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# "PROGRESS OF FORESTRY IN THE UNITED STATES"

*Yearbook of the Department of Agriculture: 1899 (Pp. 293-306)*

by

**Gifford Pinchot**

Forester

## Attitude of the Pioneers Toward the Forest.

The sentiment for forest protection was strong among the early settlers of the United States. In Massachusetts repeated enactments provided for the care and protection of the forests adjacent to the various communities. In New Jersey laws against forest fires took their places very early upon the statute books. In Pennsylvania the founder of the Commonwealth made it a condition that, of all land acquired from him, 1 acre of forest should be left standing for every 5 acres cleared. This conspicuous care for the forest in regions where at first it was a hindrance rather than a help to the gaining of a livelihood is explained by the early associations of settlers. They came from a country where wood was comparatively scarce, and where the penalties for its destruction were severe and severely enforced. The respect for the forest which had been bred in their ancestors by the early English game laws, and continued in themselves by enactments of extreme rigor, was brought over almost without change to their new land, but it was not destined to last. A growing realization of the vast resources at their command, together with the bitter struggle of the farmer against the forest in the early days, gradually replaced care with carelessness, and respect with a desire for destruction. The feeling bred by the battle against the forest began to take a dominant place in the minds of the people and to prepare that mental attitude which is still responsible for the greater part of the forest destruction even yet in almost undiminished progress over by far the larger part of the United States.

## Early Protest and Action Against Forest Destruction

Following the spread of forest destruction came protest and action against it. In the last decade of the eighteenth century the New York Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, Arts, and Manufactures, and in the first years of the nineteenth, the Massachusetts Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, took action, inspired by a desire to protect and promote the growth of forests. In 1799 Congress passed an act for the purchase of timber suitable for the use of the Navy, or of land on which such timber was growing. This law, reenacted in 1817 and supplemented in 1820, 1822, 1827, 1828, and 1831, led to the purchase and partial protection of 244,000 acres of forest-bearing land in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and, in Florida, to some partially successful efforts at the culture of the live oak.

## Development of a Forest Policy

Immediately following the civil war came a development of railroad building without parallel in the history of the world, and with it a coincident extension of the lumber trade and of forest destruction. Agitation followed it feebly and at a distance, but not without planting the seed from which the present agencies for forest protection have sprung. In 1867 horticultural and agricultural societies in Wisconsin appointed a committee to report on the results of forest destruction, and two years later the Board of Agriculture of Maine took action toward the formulation of a forest policy for the State. Laws for the encouragement of tree planting were passed between 1868 and 1874 in nine Western and two Eastern States, and in 1873, 1874, 1876, and 1878 Congress passed and amended the timber-culture acts, which provided for the granting of homesteads to settlers who planted one-fourth of their entries with certain specified kinds of trees. The very mediocre results of these measures led to their repeal in 1891.

In 1831, under the act of that year, a partial oversight and protection of the public timber lands was assumed by the Solicitor of the Treasury, acting through the regular agents of the Department. This function was transferred in 1855 to the General Land Office, in the Department of the Interior, where it has since resided. Under this system cases of deliberate trespass were settled by payment of the stumpage value of the timber



unlawfully taken, while cases of unintentional trespass were satisfied by actual entry, with the payment of customary entry fees. Express appropriation for the pay of special timber agents was not made until 1872, when \$5,000 was appropriated, and this amount was continued annually thereafter until 1878. The ineffectual working of the system was recognized in that year by an appropriation of \$25,000 to meet the expenses of suppressing depredations. Appropriations for this purpose were afterward increased to a maximum of \$120,000 in 1893.

The same act which repealed the timber-culture laws contained a clause, whose insertion was due largely to the efforts of members of the American Forestry Association, by which the President was authorized to set aside "any part of the public lands wholly or in part covered with timber or undergrowth, whether of commercial value or not, as public reservations, and the President shall, by public proclamation, declare the establishment of such reservations and the limits thereof." Under the provisions of this clause, which may fairly be described as the first marked step toward a national system of forestry, the reservations shown in Fig. 4 were set aside. The existence of some 18,000,000 acres of forest reserves, wholly without care or management by the Government, was perhaps the primary cause which led the Secretary of the Interior, in February, 1896, to address to the president of the National Academy of Sciences a request for an investigation and report upon the "inauguration of a rational forest policy for the forested lands of the United States," and upon the questions which underlie it. In reply, Dr. Wolcott Gibbs recited the difficulties of the undertaking and the best means of surmounting them, and expressed his willingness to comply with the Secretary's request.

The result of this correspondence was, on the part of the academy, the appointment of a [National Forest Committee] committee of seven, of whom six were chosen from among its most distinguished and experienced members, the seventh being [Pinchot] a professional forester, and on the part of the Government, the appropriation of \$25,000 to defray the committee's traveling and other expenses. All its members served without pay. After a summer spent in active examination of forest reserves, proposed and established, on the ground, the committee recommended as a preliminary step the segregation of eleven new reserves with a total area of somewhat more than 21,000,000 acres. These reserves were established by the President on February 22, 1897. The wording of the proclamation led many persons to believe that the lands reserved were to be wholly withdrawn from every sort of use and development, a belief carefully fostered by some who, for reasons of their own, were opposed to the reserves. No pains were taken to enlighten the public upon this point until the harm had been done. The report of the committee, whose appearance would have done much to set matters straight, was not submitted until May 1 of the same year. Vigorous and even violent attacks upon the President and upon the committee and its members became frequent in Congress and culminated, after a spirited fight, in a provision of law which suspended the action of the proclamation of the new reserves, except in the State of California, until March 1 of the succeeding year (1898). In the meantime public sentiment concerning the reserves underwent a remarkable change. A better understanding of their objects and a knowledge of the new law (act of June 4, 1897), which regulated their use in practical accord with the principal recommendations of the committee, spread throughout the West. A further official study of the reserves, while it suggested certain modifications of their boundaries, served to confirm their desirability as a whole, and an attempt to continue the suspension beyond March 1 failed completely. Instead, the estimate of the Secretary of the Interior for their care and preservation was more than doubled by the appropriation of \$175,000 in Congress for that purpose, and shortly after President McKinley proceeded to establish further reserves. The area of all the reserves established by him up to January 1, 1900, is 6,708,425 acres.

The work of the committee of the National Academy of Sciences, while it failed of much that it might have accomplished, nevertheless was the spring from which the present activity in forest matters was derived. The proclamation of the reserves which it recommended drew the attention of the country as nothing else had ever done to the question of forestry. Vigorous discussion of forest matters by the public press led to a widespread interest, and that in turn to a keen appreciation of the value of forests in the economy of each State, and to a willingness to take measures to protect them. It may fairly be assumed that, as one of the results of this awakened interest, the policy of making Government forest reserves is now established beyond the reach of further question....



The article continues with sections entitled:

Administration of the National Forest Work.

National Parks

Private Forestry

State Forestry

The Division of Forestry

Tree Planting

Associations

Instruction in Forestry

Protection of Fish and Game

Arbor Day