

An Analysis of the Opinions
of High School Students
in Oregon Toward the
Lumber Industry
by
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INTRODUCTION

Today the lumber industry is beginning to develop a program of public relations. At long last it has awakened to the benefits that can and will accrue to an industry that will devote a good deal of time, money and effort to a public relations program. It has also become aware of the evils which fall upon the industry that fails to see the value of public relations. In the last two or three years, the lumber industry has changed suddenly from a lethargic attitude to one of definite interest. They are now beginning to make a concerted attempt to build a better public opinion of the lumberman. Public opinion, however, is a thing that develops rather slowly and a good public relations program should look to the future as well as the present. Tomorrow's adult citizens are in our schools today. It is important then that the opinions now being formed in the minds of the youngsters in our schools be the right ones for they will be the nucleus of tomorrows public opinion.

Many lumber companies and associations realize this and by various means are trying to reach school children and develop a favorable opinion amongst them. This is a very commendable action and should be continued. My objective in trying to analyze the opinions of high school students is to find out just what their opinions are and with that as a basis determine where they are misinformed and then suggest some methods for building a

good opinion.

As far as I have been able to determine there has been no attempt to find out just what the students are thinking. This study is intended to bring to light a few facts that can be used as a basis for public relations work in the Oregon schools. I do not mean to infer that the present programs now under way are ill-concieved and poorly carried out simply because opinions haven't been scientifically determined beforehand. Most of the opinions and attitudes were very apparent and the remedies are obviously doing good. A study like this one, however, should form a better basis for a comprehensive program than someone's opinion of what the student opinions are.

About the only way to find out what the students are thinking is to ask them. It would have been impossible for me to go about the state interviewing individual students. My only alternative was to construct a questionnaire and send it to the students to be filled out and returned. For an amateur the construction of a questionnaire is no simple task. My initial specimen wasn't technically perfect, neither was my final one, which was the one sent out. The final questionnaire although not perfect was, I think, adequate enough to bring out a good many of the prevalent high school student opinions.

In framing the questionnaire I first decided on a number of things which I thought it would be advisable to have the opinions on. I tried to determine whether or

not the students realized the importance of the lumber industry, whether they thought it important to defense, whether there should be more governmental control of the lumber industry etc. After determining just what I wanted to know I attempted to devise a set of questions which would bring forth the opinion I wanted. The first list of questions was worked over several times after conferences with R.M. Evenden, Assistant Professor of Forestry, E.G. Mason, Acting Dean of Forestry, and Carl Salser, Dean of Education. The final questionnaire consisted of 18 questions mimeographed on a single sheet of paper. In drafting this questionnaire several things had to be considered. First of all the questions should not be leading and there should be no obvious answers. The next consideration was to make the questions definite and easily understood. Repetition was to be avoided. I attempted to form the questions so that, in the main, they could be answered by checking alternative blanks. I did this in order to make the questionnaire easy to understand and fill in rapidly. Since I was forced to enlist the aid of teachers and educators who are already busy with their own tasks for which they are paid, it was quite important that the questionnaire be as little trouble to them as possible. This is also the reason why I restricted the questionnaire to one page.

In addition to the questions, I included on this sheet a blank for the student's name, age, grade and father's

occupation. I also included a short paragraph indicating how the questions were to be answered and emphasizing that opinions only were wanted and that the questionnaire was not a test and there were no right or wrong answers.

After the questionnaire was completed the next question was where to submit it. In order to get a picture of opinions through-out the state I tried to send the questionnaires to various parts of the state. The questionnaires were submitted without special regard to size of school, courses taught, type of community, or the main source of income for the community. Both boys and girls were given questionnaires.

It might be argued that there are too many variables entering in and that in order to make the results more accurate as many things as possible should be kept equal. In other words if the paper were given only to boys who are taking the same courses in the same school whose fathers are in the same occupation, the results would be more accurate. However, it seems that the more restricted and consequently more accurate the study is the less useful it is because it applies only to a small group. For that reason, since I wanted results applicable to the entire state of Oregon, I tried to get a statewide representation. If my study were to show that nine out of ten students prefer a brick house to a wooden one it would not be safe to say that out of ten students in any one school nine will favor a brick house, however, it would be safe to say that a

Permanized

large percentage of the students through-out the state very probably prefer the brick. This I think is more important.

