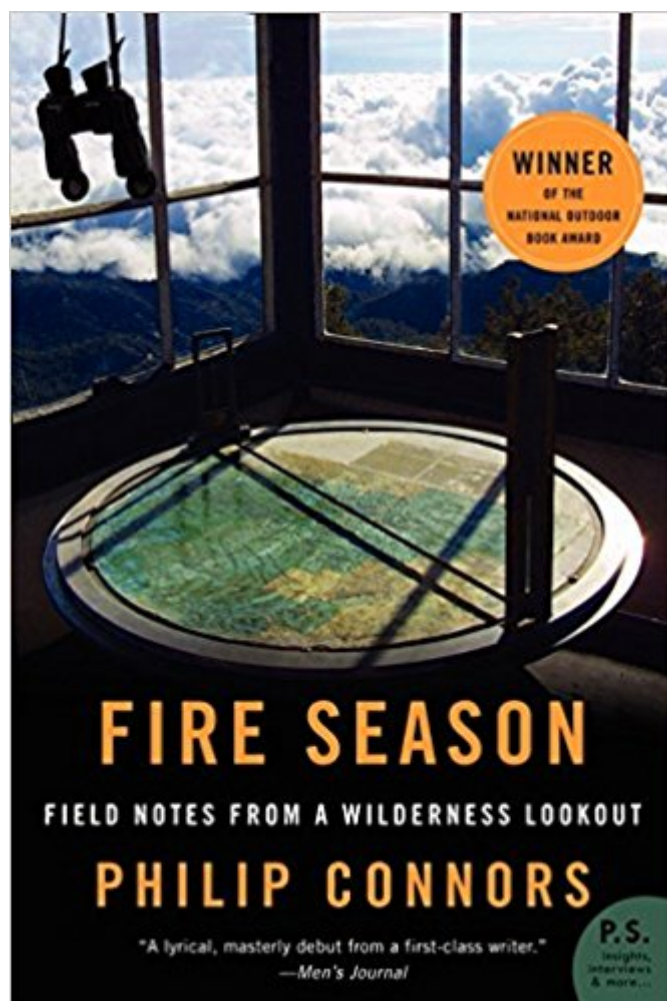


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# Fire Season: Field Notes From A Wilderness Lookout



## Synopsis

“Fire Season both evokes and honors the great hermit celebrants of nature, from Dillard to Kerouac to Thoreau—and I loved it.” J.R. Moehringer, author of *The Tender Bar* “[Connors’s] adventures in radical solitude make for profoundly absorbing, restorative reading.” Walter Kirn, author of *Up in the Air* Phillip Connors is a major new voice in American nonfiction, and his remarkable debut, *Fire Season*, is destined to become a modern classic. An absorbing chronicle of the days and nights of one of the last fire lookouts in the American West, *Fire Season* is a marvel of a book, as rugged and soulful as Matthew Crawford’s bestselling *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, and it immediately places Connors in the august company of Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard, Aldo Leopold, Barry Lopez, and others in the respected fraternity of hard-boiled nature writers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

For almost a decade, former Wall Street Journal reporter Connors has spent half a year keeping vigil over 20,000 square miles of desert, forest, and mountain chains from atop a tower 10,000 feet above sea level. One of a handful of seasoned, seasonal fire-watchers in New Mexico’s Gila National Forest, Connors introduces us to his wilderness in this ruminative, lyrical, occasionally suspenseful account that bristles with the narrative energy and descriptive precision of Annie Dillard and dovetails between elegiac introspection and a history of his curious and lonely occupation. Poet Gary Snyder, environmental advocate Edward Abbey, and beat novelist Jack Kerouac once stood watch over the woods, but today, 90% of American lookout towers have been decommissioned,

