

## **State Forester/Fire Warden**

The Clarke-McNary Act of 1924 offered federal aid to states for the prevention and suppression of forest fires. In response, the 1931 Legislature authorized the Surveyor General to negotiate agreements with the U.S. Forest Service, county and local officials, and private landholders "for the purpose of securing cooperation in the protection of the forest and watershed areas of Nevada from fire." A 1937 act provided for the organization of fire protection districts.

Joint funding through the Clarke-McNary Act and the Extension Service of the Department of Agriculture enabled the Surveyor General to employ an Assistant State Forester Fire Warden in 1942. In 1945 the Legislature provided a statutory basis for a State Forester Fire Warden, which position the Surveyor General was to hold ex officio. His jurisdiction extended over state and privately owned forest and watershed land, an area that came to include approximately 8.7 million acres. Other legislation created the State Board of Fire Control. Its membership consisted of the Governor, the Director of the University of Nevada Agricultural Extension, and the State Forester Fire Warden, the latter serving as the Board's secretary. In 1955 the name was changed to State Board of Forestry and Fire Control, and its membership had to be chosen from agricultural, cattle, timber, and others interests, with one member representing the general public.

A 1953 amendment to the 1945 statute imposed criminal and civil responsibilities and penalties for the willful or negligent setting of fires in fire protection districts. The Nevada Forest Practice Act of 1955 established regulations for logging and set rules for fire prevention and suppression. The Forester Fire Warden was given responsibility for administration of the act, and the State Board of Forestry and Fire Control was authorized to make additional rules for the protection of trees.

For several years the position of Assistant State Forester Fire Warden was combined with that of the Extension Forester of the University of Nevada Agricultural Extension Service. The state paid half of the salary out of Clarke-McNary funds, and the Extension Service the other half. In 1955 it became a full-time state position. Several acts of the 1957 Legislature affected the office of State Forester Fire Warden. One gave him the authority to investigate infestations of forest pests and diseases, and to take steps to control them. Another act stated that he was to decide if territory could be included in or excluded from a fire district. If territory was to be included within a district, he was to make the necessary rules and regulations to bring the district into compliance with the Clarke-McNary Act. An earlier act protecting trees, shrubs, and other flora on state land was amended to extend the protection to federal land, and included the Forester Fire Warden among those who were to enforce the act. An amendment to another statute gave this official the responsibility for establishing and maintaining state nurseries; one was soon begun in Reno and, later, another was established in Las Vegas. Finally, in 1957 the Legislature transferred the duties of the Surveyor General to the new Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The Director of the department

was to appoint a qualified person as State Forester Fire Warden, who was to be the head of the Division of Forestry. The same act reconstituted the State Board of Forestry and Fire Control. The Director, in consultation with the Board, was to set the general policies for guiding the Forester Fire Warden.

The Forester Fire Warden became a member of the Governor's Environmental Council and the State Commission of Environmental Protection in 1971; in 1979 he was made a member of the Board of Review Concerning Public Lands and the Fire Marshal's Advisory Board. An act of 1971 required those engaged in logging or timber cutting to obtain a license from the Forester Fire Warden, who had the power to suspend or revoke them; persons or businesses owning timber land that was devoted to another use were required to secure from him a timber conversion certificate, which was also subject to revocation or suspension.

During the 1973-1974 biennium, the Division was reorganized and its operations divided between Resource Management and Administrative Services, each headed by an Assistant State Forester. A Flight Operations section came into existence in 1960. In 1977 the State Board of Forestry and Fire Control was brought into the Division of Forestry, and the Forester Fire Warden became subject to the administrative supervision of the Director of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The Board was abolished in 1993.

Congress created the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act in 1978, which provided for grants to rural fire departments; in the following year the Legislature entrusted the Forester Fire Warden administering the state's implementation of the act. Legislation of 1981 permitted him to prohibit or limit certain activities in any Fire Protection District.

Among the many programs the Forester Fire Warden and the Division of Forestry has undertaken are: Conservation Camps for penitentiary inmates (since 1959), urban and community forestry, fire prevention campaigns, windbreak tree programs, seed and plant distribution, assistance to volunteer fire departments, range rehabilitation, and a federally assisted Cooperative Forest Management Program. In Civil Defense efforts, the Forester Fire Warden has been the coordinator of state fire services.

From the beginning, the Forester Fire Warden and the Division of Forestry have worked closely with the U. S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Among the state agencies cooperating with the Division are the Department of Agriculture, the University of Nevada, and the Fish and Game Commission.

Although the powers and duties of the State Forester Fire Warden have expanded since the creation of the post in 1945, the primary ones have continued to be: to "Supervise or coordinate all forestry and watershed work on state- and privately-owned lands, including fire control . . . working with federal agencies, private associations, counties, towns cities or private persons."