

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 wanes in the East, is beginning to leave behind it exhausted villages which bid fair to outstrip all the punctured booms in the West; and each of these depopulated towns means a national menace.

For these villages mark the depletion of private forests and the failing of the lumber industry in their sections. The original supplies of pine in the South, experts predict, will be practically exhausted in ten years, and a few years thereafter 3,000 mills will go out of existence. This is the last large source of

that as most timber land owners have bought their property to exploit their timber, not to grow trees, forestry and forest growth are not matters of private concern. The fact remains, however, that the greater part of the timber of the country—three-fourths of it—is privately 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 forests should have been adopted than that used by the Government in disposing of its timber lands; they were parceled out as fast as possible in small lots and under

caring properly for their timberlands, including fire protection and forest renewal, or the public must take over the responsibility, which it once had and surrendered, 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 a low rate of interest; but unless this plan makes provision for the permanence

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

"The general estimate is that we are using twice as much as we grow. My own belief is that the actual growth does not exceed one-third of what is used or destroyed. All that we are using, too, is practically out of virgin forests. That has been our practice from the start, to move from one field to another. When the New England States began to be exhausted, the first move was to Pennsylvania, then to the lake States, and when that was exhausted to the South. Now it is freely predicted that the pine in the South will be used up in the next ten or fifteen years—I don't refer to second growth or that at the end of that time there will be no trees left—but it will mean the withdrawal of the South as a competitor, and that we shall have to go to the West for practically all our native supply for general construction—which means freight rates from the Pacific Coast and a much higher cost.

"In the face of this, with our natural advantages, such as the fast-growing and splendid species of trees we possess, we could not only produce all the lumber we need, but also have a large amount for export."

"How long would it require for such rehabilitation?"

"France," said Mr. Graves, who served during the war as Colonel at the head of our forestry forces in France, "developed her program in about seventy years. France's forest land is about the size of New England, 25,000,000 acres, but France is producing by growth each year 50 per cent. more than New England. France is approaching a point where she can furnish most of her domestic needs. The forest and wood-using industries of France before the war furnished employment 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 failing in the East because of the depletion of the forests, in France it was the 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, not counting the large amount of pulp, is importing from the outside 30 per cent. of its lumber requirements. Some of it comes from the Pacific Coast, and thus the Pacific Coast, with the 3,000-mile freight haul added, sets the price.

"Our paper industries are in an acute situation on account of the lack of wood pulp. The New England factories are embarrassed; some of the principal concerns have fortified themselves by buying 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 when those mills will have to import their pulp wood from a distance or liquidate investments of great value in water power and plant and move to new sources of supply.

"Partly owing to the rapid exhaustion of the old sources of wood pulp supply, and in part owing to the tariff laws of Canada, American capital is going into that country to build mills to supply this country with wood pulp and paper. Within the last ten years new mill development for news print paper has almost wholly ceased, while in Canada, during that time, twenty-eight mills have been built, largely with American capital. There is a similar acute situation confronting many other of the industries which use special classes of forest products, due to uncertainty of supplies in the future—industries, for example, which use oak, hickory, cherry, yellow poplar, walnut, and ash."



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 \$6,000,000 annual freight charges on lumber shipped in.

Under the present trend total national timber exhaustion is threatened by 1960. Since the agitation of ten years ago, when the danger was first brought prominently before the country, the public has been lulled to sleep by the belief that the enlarged system of national forests was to be a protection against timber exhaustion. The facts are that four-fifths of the standing timber of the country is in private forests, from which come 97 per cent. of our timber and wood products.

The war exposed the growing danger of this situation as never before. Extreme difficulty was encountered in getting hold of certain high-grade hardwoods, and if, with a continuance 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 considered at Washington that in no other of our fundamental resources is a program of reconstruction, on the broadest and most thorough grounds, so urgently needed as in forestry.

Henry S. Graves, Chief Forester, United States Forest Service, is now laying the groundwork for a national policy to meet the emergency, and to that end is holding a series of conferences with forest agencies of States and with representatives of interested institutions and organizations.

"First, as to the scope of the problem," said Mr. Graves, when asked about the subject in Washington the other day. "A good many assert that the growing of timber is wholly a public function:

conditions which encouraged speculation. But the action was taken and we cannot undo it, nor can we ignore the problems resulting from it. The burden of carrying the timber and properly caring for it was transferred from public to private hands. Whether they like it or not, the private owners must solve the problem of the right handling of a large part of our forests.

"But the public has an essential interest in keeping the lands in a producing condition, and cannot leave this matter wholly in the private owner's hands as in the past. Even though the public has surrendered its direct ownership, it cannot afford to permit the timber lands to be handled in a way injurious to the welfare of the community. This is what has happened up to this time, and we see many communities in the East, which depended wholly or in large part on the timber industry, flattened out because the timber was cut off the land with no thought but to market it as soon as possible, and, therefore, without any plan of replacement. The small-wood industries which gathered around the sawmills, such as furniture and the ladder factories, die. Even the small farmer, deprived of the local market, finds it necessary to move away.

"Another local effect is a large area of devastated land, and if not agricultural it lies there unprofitable. With a great deal of this land nothing is done.

"I am advocating a large program of public forests widely distributed throughout the country, but it is seen from the facts cited that the solution of the forest problem cannot come from public forests alone."

"Are you in favor of compelling private owners to conform to a system of conservation?" was asked.

"As I see it, either private owners must assume the full responsibility of

of the forest it would be only a half measure.

"I am ready to advocate a policy more far-reaching in all respects than has been generally offered. I would afford whatever public assistance is needed to make possible the conservative handling of our forests, and I would then make fire protection, conservative production of timber, and the right methods of removal a matter of requirement, with such public direction and control as is necessary.

"The program should first of all require compulsory fire protection, and this should apply to second-growth and cut-over lands as well as to old timber. Fire protection should be organized under State supervision. The States should provide an effective organization to enforce the fire laws and to administer protective work. In most of the States the laws are not drastic enough; there is not sufficient direct responsibility on the owner. The damage by fires can be stopped. Its continuance is due to a combined failure on the part of the public and the owner.

"A sound policy of taxation of forests should also be adopted. The present system tends to force premature cutting and adds to the burden of holding young forests. The relief proposed is that there should be an annual land tax and a tax on the product when cut. Regarding cut-over non-agricultural lands, I am in favor of a greatly enlarged program of acquisition on the part of the Federal Government and the States. Since 1911 the Federal Government has been acquiring cut-over and culled lands in the Southern Appalachian and White Mountains at the rate of a \$2,000,000 investment a year, and the plan has worked out successfully. Some of the States also are engaged on programs of acquisitions."