

Gretchen Schulz



# The Great Fire of 1910

# Table of Contents

Common Core State Standards .....	1
The Summer of 1910 .....	2
The Big Blowup .....	3
Fighting For Their Lives .....	4
A National Hero .....	5
After the Fire .....	6
The Forest Today.....	7
Interesting Facts .....	8
Burn Area Map.....	10
Media Attributions.....	11
Works Referenced.....	12
Licensing .....	13

# Common Core State Standards

This text is relevant to several Common Core State Standards, including the following:

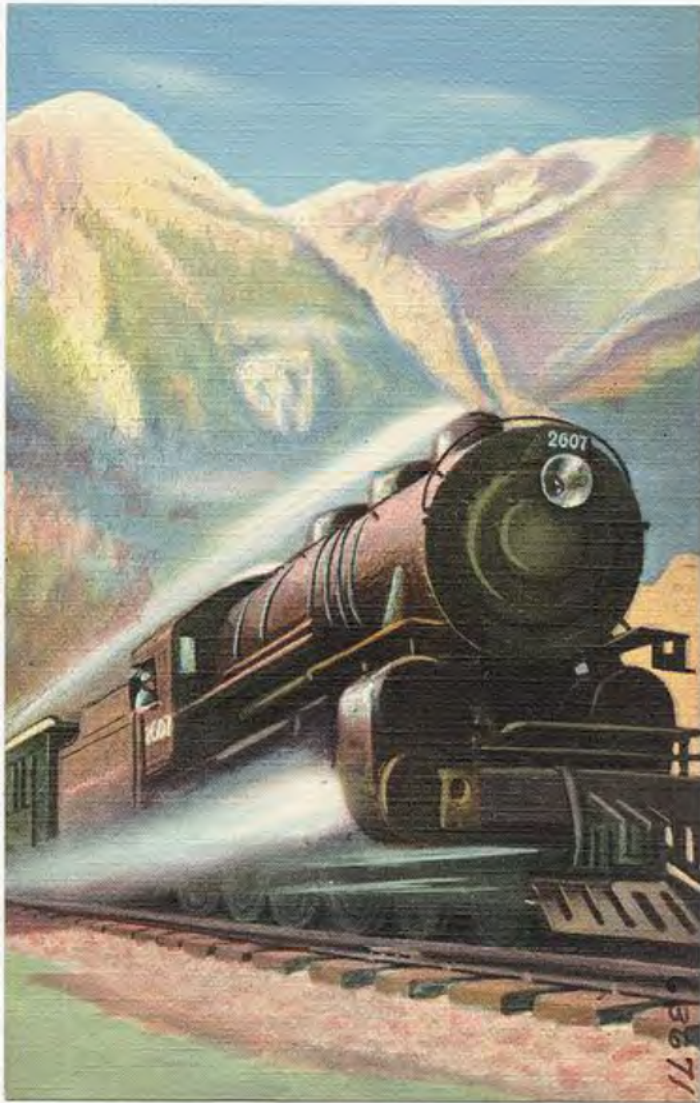
## CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.3

Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

## CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.10

By the end of year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, in the grades 4-5 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

# The Summer of 1910



In the mountains of northern Idaho and western Montana, the summer of 1910 was the hottest and driest that most people could remember. The grasses turned brown and prickly, and streams were drying up. The previous winter had been cold, but hardly any rain fell throughout the spring.

By the end of April, the fire season had already begun. Electrical storms, people, and the railroad were all responsible for starting the small fires that sprung up throughout the region. Many fires were started by accident, and perhaps as many as 100 fires were started by embers that rose from the chimneys of coal-powered trains and landed in dry trees and grass.

*This image of a train on the Northern Pacific railway at Bozeman Pass in Montana was printed on postcards from 1930-1945.*



# The Big Blowup

By mid-August, forest fires speckled the landscape across northern Idaho and western Montana. Some people estimated that there were 1,736 fires burning, while others estimated that the number was closer to 3,000. Firefighters were working round the clock, and President William Howard Taft even sent army troops to help fight the fires. Finally, by August 19, it seemed like the fires were under control.

Then, on August 20, hurricane-force winds blew across the region, causing the fires to grow and spread. Where there had been many separate fires, there was now a raging wall of flame—it was impossible to tell where one fire ended and the next began.

The winds were so strong that whole trees were ripped out of the ground, and balls of flame jumped between ridges over canyons a half mile wide. “The fire turned trees into weird torches that exploded like Roman candles,” one observer told a reporter.



*This photograph of a fire was taken by Harry English near the Bullion Mine in Northern Idaho.*

# Fighting For Their Lives

Over the next two days, thousands of men, including 4,000 soldiers, fought to keep back the fire. Trains raced to evacuate the small mining and logging towns, carrying residents to safety in the nearby cities of Missoula, Montana, and Spokane, Washington. As the fires closed in, evacuation trains sped over burning trestles, and some found shelter in tunnels that had been drilled through the mountains.