The questionnaires were sent to six high schools in various parts of the state. Approximately fifty questionnaires were returned from Corvallis High School, Corvallis, Oregon; Washington High School, Portland, Oregon; Medford High School, Medford, Oregon; Pendleton High School, Pendleton, Oregon; Astoria High School, Astoria, Oregon; and Union High School, Adrian, Oregon. The completed questionnaires totalled 324. A few of the questionnaires were only partially filled in and therefore total answers to many of the questions do not total up to this amount.

I

Question: What in your opinion is the most important industry in this state?

Answers: Lumber 232
Agriculture 60
Other 32

This question was framed to determine whether or not the students realized that lumber is our most important industry. The results are a little better than was expected, for certainly a large proportion of our high school students realize that lumber is important, but they are far from what they should be. If lumber is our most important industry very nearly all of the students should know it.

II

Question: List five industries you think important to National Defense.

Answers: Lumber was listed first 134 times
Lumber was listed second 69 times
Lumber was listed third 30 times
Lumber was listed fourth 23 times
Lumber was listed fifth 16 times
Lumber left off the list 30 times

The question is similar to question number one and was designed to see if the students realized lumber's importance to the war effort. It showed a fair percentage listing lumber as important but not as large a percentage as would be desirable.

III

Question (Part 1): From what you know of the past have
timber cutting practices been economical
or wasteful?

(Part 2): Are these practices being continued?

Answers:	Those answering economical to part 1	54
	continued	32
	not continued	15
	Those answering wasteful to part 1	241
	continued	124
	not continued	127

It seems from this question that the students have been rather well-informed about the unsavory past of the lumber industry. That in itself is not too bad but the fact that over half of the students who thought that the lumber industry was wasteful in the past believe it is continuing its wasteful practices is bad. It is also interesting to note that of the 54 students who believe past cutting practices to have been economical 15 believe that these practices are no longer continued.

IV

Question: Do you believe there is enough timber in this country for all future needs?

Answers: Yes 111

No 210

This question was used for several reasons. For one thing, within the forest industry picture there are conflicting opinions as to our timber supply. Forest Service officials say, and tender figures and surveys to prove it, that our timber supply is in grave danger of being exhausted. Lumbermen say, and also offer substantiating figures and surveys to prove it, that the supply is well nigh inexhaustible. Apparently the Forest Service has done a better job of telling their story in the schools.

This question is important because it concerns the future and stability of the lumber industry. If people believe that the industry is doomed to practical extinction, if they consider jobs, homes and businesses in lumber communities to be unstable they will not want to work in and support the states greatest industry. They will want to tie their future to something more stable.

It is important then to note that of the students quizzed nearly two-thirds believe that there is not enough timber in this country for future needs.

V

Question: Do you believe a genuine attempt is being made to reduce waste in logging and sawmilling?

Answers: Yes 232

No 81

This question of course is directed at the student opinion of the attempts to reduce waste in sawmilling and logging. Apparently a good many students believe that a sincere attempt is being made to reduce the waste. There remains, however, 81 out of 313 still to be convinced.

VI

Question: Do you believe that the amount of timber cut each year is more than or less than the amount replaced through planting and natural growth?

Answers: Less than 68

More than 181

About the same 69

Like the three preceding questions this one is concerned with the future of the lumber industry. Again there is disagreement as to what the right answer is. At any rate, more than fifty percent of the students believe that our withdrawals from our forests exceed the deposits.

VII

Question: Have you ever heard of a policy of selective cutting to thin out full grown trees to give young trees a better chance?

Answers: Yes 285

No 27

Do you think many lumber companies or just a few are doing this?

Answers: Many 100

Just a few 199

Do you think this is very important or not so important?

Answers: Very important 286

Not so important 15

It seems that most of the students have heard of the oft discussed selective cutting and evidently think it important that lumber companies treat the forests in this manner. Also two-thirds of them believe that only a few companies are cutting selectively. Whether or not selective cutting is important or even practical I do not know. Whether many or few companies are doing it I don't know either. I do know, however, that the people who will someday be voters, business men, housewives and office holders believe it is important. They also believe few lumber companies are doing it and therefore are neglecting an important item in the correct use of the forests. From beliefs such as these spring a public condemnation of the industry and laws restricting it.

VIII

Question: Which of the following do you think accounts
for the most of our timber losses?

Answers:	Fire	254
	Rotting	5
	Wasteful cutting	59
	Insects	6

If it does nothing else this question shows that ideas and information can be impressed upon the students by conscientious effort. For several years the Forest Service has been working to make people fire conscious. A good deal of effort was directed at the schools with lectures, films, slides, pamphlets, etc. It has evidently worked well. Witness 254 votes for fire, 59 apparently traditionally inspired for wasteful cutting and a mere 5 and 6 for rotting and insects.

