A German Forester in America

Eric Sauer
Iowa State College

1-1-1938

Follow this and additional works at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/amesforester
Part of the Forest Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/amesforester/vol26/iss1/11

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ames Forester by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
A German Forester In America

Eric Sauer, Exchange Fellow from Tharandt, Germany, at I. S. C.

THE European forestry is highly developed and intensive, for the natural resources are limited. The forests are under constant control. Every stand of timber is constantly treated and influenced in composition, structure and growth by the interfering forestry according to the economical aims. The lack of resources and the development of a highly qualified production system make forestry an efficient business enterprise. The Americans are always impressed by the cleanness of these forests.

Well, it is true, the forests are clean in my home country and are highly productive, and thus demonstrate the abilities of their managers. But the virgin nature has disappeared in these forests. Every bare spot is planted and used for production. So it may be possible that you walk through a pure, even-aged stand with the trees standing in rank and file and you feel tempted immediately to give the command, "Stand at ease!" and to watch how these trees give up their rigid order and form a natural forest.

CERTAINLY, after a period of destructive operation and utilization, which left only open loose stocked forests consisting of inferior classes of timber, it was the only way to build up such huge complexes of even-aged stands by planting, and Germany is very glad to have them now as a resource for timber. On the other hand, the modern forestry with the aim to combine and harmonize economical ends with the natural laws of forest growth succeeded in building up beautiful forests so that we can state with justification: Even our aesthetical feelings are satisfied by modern forestry.

But these forests are a work of art. The wilderness is lacking, the violence of nature, the dying tree, the ruins and the dead body of a tree. It is not true nature and therefore the

Ams Forester
longing remains in us as a dream and a hope to experience once the
secrets of nature left to itself and untouched by human ac-
tivity. Therefore this constant dream of so many: The dream
of a new world beyond the ocean and our hope to come there one day.

And this new world does not disappoint us. To be sure, here, too, mankind has to limit more and more the existence of un-
touched nature in laying the foundations to her existence by opening up the country for settlement and civilization. This
process is still going on at the present time, and we experience with much clearness the tragedy of life, the tragedy that we have to destroy in order to build up our own existence. The
fact that we occupy a place on this earth which, by being our own place, leaves no space for other beings; the fact that our life is always at the expense of other manifestations of life, be it humans, animals or plants. This fact cannot be denied either by forgetting it or by ideas with which mankind is pleased because these ideas are hypocritical enough not to confess this fact.

Indeed, this new world does not disappoint us. I learned at home in school how many square miles comprised the
United States. Yet, these figures cannot tell much, if we have not experienced the reality they describe. Still today it appears to me like a miracle, that a few days before Christmas, 1937, I was standing on a platform of the railroad station at Ames, and looking through the densely falling snow for the lights of the arriving train; and that only a few days after this cold winter night, I was riding through a summer farm landscape of orange plantations. For the first time it became really conscious to me how large this country is and how rich it must be.

Where else is the subject of forestry so varying? Are not nearly all zones of climate to be found in this country? It is not only the ocean and the wind, it is the highness of the moun-
tains too, and the aridity of the desert which put a limit to forest growth. Yet this forest area seems unlimited in exten-
sion and in the variety of the composing species. These factors, together with the young character of this country, being still in a process of development, determine specific features of the forestry in this country and its specific forestry problems.

Where the fundamentals for a human community are to be laid, all forces must be concentrated in the work of building up;
and the resources and presents of nature must be used. Thus the treatment of forests passes the stages of destruction in order to create space for settlement; then treatment passes the stage of rough exploitation and utilization of timber for house building and tools. The stage of use of forests as a source for raw material of a highly mechanized industry is the next, and finally forest utilization leads to the necessity of timber production on a sustained yield basis. The stage of industrial exploitation of timberlands brought about as the most efficient economical unit, the big lumber company.

THIS industrial enterprise, with the accumulated timber holdings, born in the pioneer stage of American forestry activity, is still the most impressive feature of American forestry to every European. The size of the forest ownership unit, the kind of ownership and the stumpage price, are still chiefly determined from the viewpoint and fact that forestry centers around the logging operation—quite in contrast to European forestry. In Europe the gravity point rests in timber production. The American forestry is in a transition stage to this proper forestry. In the theory and education of foresters, this transition to forestry as a timber production enterprise on a permanent basis is prepared.

Partly and naturally this theory goes out from European experiences, so far as can be made use of, but in the rest the American forestry goes its own way according to its particular transition problem.

This transition problem is not given to forestry alone. The whole economy of the country is faced with the necessity of a transition from a pioneer period to a period of permanent and conservative use of the resources. This means a modified economical behavior which can be attained in different ways. It is obvious that in choosing the means and fixing the aims, the American people must go their own way. And although it seems not American-like, merely to propound general principles and to follow the tide of prevalent customs, individual profit system and high extent of individual liberty in economic life seem at least for the present, indispensable ideals. With these ideals some of the possible ways of solution, as they have been found in Europe, are from the very beginning, excluded as possible solutions in this country.

This transition state of the whole economy is marked: First, by the conception—that not necessarily in all cases identity
exists between individual and public interests. This conception tends to further the idea of extension of the function of government and raises the question, can we assign to the state a much more significant part and how is it to play this part?

A SECOND question which arises in modern economy in present time is the question of business fluctuations of the damaging features of capitalistic economy. This importance exists not so much with regard to the question of the profitability of forestry but rather lies in the balancing power which a sustained yield forest may exercise on the whole economy. The state ownership of extensive productive timber lands in Germany has given the possibility of exercising such a balancing and equalizing effect by granting every year a constant amount of timber to the market demand.