*Troops from the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry evacuated citizens from Wallace and fought to protect the town of Avery from the approaching fires.*



*Firefighters getting off a train in Avery, Idaho.*

# A National Hero



As flames surrounded them, one Forest Service Ranger, Edward Pulaski, led forty five men to safety in the War Eagle Mine. Around midday, as the fire closed in, they fled to the mine shaft, barely making it in time. While the flames burned the forest just outside the mine, Pulaski hung blankets over the entrance and ordered his men to lie down, threatening to shoot anyone who tried to run. The tunnel was filled with smoke, but Pulaski threw water on the blankets until he lost consciousness.

When the men began to regain consciousness around 5am the next morning, they made their way out of the tunnel, only to discover that five men had died during the night. The survivors climbed down the mountain, though the charred remains of the forest, until they were met by a rescue party that helped them reach the town of Wallace.

*"How we got down I hardly know. We were in a terrible condition, all of us hurt of burned. I was blind and my hands were burned from trying to keep the fire out of the mine. Our shoes were burned off our feet and our clothing was in parched rags. We were covered with mud and ashes."*

*- Ranger Edward Pulaski*



# After the Fire

The weather started to change on August 22, and by the 23rd light rains and snow began to subdue the flames. Although some of the fires continued to burn until heavier rains arrived, the great firestorm had ended.

By this time, towns, logging camps, and anything else that was in the path of the fire had been incinerated. At least 85 people, mostly firefighters, had perished. The region's hospitals were filled with injured and burned firefighters. The towns of Haugan, DeBorgia, Taft, and Tuscor were completely gone, and a third of Wallace was destroyed.



