

Third Effort Has Potential

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State's New Forests Better Than Many

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JACKSON, Tenn.—
The southern states, including Oklahoma, are trying to grow their "third forests."

To observe progress along these lines, I joined about two dozen other journalists from several states on a Southern Forest Institute bus tour through western Kentucky and Tennessee.

The "first forest" was that which covered most of the eastern half of the North American continent when the early colonists came to settle. They cleared much of it to make room for crops, livestock, cities, factories and roads.

Industry Turnaround

At one time, the 13 southern states had more than 5,000 lumber towns. Since Capt. John Smith established the first sawmill at Jamestown, Va., in 1607, it is estimated these native forests have yielded enough lumber to build over 100 million homes.

In 1890, a young man named Henry Hardtner noted how the timber industry was declining and began promoting the business of conserving and growing trees. His efforts led to a turnaround of the forestry industry, so that by the early 1960s the South was growing twice as much timber as was being harvested. This new growth became known as the "second forest."

Then, in 1968, the federal government announced a housing goal of 26 million new units a year. The timber industry took a nother look and decided tree production must be accelerated. Nationally, we were consuming a

ton of paper per family per year for bags, boxes, newspapers, magazines, cartons, napkins, towels and other uses. Houses were getting bigger, requiring more lumber.

Lumber trade organizations got together to start a program to grow our "third forest." Projects included timber stand improvement, financial assistance for tree planting, fire control, formation of privately sponsored associations of landowners to extend forest management, lease arrangements between industry and small owners, tax incentives and stronger state forest organizations.

Plants Built

As the "third forest" began to flourish on cutover land, timber companies which had helped to clear out previous stands of trees had a change of heart, a change of program and a change of direction. They took another look from out West and came back to the South.

Local companies were formed, too. A number of newspapers (including this one) went together and built the first newsprint mill in the South at Lufkin, Tex., and later a second one near Houston. A newsprint mill was built in Alabama and kraft or other types of paper are now manufactured at a number of points.

Oklahoma's timber lands followed the same pattern. They were cutover first when the Choctaw Indian Nation leased land to white sawmill operators. After statehood, "high graders" came through to cut out re-

maining good timber and leave less desirable trees to form crowded, stunted, unproductive forests.

No extensive reforestation program was launched in the state until five years ago, when The Weyerhaeuser Co. acquired large holdings and launched a tree planting system to keep their new linerboard paper mill and fiberboard factory supplied.

Forests Toured

The Southern Forest Institute tour last week started from Paducah, Ky, a historic city near the Ohio River. En route to the Westvaco Paper mill at Wickliffe, Ky., we observed forest management systems for removing poor quality hardwood trees so that better varieties and types would have room to grow.

We stopped for lunch at the Columbus-Belmont Civil War Battlefield State Park, where the Confederates stretched a mile long chain across the Mississippi River toward Cairo, Ill., in a futile effort to blockade Yankee shipping.

Along the way to the Inland Container Corp.'s new automated sawmill near Waverly, Tenn., we saw managed and unmanaged woodlands and watched a whole tree chipping system at work.

Near Pinson, in south central Tennessee, we visited an experimental hardwood seed orchard. Here superior sorts of green ash, sycamore, yellow poplar, cottonwood, catalpa and other tree varieties are being developed in a type selection program.

Potential There

Tennessee River Pulp and Paper Co. owns or leases 320,000 acres of timberland in three states near the huge TVA Pickwick Dam in the middle of the southern border of Tennessee. These tracts are stocked with deer, quail, dove, turkey and other wildlife. They are open to the public for hunting.

Here we saw demonstrations of clearing land of crowded small trees in site preparation for planting loblolly and short leaf pine seedlings. The mechanized operations were similar to those being used in southeast Oklahoma to boost timber production.

Our state's nearly one million acres of commercial forest land is far from its potential production but is better than much of the timber we saw on this tour. More inducements are needed to encourage private landowners to adopt forest management or "tree farm" systems. It's a long time from planting to harvest.

After observing the "third forest" in several states, one can only conclude that the eastern one-third of Oklahoma has about as good a chance as other southern areas for improving and enlarging woodland acreages to support expanded lumber and paper industries.

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