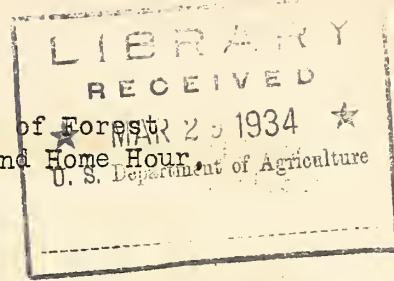


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OUR FOREST RESOURCES

Radio address by R. E. Marsh, in Charge of the Division of Forest Economics, U. S. Forest Service, in the National Farm and Home Hour, Friday, March 16, 1934.



Forests and forest land constitute one of our greatest natural resources; they contribute to our well being in a variety of ways and to a remarkable extent.

First, they supply us with the things to which we can put an actual value - the raw material for lumber, railroad ties, firewood, paper and other cellulose products, turpentine and rosin, chemical derivatives, and literally hundreds of other products made from wood. These come to us through the forest industries manufacturing these products, and forest communities grouped around these industries. All these depend partly or largely on the forests for their livelihood.

But the forests contribute other essential benefits. They are of far-reaching importance through the help they give in regulating the flow of streams, in the reduction of flood waters, in preventing the washing away of valuable soils and the filling of reservoirs with silt, in the protection of extensive irrigation projects, as well as in providing shelter for homes and livestock against winds and drought.

Forests are among our favorite recreation grounds, whether we are bent on a day's excursion, are auto touring, or are seeking the more rigorous delights of wilderness camping. Whatever our recreation plans may be in the forest, nature there responds to our mood and in her forest wonders gives us spiritual and inspirational benefits that are to be valued no less highly because they cannot be reckoned in dollars and cents.

Forest lands also maintain directly or indirectly a large percentage of our national wild-life resource such as game, fur bearers, and fish.

Finally, our domestic livestock depends upon our forest land to a large extent - more than half of our forest land area is now supplying herbaceous and shrubby plants to these flocks and herds. This forage from forest land is an important resource for countless livestock ranches, farms, and communities.

Now, all of these less direct benefits - watershed protection, recreation, game production, and forage for livestock - may well represent values to the public far greater in the aggregate than those to be realized from timber supply. You can judge of that as they are described to you in later talks in this series. Today I have time to discuss forests only as a source of timber products.

Nearly 500 million acres, or about four-fifths of the forest land in this country, may be classed as able sooner or later to furnish timber for commercial use under present or reasonably conceivable future conditions. This commercial forest land occupies more than a quarter of the area of the United States. It far exceeds the acreage of agricultural crops. It does not include some 75 million acres of unused agricultural land and land that may still be withdrawn from crop production and made available for timber growing.

How much of this so-called commercial forest land actually figures at present in our timber supply? Less than two-fifths - less than 200 million acres - bears timber large enough to be cut into lumber and other saw-log products, and

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probably not over half of this timber is accessible enough to be harvested profitably with economic conditions as they have been in recent years.

A larger part of the total area - 230 million acres - has trees on it, but these are small, ranging from little seedlings up to cord-wood size. Moreover, forest deterioration, in the form of poorly stocked stands and poor species, has greatly reduced the productiveness of most of this area.

The remaining 60-odd million acres has been denuded practically to waste land, and can be restored to timber growing only by the expensive method of planting trees by hand, or the very long, slow natural process under which the forest slowly creeps back, achieves finally an efficient density, and the growth of the more valuable species.

This forest deterioration and denudation are largely due to the fact that lumbering has usually been done without regard for the next timber "crop." The young trees and seedlings have not been saved and protected. Seed trees have not been left where necessary to seed up blank spaces. And, worst of all, forest fires have been allowed to follow the logging. Successive fires following logging have too many times reduced cutover acres to a no man's land.

As a matter of fact, forest fires are a major single cause of forest deterioration and destruction. Over 40 million acres are burned annually. Can we reduce that yearly loss? It would seem so, for more than 90 percent of this burn is on land which has not yet been placed under organized fire protection. Most of this is privately owned land in the South.

