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# Forest Policy, by William B. Greeley

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FOREST POLICY. By William B. Greeley.\* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953. Pp. viii, 278. \$5.00.

In its younger days, the United States could not see the forest for the trees. With the exuberance and *carpe diem* spirit which frequently characterizes the young, the trees of the United States were cut and used profligately with little or no thought of the future needs of our expanding nation. In those days it was thought that we had wood to burn, and in some areas whole forests were decimated and destroyed.

This prodigal use of our rich natural resources was not confined to timber. It was part of a national attitude of a sparsely settled nation which had not reached its frontiers. Natural wealth seemed limitless and inexhaustible. But by the end of the 19th century, a new philosophy had taken root. Dramatized by Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, conservation of natural resources became an article of faith with the American people. *Forest Policy* puts this story into perspective not only as part of the history of our country but as a chapter in the development of forest conservation throughout the world.

This book presents not merely a study of forest and conservation policy in various nations; it is also a short course on comparative government and economics cast in terms of forest policy. As the author so clearly recognizes, this study of governmental policies is inescapable because of the public interest in future supplies of timber and the impact of forest policies upon watershed control. Forest cover in uplands helps prevent erosion and contributes to regularization of stream flow to avoid the extremes of flood and water famine. Indeed, he demonstrates the growing world-wide realization that the use of forest resources, both public and private, is and should be subject to the public's overriding interest.

This excellent study does a fine job of relating timber supply to the material needs of national economies. There are good general analyses of the interplay of forces among government, private industry, cooperative groups, and farmers. In addition, appropriate attention is given to the defense and economic aspects of timber use. The book is full of object lessons such as Britain's reduction of its forest to the point that it lacked sufficient timber supplies for naval purposes and the needs of its domestic economy.

If I have any criticism to make, it is that insufficient consideration is given to the economics within the forestry industry in foreign countries and in the United States, which is a vital factor in assessing the forces

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tending toward good conservation policies. More importantly, the presence, or lack, and degree of competition among private forest owners and users is important in determining the role of government. In our democratic system, the preservation of such competition promotes full utilization of wood products. It also promotes the balance of economic strength among large corporations and small businesses which is indispensable to political democracy. Domination of any segment of the economy by a small group with similar interests leads to political ascendancy of that group. Government has frequently entered the realm of economic activity to offset such domination. It can best do so by encouraging competition, which fosters the position of small entrepreneurs to counterbalance concentrated economic power.

In part this omission results from the book's emphasis upon conservation as an end in itself. The author describes in manifold detail the federal, state, and private programs which tend to insure that cutting will not outdistance renewal of the forest resources of the nation. I would have preferred to see greater emphasis placed on the fact that trees, unlike petroleum or solid minerals, are a renewable resource. Perhaps that is too elementary a lesson for students of forestry practice and policy. It is one that cannot be repeated too often to the public.

The author describes the many federal units which deal with forest use and conservation. He is not disturbed by their overlapping with one another and state and private groups. Indeed, he comments that this multiplicity and duplication are features of democratic development. Many agencies have come into being in response to the demands and needs of a particular group in the economy so that every substantial interest has representation. The agencies tend to strike an equilibrium among different interest groups. This is an excellent observation upon our democratic system. It is an excellent answer to the authoritarians or those who lose patience with what is sometimes considered the inefficiencies of democratic government.

Mr. Greeley is somewhat ambivalent about federal activities in this field. Usually he is content that it has not stepped beyond its proper bounds and has utilized the proper admixture of incentive, education, and direct regulation. There are infrequent criticisms that there is danger of socialism from extensive central government participation in forest programs. In these latter cases, it would almost seem that the comments are irrelevant and undocumented grafts upon the main presentation.

For the most part, the author is satisfied that the various levels of government and private groups are headed in the right directions on

forest problems although he observes, quite correctly, that there is much to be done to make good the losses of irresponsible exploitation, fires, disease, and insects. There is much to be done in prevention of future losses from natural causes. Present day cutting has yet to be matched by reseeded and replanting. The examples of other countries may well provide models for more vigorous programs in these fields.

The dilemmas of the appropriate distribution of authority and responsibility are presented as two main problems. First, an enormous amount of forest land is in private hands and in small lots. Here, conservation practices are farthest from ideal. But this kind of production also is not the most significant in terms of quantity. Second, the author presents the tugs and pulls between government and private ownership of forest land. Government stands are less than one quarter of the national total. But in the areas of greatest activity, such as my own state of Oregon, government timber far exceeds private stocks. Mr. Greeley does not relate this to the fact that it is private enterprise which does the actual logging on government land. It is true that this is subject to federal regulation. But it is here that economic factors are highly significant.

Most government timber is offered for sale on the basis of competitive bidding. Unfortunately, competition does not result. In order to log an area, access roads must be built to provide transportation of cut timber to permanent means of transportation. Under existing procedures access roads are built, not by the government, but by the successful bidder. The cost of the road is deducted from the purchase price with little administrative control over the type of road, its serviceability, and actual cost. The nub of the matter is that in order to defray road building expenses it is necessary for the federal government to offer for logging large tracts of land in a single unit. This results in the practical exclusion of small operators.

Inadequate estimates of the timber to be derived from an area result in consistent underappraisals. Because many of the contracts set a price unrelated to the amount of timber which can be cut, the board foot price average is below the estimate of the government agency. This leaves a margin of profit which, combined with the lack of effective competition in bidding, results in wasteful cutting practices. These factors permit the abandonment of waste on the site which constitutes fire, pest, and disease hazards.

Only one slight mention is made in the book of proposals for federal access roads. Legislation to provide the Forest Service with

funds to build access roads has been proposed in the Congress, and one bill I introduced passed the Senate a few years ago only to die in the House.

Government-built access roads would result in great savings to the United States. A systematic access road program would introduce a larger measure of competition into timber operations by giving small operators a chance to bid against the mammoth corporations which now dominate the industry. These factors would also encourage full utilization of timber and diminish the hazards which accompany present wasteful practices. The proposal is, to my mind, one of the principal reforms which can be made in United States forest policy.

*Forest Policy* is informative and provocative.<sup>1</sup> It can be read with profit by the general reader who has an interest in conserving our magnificent natural resources. It might help professionals in the field place their experience in perspective. But, I must add, it cannot be read uncritically or as the sole source on the subject.

Wayne L. Morse†

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1. To those who are interested enough in footnotes to read this passage, it should be observed that the book contains no footnotes or detailed notes at the end of each chapter or the close of the book. This is a handicap in assessing statistical information or searching after additional information on points of interest.

The bibliography at the end is somewhat sketchy and particularly deficient in providing the titles of government publications on the subject. The author mentions only a few and states that there are many others.

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