

(Continued from page 1)
Management, National Park Service—and private timber protective associations are well equipped to handle fires on lands under their control. As members of the Rural Fire Fighters Service, they cooperate with the county organizations in and adjacent to their areas in fire prevention and in training and in fighting fires.

The State Extension Service, with its system of county agents in most of the counties, carries the greatest load in the rural fire organization work. The agents, cooperating with the fire chiefs and the county commissioners, can and do bring fire prevention and control to a high standard.

Losses in Last 5 Years

Reports of some of the rural fires that occur are sent to the coordinator by county extension agents. These incomplete figures show that the state sustains a heavy loss in property and crops each year.

A summary of the reports for the past five years shows that in 1952 there were 174 fires with an estimated loss of \$650,022. Nine lives were lost and 157 farm buildings burned, valued at \$379,010. In 1953 there were 194 fires, with an estimated loss of \$527,812. Two lives were lost and 135 farm buildings valued at \$451,950 were burned.

In 1954 there were 189 fires reported with a loss of \$534,166. Twelve lives were sacrificed and 140 rural buildings burned valued at \$418,865. The reports for 1956 showed that 533 fires with a loss of \$1,278,185 killed 14 people and burned 104 buildings valued at \$668,550.

Figures Show Need

A study of these figures, though incomplete, shows no reduction in the number of fires or the resulting losses. It appears that fire prevention education is the best approach to the prob-

lem. Many agencies, both public and private, have waged a fire prevention battle for years. No doubt a great amount of good has resulted, but we must step up our efforts if we hope to make any headway against human carelessness, and reduce the number of man-caused fires.

We cannot prevent lightning fires. We must be prepared to fight them. In 1956, lightning caused 26 building fires and 122 range fires, about 29 per cent of the fires reported.

Truck-Lease Plan

Some counties are well organized and equipped to fight rural fires. Some are not. Fire trucks of various sizes and makes are available for purchase. Very reasonable terms are offered by the equipment firms. Trucks costing from \$6,000 to \$15,000 can be financed through those companies on a lend-lease basis.

The truck is leased to the county or district for five years, the annual rental fee being paid from the tax levied for fire control equipment. At the end of this period, on payment of a small sum, the truck is turned over to the lessee. There are portable slip-on units selling for around \$1,000.

If a county can afford the legal amount of \$5,000 per year, several trucks can be financed over the five-year period.

The fire trucks are manned by volunteers in the district or small town. Some of these fire companies take an interest in their work and hold monthly or semi-monthly meetings. The truck and equipment are kept in good condition, the men are well trained and everything is ready to roll.

Worse Than None

The sad fact is that the same cannot

be said of a few of our rural communities. There the truck is not equipped with hand tools, such as man-pack water pumps, shovels and other hand tools. Maybe the battery is dead. The truck is covered with dust. Equipment in such shape is worse than none.

The community that has a man who is interested in the work of fire prevention and control is lucky. There you will see a good truck, well cared for and housed in a neat, heated garage. In districts around the larger towns, the rural truck is often housed in the city fire hall and is manned by the volunteer city firemen. This is a good arrangement, as the equipment is kept in shape and the crew is a well-trained unit.

Information Available

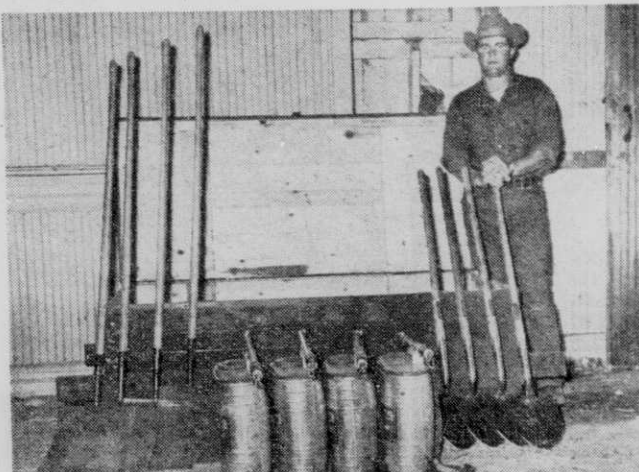
There are 82 legal fire control districts and several are in the process of organization. An outline to be followed in establishing these districts can be obtained from the State Coordinator, 218 N. 7th, Bozeman. This outline shows each step in order, and sample by-laws, constitution and other forms needed.

We should all put forth every effort to reduce the great loss due to rural fires.

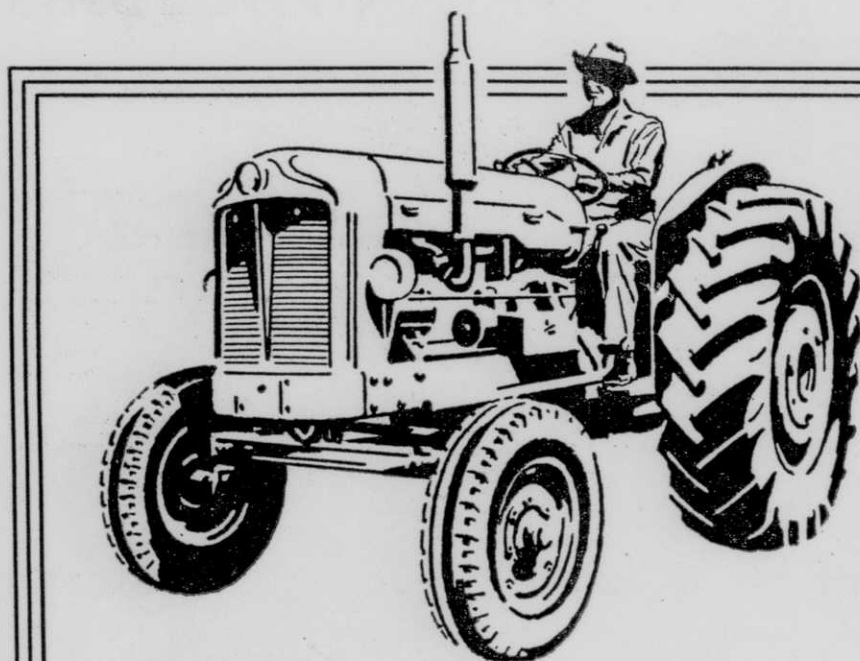
A story is being told about a Texan who was touring Europe. He arrived in Italy, where officials showed him the sights. He was unimpressed. For each wonderful building he saw, he had something better in Texas. So they took him up in an airplane to see Mt. Vesuvius. He could not beat that. The Texan looked down into the boiling crater with its flame and smoke.

"Huh, we have a fire department at home that would put that out in 10 minutes."

We need more such fire companies.



This fire fighting cache is one of several stored in remote areas of Cascade County. It is on the Rex Bower place west of Cascade. Dick Bower, pictured, reports that soon after the cache was established it proved its value when it was used to put out a range fire started when a high wind blew down a power line (MF-S photo)



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