

Did You Know?



Smokey Bear has a home at the National Agricultural Library (NAL).

NAL Special Collections has an impressive 115 feet of [Smokey Bear history](#), including sound recordings like the Grateful Dead's Mickey Hart and B.B. King celebrating Smokey's 40th anniversary as a "spokesbear" for the U.S. Forest Service; films and video, like Smokey on "Hollywood Squares" and "Entertainment Tonight"; and commemorative baseball gloves, along with the more expected memos, posters, and letters.



But the stars of NAL's Smokey material are 19 original paintings by Virginia artist Rudolph Wendelin. The artwork is on public display for the first time in an exhibit at the [Chrysler Museum of Art](#) in Norfolk, VA, as part of

Smokey Bear's 70th anniversary campaigning against careless fire habits in the woods.

Wendelin wasn't the first to draw Smokey back when the bear was created in 1944. But he drew Smokey hundreds of times, serving as art consultant and "chief caretaker" from 1946 until his retirement from the Forest Service in 1973. Under Wendelin's hand, Smokey took on the humanized look by which he is best known today: grave expression, hands rather than paws, jeans, shovel, and sporting that emblematic ranger hat long before pop star Pharrell Williams made it his signature.

After retiring, Wendelin continued to produce Smokey Bear images, including these 19 oil and acrylic paintings, as artwork for calendars by the Vernon Company. In 2000, after Wendelin's death, the Forest Service purchased the paintings from his family and transferred them to NAL for proper conservation, meshing with the existing historic collection.

So if you suddenly came face to face with big brown eyes, a deep resonant voice, and the words "Only YOU..." would you be able to complete the iconic phrase by saying "Can Prevent Forest Fires"? More than 7 in 10 adults in the United States would recognize Smokey Bear and know his message, according to a 2011 Ad Council survey.

"Celebrating Smokey Bear: Rudy Wendelin and the Creation of an Icon," is at the [Chrysler Museum of Art](#), Norfolk, VA, through February 1, 2015.



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