

Forests in Canada's Economy

Many of the member countries of the Commonwealth have forest conditions and forest problems of marked similarity because they lie in the tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world. Canada's position is unique in the Commonwealth since it lies in the north temperate zone and a very large proportion of our forests is coniferous rather than broad-leaved. Canada is unique also in the large scale of our forest industries and in the relative importance of forests and forest products in the national economy.

Here in Canada, where forests are our most important natural resource, when viewed in terms of dollars in our overall economy, we are aiming at nothing short of the type of forest management that will result in sustained yield. Those of us who have responsibilities in the field here must see to it that our forests will continue to be capable of yielding at their present or even increased rates in perpetuity for oncoming generations.

Under our system of government, jurisdiction over and responsibility for natural resources is vested in Provincial Governments. But forests are national in scope and they are vital to the overall economy. The Federal Government has, therefore, over the years undertaken a number of measures in this field designed to supplement and encourage the good work all provincial governments are doing.

Canada Forestry Act

Perhaps the Federal Government's biggest and most important step in this field was the passing by Parliament of the Canada Forestry Act in December 1949. This Act, among other things, authorizes the Federal Government to

"enter into agreements with any province for the protection, development or utilization of forest resources, including protection from fire, insects and diseases, forest inventories, silvicultural research, watershed protection, reforestation, forestry publicity and education, construction of roads and improvement of streams in forest areas, improvement of growing conditions and management of forests for continuous production".

Now it's not possible to say whether our forest resources are increasing or decreasing unless our inventory position is known from time to time. I'm happy to say that since the First Conference, over thirty years ago, we have increased considerably our knowledge of the extent and nature of our forests. Nevertheless, on a national basis our forest inventories are far from complete at this moment and whatever figures we can present regarding them are less reliable than we would like them to be. I'm sure the Conference will be interested to know that, acting under the authority of the Canada Forestry Act, the Federal Government has entered into agreements with the majority of the provinces and is now contributing 50 per cent of the cost of the inventory surveys they are conducting. This program started only last year, but we hope and believe that it will result in the production of estimates, within the next five years, which can be regarded with confidence. In the meantime and in order to encourage reforestation, the Federal Government has entered into agreements with several provinces whereby it contributes 20 per cent of the costs of reforesting vacant Crown lands