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Cooperative Forestry in Arkansas

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THE COOPERATION given the private timber landowner of Arkansas by the Arkansas Forestry Commission amounts to assisting him in helping to reduce to a minimum the fires caused by man and to manage his timbered acres with the view to maximum production and a maximum return on his investment through sale of high quality forest products.

Funds for use in the protection of private forest lands from fire in Arkansas are derived from three-way cooperation. The landowner pays to the Arkansas Forestry Commission two cents per protected acre per year; the state makes a biennial appropriation based upon a definite budget; the United States, through the Forest Service and by authority of the Clarke-McNary Law, Section 2, pays to the Forestry Commission an annual allotment which is Arkansas' proportionate share of the money allotted to the United States as a whole.

Under the Clarke-McNary Act, Section 2, the state's allotment is paid as a reimbursement for expenditures for fire protection made from the funds secured from the state and the private timberland owners.

The United States Forest Service is charged with the supervision of the expenditure of the federal allotment which involves the maintenance of certain prescribed standards.

Revenue from severance tax on timber is the only source of forestry funds paid by the state. No assessment is made against timber land for the support of fire protection.

The “Cooperative Agreement” between the Forestry Commission and the private landowner is a written contract drawn and executed by both parties. A separate agreement is made for each cooperator. In this agreement the cooperator contracts to pay the stipulated amount per acre per year for protection of his timber land from fire. He also agrees to render assistance in suppression of fire when needed.

MUCH of the success of this organization is due to this agreement between the timberland owner and the Forestry Commission. The cooperator is a partner in an enterprise in which he pays his own money for the protection of his own
land. The fact that the landowner is paying for the protection of his land creates an interest in the enterprise that cannot be attained by a blanket county or state assessment. The personnel of the organization is not only a servant of the state as a whole, but is responsible to the individual who pays his money for protection. The taxpayer may grumble about the spending of tax money and that is the end of it, but the individual who pays his money for protection is certainly going to make some comment when a statement for his protection costs is received, if the service rendered has not been satisfactory. This arrangement not only maintains a high interest level among the cooperators, but it also has a very decided effect on the efficiency of the personnel of the entire organization.

On December 31, 1938, there were 2679 active cooperative agreements between the Arkansas Forestry Commission and private landowners. These agreements aggregate 3,222,202 acres of forest land.

Besides the "Cooperative Agreement," there is the "Volunteer Agreement." Ownership of less than 300 acres where the owner lives on or within one mile of the land are eligible for this agreement. In exchange for their cooperation in prevention and suppression of fire on their own and adjacent lands, these owners are given the same service as the paying cooperator. On December 31, 1938, there were 1,097,839 acres covered.
by volunteer agreements, with 12,862 owners and renters cooperating.

All organized fire protection in Arkansas is intensive. Extensive protection is not practiced. Protected areas are subdivided into “Protection Districts.” Both kinds of protection areas are separated on the basis of natural boundaries such as streams or roads, rather than political unit boundaries. When a new protection unit is opened, only one or a few of the districts may be protected. Protection in the other districts is contingent upon the timberland owners’ willingness to cooperate, as expressed by their signing of one of the two types of agreements.

**DURING** the calendar year 1938, protection was given to 11,670,000 acres. The difference between this total and the sum of the cooperative and volunteer acreage represents the area owned by persons who either do not appreciate the value of their timberlands, or expect to get protection at the expense of a neighbor, since fires must be stopped on their land in order to protect the land of a cooperator. (The Arkansas Fire Law provides for collection of suppression costs if and when the owner refuses to control a fire burning on his land.)

Suppression of fire is a waste of time because, except when caused by lightning, the fire could have been prevented. Ninety-nine percent of the fires in Arkansas are man-caused and therefore preventable. The principal objective of cooperative protection effort is to prevent the occurrence of fires and this requires an intensive educational and public relations program.

In order to sell the idea of forest fire prevention to cooperators and personnel, the possibilities for increased growth and more successful reproduction, as well as the attendant increased earnings from time and money invested, are constantly stressed. These arguments appeal to the timber owner who desires the maximum return on his investment. They also appeal to the rangers and towermen who have nothing to gain from long hours and days of fatiguing fire suppression work.

**PUBLIC** relations work has started concurrently with fire protection and has been intensified every year since. Every member of the Commission’s personnel is taught that his every action is an essentional part of public relations, whether he is

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conducting a forestry program in a country school, or arresting a violator of the fire law. The cooperators are also charged with their share of responsibility for public relations work.

The cooperator is constantly kept in the picture as a partner in the business of growing and protecting timber. This partnership idea cannot be over-emphasized and every effort is made to stimulate its growth. "Spot" news, human interest stories and newspaper articles covering forestry plans and developments all help to keep the land owner and the forest user reminded of the importance of the state's forest resource, and of the Forestry Commission's activities. Some of the rangers contribute regularly to the weekly newspapers in their districts. In order further to unify the efforts of all concerned, a statewide meeting of cooperators is held annually.

Fire protection, after all, is only one phase of forestry. The ultimate goal is sustained management and utilization but these cannot be realized without protection. On the other hand, assistance to land owners in the management of their property, and to mill owners in the solution of timber utilization problems, is paying dividends in the reduction of fire occurrence. The cycle inevitably returns to the land owner himself. The personnel of the Commission, with the assistance of the land owners, use all the means at their disposal to prevent fires, and to

Photo by U. S. Forest Service


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control those that do start. Then they extend assistance to these same owners in the management of their forest properties.

Specific assistance to a land owner may be rendered by furnishing him with low-cost planting stock from the state forestry nursery which has been established with federal cooperation under Section 4 of the Clarke-McNary Law.

PUBLIC education is accomplished partly by the activities described above, and partly by a unique device, the "Forest Festival," which is held annually in each protection unit. At each festival an afternoon program includes competitive wood sawing and chopping, rolling-pin throwing, hog-calling, cow calling, husband calling and similar sporting events. At night, a competition for all sorts of musical entertainment, including a fiddler's contest, is held. An educational moving picture concludes the festival. It is difficult to estimate the amount of good resulting from these festivals, but their popularity is indicated by an increase in annual attendance from 27,000 to 42,500 in three years since they were initiated.

Detection and suppression activities have not been discussed in detail. These activities, together with the necessary improvements and equipment, must keep pace with the reduction in fire occurrence.

The building of timber consciousness, and the reduction of area burned place a higher value on timberland in the minds of timber owners as well as of the public at large. A fire of 100 acres five years ago was not considered as serious as a 10-acre fire today.