

Jules August Viquesney

Jules August Viquesney was born April 7, 1869 in Belington, and died later in Indiana. He was educated in local schools and spent a term at the WVU School of Law. He was at different times a commercial orchardist, potato farmer, Mayor of Belington, Bank President, Justice of the Peace and lawyer.

In 1909, he was appointed West Virginia's first Forest, Game and Fish Warden. He served in that role for nearly 10 years under three governors. He signed an agreement with the U.S. Forest Service in 1913 to cooperatively protect watersheds from forest fires.

This agreement is regarded as the beginning of forest management in West Virginia. The following year, a group of private landowners organized the Central West Virginia Forest Fire Protective Association. Collectively owning over 700,000 acres, the group levied a one cent per acre assessment upon themselves to be used to fight forest fires. A similar group, the Southern West Virginia Forest Fire Association, was formed in 1916, and these groups remained in existence until the early 1950s.

Viquesney also worked cooperatively with the West Virginia Geological and Economic Survey to combat Chestnut Blight by cutting all Chestnuts in a band to form a barrier against the spread of the blight. Unfortunately, it was not known at the time that the fungus was spread by wind-blown spores. The effort was halted when that fact became apparent.

He also instituted the forest fire lookout tower development program, and the Legislature in 1915 at his urging passed a law making it a felony to set a forest fire. Following his term, the state Game and Fish Commission implemented an earlier recommendation by Viquesney to allocate 25 percent of hunting and fishing license revenue to forest fire protection.

His interest in outdoors activities led him to assist in the organization of the Cheat Mount Club – which hosted such dignitaries as Henry Ford and Thomas Edison - and the Allegheny Sportsman's Association, which was visited by numerous governors and Pearl S. Buck.