

Twelfth Tall Timbers Fire Ecology Conference: Comment by a Co-Chairman

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I AM glad of this opportunity to thank Dr. E. V. Komarek and Tall Timbers Research Station for the great honour of being present as a Co-Chairman at this, the Twelfth Fire Ecology Conference. It is an honour which I appreciate because of the special interest I have in the effect of fire on vegetation.

I am grateful too, for the truly magnificent hospitality I enjoyed throughout my visit.

The Conference as everyone knows is about fire, its effect on the environment and its use in management. Fire is often described as a controversial subject and it is maintained that its discussion generates heat and evokes emotional, rather than objective and reasoned reaction.

I am happy to record that this is not the case at the Twelfth Tall Timbers Fire Ecology Conference, where the emotional reaction is notably absent and where both the papers and the discussion are of a high standard and of great scientific and practical interest.

The papers presented to the Conference deal with the use of fire in the fields of Range Management, Wildlife and National Parks, while one on "Ancient Fires", deals with evidence in the fossil record of

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widespread fires in the Mesozoic and shows that fire had played its part in moulding vegetation and animal life on earth, since long before the advent of man.

The papers and the discussion which follow them, makes it plain that the traditional attitude, perhaps best described as the "NEVER USE FIRE because Fire is Bad" attitude which for so long has hampered the development of effective management practices, is rapidly giving way to the concept that fire is natural and can be used as a valuable and sometimes essential, management tool. This change, so fundamental that it amounts to the substitution of science for witchcraft in man's attitude to fire, did not come easily but has been reached against much opposition over a considerable period of time. It should be acknowledged that much of the credit for the general acceptance of the present concept must go to the work of Messrs. Herbert F. Stoddard, E.V. Komarek and Roy Komarek, to Tall Timbers Research Station and to the twelve successive Tall Timbers Fire Ecology Conferences, all of which together have had a profound effect on ecological thought in relation to the role of fire and its use in the management of ecosystems.

Because the importance of fire is not confined to any particular country, it is encouraging to note that while the papers delivered at the Twelfth Conference are confined to the United States, the Eleventh Conference was concerned with Africa and the Thirteenth will be devoted to Europe.

This recognition by Tall Timbers that fire is of world wide importance is helpful and encouraging to workers in other parts and particularly to those who labour in undeveloped countries where often the continuity of the work, so essential in what are necessarily long term investigations, is difficult to maintain. Here the interest aroused by the Tall Timbers Fire Ecology Conferences and the evidence they provide, that even in highly developed countries such as the United States of America, the importance of the effects produced by fire are still considered worthy of investigation, can be of assistance to the worker in obtaining continuity of support of the projects he has in hand.

In conclusion I should like to stress the great importance of the role Tall Timbers Research Station has played in promoting research

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and understanding of the ecology of fire and to express the hope that this station will long continue to undertake and to encourage research in this rewarding field where our present scratchings have revealed some of the wealth still to be uncovered.