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The Field of Consulting Forester

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The railroad claim agent finished lighting his cigar and with a dirty look at the young man facing him, said "And now young feller what makes you thankful that our number twelve set the woods afire two years ago last August tenth?" The young man, shifting weight to the other foot: "I have the proof, and after having appraised the damages done by the fire, the owners asked me to come to you and file claim for $23,500 or in other words, an average of $10 an acre for the 2,350 acres burned."

"You must think that there was money growing on them trees or something, and before this company is going to pay the owners or anybody else any such amount of money we'll see you in —— and before that we'll fight you to the last ditch in the courts. Why, the nerve of a young squirt like you even insinuating that we are responsible for that fire, and then to say that we must pay for it at the unmentionable rate you just mentioned makes me boil. I suppose you want to file a claim, so sit down at that desk and fill out these papers, but don't ever expect to get anything!" With that the claim agent slam-
ned down a sheaf of blank forms on an adjoining desk and turned again to his own work.

Such might be the fate of a man entering a railroad or any other office to file claim for damages for property burned or otherwise lost to the owners. The young man is most likely a young lawyer, who has been appraised of the evidence in the case by a consulting forester, who has spent days in questioning local inhabitants, taking careful observations and generally acting like a sleuth to collect evidence regarding the origin of the fire. More days have been spent carefully rerunning the old surveys to determine just whose property has been damaged. After having satisfied himself as to the cause and responsibility of the fire, as well as its exact extent, the owners damaged, etc., he then proceeded to collect data on the amount of timber both old and young that was killed or partly so. After this the forester had to spend considerable time in checking up on the stumpage values of timber at local mills or manufacturing plants, plan the set-up for an operation on the area burned and finally after getting together all of the pertinent data he arrived at the figure of $23,500 as the damage.

There are a great many different kinds of work in forestry that a consulting forester's firm may be called upon to perform. One of the most common in times of good business is that of timber appraisal, since in such good times many tracts of land both large and small are being bought and sold. The firm, if well known, may be called on to do such timber appraisal and cruising work all the way from the tropics of Central and South America to the limits of tree growth in the Northern part of Canada. For men engaged in such work to change locations frequently is not at all uncommon. Obviously they must have considerable information as to conditions in the various parts of the world where they may be called upon to work. If such information is not easily available (and frequently it isn't) it may have to be learned from experience. One can easily imagine that there are many such conditions that may easily make or break such an enterprise; for example, living conditions, travel in the forest, availability of supplies, availability of tables for various species of timber, information on merchantability and marketability.

Various firms of consulting foresters frequently specialize in certain forms of activity. For example, one firm may specialize in the location and conduct of logging operations, including the analysis of such operations prior to operating. Other firms may specialize in the management of large forest tracts for owners individually or for a large number of owners together. These latter firms may or may not conduct the logging or cutting operations themselves, depending upon the local conditions.
The above illustrations of activity are not intended to cover all those possible for consulting foresters to engage in. They are examples that such firms commonly deal with. An analysis of either type of work will lead one to the conclusion that the work of a consulting forester may require a very wide experience in all forms of forest activity. The width of the experience required will in all cases depend on the scope of activity that the individual forester intends to pursue.

If he intends to stay within one forest region, then the length of time required to gain all the necessary experience and obtain detailed information will be much shorter than if he intends to work in several regions; or still further into foreign countries. In the latter cases, some firms have found it desirable to establish branch offices in various parts of the United States and Canada, with each branch equipped to do special work in its particular region. Established at each branch office would be equipment and men of experience for work in that particular locality or region.

For young unmarried men, perhaps there are no fields in forestry more interesting than that of consulting work. It takes him into new territory and he meets with new experiences very frequently. The remuneration may not be greater than in other phases of forestry, especially for the younger men. For older men, members of the firm, there is good remuneration as in any business when business conditions are good. When a depression comes along, and timberlands are not being bought or sold, the consulting business is likely to fall in hard times along with other forms of activity. At such times the firm to stay in business may have to fall back on some side-line.