

Finnish Experiment in Draining Swamps
Criticised in Soviet Timber Press

Finnish foresters have achieved some major successes during the last 30 years, and Deputy Minister N. Medved'ev wrote in glowing terms about them in an article published in the April 19, 1990 edition of "Lesnaya promyshlennost". Nevertheless, the positive picture which he sketched overall does have a negative side to it. For with a view to the intensification of forestry, in the USSR also some major errors have been permitted, the consequences of which are as yet unknown to the Suomi public and to foreign specialists. I have in mind the sharp reduction of the area occupied by swamps.

It is true that the increase in the productivity of the forests, above all in the growing stock, is chiefly on account of the draining of swamp-ridden forest lands on a vast scale. At present, the network of drainage canals covers almost 6,000,000 hectares, or more than 15 percent of the area of the country. Of the total annual increment of the Finnish forests (More than 60 million cubic metres), the proportion of timber derived from drained swamps amounts to 12 million cubic metres, which is almost a fifth of the total. Unfortunately, there is a negative side to these drainage operations, namely the destruction of the natural wetlands, a worsening of the water quality in low-lying water bodies, and an increased frequency of spring flooding. Latterly there have even been fears expressed that draining the swamps could aggravate the greenhouse effect, however this theory has not been scientifically proven.

In the opinion of forestry specialists drainage of swamps denotes an irrational squandering of resources, which might have been used to better advantage in the form of measures to increase forest productivity.

An interesting feature of the Finnish drainage campaign was the powerful support it enjoyed in wide circles of the public. Swamplands occupy almost a third of the country's territory. The Finnish peasant always regarded the swamp as his enemy. As late as the sixties,