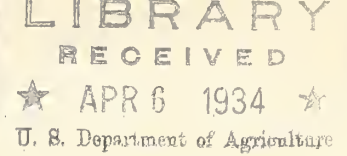


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OUR NATIONAL FORESTS

Radio Address by H. N. Wheeler, U. S. Forest Service, in
the National Farm & Home Hour, Friday, March 23, 1934.

While America was still in the expansion stage of development, with abundant resources at every hand, the dangers into which its land policies were leading were obscured by our characteristic national optimism. We were a free people, with plenty for all. Apparently there was no need to worry about a second crop of timber from cut-over land, with a presumably inexhaustible supply of virgin timber at hand. The extensive measures of expansion had nothing in common with the intensive measures of conservation.

Gradually, toward the end of the nineteenth century, the inevitable outcome of these policies became apparent. The depletion or exhaustion of resources caused certain individuals to think of the future, and the idea of conservation was born. With the twentieth-century, development of transportation and communication, world trade and increased local consumption of products speeded up exploitation. At the time better opportunities were provided for observing and appreciating the extent of this exploitation. The demand for conservation became stronger and constructive action began. The creation of national forests, by withdrawals from the public domain, and the establishment of Federal and State forestry organizations were among the first steps taken.

The first action by the Federal Government was as the custodian of the public lands. By the Act of March 3, 1891, a policy was inaugurated of withdrawing the federally-owned forest lands from destructive exploitation, and in 1897, provision was made for the regulated use and occupancy of these lands, which were then called forest reserves. In 1905, the U. S. Forest Service was established. The forest reserves were soon re-christened "national Forests," and the Forest Service began the building up of our great national forest system.

The problem of forest conservation, however, was most acute in those States in which there were either no public lands at all or where they were very limited or very scattered. The rapid and destructive depletion of forest resources was creating a condition of economic insecurity. Deforestation of the watersheds of important streams was diminishing their navigability and causing widespread damage and loss. The States in which this condition existed were not prepared to meet it effectively. Public ownership and management of the areas in which the situation was most acute was imperatively necessary. To meet this need, the Federal Government entered the second phase in its problem of forest land management. Additional lands valuable for the protection of the headwaters of navigable streams or for timber production were purchased under the provisions, first, of the Weeks Law of 1911, and later by the amendatory act of 1924, known as the Clark-McNary Law. Under these acts, the Federal Government has developed and placed under administration east of the Great Plains 46 national forest units within which the United States now has nearly 10 million acres of land. Most of it was acquired by cash purchase.

Now, all told, we have 146 national forests covering more than 162 million acres. That's a pretty sizeable area - about as large as the whole State of Texas, for instance.

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And upon these lands the United States Forest Service has established administrative organizations, systems of protection against damage by fire, insects, and disease, and effective machinery for the regulation of logging, the grazing of domestic livestock, the use of water resources, and the use of land for purposes of industry and recreation. We have inaugurated advanced systems of silvicultural management, including the planting of denuded areas. We have established systems of physical improvements that we had to have for the protection, utilization, and occupancy of the areas - such things as roads, trails, bridges, telephone lines, administrative structures, and lookout towers.

One of the outstanding benefits to local interests which accrues through national-forest administration is the stability and permanency of local industries. Natural resources are protected from fire, insects, disease, and destructive forms of use. Their volume and utility are increased by constructive forms of management and development. Their utilization is conducted in an orderly manner, with a view to securing permanent and sustained production, with the preservation of the basic natural capital.

Another extremely important contribution to public welfare is that of watershed protection. With each passing year water becomes more and more indispensable to the industrial and community life of the Nation. Where no national forests exist, watershed protection is entailing an increasing burden of public and private expense. States whose watersheds are embraced within national forests secure satisfactory watershed protection without direct outlay.

A third public benefit of outstanding proportions is the conservation and development of the extensive recreational resources within the national forests. The values of such resources are fully recognized; they are safeguarded and improved, and their full and free enjoyment by the general public is encouraged. Camping is free on the national forests and usually requires no permit. In localities frequented by large numbers of people, free public campgrounds are being established, where water developments, camp fireplaces, and other conveniences are available, and the areas are cleaned up so you won't have to worry so much about snakes and red bugs and ticks and the like. Big game is found in the more secluded parts of the mountains, and excellent trout streams and lakes offer keen sport for the angler. State fish and game laws apply on national forests and visitors are expected to cooperate with forest officers by observing proper camp sanitation and being careful with fire.

Another benefit of national forests, closely allied with that of recreation, is the contribution to wild-life conservation. The availability of extensive areas of national-forest lands as environments for wild life permits the fullest public development and most complete use and enjoyment of this resource. Our National Forests are the home of much of the country's remaining big game, and the only large-scale public hunting grounds in the country.

When the Forest Service assumed the administration of the national forests there was no developed technique of forest-fire prevention and suppression in the United States, and there was very scanty means of action in the form of personnel, tools, and transportation and communication facilities. A steady drive has been maintained to make these adequate, to get public cooperation in care with fire in the forests, and to reduce the hazard incident to lumbering, land clearing, slash burning, and similar sources of risk.

Although the national forest system now contains only a relatively small portion of the commercial forest land of the United States, under Forest Service management, this much of the Nation's commercial forest land is assured of permanent technical management under a plan of coordinated use of the various resources.

On these lands timber is managed so as to obtain a continuous yield of wood; watersheds are assured of protection which will preserve their value; the recreational grounds of millions of people are being developed for permanent use; wild life is being protected and is increasing; and there is a steady decrease in the acreage burned, despite a tremendous increase in the human use of the national forests.

National forests have exerted influence far beyond their own borders toward the attainment by the Nation of the objectives sought in their creation - that is, "securing favorable conditions of waterflows, and to furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of citizens of the United States." Though still facing many unsolved problems of protection and administration, our national forests have amply proved the soundness of the principle of conservation through wise use. They are undoubtedly one of our country's greatest assets, and a foundation stone in our continuing effort to safeguard all our forest resources for the country's benefit.

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