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SMOKEY BEAR

80 YEARS OF PREVENTING WILDFIRES

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CELEBRATING
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DEAFILATELY
PART II

TOPICS ON
POSTMARKS





**Only you can
prevent forest fires.**

Smokey Bear

80 Years of Preventing Wildfires (1944-2024)

by **Patrick & Lisa Morgan**

I love to find interesting topics to collect, and if you have read my other articles, you might recall that I love a collection that can be easily completed. If you are looking for such a collection, then Smokey Bear is for you. As postage stamps go, there is just one, US Scott 2096, issued on August 14, 1984, in Captain, NM, to celebrate the 40th anniversary. Now, 40 years later, Smokey will be celebrating his 80th anniversary. To expand your Smokey Bear topical collection beyond a single stamp, you will find no shortage of other items to add. His message regarding fire prevention is still very relevant as each year we are exposed to plenty of news stories about wildfires around the country or in neighboring countries. For this article, I will not spend much time covering the bear cub rescued from New Mexico, known as “Smokey,” who lived at the National Zoo, Washington DC, from 1950 to 1976. During those years, he received millions of visitors and many letters addressed to him. In 1964, the United States Postal Service gave him his own ZIP Code (20252), which is still in use. As you read on, I will share with you some fun and interesting information about the 80 years of Smokey Bear and some of the philately around him that I find fun and enjoyable.



How did Smokey Bear come to be?

In the spring of 1942, Japanese submarines off the coast of Santa Barbara, CA, fired shells that exploded on an oil field near the Los Padres National Forest. Shocked that the war had come directly to the American mainland, fear grew that there would be more attacks on the Pacific Coast that might ignite wildfires in the forests. Between November 1944 and April 1945, the Japanese military renewed their wildfire strategy, launching some 9,000 fire balloons into the jet stream, with about 11% reaching the US, causing a total of six fatalities. The communities around the forests were left to deal with wildfires as best they could, and thus, the protection of forests became a matter of national



Figure 1. Forest Fires Aid the Enemy poster.



Figure 2. Our Carelessness, Their Secret Weapon poster.



Figure 3. Bambi poster (1944).

importance. Out of this was the idea that people could be urged to be more careful, and perhaps fires could be prevented. To rally Americans to this cause, the Forest Service organized the Cooperative Forest Fire Prevention (CFFP) program in cooperation with the War Advertising Council and the Association of State Foresters. First posters for this program were created with slogans, including “Forest Fires Aid the Enemy,” (Figure 1) and “Our Carelessness, Their Secret Weapon” (Figure 2).

In 1942, forests and their animal inhabitants were celebrated in Walt Disney’s animated movie, *Bambi*. Disney allowed the CFFP to use the characters from “Bambi” (Figure 3) in 1944 on a poster. This poster proved the success of using animals as a fire prevention symbol. Since Disney had only loaned the characters to the campaign for one year, another animal needed to be created that the CFFP would control, and nothing seemed more fitting than the majestic, mighty bear.

After much deliberation, a bear was chosen based on a rough sketch by Forest Service artist Harry Rossoll, who is said to be “the father of Smokey Bear.” Smokey’s name was inspired by “Smokey” Joe Martin, a NYC Fire Department hero who gained notoriety from a bold rescue in 1922. Smokey’s name has always intentionally been spelled differently from the adjective “smoky.” On August 9, 1944, the initiation (or birth) of the Smokey Bear Wildfire Prevention campaign was authorized by the Forest Service and has been the longest-running public service advertising campaign in US history. The first Smokey Bear campaign poster was delivered on October 10, 1944, by artist Albert Staehle (Figure 4). The poster depicted a bear pouring a bucket of water on a campfire along with Smokey’s original catchphrase, “Smokey Says – Care Will Prevent 9 out of 10 Forest Fires.” In 1947, his catchphrase became the one we all know, “Remember... Only YOU Can Prevent Forest Fires.” (Figure 5).

