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Monster Fire at Minong: Wisconsin's Five Mile Tower Fire of 1977

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Monster Fire at Minong: Wisconsin's Five Mile Tower Fire of 1977, by Bill Matthias. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2010. xvi, 176 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, appendixes, index. \$14.95 paper.

Reviewer Ken Brown is a battalion chief with the Iowa City Fire Department and teaches History and Philosophy of the Fire Service at Kirkwood Community College.

Monster Fire at Minong is a first-person account of the largest forest fire in the Midwest in more than 50 years. In addition to the author's recollections and personal notes, Bill Matthias interviewed more than 130 people who were involved in fighting the fire. The narrative follows the course of the fire from its start with a single match at a campfire on a Saturday afternoon through its eventual control and extinguishment along a riverbank in the early morning 17 hours later. The book keeps readers' interest and also informs them about how wildland fires were fought in the Midwest in the 1970s.

The second section of the book draws several of the lessons learned from the fire. The magnitude of the fire, unusual in the Midwest, forced fire departments and natural resources agencies to adopt many of the tactics and strategies already in use by western fire departments and the U.S. Forest Service for dealing with any future fires. Before the Minong fire, a wildland fire in the Midwest was considered a local problem; afterwards it was recognized that a forest fire is a regional problem that needs state resources as quickly as possible. No fires as big as the Five Mile Tower Fire have ravaged the Midwest since then — a testament to the value of the lessons learned at that fire.