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Timber—Problems, Prospects, Policies

Edited by WILLIAM A. DUERR¹
Iowa State University Press
Ames, Iowa, 1973
260 pp. \$7.95

Report of the President's Panel on Timber and the Environment (PAPTE)

FRED A. SEATON,² Chairman
GPO, Washington, D.C. 1973
541 pp. \$4.80

The Outlook for Timber in the United States

U.S. FOREST SERVICE
Forest Resources Report No. 20
GPO, Washington, D.C., 1973
367 pp., \$3.25

These 1,168 pages contain most of the present knowledge about timber production in the United States clothed in some of the dullest prose available to man. I have to except a few chapters in Bill Duerr's book. Aside from these, the writers (often anonymous) rely heavily on what Galbraith calls "the double-passive-subjunctive" of government reports. Each of these is the product of a committee. Each is loaded with data, assumptions, and opinions from which conclusions of various levels of reliability are drawn, but the cause and effect relationships tend to be cloudy.

Timber is the product of twenty-two authors representing government, industry, conservation, and consumer groups at a conference at the State University of New York in 1970. Integration, to the extent it is achieved, is effected by an opening chapter, "A Perspective," by Duerr who opens up the subject of multiple and conflicting uses very well, and a closing "Epilogue" by John Fedkiw, who considers the price of timber as the only relevant issue. *PAPTE* also had about twenty authors, some identified, some not. The report and recommendations are in the first 117 pages and are based on the remaining 424 pages of individual reports in the appendix. The relationship between the two is not always clear. *The Outlook for Tim-*

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ber in the United States acknowledges a multitude of contributors in the Forest Service plus review from industry, conservation groups, and forestry schools. The first 222 pages are reports, followed by 145 pages of statistics in fine print.

The incubation period for all of these documents covered the recent period of high timber prices, and this becomes the main concern of all three. They also discuss long-run problems and concerns for the environment, but short-run supply is overriding even in these.

Accelerating the cut from Western national forests becomes the solution. The forests are considered flexible: they are only growing at about 25 percent of biological potential. Management can increase production to meet anticipated supply. To management, meeting supply is a function of immediate and continuing investment. Henry Vaux (in *Timber*) estimates that we could double the timber supply by 2020 for all timber lands in the country if we invested \$10 billion during the next thirty years: \$484 million per year during the 70's, \$358 million per year during the 80's, and \$158 million per year during the 90's. At a 4 percent discount rate the average cost for the increased production would be \$76.80 per thousand cubic feet. Or, we could double yield by 2000 with an annual investment of \$1,125 million during the 70's and \$400 million during the 80's, for a total of \$14,250 million and a cost of \$75.60 per thousand feet. *PAPTE* calls for doubling the harvest from the national forests on the basis of a \$200 million annual increase investment in management. *Outlook* believes that we can do it for the bargain basement price of a \$65 million increase annually.

I find Vaux's the most convincing presentation of actual costs. I believe that the Forest Service was seeking a figure that might be acceptable to the Administration, since word had already come back that the chances of getting the \$200 million increase recommended by *PAPTE* was hopeless. In the scramble for federal dollars it must be clear by now that we are not likely to get that scale of investment in growing trees until we can whomp up a better crisis than the present one. I am convinced that in these three documents (as well as in earlier ones) foresters have demonstrated the futility of trying to meet projected timber needs solely by increasing the growth of trees. There are many alternatives, however, two of which are recognized in these reports: one is to stretch the supply by various technologies; the other is to reanalyze the demand projections in terms of price, substitutes, and imports and also to generally reanalyze the rigid assumptions on which the projections are based.

Timber does the best job of recognizing the possibilities of increasing supply through technology. Speakers from industry and the

forest products laboratory show possibilities of getting up to one-half of our supply from materials presently wasted. New developments could use lower grade materials, thus greatly expanding the forest resource. Instead of moving into steeper mountains, or poorer and more fragile sites, we could move our harvesting into areas where alternative values were low and adverse environmental effects at a minimum. Jerry Saeman's refreshing paper in the appendix of *PAPTE* shows the possibilities, but his recommendations are little more than acknowledged in the report.