IX

Question: Have you heard of any plan to scientifically replant the forests as the timber is being cut?

Answers: Yes 229

No 78

Who do you understand is sponsoring the plan?

Answers: State government 71

Federal government 154

Lumber industry as a whole 19

Individual lumber companies and associations 6

Individual lumber companies have established tree farms and are definitely interested in planting and reproduction but apparently little of this has reached school children.

X

Question: Which of these kind of houses would you rather live in?

Answers: Stucco 52

Brick 123

Wood 139

Here is a question that effects the lumberman in the place where he is most interested, his markets. Eight out of every ten American homes are built of wood but here is coming a generation in which a substantial percentage of people prefer stucco and there are almost as many who prefer brick as there are who prefer wood.

XI

Question: Do you think it would be a good idea if more processed materials made of cotton, cornstalks, etc. were used in place of wood?

Answers: Yes 205
No 100

Here is another point that is liable to hit the lumberman right in the midst of his pocketbook. The trend toward plastics and substitute synthetic materials evidently is a prevalent condition among the students as it is among their fathers and mothers.

XII

Question: In regard to wages, working conditions, etc. do you believe that lumber workers are treated better, worse, or about the same as workers in other industries during normal times?

Answers: Better 68
Worse 19
About the same 227

From this question we can judge that according to popular opinion in high schools lumber workers are treated neither better nor worse than workers in other industries. Whether or not their judgment is correct is hard to say. It is true that wages in Oregon's lumber industry have been high, well above the average. It is also true, however, that safety, placement, selection and training of personnel have been sadly neglected. One cannot compensate for the other.

Only when the industry thinks of the worker's welfare rather than only his wages can a program be instituted which will make the answers to any future questions like this one be "better" most of the time.

XIII

Question: In your opinion which of the following agencies should determine the management of privately owned forests?

Answers:	United States Forest Service	154
	Private owner	45
	State Forestry Board	119

Perhaps these answers are a reflection of the times. Governmental control has been expanding in all lines of industry and business. It is possible, however, that if these school children who will soon be expressing their opinions by means of ballot, were told of the many good things accomplished by a lumber industry entirely independent and were convinced of the capability and social responsibility of the lumberman, they would hesitate before deciding that someone else should manage his land.

XIV

Question: To what extent do you believe high school students should participate in the future development of our forests?

Answers:	A great deal	216
	Not so much	42
	A little bit	45

I asked this question to determine the amount of interest the students have in forestry, whether they are really concerned, whether they think that they should participate in the future of our forests. The results were fairly gratifying.

XV

Question: Would you like to join some sort of forestry club?

Answers:	Girls	Boys	Total
Yes	57	84	141
No	75	63	138

In this question and the three remaining ones I have tried to find out what means could be used to alter any poor opinions that were revealed by the previous questions. I felt that before any steps were taken by the industry to develop a good relationship through the establishment of forestry clubs it should be determined whether or not the students themselves would want such a club. The same reasoning applies to questions 16, 17 and 18. It seems from this question that a forestry club would not be too

popular especially with the girls. It is true, however, that in a project of this kind if it goes over well with a few, the others will change their opinion and join the group with little persuasions.

XVI

Question: Would you like to read material concerning our forests and forest industries?

Answers:	Girls	Boys	Total
Yes	89	110	199
No	45	33	78

Here again the boys seem to be a little more available. The difference is not quite as great as in the previous question, however, and if the information presented this way were done in an attractive and interesting way it would be quite effective.

XVII

Question: Would you like to see educational films about forests and forest industries?

Answers:	Yes	276
	No	13

The media of motion picture has long been used in schools as a means of building good will by many single firms, industries and organizations. Thousands of these films are shown each year and apparently are still popular and effective if well done.

XVIII

Question: Would you like to see colored slides of our
forests and forest industries?

Answers: Yes 262

No 28

The answers to this question were rather surprising, but apparently colored slides would be a very effective means of reaching high school children.

It is only fair to the reader who has gotten this far, assuming he started at the beginning and read straight through, to admit the weaknesses of this questionnaire. The first question was placed first for the specific reason of avoiding the tendency of the students to answer lumber simply because the rest of the questions were about lumber. In spite of this precaution I believe that the fact that the questionnaire was obviously about lumber had some effect on the answers. It is also true that the locality of the school and the principle occupation of the surrounding community affected the answers to questions one and two. In an agricultural community, agriculture was liable to be listed as Oregon's most important industry and listed first in the list of industries important to National Defense. The results from these two questions although not as accurate as the others, are accurate enough to point out the trend of thought.

