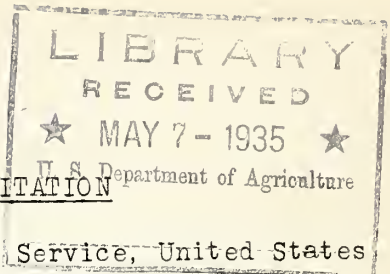


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SOME SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF FOREST EXPLOITATION

A radio talk by F. A. Silcox, Chief of the Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture, broadcast Friday, April 26, 1935, in the Conservation Day period, National Farm and Home Hour, by NBC and 60 associated radio stations.

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Gifford Pinchot, first chief of the United States Forest Service, once told a group of Western lumbermen that if they continued cutting timber as fast as they had been cutting it, their forests would be cleaned out in thirty years.

"Mr. Pinchot," replied the leader of the group, "there is enough timber tributary to our mills to keep them going for seven generations, and that's long enough for me."

It was 23 years ago that this observation was made. Today the timber is gone, the mills closed, 1,500 workers scattered to the four winds. Farmers and merchants with whom those workers traded are without markets and, - after a waste of natural resources which with proper management might still be supporting prosperous and self respecting communities, - the Federal Government now dispenses the dole.

This is one picture which forest exploitation has painted. There are many others like it, for the process has covered territory which extends from the Lake States to the Gulf of Mexico, from the Virginias to the Pacific Coast. And just as a steel town can not keep going if there is no ore, so a sawmill town can not exist after forests have disappeared.

Ghost towns are desolate things. And the effects of forest exploitation, which leaves them stranded and forlorn, spread far into the social fabric. For it happens all too often, when forest communities go, that local agriculture and labor are left without markets, taxes remain unpaid, and community bonds - owned largely by those who have no part in devastation - go by default. Indeed, effects are often still more disastrous and widespread. For when forests are cleared from hillsides, rains run off quickly instead of being absorbed into the ground; floods are aggravated; top soil is washed from fertile acres; streams, dams and harbors are filled with silt; property is damaged; human lives are lost.

So it is that forest exploitation weakens the social and economic structures of a State, a group of States, a Nation.

Is this a beneficial process? Shall we continue it? Shall we go on treating forests as mines, thus creating still more ghost towns to scar the landscape and gnaw hungrily at our social and economic vitals? Or shall we, preferring stable, permanent family and community life, treat forests as products of the soil susceptible, like other crops, of renewal and management in accordance with known sciences and practices?

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Forest-land data, - which the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service furnished so the National Resources Board might have a sound basis for considering such questions, - is disturbing, to say the least. For example: -

1. In the continental United States, we have today, - classed as old growth sawtimber economically feasible to log, - only 16% of the virgin timber which sheltered the soil when the good ship Mayflower first anchored off Plymouth Rock.

2. Of the 495 million acres of forest land now capable of producing timber having a commercial value, four-fifths is in private ownership.

3. Of this privately owned commercial forest land, 74 million acres, - an area about the size of Indiana, Illinois, plus one-half of Wisconsin, - has been devastated or left in a poorly stocked condition; 41 million acres, - greater than the land area of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Virginia, Maryland, and West Virginia, - has been burned, annually, in recent years; more than 95% of all privately owned commercial forest land still lacks adequate forest management.

The significance of such conditions, and the importance of the entire forest problem, is the more readily grasped when we remember that forest lands make up, today, almost one-third the total land area of the continental United States. More valuable for forest and allied uses than for other purposes, is it any wonder the economic and social welfare of the nation is vitally involved in their wise use? Or that the fundamental purpose of public conservation policies is to make this huge forest empire contribute, with security and stability, to the permanent support of its fair share of the country's population. If there is any better purpose - and I know of none - how, then, may it be accomplished?

There is a way. Exploitation can be stopped; forest lands can be made, then kept, productive; sustained yield forest management can be applied to all commercial forest lands; to the four-fifths in private, as well as the one-fifth now in public ownership.

This calls for improving and developing much of our forest properties; for reforestation - by which is meant the whole process of rebuilding impaired forest values - more of it.

A real task, this. One to challenge the imagination of the mighty Paul Bunyan, that mythical man whose saga has been sung in every lumber camp in America. For it involves nearly one-third of our total land area; has to do with resources which, from the day the first pioneer took his ax into the woods, have played a major part in the building of our civilization.

A start has been made. Already those resources have begun to play a part in the rebuilding which is under way. For in the two years just passed, forest lands have furnished worth while work for more than a million men. Non-competitive work; work which does not take the place of that which, in normal times, gave employment to 1,300,000 people; of that which, in addition, furnished supplemental cash incomes to two and one-half million farmers each year.

This work, done in part by the boys of the Civilian Conservation Corps, is that of forest restoration and improvement. And in this task there is, now, worth while, non-competitive work for another million men.

How can there be such a huge work-reservoir in a country where so many men are now jobless? And what is this work? These and other questions will be answered in the next of this series of informal talks on that part of the National Resources Board report which has to do with Forestry in Land-Use Planning.

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