fortin, Medford warehouseman for the forestry department, worked as a mechanic for the forest service during the days of the CCC. He worked out of the Medford camp, traveling to most of the side camps to repair equipment.

The forest service crews were responsible for the construction of almost all campgrounds in the Union Creek, Butte Falls, Applegate, and Lake of the Woods areas. The familiar rustic tables and fireplaces have served for many years as ideal camping spots for fishermen and campers.

## Increase in Use

The recent increase in use by the public plus the natural deterioration of these improvements has resulted in the first major recreational development program since the CCC work was done.

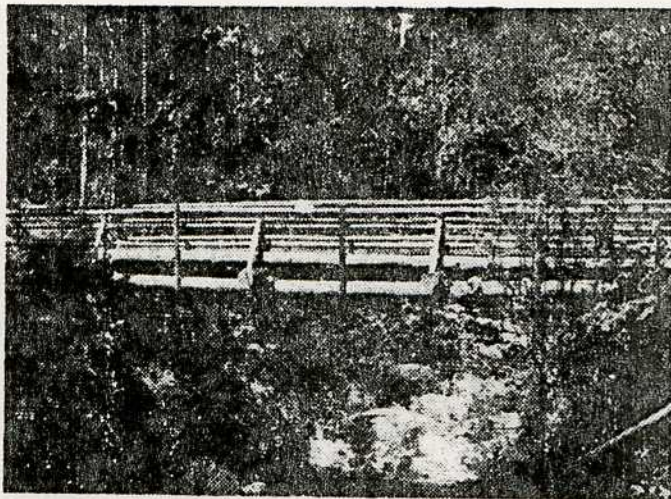
Miles of forest access roads and numerous administration buildings, lookouts, and residences were constructed by the CCC on the Rogue River national forest. The brown-stained buildings at the Lake of the Woods ranger station are an example of their work. Crater Lake National park

maintained CCC camps at the park headquarters and at Lost creek ranger station. These crews worked on recreational projects within the park.

#### CCC Had Faults

Like many of the governmental projects, the CCC had its faults. Expansion of the organization was so fast that few operations were as well planned as they might have been. Competent leaders were scarce, although the demand for qualified men did increase forestry school enrollments during the last few years of the CCC.

With the outbreak of World War II, CCC graduates became top soldiers and excellent war production workers. The results of their efforts and training were important contributions to the nation's economy.



**BRIDGE**—Approximately 38,000 road and trail bridges were constructed by the CCC. Bridges such as this one in western Oregon helped to bring adequate fire protection to isolated timberlands.—State Forestry Department photo.

When the CCC disbanded on June 30, 1942, forestry leaders saw in its history that forest fire losses could be reduced considerably by the use of large numbers of trained fire-fighters. Proving this lesson had cost the lives of 29 enrollees, 10 of whom died in the Blackwater fire on the Shoshone national forest in Wyoming on Aug. 21, 1937.

#### Important Accomplishment

Perhaps the most important accomplishment of the Civilian Conservation Corps was not as tangible as the miles of roads and telephone lines constructed, the hundreds of buildings and campgrounds built, or the thousands of acres of forests saved from fire.

For nine years, the nation had watched conservation in practice rather than as a long meaningless word. The three million enrollees of the CCC had worked and lived conservation during that time.

At the end, the publicity on fire prevention, soil erosion control, and wildlife preservation was perhaps the most enduring accomplishment of the men of the "Three C's."