CONCLUSION

Viewed as a whole the opinions of high school students toward the lumber industry are not good. It is important they should have a good opinion because these students are the future voters and the future consumers. It is obvious then that something should be done to change these bad opinions that we have discovered.

First of all like any other public relations program, one directed at high school students must be based on honesty and truth if it is to be successful. In other words it is fundamentally unsound to tell students that lumber workers are treated better than other workers unless it is actually true. It would be a poor policy to tell the students anything that does not have a factual basis.

The first problem then in bringing about a good opinion in the high schools is to be sure that we have a good story to tell. After we have the facts we must then find some way of giving them to the student in an interesting manner. In other words, the cake must not only have a good looking frosting to entice the first bite, it must also have something good and substantial underneath to make the biter really like the cake.

The mere making sure of a good set of facts is not enough, however, to create a good public opinion. The story must be told, and as stated before, it must be told in a manner that will be interesting to the persons we

want to know our story. The last four questions on this questionnaire were intended to discover what means of getting information to the high school students would be most acceptable to them. Of these four alternatives the use of motion pictures is apparently the best method. This, of course, does not exclude the use of printed material, slides, forestry clubs, or any other method. As a matter of fact it would probably be best to attack the problem from as many angles as possible.

The questionnaire has indicated that high school students hold opinions of the lumber industry, some of which are decidedly bad, some rather good and others which represent, more or less, the middle ground. The poor opinions must be brought up to the level of tolerance as neither good nor bad and then to a good opinion. The opinions already in the middle ground need merely to be built up to a good opinion. The opinions which are good need only reinforcing now and then to keep them there. All of these opinions need attention, the difference is merely in the respective degree of effort each one needs.

If these opinions are recognized and worked upon with a program that is interesting and attractive to the students and has an honest basis in fact tomorrow's citizen of Oregon will respect the lumber industry and the men in it. They will appreciate not only what the lumberman has done and is doing for the country but also the uses and advantages of lumber. Surely this is a goal worth working for.

Name _____ Grade _____

Father's occupation _____ Your age _____

Please indicate your answers in the blanks provided. In most cases a check mark is all that is necessary. This is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. We simply want your opinion.

- 1 What in your opinion is the most important industry in this state in normal times? _____
- 2 List five industries you think important to National Defense
a. _____ b. _____ c. _____ d. _____ e. _____
- 3 From what you know of the past, have timber cutting practices been economical? _____ or wasteful? _____
Do you think these practices are being continued? Yes _____ No _____
- 4 Do you believe there is enough timber in this country for all future needs? Yes _____ No _____
- 5 Do you believe a genuine attempt is being made to reduce waste in both logging and sawmilling? Yes _____ No _____
- 6 Do you believe that the amount of timber cut each year is more than or less than the amount replaced through planting and natural growth? Less than _____ More than _____ About the same _____
- 7 Have you ever heard of a policy of selective cutting to thin out full grown trees to give young trees a better chance? Yes _____ No _____
(If yes) Do you think many lumber companies or just a few are doing this? Many _____ Few _____
Do you think this very important or not so important?
Very important _____ Not so important _____
- 8 Which of the following do you think accounts for the most of our timber losses? Fire _____ Rotting _____ Wasteful cutting _____ Insects _____
- 9 Have you heard of any plan to scientifically replant the forests as the timber is being cut? Yes _____ No _____ (If yes, who do you understand is sponsoring the plan? State government _____ Federal government _____ Lumber industry as a whole _____ Individual lumber companies _____)
- 10 Which of these kinds of houses would you rather live in?
Stucco _____ Brick _____ Wood _____
- 11 Do you think it would be a good idea if more processed materials made of cotton, cornstalks, etc. were used in place of wood? Yes _____ No _____
- 12 In regard to wages, working conditions, etc. do you believe that lumber workers are treated better, worse, or about the same as workers in other industries during normal times? Better _____ Worse _____ About the same _____
- 13 In your opinion which of the following agencies should determine the management of privately owned forests? US Forest Service _____ Private owner _____ State Forestry Board _____
- 14 To what extent do you believe that high school students should participate in the future development of our forests? a great deal _____ not so much _____ a little bit _____
- 15 Would you like to join some sort of forestry club? Yes _____ No _____
- 16 Would you like to read material concerning our forests _____ and the forest industries? Yes _____ No _____
- 17 Would you like to see educational films about the forests and the forest industries? Yes _____ No _____
- 18 Would you like to see colored slides of our forests and forests industries? Yes _____ No _____

THANK YOU