with only a few hundred remaining. The world at large intrudes in Connors's account of contented isolation only in a discussion of evolving forest fire-fighting policies, in which advocates of ruthlessly suppressing fires are pitted against a new generation of Forest Service professionals who choose, when it's safe, to let forest fires burn themselves out. (Apr.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"[A] lyrical, masterly debut from a first-class writer." (Men's Journal) "[A] finely, wryly, at times poetically wrought first book. . . . Connors has succeeded in weaving many stories into one [and has found] a voice and new literary life in arid terrain where I, for one, had suspected there was little new life to be found." (New York Times Book Review) "A fine prose stylist with a splendid eye for detail, Connors allows his readers to see the natural beauty he witnesses. . . . All lovers of nature will understand the allure and wonder that Connors so gracefully describes." (Minneapolis Star Tribune) "This is a book for all nature lovers, and more importantly, those who fail to see the beauty of the natural world. Connors's prose is so mesmerizing, so enthralling, that even the most committed city dweller will be tempted to head for a remote, quiet destination." (Pittsburgh Tribune-Review) "[T]his is modern nature writing at its very finest." (Daily Beast) "[R]eading this book is like taking a vacation in beautiful scenery with an observant and clever guide. So relax and enjoy." (Associated Press) "Compelling and introspective, *Fire Season* lingers like a good poem." (New Mexico Magazine) "Philip Connors is the typical run-of-the-mill U.S. Forest Service employee. Except, you know, he can write like hell. . . . This book is great, like Norman-Maclean's *Young-Men-and-Fire* is great." (Mountain Gazette) "[A] compelling study of isolation, wildness, and a vocation in its twilight." (The New Yorker) "[A] quietly moving love letter to a singular place. By the last page, I wanted to hike up to the tower, sip some whiskey with him and just look." (Los Angeles Times) "[R]ife with breathtaking moments. . . . [T]o turn the last page of *Fire Season* is to emerge from a journey that enlightens and leaves the reader hungry for more." (Denver Post) "Entertaining and informative. . . . Connors mixes natural, personal, and literary history in this remarkable narrative." (New West) "This book captures all that is grand about our western wilderness." (Vail Daily) "For those lacking the freedom, gumption or plain will power to taste such a romantic life for themselves, simply reading Connors's account sure is fun." (Deseret News) "Fascinating. . . . Connors's narrative is crisp and accessible." (The Tucson

Citizen)“[E]ngaging. . . [Connors] sends thoughtful word from deep in the wilderness. . . .” (Seattle Times)“A clear overview of America’s shifting attitude toward its own wilderness. . . . [H]is affection is catching.” (Portland Mercury)“[A] fascinating personal narrative . . . and a poetic tribute to solitude and the natural world.” (Paris Review Daily)“[A] fascinating, pyro-charged reflection. . . . For a man so drawn to solitude, Connors has a particular knack for writing characters. . . . [Fire Season] proves a nifty way to shake off the last of winter’s cold.” (Cleveland Plain Dealer)“An excellent book, an entertaining read, and a lot of food for thought. . . . Without doubt, this was the most enjoyable read I’ve had all year.” (National Parks Traveler)“[F]ull of wry wisdom and humor. . . . [O]ne of the best books to come out of a government gig since Ed Abbey turned a ranger’s wage into Desert Solitaire.” (Outside magazine)“[C]harming. . . . [Connors is] a careful observer delighting in nature and aware of what threatens it.” (Bloomberg News)“[A]n exultant take on the natural world. . . . [Connors] describes his lookoutry with understated exuberance, an engaging and measured enthusiasm for being alone in a beautiful place.” (Nina MacLaughlin, Bookslut)“[R]uminative, lyrical, occasionally suspenseful. . . . [Fire Season] bristles with the narrative energy and descriptive precision of Annie Dillard and dovetails between elegiac introspection and a history of [Connor’s] curious and lonely occupation.” (Publishers Weekly)“Print journalist and fire lookout: When it comes to paying jobs, Connors has a death wish, but he has made the very best of it.” (Kirkus Reviews)“[A] poetic, thoroughly researched, thrilling account of [Connors’s] job as a fire lookout. . . . [I]lluminates the joys of solitude and the complicated nature of life in a volatile, untamable environment.” (Booklist)“Fire Season is a beautiful narrative, evoking a reverent appreciation for protecting some of nature’s remaining wild places.” (San Francisco Book Review)“What a wonderful book. Philip Connors went up to the mountaintop to serve as a lookout—and he has come down with a masterwork of close observation, deep reflection, and hard-won wisdom. This is an unforgettable reckoning with the American land.” (Philip Gourevitch)“An excellent, informative, and delightful book.” (Annie Proulx)“In an age of relentless connectivity, Philip Connors is a conscientious objector. His adventures in radical solitude make for profoundly absorbing, restorative reading. The soul that learns to keep its own company, this book reminds us, can never be alone.” (WALTER KIRN, author of *Up in the Air*)“FIRE SEASON is an urgent, clear, bright book; it is both lyrical enough to arrest breath and absolutely compelling, reminding us why we need fire, solitude, wilderness. Find room on your bookshelf next to Wallace Stegner and

Norman Maclean; Philip Connors is here to stay. (Alexandra Fuller) "Philip Connors's remarkable account of his seasons as a fire lookout in the Gila National Forest in New Mexico is enlightening and well-informed. The surprise in the book is the author's willingness to examine his own naïveté about the natural world. His is a most welcome new voice. (Barry Lopez) "Philip Connors has crafted a book illumined by the gob-smacked, wide-eyed, inquisitional wonder at creation. . . . Fire Season is for pilgrims, pedestrians, hikers and anchorites, city dwellers, and solitary sorts: a treat for the senses, fit for the long haul. Bravo! (Thomas Lynch, author of *The Undertaking*) "FIRE SEASON is enlightening and well-informed...and Philip Connors is a most welcome new voice. (Barry Lopez) "[A] stunning gift of a memoir. . . . [A] profound (and at times hilariously profane) perspective on the relationship between humans and the earth. . . . Passionate and funny, Fire Season is an exciting new addition to the canon of American nature writing. (BookPage) "[A]n engaging and highly readable mix of wilderness reflection, ode to solitude, and reasoned assault on forestry techniques. (AARP Magazine)