As a result of Smokey Bear’s widespread popularity, his image began appearing on more posters and cards. By 1952, Smokey Bear had attracted a vast commercial interest. As a result, Congress removed Smokey Bear’s name and image from the public domain via the Smokey Bear Act of 1952

(16 USC 580 (p-2); previously also, 18 USC 711), placing them under the control of the Secretary of Agriculture. The Act provided for the use of royalties and fees for continued wildfire prevention education. According to the Ad Council, Smokey Bear is one of the most recognized icons in advertising history and has appeared almost everywhere via Public Service Announcements in print, radio, and television. Smokey's voice has been provided by many people for over 80 years.

- Jackson Weaver (1947–1992)
- Dallas McKennon (1957)
- George Walsh (1960)
- Roger C. Carmel (1969–1986)
- Gene Moss (1992–2002)
- Jim Cummings (1993–2006)
- Frank Welker (briefly)
- Jack Angel (2002–2012)
- Sam Elliott (2008–2023)
- Stephen Colbert (2019)
- Brian Tyree Henry (2024–present)

It's NOT "Smokey the Bear"

The name "Smokey the Bear" originated in 1952 when Steve Nelson and Jack Rollins wrote the song of the same name (Figure 6). To maintain the rhythm of the song, they added "the" between "Smokey" and "Bear." As a result of the song's popularity, Smokey Bear has been incorrectly called "Smokey the Bear" by many fans over the years, but, in actuality, his name has never changed. His name is "Smokey Bear."

Smokey the Bear has been recorded many times. Some of the well-known or engaging versions were by Eddy Arnold in 1952 on RCA Victor (Figure 7), Gene Autry and the Cass County Boys also recorded the song in 1952 on Columbia Records (Figure 8), Peter Pan Records released a version of the song by Johnny Jones in 1984 (Figure 9), but the most interesting group to record it has to have been Canned Heat, an American blues and rock band formed in 1965, who put it on the album *Glimpses Volume 3 - 60's Punk/Garage Comp* (Figure 10) in 1984.



Figure 4. First Smokey Bear poster (1944).



Figure 5. First "Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires" poster (1947).

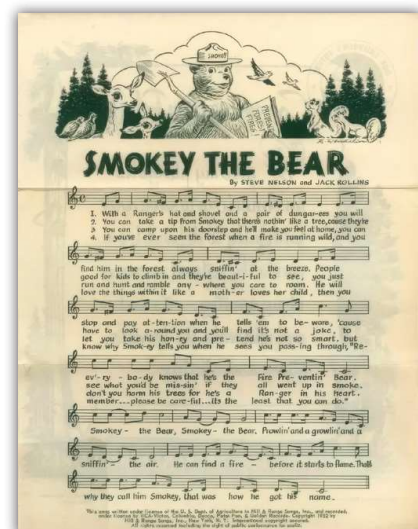


Figure 6. Smokey the Bear sheet music.

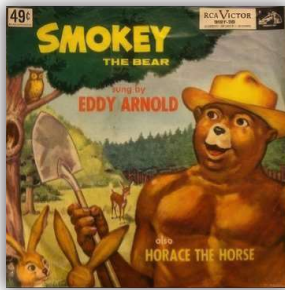


Figure 7.

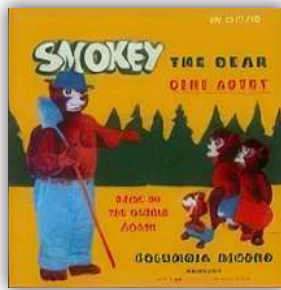


Figure 8.

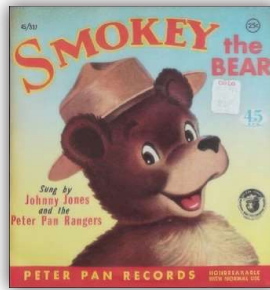


Figure 9.



Figure 10.

Smokey Bear

In 1956, Smokey appeared in the Walt Disney short film *In the Bag* (Figure 11) with a voice provided by Jackson Weaver. Rankin/Bass Productions produced an “Animagic” stop-motion animated television special, *Ballad of Smokey the Bear*, narrated by James Cagney. It was broadcast on Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 1966, as part of the General Electric Fantasy Hour on NBC. The same day, a Smokey Bear balloon was featured in Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade.

