1-1-1936

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Recommended Citation
Brown, Nelson C. (1936) "President Roosevelt and His Contributions to American Forestry," Ames Forester: Vol. 24 , Article 10. Available at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/amesforester/vol24/iss1/10

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President Roosevelt and His Contributions to American Forestry

A Little Glimpse of the President and How he is Practicing What He Preaches

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FOREWORD

It is very pleasant to be asked to contribute an article to the Ames Forester. This brings back many happy memories of very happy days in 1911-12 spent with a grand boss, teacher and administrator, my old friend MacDonald. And the Ames boys were always a great bunch. I have met them in the high Rockies, in the swamps and pine plains of the South, the big timber of the Far West, and they are carrying high the banner of Ames throughout the country. They are making a reputation for the school, and I know MacDonald and every other member of the faculty and friend of Ames is proud of them.

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S contributions to the upbuilding and development of American forestry will probably be accurately measured only in retrospect. After he has been out of office for a number of years, 10 to 20 perhaps, we shall be able to appraise much more fairly and adequately his part in the development of American conservation. In the same way Lincoln was not understood or appreciated, neither during his term of office as President nor in the immediate succeeding years.

As President Theodore Roosevelt in timely fashion made significant contributions to the development of American forestry by setting aside over 100 million acres of national forests, and thereby, at the instance of Gifford Pinchot, then Chief Forester, made it possible to bring into being our present great national forest program, so President Franklin Roosevelt has contributed in his own way to the consolidation, refinement and further development of our national forestry program.

For many years American foresters have been wanting to do
a great many things in our open and waste places, as well as in our forests, which, because of lack of man power and available appropriations, it has been impossible to do. Our national forest development was practically at a standstill for several years because of lack of funds available to do many things such as tree planting, improvement thinnings, road building, fire protection, etc., which are now being done. When history is written in the years to come, the CCC program will be recorded as one of the great accomplishments of the Rooseveltian regime, beginning in 1933.

For over 20 years the President has been planting trees on his private farm at Hyde Park along the beautiful shores of the Hudson just above Poughkeepsie. From his old Dutch Colonial home erected in 1810, one can look over the entire rowing course of the Poughkeepsie regatta along the historic Hudson. He enjoys rambling around in the woods and planting trees on his farm. There are over 600 acres that are devoted to forests or are growing up in natural re-seeding or in planted forests. As early as 1915 he began planting yellow poplar, white pine, Norway spruce, Scotch pine and other species on his place. When he became Governor of New York he advanced his forestry program. Each year from 5,000 to 40,000 trees have been planted and a total of 150,000 trees, chiefly Norway spruce, white pine and Norway pine have been put in. Besides these, European and Japanese larch, yellow poplar, black walnut and Japanese pine are used as well as some Ponderosa pine, Sitka spruce, and other species. He, in fact has a veritable arboretum of both domestic and exotic species arranged in plantation experiments rather than in individual tree groupings. His favorite tree is the yellow poplar, which he has planted about his home place, and he has secured strains of several different seed origins to determine which does best under the particular conditions of soil and climate on his place.

He is also sincerely interested in the possibility of growing Christmas trees. One of his spruce plantations, spaced 3 ft. by 3 ft., now about 10 years old, is almost ready for cutting, and in the nearby metropolitan market of New York City, which is only 75 miles away, there is an excellent market available for all of the Christmas trees which are normally brought in from 300 to 500 miles away, from Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and eastern Canada. The President believes in practical forest management, and by that I mean cutting trees when mature,
and getting a profit out of them, as well as in pruning and thinning out his young growing stands to improve their condition and to increase their rate of growth. With this in view, he has sold large quantities of crossties to the local railroads, piling for local construction projects, and sawlogs and other specialized forms of forest products, as well as large quantities of cordwood. He has cleared swamps of poor hardwood growth in order to replace these stands with quicker growing conifers. In doing so he has been able to cut fuelwood at a profit.

Much of his 1,200 acre farm is naturally wooded. On the steep Hudson River slope is a primeval grove of hemlock whose pristine beauty is unmarred by the axe. This grove is to be preserved for posterity as an illustration of what our original forests looked like when the thrifty Dutch forefathers first settled these shores. The President's most impressive and stately stand of timber, however, is the white and red oak and mixed hardwood forest, including some ash, hickory, beech, maple, elm and basswood. By judicious and careful cuttings the beauty and the capital growing stock of these timber stands have been preserved. One might also imagine he was in the stately forests of Epinal in France, or perhaps in one of the better known forests of Fontainebleu or Compiegne. Here and there on the Roosevelt place, agriculture has outlived its usefulness. It does not pay to keep some of the lots under the plow so the President has been in the vanguard of the great reforestation movement in New York State by planting trees. Here is a real problem in land use and it is typical of a great many thousand acres in many parts of New York State which were once cleared of timber and which should never have been put under the plow.

The question of who is responsible for the thought behind the CCC program has often been debated. This is to be credited directly to the President. I had a long chat with him in Albany in December, 1932, when he outlined in great detail how he would have the foresters and the army work together to do a lot of things in the woods that should be done and should have been done years ago. He announced in his Chicago speech in June, 1932, that he would put half a million men to work in our woods to improve their condition. He has done that very thing in the CCC, and in addition he has put forestry very definitely on the map in many other ways. He has been charged with being visionary, and yet he has a very intimate and accurate
grasp of a number of our real forestry problems. It was through his efforts and largely on his personal initiative that the Natural Resources Board was created and the Plains Shelterbelt Project started. Forestry became an integral part of the TVA program, and now we find forestry and soil conservation being intimately related with our whole agricultural, soil erosion, game management and flood control problems as they should be. He has provided for vastly increased funds for land acquisition for national forests, and his CCC and other programs have stimulated an important expansion in the acquisition of forest lands, game refuges and parks by the various states throughout the nation. In other words, our forestry house is at last being put in order. It is costing money, but it is closely related to and is being intimately integrated with the social relief program, and it has met with widespread popular approval.

The President's pleasing, simple and genuine personality is well known throughout the length and breadth of the land. When he speaks over the radio and addresses his audience as "my friends," he sincerely means that very thing. The cares and burdens of our complex government had not particularly changed him when I last saw him this year on February 23 at his place at Hyde Park. He has that same happy, carefree smile—the smile that makes friends and warms people to him.