National Menace of Our Depleted Forests: Supplies of Southern Pine Likely to be Exhausted in Ten Years, and Program of Conservation Is Needed to Protect Country and Its Industries

MINING districts in the West have no monopoly of deserted towns. Another industry, as it were, is springing up there, in which the West, and each of those depopulated towns means a national menace.

The two elements mark the depletion of private forests and the failing of the lumber industry in their sections. The words, "Man and Nature" have become too familiar in the South, and the experts predict, will be practically exhausted in ten years, and a few years thereafter, 2,000 mills will be out of existence. This is the last large source of that as must timber land owners have bought their property to exploit their timber, not to grow trees, forestry and lumbering not matters of private concern. The fact remains, however, that the greater part of the timber of the country—three-fourths of it—is private owned, and it is further a fact that the bulk of the land which must grow timber in the future is also privately owned.

We now see that a different method of administering the public lumbering should have been adopted than that used by the Government in disposing of its timber holdings, for as much as possible in small lots and under care properly for their timberlands, including fire protection and forest renewal, or the public must take over the responsibility, which it once had and still renders, or the public must share the responsibility with the owners. The lumbermen bought their lands for speculative purposes, solely to cut and sell off the timber, and therefore, in order to introduce an adequate system of fire protection and replacement without putting an unbearable financial burden on the owners, it has been suggested that the public co-operate in the financing of timber holdings through long term loans at interest; but unless this plan makes provision for the permanence of the forest it would be only a half measure.

"How much faster are we cutting timber than growing it?"

The general estimate is that we are utilizing the forests at the rate of three hundred per cent. Our own belief is that the actual growth does not exceed one-third of what is now being consumed, and yet it is practically out of virgin forests.

That has been our practice from the start, to pay up to the full market price for timber, and so the New England States began to be exhausted, the first move was the Pennine and the second the Great Lakes, and now the Pacific Coast and a much higher east.

In the face of this, with our natural advantages, such as the fast-growing and spaced distribution of timber, we could not only produce all the lumber we need, but also have a larger amount for export.

"How long would it require for such replacement?"

"Six years," said Mr. Gravens, who served during the war as a Colonel at the head of our forest rangers in France, developed her program in about seventy years, to France's forest land is about the size of Wyoming, with 5,000,000 acres, but France is producing 25 per cent more than New England. Pennsylvania, where Mr. Gravens is now throughly familiar, can furnish most of her domestic needs.

The forest and wood-working industries of France virtually supply the whole of their population to 700,000 persons, and because the forests were handled to keep up production by growth this employment was permanent.

"Where our small wood industries are factories in the East because of the depletion of the local resources which small industries supported from the local forests that furnished employment to so many people. New England is cutting each year twice its annual growth, and so is Pennsylvania, but the Southern States, excluding the Pulps, is importing from the outside 20 per cent of its lumber requirements. Some of it is being cut in the South, as the Pacific Coast, with the 3,000-mile freight haul added, sets the price.

Our paper industries are in an acute situation, and if the conditions continue, this country is going to depend more and more on imports of pulp metrics for the paper mill. The New England factories are embarrassed; some of the principal concerns are being supplied by themselves by importing large blocks of timber in Canada. The question of supplying the mills of Michigan and Wisconsin is even more acute, and it is only a question of time before those mills will have to import their pulp wood from a distance or liquidate investments of great value in water power, and move to new and more sources of supply.

Partly owing to the rapid exhaustion of the supply of timber, and in part owing to the tariff laws of Canada, American capital is going into those forests. The United States is going into the Canadian country with wood pulp and paper.

Within the last ten years new mill developments have been made, and the country has been made wholly ceased, while in Canada, during that time, twenty-eight millions dollars of new capital have been invested. There is a similar acute situation confronting many other of the industries which use specifications which are products, due to unrelentlessness of supplies in the future—industries, for example, which use oak, hickory, and yellow poplar, walnut, and ash.

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The Path of a Forest Flame in Michigan—Millions of Acres Are Made Virtual Deserts by Such Fires.

supply this side of the Far West. The lake States, formerly our greatest producers of timber, now pay $58,000,000 annual freight charges on lumber shipped in.

Under the present trend total national timber exhaustion is threatened by 1920. Since the beginning of the war, the shortage has been so great that, on the basis of our present practices, the war had come ten years later, we would have been hard put to obtain the amount of lumber required for general construction. Both from the standpoint of national protection and on economic grounds, it is a serious matter that in no other of our fundamental resources is a program of research on the breed and most thorough grounds, so urgently needed as in forestry.

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