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FOREST UTILIZATION SERVICES¹

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Some 36 years ago the pressing importance of forest products research to the then developing national movement in forest conservation, the national scope of the problems to be solved, and the glaring deficiencies of the widely spread regional system of forest products research dictated the concentration of all forest utilization research in one central laboratory. This was accomplished by the establishment of the Forest Products Laboratory at Madison, Wisconsin in 1910. While established in cooperation with the University of Wisconsin, this laboratory is a federally owned and federally operated research laboratory. The results have amply justified the action taken in 1910, and, in its work of ascertaining the technological and scientific bases for up-to-date practices in wood utilization, the Forest Products Laboratory is considered to be without parallel. However, the physical distance of the Laboratory from many regions of the country, and the general objective that the forested resources of the various regions be more efficiently and fully utilized, have created need for a means whereby the findings of the Laboratory can be more fully and more readily disseminated and more promptly applied. At the same time, it is equally necessary that problems typical of the various forested regions be promptly brought to the Laboratory for attention and solution.

The Forest Service believes that the need in these fields can best be met by specialized utilization services in the several forested regions of the country. These utilization service units consist of competent technicians or subject-matter specialists who keep in close contact with the Forest Products Laboratory but who work in a particular region with headquarters at the Forest Experiment Stations. The function of each group is to bring to bear upon the problems of its region the findings of forest products research. These technicians study the forest resource from the point of view of converting it to useful goods and correlating such conversion with the current and future supplies of the resource. They determine locally what needs to be done to meet local problems. These problems are studied in the light of new technological developments, and problems which need solution at the Forest Products Laboratory are submitted to it for study. They suggest and participate in pilot-plant tests when research indicates a good prospective process or product is ready for development, and in general do whatever possible locally to promote an expanded and improved forest utilization. In brief, our plan is to have in each of the several regions a full and immediate service for putting the results of research to work in the development and improvement of local forest industry.

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A sound utilization program must also consider the forest itself as the source of the continuing flow of products necessary to sustain profitable forest industries. Forest transportation and cutting methods vitally affect the kind and volume of raw materials that can be harvested in the future as well as the profitableness of current operations. Utilization without regard to the requirements of the forest means destructive spoliation and ultimately stopping the flow of raw products from the forest.

For example, intensive utilization of low-grade bottom-land hardwoods in the South, unaccompanied by positive measures to renew the forest with desirable trees, will merely provide more space for a choking growth of weeds, briars, and vines. Similarly, integrated utilization in the Pacific Northwest built on Douglas-fir and accompanied by large investments in complete utilization plants and forest units organized for sustained yield will run into serious difficulties if cutting practices are not followed that will perpetuate Douglas-fir in sufficient proportion to other species.

As a part of this utilization program, therefore, it will ultimately be necessary to investigate such basic questions as:

1. For a given utilization area, what volume of forest production on a continuing basis is possible and most profitable at different intensities and methods of cutting?
2. To what extent can the species composition of the forest and the size and quality of raw products grown be modified to yield most profitable utilization?
3. In organizing currently depleted forest properties for sustained production, how and to what extent will the kind and volume of raw forest products change as the forest becomes fully productive? It is obvious that the utilization of a run-down forest currently composed of low-value trees is vastly different from that of the same forest after it has been built up to full production.

When the annual program of research for the Forest Products Laboratory is being considered, the regional forest utilization services will be represented in order that their respective regional problems will be given due consideration along with other regional problems and problems of a national character.

The local groups of forest utilization experts are expected to make use of whatever information is available from any institution engaged in forest utilization research, and not to depend solely on the Forest Products Laboratory. Therefore, they must keep fully informed as to what is being done at the various institutions engaged in forest utilization research. Thus when a local problem arises, local research agencies will be considered as well as the Forest Products Laboratory for undertaking its solution.

I must emphasize here that the establishment of these regional forest utilization services does not mean setting up regional forest products laboratories. The members of each group, stationed in their respective regions, operate from an office rather than from a local laboratory. In other words, it is not intended that these specialists operating in the field will be equipped with extensive research facilities. These men are in constant contact with the Laboratory at Madison and occasionally take training courses there. If the problem encountered is of such a highly technical character that the local consultants are unable to handle it, specialists from the Forest Products Laboratory will be called in for advice, counsel, and cooperation. Furthermore, within its field the Forest Products Laboratory is recognized as the responsible technical agency of the Forest Service. Regional service workers are accountable to the Forest Products Laboratory, through the Forest Experiment Station Director, for the technical accuracy and soundness of the information they give and of their working plans, reports, conclusions, and recommendations.

In order that the local groups may work most effectively in accomplishing their purposes they are expected to maintain the closest possible contact with regional and industrial associations and laboratories as well as with individual industrial operations.

A Federal appropriation has been made available for forest utilization service in seven regions. So far this appropriation is modest but it has enabled the employment of two or three subject-matter specialists each in the Northern Rocky Mountain region, the Pacific Northwest, California, the South, the Appalachian area, the Central States, and the Northeast. Expansion of this activity in these regions and extension of it to other regions of course depends upon the desire and will of the Congress. This service is just getting started. It is destined to fill a great need.