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CONSERVATION OF THE FUTURE LUMBER SUPPLY.

By PRESIDENT T. B. WALKER.

Any practical plan of conservation of existing forests for a continued future supply of lumber and wood products must be based upon a fair, candid understanding of past conditions and policies which have been responsible for the wasting and denuding in the past.

Investigations should not be confined to summarizing present conditions. They should be directed largely to determining the causes which have been responsible for denuding our forests. In this way only can past errors be avoided and a comprehensive plan be worked out to conserve the future supply.

The destruction of our forests is charged to the wasteful propensities of our lumbermen. This is as unjust as it would be to charge the agriculturalists with a responsibility and blame for destroying our hardwood forests.

These forests were two to three times as extensive in area and amount of timber as the pine or coniferous forests. To reach the soil to furnish the food supply the timber was rightfully and naturally cut away, and in large part destroyed by burning—only a fractional part being utilized.

So far as the forestry questions relate to hardwood timberland, which was mostly agricultural, the conveyance of title, largely as a free gift under the Homestead Act was not only justifiable, but a necessary policy to pursue. While it resulted in the destruction and waste of a large proportion of the hardwood timber, it cleared the land and laid the foundation for the great national progress and the prosperous conditions now existing.

The lumbermen, being as legitimately, and next in usefulness to the farmer engaged in furnishing the timber supply, were naturally compelled to cut and manufacture the pine forests in a way which would make a return for the labor,

capital and energy devoted to it. The farmers have always had the good will of the people, but for some remote and contingent reasons, a strong prejudice has existed against the lumbermen.

The policy of distributing the pine timberlands as a gift or at a nominal price to the multitude of people or citizens who chose to secure a tract for the advantages of the speculative value, was not a wise or justifiable policy.

But as the present timber and stone act has been preceded by yet more liberal laws, by which distribution of the timberlands was made from the earliest times and applied to all the forests from the eastern states all across to the remaining western states, the western people naturally consider that the same right and privilege should be continued with them, and there is so little left unreserved or not disposed of that it makes but little difference at this late day.

The timber land should not have been sold in this way. The timber should have gone direct in suitably large tracts, to those who intended to hold and use it in supplying the public demand for lumber. This would have been more appropriate and served better purpose for the public. It was the intention that this method of disposing of the timber should be only an indirect way of furnishing the lumberman with timber from which to supply the public with the necessary commodity of lumber.

This roundabout method made higher costs of stumpage and heavier carrying charges of interest and taxes, and also prohibited securing consolidated holdings and cheaper logging and driving.

It originated more from a prejudice against a presumed monopoly which was anticipated if the timber was placed directly in the ownership of lumber manufacturers at a minimum price and in large consolidated holdings. These facts have also been emphasized by the refusal to give to lumber a tariff approximating that given to other products, although, in this case, the foreign competitors had greater advantages in supplying our market at much lower prices than other manufacturers had to contend with.

This to a considerable extent, has come from the policy of the government in its determined efforts to depress and keep down to the lowest possible point the price of the lumber to supply the needs of the public.

One important feature of the government policy accomplished or operated in the opposite direction and tended to increase prices.

It has from the start been made a criminal offense for the lumber manufacturers to seek to secure a large body of pine at a low cost, which made the production of lumber more expensive. This, added to the high rate of wages, the carrying charges of interest on the larger investments and the excessive taxation on standing timber, lumber, mills, etc., has compelled the rapid destruction and the wasteful methods of producing lumber.

It has been one strong feature of the government policy to survey the forest lands rapidly and place them in market in order to keep an over-stock of timber, with a view of cheapening lumber for use of the public. This policy has resulted in the surveying of over nine-tenths of the timber lands, and leaving in the possession of the government less than ten per cent of the original area and quantity of timber, the government owning a considerable amount of land that is surveyed, together with some that is yet unsurveyed.

This method of disposing of the timber has made the cost of the timber to the lumbermen or timber owners much higher than the price received by the government from the entrymen, and has been one of the prime factors in the denuding of the forests. And the method of disposing of the timber has prevented the lumbermen from securing consolidated holdings by and through which they could, to better advantage, conserve and preserve the forests.

These conditions have prevailed, to a large extent, from the earliest times through the territory of our white pine forests to within the past ten or fifteen years. They do now and will prevail in the future in the remaining quite extensive southern forests, and the great and principal supply of the Pacific or western states. In the old white pine states the problems of conservation are of little concern. The

small stock of timber remaining and the reduced amount of the white pine in the eastern Canadian provinces, render it of much less concern as to the remainder of our white pine forests. On the Pacific coast the conditions are as much subject to waste as those formerly prevailing in the old pine regions; and in some respects more waste has been carried on, especially in the great forest of California.

