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U. S. Department of Agriculture
FOREST SERVICE
H. S. GRAVES, FORESTER

FOREST ATLAS

OF THE

NATIONAL FORESTS OF THE UNITED STATES

STATISTICS

COMPILED IN THE FOREST SERVICE
UNDER THE DIRECTION OF
THE GEOGRAPHER

FOREST DISTRIBUTION

Information relating to the distribution of trees in this country has been obtained partly from the vast number and variety of published records, partly from numerous unprinted reports, notes, and the knowledge of individuals whose observations are still unrecorded, and partly from an examination of thousands of forest herbarium specimens preserved in small and large herbaria of this country. No work yet published on American trees contains in detail even all of this incomplete information, to which future observations will of course add many new facts.

In attempting to bring together as much as possible of this data a number of perplexing difficulties have arisen, particularly regarding the occurrence in some sections of the country of closely related trees whose ranges overlap or extend over practically the same territory. Difficulties of the latter kind were due largely to records based on hasty field identifications or failure on the part of observers to obtain for later identification fully characteristic specimens of the trees seen. A good deal of the confusion of ranges resulting from inaccurate identification of closely related species has been cleared up by obtaining other specimens of the species in question and also by reexaminations of trees in the doubtful localities. There still remains to be done, however, very much more critical work of this sort.

Satisfactory progress toward the completion of our knowledge of the ranges of North American trees is distinctly dependent upon the cooperation and united efforts of many observers. No one person can hope to accomplish so great a task. Because Forest Service officials, and especially members of the District organizations, are particularly interested and in the best position to help greatly in this work, they are likely to contribute a fuller and more exact knowledge of the distribution of trees than any other equal number of field workers. It is hoped, therefore, that each member of this body of practical investigators will make every possible effort and improve every opportunity to effect the utmost in this direction. Some, more than others, can help the work along, but each member of the Service can lend important aid by noting the different trees met with in various localities. For want, in the past, of such concerted diligent effort as is now possible by members of the Forest Service, our knowledge of the distribution of North American trees has too long remained imperfect.

Description is the most common and the least satisfactory method of permanently recording the ranges of trees, while mapping, the least common, is the best of all methods. Meager information on range and the too easily accepted convenience of a brief description of it have long satisfied many writers of books on plant life with such nominal statements of distribution as, "From southern New York to Tennessee and westward to Missouri and Iowa." Few can realize, without a trial, how almost impossible it is to express so indefinite and inadequate a statement as this on a map, and it is probably true that the forester's practical need of accurate geographic representations of range has done more than anything else to emphasize the meagerness of such descriptive range data now published. The time seems to have arrived when, at least for the forester, mapped ranges of trees must as a final record replace the vagaries of brief description, as well as detailed voluminous records of range.

Newly discovered facts will necessitate more or less change in the distribution of certain species as now understood. In order that these changes may be recorded on the file maps in Forest Distribution, District Foresters are requested to check up these maps with range records in their files. Corrections and additions should be accurately noted, and at the beginning of each calendar year the maps should be forwarded to Washington, when all recent data collected by Forest Distribution will be added and the maps returned. By this regular exchange of maps all the data accumulated in the Washington office will be added to the District maps, and at the same time the corrections and additions noted by the District Foresters will be added to the original file maps.

R. Y. Stuart
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