

Poster Stamps: Smokey Bear (1944-1990)

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I saw an album on eBay for "Smokey Bear" stamps. Most of the stamps that were to go in the album were poster stamps except for one. As I often do, I reached out to Ray Petersen (a walking encyclopedia of poster stamps, in my opinion). He gave me a quick history, and off I went to write an article for Topical Times which I understand will be published in Aug. 2024 for Smokey's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. What I'll share with the PSCC is a shortened version of what I found out about Smokey with a focus on the Smokey Bear poster stamps.

#### 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. 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.



Figure 1. Our Carelessness, Their Secret Weapon Poster

First posters for this program were created with slogans, including "Forest Fires Aid the Enemy," and "Our Carelessness, Their Secret Weapon" (Fig. 1).

In 1942, Disney allowed the CFFP to use the characters from "Bambi" 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, powerful bear. The bear chosen was based on a rough sketch by Forest Service artist Harry Rossoll who is said to be "the father of Smokey Bear." 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 U.S. history. The first Smokey Bear campaign poster was delivered on October 10, 1944, by artist Albert Staehle (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. First Smokey Bear Poster (1944)

# 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 (Fig. 3). 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."



Figure 3. Smokey the Bear Sheet Music

## The live Smokey & a U.S. Postage Stamp

For Smokey's 40th anniversary in 1984, he was honored with a U.S. postage stamp, Scott #2096 (Fig. 4), illustrated by Rudy Wendelin, who pictured a cub hanging onto a burned tree. The stamp was issued on August 13, 1984, in Capitan, NM. The cub on the stamp and the city of

issue are both tied back to the story of a bear cub that became the live Smokey: he was moved to the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. after being rescued from a wildfire in the Capitan Mountains of New Mexico in 1950. Capitan, NM is now known as Smokey's hometown.



Figure 4. Smokey Bear Scott #2096 (1984)



Figure 5. Hand-painted FDC w/Poster Stamps from 1957 (Cachet by Lois Hamilton)

## **Smokey Bear Poster Stamps**

All of the Smokey Bear Poster Stamps were printed as part of the Smokey Bear Wildfire Prevention campaign by the U.S. and State Forest Service. The first stamp (SBr. 1) was printed in 1944 in sheets of 100, perf 12 ½, with a total of 5,000,000 having been issued. Not until 1947 was an image of Smokey Bear printed on the stamps, which were issued in two separate colors (red, SBr. 8 and green, SBr. 8a). From 1944 through 1955 a single image was issued. Then from 1956-1966, two images were printed each year, and after that four images were produced until 1990, the last year these stamps were issued.

In 1984, the U.S. and State 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 NAL collection consists of posters, proofs, mechanicals, original artwork, motion pictures, sound recordings, and various pieces of memorabilia; all pieces are accessible through the library. In 1985, David Jackson's, Jackson Stamp Co. in Dallas, TX obtained licenses to publish the "Smokey Bear Stamps" album (Fig. 6). The album was well made and documents each stamp extremely well. The album was maintained by David Jackson until the last stamp issued in 1990. The album includes places for the 1958 FDC of the Scott 1122, which has smokey as part of the cancel and the 1984 FDC for the Scott 2096. If you are fortunate enough to find a copy of the Jackson album, I suggest you grab it to house your Smokey Bear stamps.

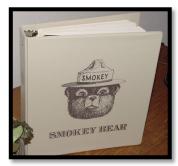


Figure 6. Jackson Stamp Co. Smokey Bear Stamps Album (1985)

### Inventory of Stamps from the Smokey Bear Wildfire Prevention campaign (1944-1990)







SBr. 15 (1954)

SBr. 16 (1955)



SBr. 17-18 (1956)







SBr. 21-22 (1958)







SBr. 23-24 (1959)

SBr. 19-20 (1957)

SBr. 25-26 (1960)





I PROMISE NOT TO PLAY WITH MATCHES



SBr. 27-28 (1961)

SBr. 29-30 (1962)









SBr. 31-32 (1963)

SBr. 33-34 (1964)









SBr. 35-26 (1965)

SBr. 37-40 (1966)

SBr. 41-44 (1967)



SBr. 97-100 (1981) SBr. 101a-104a (1982)

SBr. 101b-104b (1982)

SBr. 93-96 (1980)



SBr. 105-108 (1983)



SBr. 109-112 (1984)



SBr. 113-116 (1985)



SBr. 117-120 (1986) Perf 12 ½ x 12 ½



SBr. 121-124 (1987)



SBr. 125-128 (1988) Perf 12 ½ x 12 ½



SBr. 129-132 (1989) Perf 10 ½ x 10 ½



SBr. 133-134 (1990) Perf 10 ½ x 10 ½

### Conclusion

If you decide to collect the Smokey Bear stamps you will find yourself locating all kinds of products that were also associated with the Smokey Bear Wildfire Prevention campaign over the years. These stamps are sure to remind you of the 80 years that you, your parents, and probably grandparents have been asked to help in the prevention of forest and/or wildfires.

### References

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Special thanks to **Howard Richoux (Oregon City, OR) and his** ducks2k.com website for some of the photos of the stamps that I was not able to find other places. Howards' site was a great resource to me but extends well beyond Smokey Bear and is a great source for all kinds of hunting, trout, wildlife, and society stamps. <a href="https://www.ducks2k.com/">https://www.ducks2k.com/</a>

