

CONFERENCE DEDICATION TO E.V. KOMAREK, SR.

James A. Stevenson

It gives me great pleasure to talk with you about a man that I have been very fortunate to know for the past 20 years.

The Florida Park Service transferred me to Tallahassee 20 years ago to serve as Chief Naturalist for the Florida State Park system. The State Park system had been in existence for 30 years. There was no resource management of state park lands at that time. The parks had been under strict fire suppression for those 30 years and we sincerely believed that our philosophy and policy of fire suppression were right and proper. In fact, we were the only government land-managing agency in Florida that did not control burn.

While organizing the office that I inherited, I came across a leaflet that mentioned a place called Tall Timbers. A place with a name like that was a place that I wanted to visit. I drove to the state line one afternoon, found Tall Timbers and introduced myself to the Director, Ed Komarek. He put me in his car and drove to the study plots from which fire had been either excluded or which were burned at different intervals than the surrounding annually burned landscape. That afternoon the best salesman I have ever met sold me on the critical importance of ecological burning. I believe Ed Komarek could sell a forest fire to Smoky Bear.

A few months later, on a cool day in February, Ed's wife Betty and I travelled to Falling Waters State Park where Betty was the fire boss on the first control burn to be conducted in a Florida state park. Since that day, ecological burning has been our most important resource management tool. Today we prescribe burn over 111,000 acres in 66 state parks. No other person has had such a positive impact on the pinelands and grasslands of Florida's state parks than has Ed Komarek.

But we are only one land managing agency in one state. Consider the influence he has had on other land managers elsewhere.

He was Director of Tall Timbers Research Station for 21 years and has served as chairman of 16 Tall Timbers Fire Ecology Conferences. He has published over 70 papers on fire ecology. He has lectured and given seminars throughout the United States, in Canada, Mexico, seven European nations, 7 African countries, two Asian nations, and Australia. He has been a consultant to the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Portuguese Forest Service, German Forest Service, and the Victoria and Tasmanian forest services.

Ed Komarek's philosophy of land management has had a very significant affect on the natural environment of the United States and many countries on several continents. He has been a very effective teacher and he is not done yet. Ed and I were sitting on his back porch at Birdsong Plantation a couple of weeks ago discussing our favorite subject and he told me of a book he

would soon begin writing. Ed, you are a hard act for the rest of us to follow.

I visited Ed and his brother, Roy, frequently over the years to listen attentively to everything they had to say about fire ecology. During one visit, I was lamenting the slow rate at which our pinelands on the state parks were being restored. Ed said something that changed my perspective on land management which I have shared with our park managers and park biologists on numerous occasions. He said, "Jim, it took 30 years of mismanagement to put those pinelands in that condition. It will take thirty years of proper management to restore them."

Ed's interests have been diverse and not restricted to fire ecology. He has studied and is an authority on many other topics including lightning ecology, grasslands of the world, the affects of aborigines on their environment, Indian corn, and earthworms.

As you know, it is not uncommon for a plant or animal to be named after the botanist or herpetologist or ornithologist who discovered and described it. But how many scientists' interests and expertise are so broad as to have had a liver fluke, a cotton rat, a weevil, a fungus, and a family of earthworms, named after them, as has Ed Komarek?

Ed and Betty's home for the last 50 years, Birdsong Plantation, is also the Birdsong Nature Center where nature education is provided to the people of the Thomasville/Tallahassee region. It is a place where the layman can learn the importance of stewardship and, as you would expect, a place where the layman can participate in a control burn.

I have given only a brief sketch of Ed's many impressive accomplishments. The list is considerably longer; he has without question made a difference—he has left his mark.

At the Eisenhower Farm National Historic Site, adjacent to Gettysburg Battlefield, a documentary film is shown in the interpretive center of an interview conducted by Walter Cronkite a short time before Eisenhower's passing. In the final minutes of the film Eisenhower and Cronkite were talking as they strolled along the lane to the house and Eisenhower said something very significant. He said, "I hope to leave this farm in better condition than I found it." Here was a man who had commanded the Allied Forces in the defeat of Nazi Germany; he had been President of the United States and in his final days his desire was to leave the farm, the land, in better condition than he found it. We are all here to learn how to be better stewards of the land. Ed Komarek has set a standard of stewardship. He has caused the land in Florida, in Germany, in Africa, to be in better condition than he found it.

I know of no other person more deserving of the title "The Father of Fire Ecology" than Ed Komarek.

It gives us all great pleasure, to dedicate the 17th Tall Timbers Fire Ecology Conference to E. V. Komarek, Sr.