

## The Story of Smokey Bear



When a Japanese submarine shelled the southern California coast during World War II, people were worried that more attacks might start forest fires. So the USDA Forest Service began a program to make everyone aware of the dangers of forest fires. They wanted an animal to represent forest fire prevention and they decided on a bear. This bear was to

have a short nose, be brown or black, and have a face that looked smart and friendly. They also wanted him to wear a ranger hat and blue jeans. They named this bear “Smokey” after “Smokey Joe” Martin, a fire chief from the New York City Fire Department.

Until 1950, Smokey was just a character drawn on posters asking people to help prevent forest fires. Then in 1950, someone was careless with a match, cigarette, or campfire in the Lincoln National Forest in southern New Mexico. This was the start of a terrible forest fire. After the fire passed and the smoke cleared, the only liv-

ing thing the firefighters saw was a badly burned bear cub clinging to a blackened tree. The little bear was taken to the ranger station, where people bandaged his burned paws and helped him to become healthy again. They called this cub “Smokey,” and he became the first living symbol of Smokey Bear.

When Smokey’s burns healed, he was sent to live at the National Zoo in Washington, DC. Over the years, thousands of people from around the world came to see Smokey Bear. Smokey died in 1976, and he is buried near his original home in southern New Mexico at Smokey Bear State Park.