

Where do We Stand in Timber?

An interview with Senator William C. Edwards,

Chairman of the Committee of Forests of the Commission of Conservation

Few in Canada have done as much personal exploration of forest areas east of the Rockies, or have put under way so many investigations of the whereabouts and quality of commercial timber stands, as Senator Edwards, President of W. C. Edwards & Co., Ltd., Ottawa, the long-established lumber corporation recently absorbed by the Riordon Company Ltd. Twenty-five years ago, Senator Edwards repeatedly sounded a warning to the Canadian people regarding the persistent over-estimate of Canada's timber resources. At the time, and since, Senator Edwards has been accused of deep pessimism by those who seemingly prefer to hold their heads in a purple cloud of illusion even though their feet carry them to the edge of a precipice. The common cry of "inexhaustible timber resources" received little but protest from Senator Edwards many years before any of the provincial governments had considered making accurate inventories of their timber supplies.

"I am not one," said Senator Edwards to the editor of the *Canadian Forestry Magazine*, "who knows so little about actual conditions as to predict a timber famine within the immediate future. Forest exhaustion is not at hand in the sense that our mills in Eastern Canada will be obliged to shut down next year or the year after, because of a failing supply of logs. I am quite definite, however, when I prophesy that within fifteen years, Eastern Canada will be drawing the bulk of its sawn lumber from British Columbia and will be paying for it through the nose on account of high freight rates. The consumer, not the lumberman or the limit holder, is the man who will pay the price of forest exhaustion.

"The plain fact of the matter is that the cutting of timber limits has been so much more rapid than any new growth could offset, and over and above the waste of the limit through injudicious

cutting forest fires have been permitted to strip thousands of square miles of our most valuable timber.

"In addition to complete fire protection which is the corner stone of any scheme of forest conservation, what would you suggest to counteract the present decline of the country's timber assets?" Senator Edwards was asked.

"I have almost given up considering a remedy," he replied, "as long as the mass of the Canadian people look upon their natural resources as the 'greatest on earth' and the degree of exploitation to date as a mere trifling percentage of what can be undertaken in future—I say, as long as this point of view persists (and it is common to the lumberman as to the man on the street) it seems quite unlikely that any public authority will take remedial steps in the presence of this absurdly cheerful outlook. I have not very much hope, therefore in face of the fictitious convictions of the Canadian citizen that any scheme of conservation will be put under way. To one in my position, who knows by firsthand evidence the true condition of the forest resources east of the Rockies, and who sees the present everincreasing tendency to over-exploit our timber areas, it appears that we must pursue our happy way until disaster is upon us. Then we will have no alternative except to satisfy our daily timber requirements by paying the bill of the British Columbia salesman."

"The only remedy for timber land depletion is to guage the cut by the ability of that particular timber area to sustain production. I mean that we should only cut the mature and diseased timber."

"That means a rise in the cost of logging and better prices for the lumber product?"

"Inevitably. How much better that is than to turn the greater part of our Dominion into a barren useless waste? If one were to consider the distance from coast to coast and the amount of agri-