We are now confronted with the conditions and problems transmitted to the remaining timber supply and which have led to the consumption and the wasting of so much of our forests that there is now left only an equal fraction of the original timber supply. The temporary advanced prices of lumber in the central and eastern part of the country, excepting as to the past year when prices have been lower, has not, to any extent, reduced the per capita use of lumber, or the general consumption which has prevailed in earlier years. In fact, for the past several years, the per capita consumption has been increasing because of the disappearance of the hardwood which formerly supplemented largely the pine lumber, but which is, to large extent, now exhausted. The use of lumber within the past several years has reached the actual amount of nearly 600 feet per capita, although counted at only 500, as a large amount is cut that is not reported. The use of substitutes like cement, iron, steel, bricks, stone or paper for purposes where lumber was formerly used, has not apparently reduced the demand materially. The great activity has kept the demand and supply up to the former amount.

The inherited conditions pertaining to the remaining forests bring with them the same difficulties for the continuance of forest destruction that have caused waste in the past.

Unless a more correct and rational understanding of the lumber situation and problems is taken and understood, rightly appreciated, and a practical policy—with public sentiment fairer to the lumbermen—more adaptable to the real best interests of the public, is put into operation, a comparatively few years will see the end of cheap or moderate priced lumber.

This desire to over-stock the market with the timber

supply has been carried to that extent that while we have been cutting over and denuding one-half of our coniferous forests, the title to nearly the whole has been parted with by the government. So that at the present time, the condition is that about one-half of our pine timber lands have been denuded. Of the other half over four-fifths of this remainder has been sold under this promiscuous method and passed to private owners.

The conservation of the forests under, and in the manner that the lands have been handled by the government, and other adverse conditions, have made it absolutely impossible for the lumbermen to cut and handle the timber conservatively, or to reforest the areas as they were cut over. In fact, the lumberman has had more adverse conditions to work against than the men engaged in any other industry or occupation whatsoever.

We have now reached that period of our history when it has come to be known that the forests must be conserved or in a comparatively few years, supply will be practically exhausted.

Other substitutes, and economical and more efficient methods of manufacture, can and will be applied when the price of lumber gets to that point that it will make practicable these new methods. But in the meantime the remaining forests, especially those in the Pacific and mountain states where the land is of but little or no use for agriculture and available for a timber supply, and where the area is sufficient to furnish a reasonable stock for many generations to come—perhaps a perpetual supply—may be sufficient to serve the more urgent needs of the people, and especially when supplemented by the general development of timber culture throughout the country.

The question now comes up—what can be done to conserve the forests?

There is quite a demand for the removal of the little tariff protection that is now existing. Agricultural products are protected to an extent three times as great as lumber, which are not in need of protection to as great extent as lumber; and it would not work continued waste by remov-

ing tariff on agricultural products as it would on lumber.

The forests will be continually wasted as a matter of necessity if free lumber and continued high local taxes are maintained.

The timber lands are held in such small parcels or tracts as to make conservative methods of lumbering, together with reforestation and the protection of timber from destruction by fire, impracticable. At all events, the timber lands must be consolidated to make conservation a possibility.

So that under existing conditions, I do not see but one practicable plan to conserve the present forests and provide for a future supply.

Economical lumbering can be carried on only on a large scale with sufficient capital and large enough operations to establish large milling plants and provide them with a stock of timber that will, for the first cutting, extend over nearly or quite a century before it is once cut over. Then to apply thoroughly efficient measures for reforestation as the land is cut over, and to protect the whole tract from destruction or damage by fire.

This handling of the forests, the reforestation, the economical cutting and manufacturing in ways that will make a cost for the low grades more than their worth now in the market, must necessarily be provided for, and a tariff sufficient on the low grades of lumber with which we cannot compete and conserve the forests.

In cutting the timber, it will be necessary to leave the smaller size trees up to those of medium size. These will necessarily have to be a continual source of expense in reforestation and protecting and interest on the investment. The cost of logging and manufacturing, and especially if the more conservative methods of producing composition boards of a thinner kind, are entered upon, will make the cost of production higher, but will increase the amount of available lumber to the extent of two or three times what the old methods or even more conservative way of applying the old sawing methods.

Then the question of local taxation must be met and the matter of taxing the one crop of timber every year for a cen-

ture on the same crop, must be radically changed and the standing crop of timber must not be taxed, but a reasonable tax on stumpage may be placed on the timber when cut for the benefit particularly of the local county in which the timber is located, and which tax should be paid to the county for any amount cut in that county whether manufactured there or elsewhere. All other taxation on the lumber cut and other taxation pertaining to the lumber production should be merged into this stumpage tax, which may be made to perpetually furnish the country a larger revenue than under the old method, but in such way that it can be charged up as part of the cost of the timber. And with this change in taxation a better method of organizing timber and lumber companies should be enforced in such way and under such provisions of organization and management and control, that the government and the public will be satisfied that it is not a trust form organized to plunder the people by means of extravagant prices. It is evident that higher prices for lumber, more especially on the lower grades, but in general on the whole mill run, must be maintained in order to make it practicable, or we might say possible, to conserve the timber, and which for the next perhaps ten or fifteen years would make lumber moderately higher priced than at present, but not excessive compared to other commodities and products. And at the end of 20 or 30 years, this process, if the whole or a large part of the remaining forests could be placed in such aggregations and under the best practicable form, the prices of lumber for the next 30 to 50 years would probably not be one-half of what they will be without a practical process of this kind.