There is an appalling lack of imagination in the projections on timber demand and supply. The Forest Service has felt a responsibility to predict a timber famine ever since Pinchot used it to establish the Forest Service. I understand that the people working on the figures this time could not see how it was possible to predict a timber famine on the basis of the data available. While I was encouraged to hope for something better, I was confident that the Forest Service would somehow manage to predict another timber famine. I regret that my confidence was vindicated. Their prediction does not come through as loud and clear as earlier outlook reports, and for their equivocation the writers were soundly castigated by the hard heads (hard hats?) in the outfit. All of this leads me to believe that the reliance on timber famine has become an article of faith, and that the purpose of scientific data is to rationalize support for the conclusions reached by faith and not to lead to rational conclusions.

But the facts are there: lots of good, useful facts, especially in *Outlook*. They are there to use. I suggest a game: take the figures and see what you can do with them. The possibilities are limitless. You have to provide your own assumptions, of course, and your answers will depend very much on your assumptions. And if you do not get the answer you want, you can always run in some new assumptions. We could go further and offer prizes for "the most imaginative," "the funniest," "the dullest," etc. Assumptions already used, no matter how badly, would not be ruled out and might even win the grand prize.

During the past year or so in papers before the Environmental Studies Board of the National Academy of Sciences and later the AAAS, I have recommended that while the Forest Service might continue to provide information in timber supply, demand data and analysis should be provided by an independent group of highly qualified scientists selected by the NAS, the AAAS, the Institute of Ecology, and perhaps the Council of Economic Advisors. By computing both supply and demand, the Forest Service can always be suspected of influencing the results in some self-seeking way. My pro-

posal was met with a considerable lack of enthusiasm by the Forest Service.

PAPTE's proposal for a National Forestry Policy Board I support wholeheartedly. As Stephen K. Bailey (in *Timber*) put it, "Forestry decisions tend to be made at too low a level in government." They are, consequently, too open to pressures and influence, and the broader problems, especially environmental concerns, get short shrift.

Mike Brewer (in *Timber*) speaks for consumers and emphasizes price in allocating forest uses. The problem is that social costs are largely ignored and many benefits are not priced. "The value of recreation and landscape protection to the people of the United States validly can be expected to increase more rapidly than the value of wood products," he predicts, and he concludes by saying, "Since we operate in the face of uncertainty, prudent policy should build safeguards so that when allocative errors occur, they occur in the direction that favors recreation and landscape protection."

Bailey (in *Timber*), speaking gently as a layman, cut the assembled foresters to the quick with his remarks:

I doubt that many of you are rapacious; but judging from some of the chapters, some of you are extraordinarily insensitive. And this insensitivity has been passed on to some policy formulators in the federal government. I find a world-view, a public-interest framework, that does enormous credit to the experts and lobbyists in the major timber and forest-products associations, but which is strangely archaic in its definitions of existing and prospective social values in this nation.

Timber has some bright spots. I recommend it for those.

Perhaps there is some encouragement to be drawn from the facts that each of these books shows concern for the environment. *PAPTE* has some good material in the appendix but pays it only lip service in the report. It expresses concern over the danger of degradation of wilderness through overuse. A few pages further it assures us that harvesting timber (including clearcutting) does not harm the site. Environmental concern even shows up in *Outlook*, for the first time, like timid Piglet in *Winnie the Pooh*. *Outlook's* origin dates back to an archaic order in the McSweeney-McNary Act of 1928 for "including . . . a . . . survey" to provide the basis "to balance the timber budget for the United States." Congress can do better than that and so can the Forest Service.

Until the Congress directs the Forest Service to provide all the information about the national forests that is needed to provide the

basis for a sound program of management of all the resources of the national forests, and until the Forest Service develops the scientific inventory needed to provide that information, we are going to keep on getting what we have been getting.

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