Most bears hibernate in the winter. Smokey the Bear, longtime mascot and symbol of the U.S. Forest Service, likes to go south from the depressing seriousness of Washington, D.C., to the deep delta country to meet with "Teddy" cousins, the Louisiana black bears, and to hang out on St. Charles Avenue during the New Orleans Mardi Gras. There, Smokey can scramble for heads thrown from the floats, swig Dixie beer, and no one knows that he is THE Smokey the Bear; on Mardi Gras everyone assumes Smokey is someone costumed as Smokey. As usual, Smokey gave an impromptu interview to a Delta Sierran reporter.

Delta Sierran: Smokey! Good to see you again. I almost didn't recognize you without your usual 1918 campaign hat.

Smokey the Bear: That headgear is passe in Washington. Too old-fashioned, militaristic. After Bill Clinton got elected, the folks on the transition team told me that the hat had to go if I wanted a job after January 20, 1993. By the way, how do you like my headband? (bouncing head to display ribbon across the top)

DS: What? You're dressing like Mrs. Clinton? What has Smokey the Bear come to?

Smokey the Bear: That's Ms. Hillary Rodham Clinton, friend. And don't call me Smokey the Bear anymore. I might lose my job.

DS: What are you talking about? What's going on in the Clintons' Washington?

Smokey the Bear: If you please, from now on refer to me as "Smokey La Osa." Being male and Anglo doesn't cut it. If I was to keep on representing the Forest Service, I had to be a Hispanic female. In case your Spanish is rusty, amigo, "La Osa" is the feminine form of "The Bear," a surname of some of us who trace our ancestors back to Spain.

DS: This is amazing. For over forty years Smokey the Bear, with his campaign hat and blue dungarees back on, but speaking of credibility problems, I'm running a whispering campaign out west to put ex-secretary Watt in a very defensive position with his supporters. The word is being spread that he and J. Edgar Hoover used to be very close friends.

Smokey, you're a terrorist.

STB: Adios, Amigo.

— Earl Higgins