

THE PROBLEM OF TIMBER WASTEBy **WILLIAM B. GREELEY***Chief of the United States Forest Service*

A large waste of raw, partly fabricated, and finished forest products in the United States is a recognized fact. We don't need to argue about its precise dimensions. Neither is it profitable to attempt any exact analysis of how much of this waste is preventable and how much is not; or to mete out the responsibility for poor use of timber to the logger, the manufacturer, the distributor, or the consumer. It is a common problem, resulting broadly from the abundance of cheap timber in the United States. It is a problem for which we are all responsible and in whose solution we all should share. The important questions are: Where do the largest losses in the use of timber occur? What can be done to reduce them? Who is going to undertake the job?

From the standpoint of the American public, the elimination of waste has an obvious bearing upon extending the life of our existing stocks of timber and hence upon all of the social and economic benefits derived from an adequate supply of forest products. The United States is not the first country to face a timber shortage. Western Europe had one and pulled through. Asia Minor and China each have had one and failed to pull through. Saving in the utilization of our timber was recognized as a vital part of forest conservation when we began to ask whether our future path should follow that of China and Asia Minor or that of western Europe. Research in forest products began in the Department of Agriculture in 1889. In the trinity of forest conservation which has guided our public activities and policies up to the present moment, the most efficient use of the existing supply of timber stands on an equality with the protection of forest resources and the growing of new crops of wood.

The industrial approach to the utilization of timber necessarily is a somewhat different one. Here the question becomes one of creating more raw material for a particular plant or industry, of protecting investments and established trade, or of finding new sources of profit. In the field of consumption, the problem becomes one of lengthening the life of railroads, buildings, and other structures where wood is employed, of reducing the cost of maintenance and replacements, and

of finding fresh forms of raw material or more economical ways of using raw material. The difference between the public view point and the industrial viewpoint is no other than that which exists in practically every development having to do with natural resources or national economy. It is a difference in viewpoint only, as between the direct interests of the individual and the broader interests of the Nation. The fundamental possibilities of benefit are the same, and the mutuality of interest is so great as readily to afford a basis for joint effort.

It is worth pointing out that the United States is the first country where the exhaustion of timber in one section could be readily met by the cutting of forests 2,000 miles distant. Our transportation system has largely concealed the ultimate outcome of the exhaustion of old-growth timber. Because of our transportation system, we have practically pooled all of the old-growth stumpage in the United States and maintained our enormous use of forest products with no other ill effect, from the standpoint of current consumption, than constantly higher freight bills. From many standpoints this is a national blessing. On the other hand, it is dangerous because it permits practically a nation-wide depletion of high-quality timber before any very serious local effects, in any part of the country, may be experienced. In other words, we are in danger of coming up short, almost overnight, against a depletion of virgin timber so serious as to cause disastrous public and industrial consequences.

The point I would emphasize is that this marvelous tool of transportation, which has been such a large factor in meeting national requirements, ought to be employed with equal effectiveness in carrying out the economies now forced upon us. Our transportation system ought to make a local surplus of waste timber or inferior woods nationally available to the markets where they can be profitably utilized. Transportation ought to make it possible for local mill or woods waste to reach the plants and markets for box material, pulp, and fiber products, small dimension stock, and the like. An official of an important New England railroad recently proposed that