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Development of Forest Policy

Forestry's Oft-forgotten Milestones

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As FORESTRY in the United States finds itself well on the march through its second fifty years, and wins increasing public acceptance, the days of earlier struggle with their battles for principles now well-established are likely to be discounted. And yet the past has its uses if only as records of courage and foresight.

The days of wooden warships are long gone, but they gave us our fundamental law against timber trespass on federal land. The first limping efforts to teach forestry in professional terms are forgotten and yet they gave birth to something more than the mere police force conceived by Carl Schurz when he was Secretary of the Interior. Federal and state agencies and industry, cooperating in forest fire control, is today taken for granted, but many foresters think of the Weeks Law of 1911 which first contained the policy, as a land acquisition act. The several million acres of "Tree Farms" are hardly thought to recall Article X of the Lumber Code under the NRA but the hook-up is a natural. And the list might well go on "far into the night" and end up in an unrecorded "bull session."

Let's get some of it down.

Before 1897 the way to get timber from federal forest reserves for use in building up the country locally, was, literally, to steal it. The organic act of that year, setting forth the purposes and administrative theory of a Forest Reserve (later National Forest) system, is well known. On the other hand, the importance of the one provision for disposal, on a legitimate basis, of mature timber, may easily be overlooked. A ship can't be steered unless it is moving and a forest can't be managed if crops are not removed and growth stimulated. Provision, therefore, for orderly sale and removal of timber through regulations promulgated by the Secretary of the Interior was one of the keys to forest management on the National Forests. It is there today that we have some of our very best examples.

The Beginning of Research

Youngsters in the United States Forest Service, as early as 1909, were encouraged to set up experimental areas on the national forests. There was then no McNary-McSweeney Act of 1928 authorizing a research program to which they might look for support and guidance. But the year previous, 1908, saw the beginnings of a vast system of regional forest experiment stations in the establishment at Flagstaff, Arizona, of the first one. Not until 1915 was there a Chief of the Branch of Research to coordinate and promote a sound service-wide research program which became policy, in terms of law, in the Act of 1928. Self-interest properly enlightened is one of the strongest incentives to sound forest management. Forest fire danger and loss demonstrated this long before the Weeks Law of 1911 and the Clarke-McNary Law of 1924 had joined the hands of the federal government to those of the states and private forest industry. In two extremities of a vast nation in 1909 appeared the Western Forestry and Conservation 45
Association and the Maine Forest Fire District. The former originated definitely in the lumber industry and to this day furnishes leadership to the entire forest fire control effort of the Pacific Coast and Inland Empire states, whether this effort be industrial, state or federal. The latter group's holdings involved around ten million acres in northern Maine organized into a "district" with fire control financed through a special tax levied on all land owners and with control activities assigned to the state land agent and forest commissioner. It should be remembered that 1909 is two years before the year in which the Weeks Law recorded the principle of cooperative fire control.

Another provision of the Weeks Law of 1911, and the one for which it appears to be best known among younger foresters, had to do with the acquisition of land at the headwaters of navigable streams, and their organization into National Forests. In those days the Congress included in many such policy acts as this a definite appropriation to carry out the policy for a number of years. By 1924, when the Clarke-McNary Act came along, the policy acts carried authorizations under which appropriations had to be considered by the Bureau of Budget and the House Committee on Appropriations. Unless the friends of a policy, therefore, were on the ball, appropriations were likely to lag. This is exactly what happened between 1924 and 1928. Then along comes the McNary-Woodruff Act of 1928 representing now new policy except a policy of not shutting down the program of acquiring land for National Forests. This act only authorized further appropriations—$8,000,000 over a three-year stretch and only $5,000,000 in appropriations resulted—but it kept alive the program and the land acquisition organization of the Forest Service. This was immensely important when larger amounts became available from emergency funds in the 30's. Hearings on the McNary-Woodruff Bill had also a real educational effect not only on the public but on the Congress, and yet the bill after it became an act was seldom mentioned.

**Primitive Area Concept**

Americans who believe that scenic and inspirational outdoor resources are worth dedication for those uses exclusively are proud of our National Parks. (They may not be too proud of the entire "National Park System" which takes in city monuments, cemeteries and battlefields.) A Sequoia, a Grand Canyon, a Crater Lake is something that brings a thrill to almost any American. But it was the Forest Service that invented the concept of the Primitive Area, the Wilderness Area, the Wild Area, and by declaration and regulation kept them wilder and in less disturbed state than many of the National Parks. Here then are a set of events, under administrative rather than specific legal policy: In 1926 the first letter went to the field suggesting the selection of wilderness areas on the National Forests which were to be extensive, attractive, and kept free of roads and access by mech-anized equipment. In 1929 this idea was formalized into Regulation L-20 and the name Primitive Area adopted. Then in 1939 Regulation U-1 authorized again "Wilderness Areas" to be 100,000 acres or greater in extent, and Regulation U-2 "Wild Areas" which are smaller than 100,000 acres. After public hearings these may be definitely dedicated to be permanently undeveloped and, barring limited grazing and improvements necessary for fire control, to be available only for wilderness travel and use.

In a country dedicated almost more to a headlong expanding economy rather than to making democracy work to its fullest sense, it is not easy for the Forest Service, or for any other agency, to defend wilderness areas. Lag in actual dedication of the many tentatively selected tracts and pressure to shrink boundaries in behalf of commercial use persists. But the historical fact remains that without the action in 1926 and 1929, we might have to hunt pretty hard to find a hundred thousand acres to convince ourselves and our children that nature has ever been left alone. These five examples should give the student of forest policy a start on finding others. Some of them are mentioned in the first paragraph of this paper. New ones, which will be swiftly forgotten, are happening today.