



NMSU Library News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Life of Smokey, the Real Bear, to be Presented at NMSU Library

For fifty years his face has been so well known that only Santa Claus is recognized more often. He has his own zip code and his own legal counsel. He is commemorated on a U.S. postage stamp and his image is protected by federal laws. He was a living symbol of the danger of forest fires. He's New Mexico native Smokey Bear. On May 9, 1950, this five pound bear cub was rescued along a fire line where 500 firefighters were fighting the Capitan Gap fire in New Mexico's Lincoln National Forest. The little bear cub, suffering from burns on his foot pads, tummy and hind end, survived to become a national treasure.

To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the rescue of Smokey Bear, NMSU history student Leslie Bergloff will present the program "Smokey, the Real Bear" on Wednesday, July 19, at 3:30 p.m. on the second floor east of the New Mexico State University Library's Branson Library. The public is invited to attend.

Smokey Bear had two lives, the immortal one conjured up by U.S. Forest Service and Advertising Council illustrators, and the one he actually lived. Bergloff's talk will revisit the events that surrounded the rescue, care, and subsequent donation of the real Smokey Bear to the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. Bergloff's research, conducted at the NMSU Library's Rio Grande Historical Collections and elsewhere, focuses on the individuals who participated in Smokey's rescue and their oral histories of the event. This is the story of regular folks, firefighters, children and government employees, who for one brief moment participated in the making of an American legend. Their attachment to the real bear never left them. Many saved pictures, letters, and magazine and newspaper articles. Some of them were still correcting the story of Smokey fifty years later.

Americans of all ages immediately recognize Smokey's message "Only you can prevent forest fires." They remember his theme song:

"With a ranger's hat and shovel, and a pair of dungarees,
you will find him in the forest always sniffin' at the breeze.
People stop and pay attention when he tells them to beware,
'cause ev'ry body knows that he's the Fire Preventin' Bear."

*"Smokey The Bear." U.S Dept. of Agriculture, Hill and
Range Songs, Inc. Under license by RCA-Victor. Copyright 1952.*

And Americans heeded his advice; in twenty-five years of forest fire prevention, the annual acreage of burned national forests dropped ninety percent. Smokey died in 1976, and he is buried in Capitan, New Mexico, at the Smokey Bear State Historical Park beneath the picturesque Capitan Mountains. While Smokey was replaced with another bear at the National Zoo, his story lives on in the hearts of those who helped make him a celebrity.

In addition to Bergloff's presentation, Smokey Bear memorabilia from the personal collection of NMSU Library staff member Genevieve Bauer will be exhibited. Smokey Bear posters issued by the U.S. Forest Service will be displayed in the Special Collections Research Room as well. This program is an NMSU Library Special Collections Event, made possible by an American Library Association Reference & User Services Association/Facts on File Grant for current affairs programming. For more information, please call Cheryl Wilson, Special Collections Librarian, at 646-3238.

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