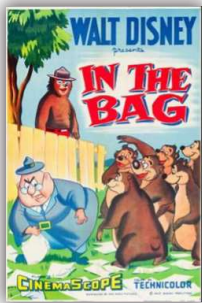


Figure 11.

During the 1969 and 1970 television seasons, Rankin/Bass produced a weekly Saturday Morning cartoon series for ABC, *The Smokey Bear Show*, animated in Japan.

40th Anniversary

For Smokey’s 40th anniversary in 1984, he was honored with a US postage stamp, Scott 2096 (Figure 12), illustrated by Rudy Wendelin, who pictured a cub hanging onto a burned tree. The stamp was issued on August 13, 1984, in Captain, New Mexico (Figure 13). The cub on the stamp and the city of issue are both tied back to the story of the cub that becomes the real-life Smokey who was moved to the National Zoo in Washington, DC after being rescued from the wildfire in the Captain Mountains of New Mexico in 1950.

The same year, the US Forest Service began to transfer Smokey Bear materials that had been collected from the CFFP campaign to the National Agricultural Library (NAL) in Beltsville, MD, to be maintained in their Special Collections as documentation of the campaign. The collection consists of posters, proofs, mechanicals, original artwork, motion pictures, sound recordings, and various memorabilia; all pieces are accessible through the library.

Collecting Smokey Bear

While there is only one postage stamp issued commemorating Smokey, the topical philatelist has the option to extend this collection of one with first day covers (Figure 14

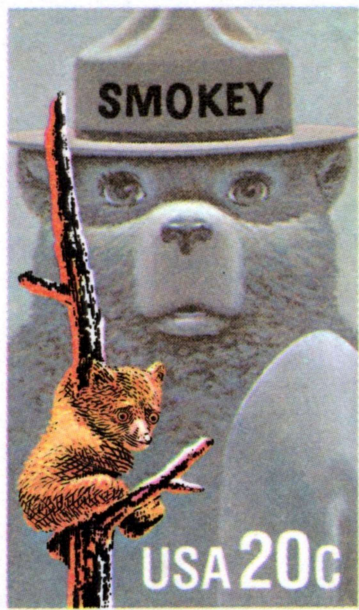


Figure 12.



Copyright U.S. Postal Service 1984

Issue Date: August 13, 1984

Press: Offset/Intaglio

First Day City: Capitan, New Mexico

Colors: Yellow, magenta, cyan and black

Designer: Rudolph Wendelin
Arlington, Virginia

Image Area: .84 x 1.44 inches or
21.33 x 36.57 millimeters

*Art Director and
Typographer:* Howard Paine

Plate Numbers: Two groups

Stamps per Pane: 50

Modeler: Frank J. Waslick

Selvage: ©U.S. Postal Service 1984
Use Correct ZIP Code®
Mr. ZIP® (running position)

Engraver: Gary Chaconas

Smokey Bear Commemorative Stamp

A stamp honoring Smokey Bear, the familiar symbol for 40 years of the U.S. Forest Service's forest fire prevention campaign, was issued August 13, in Capitan, New Mexico. The Smokey Bear cub was found during a major forest fire in the Capitan Mountains of the Lincoln National Forest in 1950.

Firefighters saw the cub clinging to the top of a burning tree, rescued him and treated his burns. Originally nicknamed "Hotfoot Teddy," the cub was given care by the New Mexico State Fish and Game Department, and was later donated to the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the development of Smokey Bear fire prevention posters. The U.S. Forest Service's Smokey Bear fire prevention campaigns have been credited with significantly reducing the number of forest fires each year. They also have helped to increase the use of forest regions for recreational activities.

The stamp depicts the well-known poster image of Smokey Bear, as rendered by Rudolph Wendelin, an artist with the U.S. Forest Service until his retirement in 1973. Mr. Wendelin also created the art for the 1958 Forest Conservation and the 1961 Range Conservation stamps and the 1964 John Muir commemorative stamp.



