Consultants Views

Keith Cranston

Iowa State College

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THE possibilities of employment for foresters are unlimited here in the South, and the forestry consultant is very busy in his role of industrial forester. A consultant may confine his activities within a specialized field or within a small area, but the forester who supervises active woodland operations in the capacity of "operating forester" must be prepared to assist with nearly every phase of the work which is encountered by the timber industry and travel over portions of one or more states. It is possible for everyone who is associated in the forest industry to secure work within his chosen field of interest, and the consultant who selects the forest management field is guaranteed most interesting work in coping with the problems of river bottomland, upland, and coastal sites.

In the South, the management and supervision of timberland tracts is the basic work desired by the forestry consultant, and the efficient marketing of the forest products for the private landowner is of equal consideration. In order to undertake the management of a new project, the forestry consultant has need of an inventory or at least a working knowledge of the timber tract so as to advise the landowner concerning values which will be derived through management in line with good forestry practices. The owner, private landowner or company representative, may have little or no knowledge of the land or timber and he may have a completely erroneous idea of the practical aspects of forestry. It is usually quite simple to substantiate the forester's recommendations and the need of complying with the recommended policy of management, as examples of mishandled and mis-cut tracts are very prevalent through the South and may be on the adjoining property.

The forestry consultant's conception of the management and growing of trees as a business separate and distinct from all other industrial interests has had a far reaching effect not only on the private landowner but on timber-owning firms. Mill firms are undertaking a gradual transition to supervised cutting on company lands comparable to that which is required of the same firm on lands which are managed by the consultant. The industrial firms contract for an inventory of the company-owned lands and the consulting forester assists in setting up a complete management policy in line with the respective firm's requirements and aids in the training of forestry personnel.

Forestry consultants have increased in number over the South during the period of the past ten years and have taken over the work which was formerly per-
formed by the local timber men. Consultant services are utilized by one or both parties of successive business transactions and it is therefore necessary to maintain a professional relationship with clients over a period of years comparable to the manner in which lawyers conduct business. The confidence which is placed upon reports by the consultant has proved to be well justified, and industry uses this service not only for management but often as a final analysis of appraisal or procurement phases of operation. The price of stumpage is now so very high that purchasers, in competing for timber which is placed upon the market, must have an accurate estimate of the volume by species and grade, and on the other hand, the owner desires to receive full market value for his forest products. Sales which are handled under the supervision of the forest may be set up to include within the timber sale proposal a summary of the size and number of marked trees and an estimated volume. This renders a dual service to both the owner and to the local timber industry as the survey data can be checked and verified by the interested purchasers with a minimum of effort. The development and improvement of mechanized equipment and plants by industry is providing great assistance to the managing forester. The construction of newly electrically operated sawmills permits the handling of small logs, and the use of band saws, debarkers, and chipping machines enables the consultant to incorporate features of a timber stand improvement measure while harvesting the mature timber.

Some timberland tracts may be managed for owners who have no immediate need of income and the consultant is enabled to work under ideal conditions, but in most instances, the management and sales must be correlated with the owner's other interests. There is often need to cut growing stock or specialized products to enable the manager to provide income to meet annual operating costs and taxes while permitting the greater number of the trees to grow. Some of the woodland projects are pictorial examples of the high-grade timber which can be grown on a given site, but most forests are understocked as a result of past cutting practices and a thorough un-
derstanding of the management policy is needed in order to clearly visualize pending problems and final objectives.

The fees charged for consulting services are standardized to conform with the forester's costs of operation. The increased valuation of stumpage has favored the consultant in the relationship between a comparison of costs for services and an appraisal of the beneficial results of his work. Depending upon the amount of forest management service performed versus timber inventories and appraisals, the final summation of charges may amount to less than one-half of 1% based upon the stumpage value of forest products checked during the course of a year. The charge for inventory and appraisal work is made on a per acre basis and the price may be set at 20¢ per acre for a cruise based upon aerial photographs and increased in proportion to the cruise intensity to $1.00 per acre for a 100% tree count. Survey and mapping services can be placed on a comparative basis with the service performed by civil engineers, and for complete management and sales service, a charge may be made on the basis of 10% to 20% of the income received through the sale of forest products. Many calls are received from lawyers in need of service for their personal holdings or for their clients, and work as an expert witness in lawsuits or cases of arbitration may be charged for at a daily rate. Much of the consultant's time is taken up providing free service, or extension type work, as the timberland owner is gaining increasing confidence in the industrial forester and having secured partial information relative to his holdings from state or federal agencies, he calls the consultant for detailed information on his tract. The landowner may hire the forester to handle the proposition or he may simply follow the suggested recommendation in an attempt to secure the same final results through his own efforts.

The recognized need for the professional forester here in the South is increasing, and forestry graduates represent the most available source of manpower to be found. The per acre yield must be increased in order to provide raw material for new and/or expanding industries, and with the assurance of a good stumpage price, the landowner will require the services of a competent advisor. The landowners have been pleased repeatedly by the fact that the receipts from sales have exceeded the anticipated income, and the consultant can continue to please his clients by utilizing the good timber sites to the greatest advantage. The growth of hardwood timber in particular has been underrated for years and the choice bottomland sites are capable of an annual increment which, converted to dollars, will please the most optimistic landowner. Work in the field of consulting forestry is available to students and recent graduates who may secure employment from the larger firms, but the greatest demand is for experienced men with a knowledge of industrial requirements. The landowners or their representatives are men of executive capacity within the various occupations, including doctors, attorneys, industrialists, farmers, and foresters, and the performance of the consultant must meet the requirements of sound and successful business enterprise in every way.

About the Author

Keith Cranston was graduated from Iowa State College with a Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry in December of 1936 and worked throughout the Tennessee River Valley for the next five years.

He was the first Farm Forester with the Louisiana State Extension Service and was employed by the U. S. Forest Service as Project Forester with the Timber Production War Project. In 1945 he assisted in the Reappraisal of the South and was transferred to the Delta Branch of the Southern Forest Experiment Station at Stoneville, Mississippi.

Mr. Cranston has been working as Forestry Consultant since 1947 and is employed by landowners and industry in all of the Southern states. He is a member of the Society of American Foresters, Secretary-Treasurer of the Association of Consulting Foresters, and registered as a Forester by the State of Georgia.