Who owns our commercial forest land, and what are the owners doing about protecting and improving it? The Federal Government, and States, and smaller governmental units own about one-fifth or 100 million acres. In this ownership, forests are for the most part so managed as to insure permanent sustained forest productivity.

A still larger area, 125 million acres, is included in farm woodlands. These make up one-third of the forest land in the East and the South. They lend themselves readily to good forestry. They are now an important factor in the economy of many farms.

The remainder or well over half of the great commercial forest area, and incidentally the best, is owned by lumber, pulp and paper, and mining companies, and by miscellaneous individuals and agencies, all collectively referred to as industrial owners.

With some notable exceptions these industrial owners were not in the past convinced that it paid to undertake the measures necessary to make their land grow timber continuously. Some were prevented from adopting such measures by conditions beyond their control.

What is the result? For one thing, millions of acres are so stripped and burned that the owner cannot afford to pay taxes on them. This land is reverting to state or county ownership through the processes of tax delinquency. This in itself constitutes a major land problem.

Our original forest resources, so vast that they appeared inexhaustible, were ample, had conservative forest management been applied, to supply abundantly and for all time our needs for lumber and wood products, and at the same time to contribute their full measure of other forest benefits. Lacking such systematic management, however, the cutover land has been so abused and depleted that in normal times growth replaces only a fifth of the quantity cut and destroyed annually.

Forest conservation, or the practice of forestry, does not mean, as so many people think, that we should lock up our forests against cutting, and import our timber from abroad or get along with substitute materials. It does mean utilization carefully conducted so as to remove trees economically ripe for cutting, inferior species, and weed trees, at the same time that the young trees and trees needed for reseedling are protected against injury from fire and logging. It means in some cases filling in blank spots by planting, and the use of various other cultural measures, such as thinning out dense young forests to keep them in a healthy, rapid-growing condition.

The forest problem ranks as one of our major national problems. There is still the opportunity, by an aggressive and comprehensive program of public and private action, to terminate the processes of forest destruction and, under carefully planned use, to rebuild our forest resources and restore their productivity so that eventually they can contribute in timber products and other benefits on a scale adequate to meet all probable national needs. To delay action means greater expense, eventually greater loss, and more time required.

Has any such program or plan been worked out? "A National Plan for American Forestry" is the title of a report recently prepared by the Forest Service. Based upon the most searching examination that has ever been made of the forest problem in all its phases, this report presents a comprehensive plan and program of action which aims to assure productive forests and efficient forest-land use, together with all the social and economic benefits to be derived therefrom.

This report points out that the major features of the forest problem center in or have grown out of private forest land ownership. The plan, which has been approved by Secretary Wallace, includes, as one major provision, a great expansion in public ownership of forest land. Under this plan the Federal Government would acquire 134 million acres, and the states an additional 90 million. Most of this would be located in the eastern half of the United States where now the public owns but 15 percent in contrast with 68 percent in the western half of the United States and where, particularly in the Lake States and the South, the problems of forest rehabilitation are particularly acute.

A great initial step in the Federal acquisition is now under way through the allotment by the President of 20 million dollars for purchase as a part of the emergency conservation program under which thousands of men, organized as the Civilian Conservation Corps, are now at work in the woods.

The National Industrial Recovery Act, one of the basic objectives of which is to conserve natural resources, has created the opportunity for private forest land owners and public agencies to get together and agree on a program of conservative management of industrially owned forest lands on a scale that has never yet been undertaken. Under Article X of its Code of Fair Competition, the Lumber industry has obligated itself in cooperation with public and other agencies to undertake such measures as will insure the conservation and sustained production of the industry's forest resources. The organized lumber industry, through its

divisional authorities, is now earnestly at work in cooperation with Federal, State, and other agencies, in the formulation of the specific rules of woods practice necessary to effectuate these commitments. This action by the lumber industry constitutes a historic turning point in the whole private forest land situation. It is a forward-looking, constructive industrial effort worthy of the highest commendation.

And so the Federal Government, States and industrial forest owners are now progressing toward forest conservation on many fronts. Forestry, one of the most important uses of land and the only productive use to which hundreds of millions of acres can be put, is assuming its merited place in the Administration's far-reaching program of planned national and regional land use.

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