*Before the fire.*



*After the fire.*



# The Forest Today

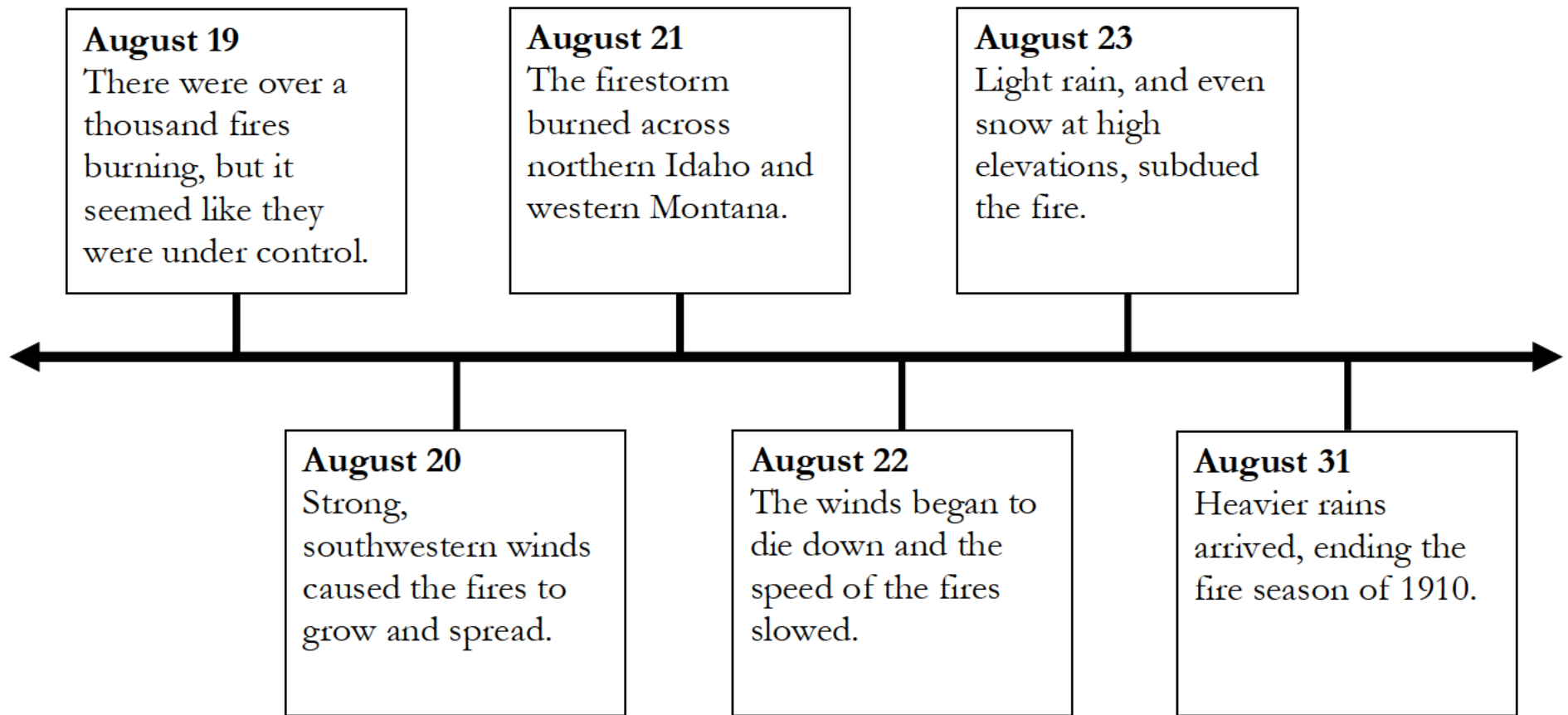


*This photograph of the Lochsa River in the Clearwater National Forest (much of which burned in the 1910 fires) was taken in August 2011, more than 100 years after the Big Blowup.*

# Interesting Facts

- It has been estimated that there were either 1,736 or 3,000 individual fires burning before the “Big Blowup.”
- After the “Big Blowup,” the “Great Fire” was 185 miles long and 65 miles wide.
- About 3 million acres burned. That’s almost 2,268,750 football fields!
- Approximately 7.5 billion board feet of timber—enough to build 2-3 hundred thousand homes—was burned.
- There were at least 85 casualties.
- The fires burned up several towns.
- There was so much smoke that it darkened the sky as far south as Denver, Colorado, and as far east as Waterton, New York. To the west, ships 500 miles out at sea couldn’t navigate using the stars because smoke filled the sky.
- Soot from the fires fell on Greenland.