A tract of timber of say 250,000 acres of the heavy timber of the coast would furnish a stock sufficient to furnish a hundred million a year of lumber for a century, or nearly that. By reforesting and protection to the fullest extent, there will, at the end of that time, be timber standing, that when cut over from the same point of beginning as was practiced the previous century, that before it is cut over the second time will produce for this second cutting as much, or more lumber, than was taken off the first cutting, and at the same time

leaving a sufficient re-foresting stock to make for the third century perhaps as large a supply.

The lumbermen generally are willing to do their full part in any practical scheme or measure that will enable them to handle the timber in the most conservative method practicable for them to devise if the conditions are made so that they can do it. But if free trade, designed to cheapen lumber, excessive taxation and prejudice against large timber holdings, shall prevail, it cannot be accomplished.

To organize companies to handle the timber in such a conservative method as herein outlined, it would seem to be necessary for Congress to enact laws under which might be organized companies of that nature and kind that would meet the approval of all parties concerned, including capitalists, timber owners, counties, states and the general government and public. Such act of Congress should provide for the method of organizing the companies, the issuance of stocks and bonds and stockholders' liability, and for a sufficient supervision and control by the government through the Commission and Forestry Departments so as to protect from fire, and conservation methods of cutting and manufacturing, and in reforesting, and against excessive prices on lumber which might result from controlling a large part of the supply of lumber, but provide and authorize a sufficient price to make it practicable and reasonably profitable to so handle and conserve the timber.

There may be same other methods of doing it. I do not know what way would be practicable, excepting in this general way. It is certain that small holdings cannot do any more than cut the timber into lumber as rapidly as possible, as they have in the past, and cut and handle the timber in the cheapest way of producing the lumber, and produce only the kind and quality of lumber that will bring a price large enough to make it profitable. In other words, the continuance in large part of that system which has prevailed in the past and has wasted the forests, and will continue to do so without doubt or question if present conditions are continued.

The Conservation Commission has made no suggestions

other than a resolution asking the States to take a certain supervision of the methods of cutting timber, but which, when applied to the best that the State can do, will not be sufficient means for conservation to provide for a future supply of lumber.

The time is becoming shorter when any feasible conservation plan can be developed and installed in time to save enough of the forests to make anything of a reasonable supply for the future at reasonable costs or prices. The message of the Governor of Washington to the Legislature just now handed in says that conservation must be entered upon immediately. That in ten years from now it may be too late. And I will say that it is a matter more particularly for the general interests of the Commonwealth than it is for the timber land owners.

But the timberland owners are willing to adjust themselves to a reasonable method of handling the forests on that basis that will bring about the best results for the future welfare of the whole nation along any lines that will not be unjust, unfair and destructive to the interests of the present owners who came into possession through the voluntary established laws and public policy of the nation.

The timber land owners do, or should, recognize the fact that the timber is the heritage of the people; Providence provided it for the benefit and use of the people generally.

The soil was made fertile and to serve the essential purpose of furnishing the food supply of all the people, and not for the exclusive benefit of those engaged in agriculture; but the distribution of the farming lands was made upon the same general policy of so distributing the earth's surface among those who chose to enter upon that occupation that it would, to best advantage, supply the whole Commonwealth with food the same as the distribution of timber would furnish the lumber supply.

There is complaint of the agricultural methods as there is of lumber, and the agricultural lands are brought in as one of the essential measures where conservation is considered necessary to protect the general interests of all, the same as with the timber.

And while the farmers are doubtless equally under obligations to handle the soil conservatively and bring it to the best use of all as well as of themselves, the lumbermen do, or should, recognize that they are equally under obligations; but in both cases, the public can only expect, and put in force, any policy or requirement consistent with the ownership and local control of each tract or portion which has come into the possession of the different individuals or companies—whether of timber or agricultural land.

That the timber should be conserved in the best practical manner, and the soil cultivated in a like conservative way to produce the best results in both cases, is the duty of both the farmer and the lumberman, as far as it is made practicable for them.

But the General Government, the States and timbered Counties and the timberland owners and lumbermen must co-operate and agree upon a conservation policy that will to best advantage for the future and for centuries to come, serve the best interests of the present and coming generations with the best and most satisfactory supply of timber that can be devised to meet the increasing demands of the great populations of the future centuries.