



## Happy Birthday Smokey

August 9<sup>th</sup> is Smokey Bear's birthday. The story of how Smokey Bear came to be dates to World War II. In 1942, a Japanese submarine launched incendiary shells into the Los Padres National Forest near Santa Barbara in an attempt to create massive forest fires and instill fear in Americans. The damage was minimal, but it raised concerns about the potential use of wildfires as weapons of war.

Then, on Aug. 9, 1944, the then U.S. Forest Service, now United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, and the Ad Council joined forces and came up with an idea to promote fire prevention and educate people about the dangers of forest fires. Their plan involved using a bear as a symbol and Smokey was born. Needless to say, it turned out to be a tremendous success.

Smokey's first slogan, back in 1947, was "Care will prevent 9 out of 10 fires." It's simple, yet powerful message emphasized the importance of personal responsibility in fire prevention. In fact, in California, 95 percent of wildfires are human caused. But it was his iconic quote in 1947, "Only you can prevent forest fires," that really made him a household name. And in more recent years, the slogan evolved to "Only you can prevent wildfires" in 2001, reflecting the broader scope of fire prevention efforts.

In 1950, an extraordinary event took place. A black bear managed to survive a forest fire in New Mexico, although he was injured in the process. Luckily, he was found and taken in for care and rehabilitation. Eventually, he found a new home at the Washington, D. C. Zoo, where he was given the name "Smokey." It's no surprise that Smokey quickly captured the hearts of people across the nation, becoming immensely popular.

In June 2019, CAL FIRE introduced Captain Cal, a California mountain lion, to join the ranks with Smokey into getting the message out about wildfire prevention. Like Smokey, a mountain lion cub was rescued from the remnants of a California wildfire, by CAL FIRE firefighters. He was taken in and cared for at the Oakland Zoo, and later transported to Ohio.

So, that's the fascinating story behind the creation and rise to fame of Smokey the Bear; a wartime threat and evolved into an enduring symbol for fire safety and responsible stewardship of our forests.

Prior to Captain Cal coming on the scene, Smokey was our mascot for fire prevention efforts. Today, you can still find Smokey at events with our very own Captain Cal. Smokey reflects our efforts to wildfire prevention, while Cal helps in our other efforts in fire prevention. The two mascots reflect our joint efforts with the USDA Forest Service to keep Californians safe from the dangers of wildfire.

We work together to ensure Californians stay safe and are equipped with the knowledge to prevent wildfires, while still enjoying the beauty and nature that California has to offer. Happy birthday Smokey!