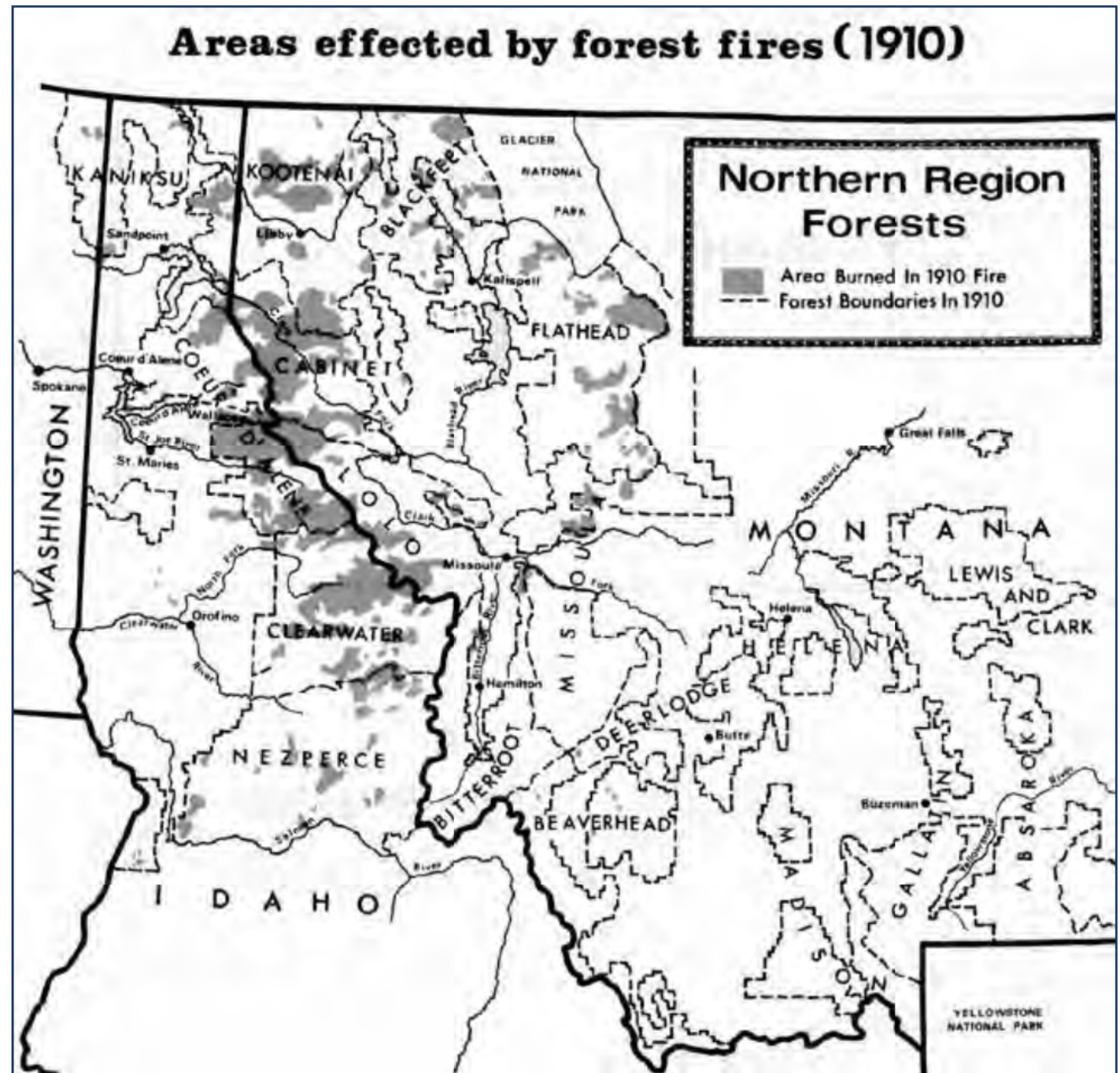
# The Great Fire of 1910 Timeline





# Burn Area Map

Can you find Spokane, Washington, and Missoula, Montana? Thousands of people were evacuated to these cities as the fire approached their towns.





# Media Attributions

Cover photograph by Cameron Strandberg. Released under a CC-BY 2.0 license.

Pg. 2 image from the Boston Public Library, Print Department; in the public domain.

Pg. 3 photograph by H. English. Released under a CC-BY 2.0 license.

Pg. 4 photograph: Museum of North Idaho Photo FI-1-22.

Pg. 4 photograph: Museum of North Idaho Photo FI-1-41.

Pg. 5 photograph by an unknown author; in the public domain.

Pg. 6 photograph: Museum of North Idaho Photo FI-1-54.

Pg. 6 photograph by R.H. McKay. Released under a CC-BY 2.0 license.

Pg. 7 photograph by the Forest Service Northern Region. Released under a CC-BY 2.0 license.

Pg. 10 map from "When the Mountains Roared: Stories of the 1910 Fire", a 1978 Forest Service publication.

# Works Referenced

- Billbrey, Wade (1910). Stories of the 1910 fire. The Great 1910 Fire of Idaho, Montana, and Washington. Retrieved from <http://www.1910fire.com/Fire%20Stories/Puget%20Sound%20Rwy%20rescues/Puget%20Sound%20Railway%20rescues.htm>. This resource is in the public domain.
- Cohen, Betsy (2010). Behind the big burn: Explore sights, smells of deadly 1910 fire at fort missoula exhibit. Missoulian. Retrieved from [http://missoulian.com/news/local/behind-the-big-burn-explore-sights-smells-of-deadly-fire/article\\_adc641dc-3af2-11df-8b6d-001cc4c002e0.html](http://missoulian.com/news/local/behind-the-big-burn-explore-sights-smells-of-deadly-fire/article_adc641dc-3af2-11df-8b6d-001cc4c002e0.html). This resource is in the public domain.
- Elers, Koch (2010). History of the 1910 forest fires - Idaho & western montana. When the Mountains Roared: Stories of the 1910 Fire. Retrieved from [http://www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/Publications/region/1/1910\\_fires/contents.htm](http://www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/Publications/region/1/1910_fires/contents.htm). This resource is in the public domain.
- The Forest History Society (2013). The 1910 fires. U.S. Forest Service History. Retrieved from <http://www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/Policy/Fire/FamousFires/1910Fires.aspx>. This resource is in the public domain.
- Leuschen, Mariah and Rose Davis (2010). The great 1910 fires of idaho and montana: day trip guides to historic sites. U.S. Forest Service. Retrieved from [http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5343878.pdf](http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5343878.pdf). This resource is in the public domain.
- Petersen, Jim (1994-1995). The west is burning up!: Stories, the 1910 fire. Idaho Forest Products Commission. Retrieved from <http://www.idahoforests.org/fires.htm>. This resource is in the public domain.
- Pulaski, E.C. (1923). Surrounded by forest fires: My most exciting experience as a forest ranger. The Forest History Society. Retrieved from <http://www.foresthistory.org/ASPNET/Policy/Fire/FamousFires/Pulaski.pdf>. This resource is in the public domain.
- U.S. Forest Service (2014). The great fire of 1910. U.S. Forest Service. Retrieved from [http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5444731.pdf](http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5444731.pdf). This resource is in the public domain.

# Licensing

This book and any prints are released under a [CC BY 3.0 license](#) by the author.

This means that you are free to share, remix, transform, and build upon this book as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author.

Included works (e.g., images and other media) may have separate licensing requirements, and this release does not supersede or replace those requirements.

This e-book template is provided under a CC BY 3.0 license by the University of Idaho College of Education. If you use, share, remix, or transform this template, you should include this page at the end of your book.