Another gorgeously written book by Philip Connors and his experiences as a fire lookout in the mountain ranges converging in southwestern New Mexico, Arizona, and Mexico. Having formerly been a writer for the Wall Street Journal, he chucked his professional career to become a bartender in New Mexico for seven months of the year to live his true life calling to live in a ranger station as a fire observer for five months of the year. Connors provides historical information on the creation of the U.S. Fire Service, the conservation laws initiated from 1901-1950, the need to burn the forest, the devastation of cattle grazing and erosion of the land, and all of his magical experiences living 100 days in near solitude on his Apache Mountain peak harking the cry of fire as it appears across the wilderness. Connors writing is poetic, lyrical and mystifying. He grew up in rural southwestern Minnesota, in Currie, on the plains and has a full appreciation for nature, agriculture, solitude, and the beauty of nature.

I absolutely loved this book. What I thought would be a dry account of a season in a fire tower was indeed a lyrical narrative about life, love and the eternal draw of nature. His writing reaches in and touches your soul, descriptive, mindful and challenging at times. It was a book to be savored for the quality of gifted writing Connors brings to the page. As a hiker I've seen the devastation of forest fire and find it difficult to reconcile the charred embers with new life, but his patient explanation made me realize we have to look below the surface to see the treasure that lies beneath. I would love to

sit down on a bar stool and have a beer with him. A clink of the bottle and no words necessary, just a silent toast to dignity and glory of our wilderness areas. Thank for the tutorial.....it's an awesome read. author of Adirondack Audacity

Having served as a U.S. Forest Service Lookout, in the Montana Rockies, back in the 1940's, the thing that struck me most was the huge contrast between Connors' experience and my own. (See "Berray Mountain: A Rite of Passage" by Kinglsey Lawrence Greene, also available from ). We had none of his modern conveniences. We lived up in our wooden towers and communicated by telephone only. We had no radios and cooked on wood-burning stoves. There was no such thing as a "day off." As soon as we were stationed on lookout we were on duty 24-7 for the entire fire season. I received mail twice during the season via Forestry personnel on horseback. Vehicles could get no closer than ten miles. The other great difference was that I was sixteen years old at the time! Those differences aside, however, I found Connors' book a joy to read, and could identify with his vivid, poetic descriptions of the country he surveyed from his perch atop Apache Peak. His knowledge of Forest Service history, and specifically, of the Gila National Forest, adds a unique dimension to his well-written narrative for he has skillfully, and interestingly, woven that history into his forays on the trail making it an integral part of the piece. The straightforward description of his blunder when he picked up the "abandoned" fawn shows his willingness to admit he is not a wildlife professional, but displays his unabashed humanness when he realizes his mistake. The book is written through the eyes, and from the soul, of a true lover of the wilderness in the likeness of Aldo Leopold, whom he quotes freely. It is a great read for any, and all, who love the untrammelled wilderness areas of our national heritage.

Wow! Found this book on the Banff Mountain Festival website. It was the 2012 winner as best "Mountain Book". Once started, I couldn't stop reading it. I learned so much. It includes the history and science of fire fighting strategies and of the role the forest service plays in executing the strategies. He also relates the excitement of discovering a fire, relaying the information to the forest service and the amount of threat the fire provides as it grows. The author is so in tune with the environment. His representations of all he sees are incredible. Then there is the history of inspirational environmental writers who all worked as fire tower lookouts...there was just so much to learn from beginning to end. Interlaced with that were the lookouts own feelings about day to day experiences, his appreciation of his dog and the acknowledgement of the love and support of his wife. Also, some humorous encounters with hikers and others who found the lookout while he was

on duty. The author had been employed to write for the Wall Street Journal. He is an excellent writer and should be added to the list of inspirational environmental fire tower writers! It's a MUST Read. One suggestion, the book should contain maps...yes, one could go online but you don't want to stop reading. Maps would really put things in perspective for readers. I guess the author really, really doesn't want company.

Let me first say, this is a good book, I really, really enjoyed it but it's not the book I was expecting. I bought Fire Season hoping to learn what it's like to spend season after season keeping an eye out for wilderness fires. I learned next to nothing about what the job truly entails. I would love to have had the 'azimuth' explained, for instance, rather than having to Google it. It's not rocket science to figure out what it does but a sentence or two detailing it's working would have been appreciated. Let me reiterate, this is a good book and I enjoyed it. Should Philip Connors write another book I would buy it. Fire Season is more a collection of ruminations pertaining to the Gila Wilderness Area he is watching over, the history and role of government in the wilderness in general and man's place in the greater scheme of things. All extremely interesting and well written but not necessarily exclusive to living in a fire tower for one third of a year.

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