

Communal Forests for Canadian Towns

An Idea Borrowed from Europe's Successful Experience and the Need of Local Woodlands in Canada for Recreation and Fuel.

By Clyde Leavitt

THE recurrent shortage of coal brings periodically to mind the value and importance of wood fuel as an emergency substitute, in town and city homes.

Perhaps the advocacy of the general establishment of public forests by cities, villages, townships and counties may not be regarded as having a very direct bearing on the problems incident to the existing fuel emergency. However, history has a way of repeating itself, and it is the part of wisdom to be prepared.

While it is not to be anticipated that a general slaughter of municipal forests would be likely to take place to relieve a future fuel shortage, it is nevertheless true that forests under good management produce a substantial amount of wood each year which may be marketed when mature, without injuring the forest. In fact, the quality may be greatly improved by judicious cutting. Thus, a municipal forest, like any other, may be made to contribute substantially to man's needs, without injury.

What A Forest Produces

From one-half to one cord of wood per acre per year is a reasonable estimate of the productive capacity of a forest area under proper care. Some proportion of this would be primarily suitable for fuel, while, in time, products of greater value or higher use would be available. With sufficient area, there would be a handsome net revenue each year, to reduce the burden of local taxation, in addition to other valuable services.

For example, a municipal forest might well serve as a community picnic or camping ground, and perhaps also as a camping ground for automobile tourists. There is a distinct movement toward the establishment of the latter and many cities and towns in the United States and to a lesser extent in Canada have found it a good investment to provide such accommodations with provision for water, fuel, fire places and sanitary conveniences. The

recreational aspect of forests has not yet received the attention which its importance deserves.

A Supply Near At Hand

Reverting to the commercial aspect of a community

forest, it is well-known that a considerable percentage of the cost of forest products, particularly wood fuel, is due to high cost of transportation. Conversely, timber conveniently accessible to a market will have a high "stumpage" value. Since a community forest would ordinarily be highly accessible, a good return for marketable products would be assured, while at the same time wood fuel could be disposed of, in times of emergency, at a price that people could afford to pay. Obviously an area of some size would ultimately be desirable, to justify necessary costs of protection and administration.

Municipal forests frequently serve the important purpose of watershed protection for town or city water-supply. In many cases this would not apply, but where conditions are favorable, this reason alone would amply justify the investment. This has been the primary incentive, in quite a number of cases in the United States.

Use the Waste Lands

In many districts there are areas of more or less waste lands which are primarily suitable for forest purposes, and which can be secured at a comparatively low cost.

A beginning might be made by acquiring a piece of such land already in forest, with provision for extension by planting. The provincial forest services of Ontario and Quebec, and the Dominion Forestry Branch in the prairie provinces, maintain large forest nurseries, and these organizations are prepared to co-operate heartily

in such projects as are here under discussion. In fact, they are most anxious to help in any way possible. In Ontario, thanks largely to such encouragement, probably a dozen

Why not City and Town Forests?

In the United States, legislation encouraging the formation of municipal forests has been enacted by a number of the states, including New York, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Minnesota. Prof. Toumey, of the Yale Forest School, estimates that there are 250,000 acres of municipal forests in the entire country, and he strongly advocates a very large extension of this area. His reasoning is equally applicable to Canada, if we substitute reference to the provinces for his reference to the states. He says:

"It is my judgment that public attention should be directed by those who have it in their power to do so, to the desirability of increasing our present area of public forests in this country by literally thousands of communal forests. Towns and cities should be persuaded into purchasing such forests, and wealthy citizens encouraged into acquiring suitable forest properties and giving them as memorials to their home communities. Here is a field for the forestry associations in the several states that is almost untouched. If the forestry association in any state can, through its avenues for publicity, show the public what communal forests mean, and why the present time is auspicious for the increase of such forest ownership in this country, and can carry its influence so far that tangible results are attained, it will perform a public service infinitely beyond anything heretofore undertaken. For one, I believe in city and town forests in America. We should have many of them and widely scattered over the country. Furthermore I believe that they are practical, in the long run economical and advantageous to the community. I believe that a considerable area in communal forests well managed will be better appreciated by the public than an equal area in national forests or state forests."

"In the development of communal forests it is not enough for individual towns to secure tracts of land either by gift or by purchase and call them town forests. If they do, and if there is no organized machinery for their use and development, very little is accomplished. Furthermore, an individual town owning a small area of forest land can ill afford to employ an efficient forester. This, I take it, has been the chief difficulty in the past in this country and the reason for the lack of efficient management of the limited areas of communal forests that we now have. It is my judgment that communal forestry must be closely linked up with the state forest administration and laws promulgated that will afford a form of co-operation between the community and the state which will insure to each communal forest a reasonably high order of forest management."