A further important knowledge and recognition marking the transition stage of the present economy is, that competition is not always perfect in a modern capitalistic economy; this, too, makes the case for state intervention stronger. Finally we have the fact of the existence of different kinds of competition: Competition between partners, the one of whom competes by using the resources in a destructive way must lead to damage for the public interest. In competition, as a matter of fact, the lowest character gives the moral tone and determines the business rules; he is the most successful, being the cheapest producer.

Nineteen Thirty-eight
Here it is obvious that the benefits of individual action are doubtful. The measuring of business solely with regard to grand profit cannot be acknowledged by the state as representative of the common interest. At least, legal enactment is necessary to determine the "game rules" for business. The profit system and individual freedom are not curtailed by such a legislation which demands for social conscience.

Finally we have the special problems besides these general economical problems, which affect forestry as a part of the modern economy. This special problem is the question of profitability of timber production. We have to separate, it seems to me, two sides of the problem. One side is the question: Can timber production be profitable at all in this country? And the second side of the problem results from the long production period of forestry and relates to the question: How can this necessary transition to forestry as a timber production enterprise be managed?

It is obvious that with increasing scarcity of high quality of timber, the lumber prices will increase more and more. From this, there could be drawn the conclusion that the stumpage price which is decisive for forestry practice will tend to increase, too, thus making timber production profitable. But the increasing lumber prices, the possibility of the replacement of wood by other wood substitutes is also given. In spite of this fact, we can assume that in such a wealthy country as America, there will always be a demand for high quality timber. About the extent of such a demand, nothing can be said for the future, but, on the other hand, there is the fact, too, that high grade timber can in a short time only be produced by a highly intensive forestry, which has developed technical methods to reach this aim, what nature brings about by the selection effect of centuries.

BUT profitable forestry practice does not necessarily depend on an increase of the lumber price. The lumber price at the present is wholly determined from the costs of the logging operation and by the costs of transportation of the timber to the places of consumption. Thus the logging operation until now has had to carry all the costs for constructing roads, foundation of settlements, and railroad construction. This high capital investment in logging equipment made exploitation methods necessary in order to be profitable. In the future,
there is a prospect that other production branches like mining, settlers and the general public will be interested in higher accessibility, so that means of communication must be created by the public, making these timberlands more accessible.

Then the logging operation will become cheaper. In the same direction of lowering the lumber price or increasing the stumpage price, tends the possibility that the centers of consumption move more and more to the regions, which by rapidity of growth and other favorite conditions are especially predetermined for forestry practice on a permanent basis. By such a development the high transportation costs would decrease, so that legislation prescribing conservative forestry practice and consequent enforcement could succeed without a raise in price for lumber. Striking differences in cost conditions for practice of forestry resulting from differences in accessibility could be taken into account by regional legislation. The forestry legislation in Germany which takes account of such regional differences of production conditions may be proof that such legislation is possible.

A final decisive part is played by forestry as a science, in so far as the theory has to develop accounting systems which make it possible to calculate if forestry is possible or not as a profitable timber producing enterprise. If we consider that the major share in lumber price is held by transportation costs and costs for difficult logging operations in regions far from the consuming areas, then it seems probable that timber production could become profitable practices.

The general question of profitability affects the question of
private or public ownership in so far as timberlands the value of which lies not especially in timber production but in the functions of importance for the public welfare, must be in public ownership. These functions can be fulfilled only by special management. As to the timberlands determined for timber production, there is no reason why private enterprise should work less efficiently than the public administration. In Europe, a sound taxation policy and corresponding legislation, securing the public interest in the management of the forests show that private enterprise is very successful. Public administration of timberland cannot afford to renounce the highest possible profit.

A SECOND aspect of this question lies in the transition problem to timber production enterprise. This problem results from the long production period of forestry. Where in the near future no income can be expected in starting a permanent forestry enterprise, private investment is not very probable. To some extent the present stumpage price is not high enough to grant an interest rate, which other investments can grant with the same security factor. The predominant tendency of many timberholders is therefore still to cut and to get out of business and to invest capital in more profitable enterprises. This being the case, the present timber price is by this competition of exploiting forestry enterprises, wholly determined from logging operations; that means the consideration of the future has no influence on the present lumber price; this consideration of the future would be expressed in costs of timber production. Thus, if nobody takes action, a scarcity at least of high grade timber must be the consequence. Thus, in spite of the low present value of timber prices, a timber producing enterprise could be highly profitable by an increase of stumpage price in the future, but it is difficult to overlook, in business calculations, such a development. Thus the risk of calculation over a number of years, possibly exceeding the life of one generation, tends to make less probable private action to prevent transitory scarcity of timber with its disturbing effect on the whole economy.

SCARCITY of high quality timber and considerable price change would mean a structural change influencing the whole economy. The real normal demand and the normal timber price for the care of permanent timber production being unknown, private initiative seems inclined to act when price

*Ames Forester*
changes have already occurred so causing booms and depressions. Initiative to care about the interest of the future seems to certain extent at least to lie with the public, so the limit between public and private ownership depends on the real behavior of private enterprise. The public must become the owner of timberlands in so far as public interests are not taken account of by private initiative. But public ownership never is allowed to prevent the adjustment of the timber price to the costs of profitable business enterprise. Public ownership of highly productive timberlands would fulfill chiefly a transition task.

But I have to finish now. At the end of my school year in this country I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation and thankfulness to everyone who has helped me in my effort to get a true idea of American forestry and the whole economical conditions of the United States. I would like to thank Professor Thomson, who was in charge of my work and never tired of helping wherever it was possible. I am glad that I can say, that in spite of my looking forward to seeing my home people again, there will be some sorrow in my heart when I have to say farewell to this country.