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Nation's Wood, Paper Industries Menaced by Obstructionist Moves

LUMBER, paper and other products made from trees are priced at all time highs. Recent court actions give reason to expect they will go higher, with some products becoming unavailable.

This will not be due to our inability to grow enough trees. If it happens, it will be because environmentalists and other obstructionists will not permit enough trees to be grown and harvested to meet our needs.

As the American Forest Institute points out, "trees are America's renewable resource." Obstructionists don't seem to want the trees renewed; they just want to keep the old ones. Nevertheless, trees grow old and die, anyway, if not harvested.

There is no question but what vast areas of forest lands have been harvested wastefully and without proper regard for replacement. When this was realized, a turn-around occurred and, for their own survival, paper and lumber companies began planting more trees than they were harvesting.

This entails growing trees as a crop, although it takes 20 to 30 years to plant, grow and harvest timber. To make such a long-term investment pay off, various methods have been tested and new ones are still being sought by researchers.

Selective cutting has been most used, but it is not necessarily the best method. It often results in less desirable or scrub timber taking over a forest after better trees have been removed. Cutover land is difficult to improve or restore and trees may be too dense for good ones to thrive.

Another method is called "clear-cutting", in which all timber is cut from selected acreages. The land then is replanted to improved varieties of trees. Because clearcutting temporarily leaves the land without forest cover, environmentalists object to its use. They argue that forests must be preserved for wild life and campers.

Over 85 per cent of the private commercial forest land in the United States is in the eastern half of the country. Most of the forest land in western states is owned by the government. Oklahoma has almost 10 million acres of forest land, mostly privately owned, and a sizable forest products industry.

Because so much of our trees are harvested from federally-owned land, a federal court ruling that has banned clearcutting on all four national forests in Texas is significant.

Clearcutting accounts for about half of 12 billion feet of timber being logged from federal forests this year. Barring of this practice means that timber companies may have to revert to selective cutting, resulting in scrubbiest forests, or else rely upon supplies from private lands which may prove to be inadequate.

The outcome may be reduced supplies of lumber and paper, forcing prices higher for all uses without increasing tree growth.

The objective of good timber management should be to harvest trees to meet our nation's essential needs and to replant trees so that forests may be maintained through new growth. Trees are a renewable resource if a practical planting and harvesting cycle is utilized.