FIRST DAY OF ISSUE



Figure 13.

Colorano "Silk" Cachet



First Day of Issue



FIRST DAY OF ISSUE

Figure 14.



Figure 15.



Figure 16.



Figure 17.



Figure 18.

and 20), pictorial postmarks (Figure 15), numerous poster stamps (Figure 16), patches (Figure 17), postcards (Figure 18), campaign posters (Figure 4, 5), decals, pins, baseball cards and more.

50th Anniversary

In 1994, Smokey's 50th anniversary commercial depicted the woodland animals having a surprise birthday party for Smokey, including a cake with candles. Smokey is blindfolded, smells smoke, and not realizing it's his birthday candles, he quickly uses his shovel to extinguish the fire. When he takes off his blindfold, he sees that he has destroyed the birthday cake they had for him, and he then apologizes.

In 2001, Smokey's catchphrase was updated to its current version of "Only You Can Prevent Wildfires" in response to a massive outbreak of wildfires.

60th Anniversary

2004, Smokey's 60th anniversary was celebrated in several ways, including a Senate resolution designating August 9, 2004, as "Smokey Bear's 60th Anniversary," requesting that the President issue a proclamation "calling upon the people of the United States to observe the day with appropriate ceremonies and activities."

In May of 2004, "Smokey Bears Days" was created by Marianne Gould from the Smokey Bear Ranger District, Eddie Tudor of the Smokey Bear Museum, and Neal Jones from the radio station in Ruidoso, NM. "Smokey Bear Days" are now held in Smokey's hometown of Capitan, New Mexico (Figure 19), the first weekend of May every year, and will celebrate Smokey's 80th birthday in 2024. Discover the details at www.emnrd.nm.gov/sfd/smokey-bear-historical-park.

From 2008 through 2011, public service announcements (PSAs) featuring Smokey rendered in CGI were released (Figure 25). In 2011, the campaign launched its first mobile application, or app, to provide critical information about wildfire prevention, including a step-by-step guide to safely building and extinguishing campfires, as well as a map of current wildfires across America. While the app is no longer available, the instructions are now available online at the official Smokey Bear website at www.smokeybear.com.



Figure 19.

In 2012, NASA, the US Forest Service, the Texas Forest Service, and Smokey Bear teamed up to celebrate Smokey's 68th birthday at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston. NASA astronaut Joe Acaba and the Expedition 31 crew chose a plush Smokey doll to be the team's launch mascot, celebrating their trip to the International Space Station. During his tour about 250 miles above Earth, Smokey turned 68.

