

One of America's most iconic bears celebrated his 75th birthday recently. Visitors to the N.C. Museum of Natural Science's Nature Research Center were able to learn a little about the real Smokey Bear and his message of preventing unintentional forest fires.

Smokey Bear fans of all ages helped celebrate with cake, a giant birthday card, goody bags and taking pictures with the big bear himself. The event also featured a showing of the short movie, Smokey Bear – The Full Story.

Smokey Bear was born on Aug. 9, 1944, when the U.S. Forest Service and the Ad Council agreed that a fictional bear named Smokey would be the symbol for their joint effort to promote forest fire prevention. Artist Albert Staehle was asked to paint the first poster of Smokey Bear. It depicted a bear pouring a bucket of water on a campfire and saying "Care will prevent 9 out of 10 fires." Smokey Bear soon became popular as his image appeared on a variety of forest fire prevention materials. In 1947, his slogan became the familiar, "Only YOU Can Prevent Forest Fires!"

Smokey plans to celebrate his milestone birthday all year.