

REGIONAL PLANNING AS VIEWED BY A BUSINESSMAN

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It is apparent that there is nothing more important, in this day and age, than the study and application of correct social science principles. We have made great progress in harnessing the forces of Nature — but comparatively slow progress in human relations. We have evolved admirable industrial organizations with amazing capacity to produce— but are still fumbling for an equitable distribution of the work and the rewards from such production. We have developed efficiency and speed in adapting natural resources to our needs—but are only beginning to bite into the problem of maintaining our resources for continuous production.

It is clear that social scientists realize the necessity of cooperation and mutual understanding between student and executive, worker and owner, business man and Government official, if equitable and effective social science principles are to be formulated and applied.

As a small lumber manufacturer with a comparatively limited horizon, the author can hardly hope to add more than a little binder to the brick of the whole structure—but perhaps that type of binder can find some degree of use in other branches of industry. Lumbermen, contrary to some expressed opinions, are mostly human beings—and social science problems are human problems.

Planning has been somewhat of a fighting word in some circles. A good many people feel that planning means

impractical objectives pushed by arbitrary bureaucrats at prohibitive cost, yet all successful forest operators plan their work. The drifter in the forest industries is soon sucked under in the whirlpool of events. The successful operator must row his boat—and if his rowing is productive, it must have a direction—and before he can choose his direction, he must have a plan.

Such individual planning, however, is not approved by the advocates of top-Government over-all plans. They cite the wastes of individuality and the exploitation of the past. But was it exploitation to harvest mature forest crops to meet the needs of a rapidly growing country? Would the nation have been better off if government had required forest operators to cut only half the amount needed, thereby holding back national growth and improved living standards? Was it ruthless destruction not to leave half of the mature forests which were available, knowing that most of the trees so left were over-ripe and would deteriorate each succeeding year? Was it reckless waste —when only horses, steam donkeys and railroads were available—to clear cut forest lands, when that was the only way forest products could be placed on the market at a price the public could pay?

No, we should not look down our noses at our forebears. They had just as much native intelligence as we have—their pencils were just as sharp. They successfully met the conditions of their day; we can only hope to do as well.

Conditions have changed. The bulk of our mature and easily accessible timber has been put to use, but modern tractors, bulldozers and trucks have opened up vast new areas, and made it possible to harvest such areas selectively so as to better the growth rate. A wider use and demand for the so-called weed species, together with higher relative timber prices, have brought timber growing for profit out of the dream stage and into reality.

Forest owners and operators have changed with conditions. Hardly a month passes here in the Northwest that some new sustained yield project is not worked out. Never have so many keen minds been focused on the problem of getting maximum growth rates for continuous production. We even find Government and private corporations competing for cut-over lands whose present owners are unable to hold for future growth. Soil, topography, climate and marketing conditions vary enormously between forest areas—and every solution must fit the local situation. It is not the place for top-Government over-all plans. As a State and Region and Nation, let us make plans to encourage such forward-looking forest owners through sensible forest land tax laws and approval of forest land consolidations. We need have no fear of monopolies in the timber growing business. Forest land areas are too vast, and the existing patterns

of ownership too diversified to permit monopoly.

Roughly two-thirds of the forest lands of the Northwestern States are owned by the Federal and State Governments. Some of these holdings are for watershed control and are a public responsibility. Large areas have mature, merchantable timber but are inaccessible without extensive road development. Let us plan to increase the return from our public forests, and ease the lumber shortage by substantial road appropriations; and let us plan to increase our stake in all forest lands by larger appropriations for fire protection and insect and disease control. Finally, let us plan to encourage timber farm forest owners—who, in total, own such an astonishing percentage of forest lands—to maintain their forests in growing condition. If we are wise we will not attempt to impose an overall plan on that ultra-individualist, the American farmer. Rather, we will cooperate in sensible tax laws, technical services, equipment and merchandising pools, but leave the initiative in the hands of the farmer at all times. The approach takes longer than by top-Government directive, but gets best results for our economy.

By all means let us plan, but let these plans be within the framework of the Bill of Rights which is worth more to Americans than any natural resources we have.