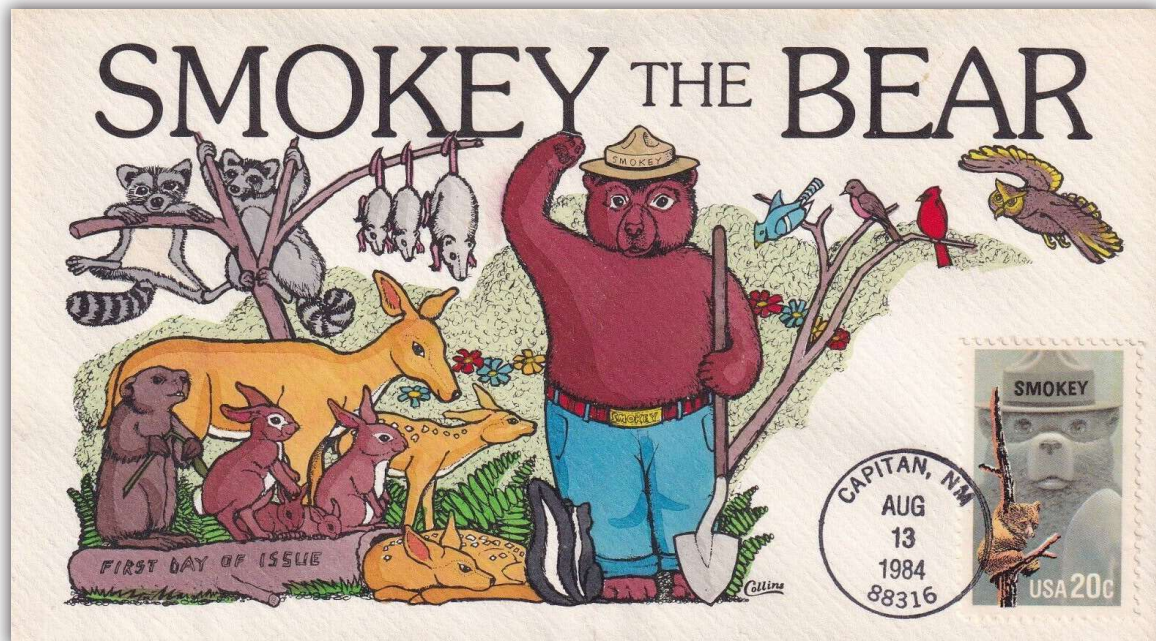


Figure 20.

70th Anniversary

In 2014, the campaign celebrated Smokey's 70th birthday with new birthday-themed television, radio, print, outdoor, and digital PSAs that continued the "Smokey Bear Hug" campaign. It featured Smokey rewarding his social media followers with a hug for taking the correct actions to prevent fires. In return, fans across the nation were shown reciprocating with a birthday bear hug in honor of his 70 years of service. Followers and fans were asked to join by posting their #SmokeyBearHug online.

In 2016 and 2017, the campaign began a new series of PSAs to heighten awareness about less commonly known ways that wildfires can start. The "Rise from the Ashes" campaign featured art by Bill Fink, who used wildfire ashes as an artistic medium. Other new videos and artwork inspired by Smokey Bear posters were also released to raise awareness of lesser-known wildfire starters. These were created by Brian Edward Miller, Evan Hecox, Janna Mattia and Victoria Ying, uniquely portraying Smokey Bear in the artists' style.

75th Anniversary

For his 75th birthday in 2019, the Smithsonian's National Zoo in Washington DC opened an outdoor exhibit. Fourteen posters and multiple archival photographs of the original bear lined the pathway in front of Smokey Bear's original habitat. New commercials and promotional materials were also released, and events were held across the US. The NAL showcased movies, commercials, and paintings, materials were loaned to government agencies, and other items were provided to travel to National Forests across the country throughout the year.

On August 1, 2019, a few days before Smokey Bear's 75th birthday, the Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles released a Smokey Bear license plate (Figure 21). Keep Oregon Green sponsored the plate.



Figure 21.

80th Anniversary

2024 will be filled with special events to celebrate Smokey Bears 80th birthday on August 9. On January 1, 2024, his celebration began on his very own float at the Rose Parade in Pasadena, California.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service, Ad Council, and National Association of State Foresters have numerous events planned for 2024 (Figure 22). These include Smokey guest appearances at local events across the country, a Facebook Live Stream in July from the California State Fair featuring Darley Newman, host of the PBS show *Travels with Darley* and a campaign across social media, where you can record yourself singing *Happy Birthday* to Smokey and post the video using

the hashtag #SingForSmokey. Naturally the Smokey Bear balloon will again appear at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, Smokey will participate at the US Capitol Christmas Tree Lighting, and others yet to be scheduled.

Conclusion

While you will certainly need to add other philatelic items beyond postage stamps to your Smokey Bear topical collection, you will undoubtedly have a lot to choose from. Your collection is sure to remind you of the 80 years that you, your parents, and probably grandparents have been asked to help prevent forest and wildfires. Though Smokey Bear has accomplished so much, his work is not yet over. Wildfire prevention remains crucial; his catchphrase "Only you can prevent wildfires" still echoes our collective responsibility and is as relevant today as it was in 1944. So, let's continue to spread Smokey's wisdom to protect our forests and grasslands!

Don't forget you can still mail Smokey Bear a letter. Address your correspondence to:

Smokey Bear
Washington, DC 20252



Figure 22. Discover Smokey Bear events in your area using the website www.smokeybearbirthday.org.

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