

1. BACKGROUND

The forestry and wood industries have an old tradition in Mexico. Ever since before the Spanish conquest of Mexico, the indian population relied on Mexico's vast forests for its food, protection and clothing needs, and, the vast majority of housing was built from wood. During the 16th century, the first regulatory measures were taken to avoid the destruction of forests, including limitations on wood cutting and primitive reforestation measures. During the 17th century, the exploitation of mahogany, cedar and oak were reserved to the Spanish crown, although British and Dutch invasions of tropical forests, for the exportation of wood, were not uncommon.

The massive exploitation and destruction of Mexico's forests began with the flourishing mining industry, led by the Spanish conquerors. The mines themselves were built and reinforced with wood structures, the transformation of the primary product into metals was fueled with wood and the indigenous population, deprived of their lands, increasingly moved into the wooded areas, deforesting them to grow their crops.

Under the new post-independence regime, a series of regulatory measures were taken to control the production of wood products and to protect the forests. During the 19th century, the exploitation of fine woods was subject to a prior permit requirement, the free importation of wood was allowed to avoid the excessive exploitation of local forests, the first inventory of existing resources was made, the cutting and conservation of forests was regulated and national parks were created to protect both the vegetation and the animal life.

Further efforts have been made in the 20th century to regulate the excessive exploitation of forests and to preserve existing resources. In 1926, the First Forestry Law was passed by President Plutarco Elías Calles, in an effort to officially rationalize the exploitation of Mexican forests. This law was reformed in 1942 and again during the administration of President Miguel Alemán (1945-1950). In 1960, President Adolfo López Mateos authorized a new forestry law to meet the requirements of the times. More recently, in April 1986, a Forestry Law came into effect, followed, in July 1988, by the Regulations to the Forestry Law. At present, a new Forestry Law is under consideration and will probably be passed early 1993 since it was recently approved by the Senate. This, in conjunction with the amendments to the Mexican Constitution, will basically translate into greater private and long term investments in the forestry and wood industries. All these measures have had a significant impact on the local production of wood and wood products.

Although the forests of Mexico have been commercially exploited for the past 70 years, both the forestry and wood industries are still considered to be in their infancy with respect to