BLACK ROCK FOREST PAPERS
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ECONOMIC RELATIONS
OF THE
BLACK ROCK FOREST

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What should be the canons of policy-making for Black Rock Forest? What are the questions which should be asked, before answers are sought?

It is to open discussion of these points that the following monograph is presented. In the course of the discussion I will have certain things to say about forestry as a field of knowledge, and forestry as a profession. This is necessary to the discussion of the problem, and I beg of my readers to understand that I intend in no way to cast aspersions upon what I consider to be a fine and hardworking group of men. To the appendix has been relegated certain material which may assist in opening up research lines suggested in the body of this paper. Discussion of the few points will be treated most lightly in the text which follows. This is emphatically a preliminary, and I hope a provocative, discussion of the subject. I shall omit the formality of definition and description of Black Rock Forest, which has been covered by Tryon.1

In descending from the sublime to the particular the choice of headings is so profuse that every explorer is bound to land in somebody’s ridiculous. This is the occupational hazard of the philosopher, however, and I won’t let it get me down. Before I start down, I want to discuss a moment on the broader aspects of our problem.

First of all, Black Rock Forest is a space on the face of the earth; it is defined by metes and bounds; it has legal existence; from the roots of the common law descend certain rights and duties associated with the ownership of real property. But quite irrespective of the judicial tradition, Black Rock Forest lies in the midst of one of the two greatest industrial areas of the world. This we tend to forget when we walk in the woods.

The nature of the location of Black Rock Forest suggests a potential social pressure not now evident, quite at variance with the tradition of ownership in fee simple absolute. This pressure may bring it to pass that Black Rock Forest’s greatest usefulness will be on a site—a site for what, in immaterial—the practical here is less important than the principle. By way of extremes may I suggest the possibilities of, (a) educational or recreational use for the growing millions of the Northeastern industrial area, spreading as they are over the improving network of roads, and (b) a use related to the national security, having to do with the proximity of West Point and the facility with which shelters could be built in advance of another war, without disturbing farms and homes.

With the eradication of space as a factor in communication and vacations, the recreational possibilities of land become limited in another meaning of that contemporary phrase, “no place to hide”. As air travel and automobiles make mockery of “new fields to conquer”, we must look down at our toes for the enjoyment of the outdoors; we must search for old fields to wander. Enjoyment of space as a macrocosm must be replaced by its enjoyment as a microcosm. It is increasingly difficult to use space or distance as a means to “get away from it all”. These factors, I submit, will increase the demand upon open lands within the Northeastern industrial orbit.

I have introduced this discussion merely to point out that there is a large field for research in the relations of forests and their administrators to the world about them. We all know that there are many uses for forest land other than the growing of trees; I won’t list them here. I shall submit merely that lines of profitable research might be directed into the legal relations of landowner and state, and the forest’s relations with groups of persons who may have interests in the land other than the primary ones of the managing forester. Unsuitable uses of forest land may pay dividends, for instance, if political support from friendly groups. This subject will not be pursued further, since the research interests of Black Rock Forest for the last twenty years have been defined as the determination of the best and quickest ways of growing commercial hardwoods. Therefore from here the discussion will be limited to problems of land-use related to resources which are (a) renewable and (b) removable. The further limitations to commercial hardwoods presents no problem. All other resources and problems are impounded in the area which is mercilessly reserved for another study.

The word “best” implies the presence of a strong dash of value-judgment. This certainly characterizes the profession of forestry; every forester holds strong opinions concerning what is “good” forestry, and what “should” be done in a given situation, sometimes perhaps finding himself at odds with democratic expressions of opinion. But a strong sense of mission and organizational morale make the profession one of the most interesting for the student of such phenomena, and the profession’s chief locus operandi, the United States Forest Service, is consequently a model of integrity and effectiveness. It is beyond the realm of forestry, but it would be an excellent problem for a political scientist to explore the clash between the uncompromising idealism of the Forest Service and perfectly legitimate contrary opinions from the body politic or from other branches of the national security, having to do with the proximity of West Point and the facility with which shelters could be built in advance of another war, without disturbing farms and homes.

Use of the word “quickly” opens up a very large and very serious area of thought. Unfortunately, today’s mature hardwoods germinated while Booth was plotting the assassination of Lincoln. Thus to be “commercial”, a forestry project has to be allowed a very long period.
in which to pay off. No matter how much cost-cutting and minor salable wood products can be culled from a great many such forests, the really recoverable material is very slow indeed. Let us see what is involved here.

Now begin the long-term plan that has taken the very serious mater of uncertainty. I use this term advisedly, to include everything that can happen to keep a forestier’s plans from moving forward as expected. For example, in Europe; property rights and social relations have had a stability that has outlasted wars and social upheavals. Towns have been in the same places for centuries and taxes for centuries. The complex and costly policies and conditions have changed slowly, but not greatly, across the century. In our society, of course, the present day is the age of change. The long-term nature of the business results in large and very resistant to change. In the United States, the pace of change is high and the effects of change are large. In the future, the pace of change is likely to be even higher.

What is the best way to manage a forest? The United States would settle down into a peaceful world of fixed status at the turn of the century, and again there was hope during the hard times. We now live in a time of economic uncertainty, and that uncertainty will persist. If there is any one thing of which we can be sure in our own future, it is that the fores on of change in our lives are just getting up steam. It is hard to conceive of a better society in which to establish forest management which depends upon stability and predictability for long periods into the future.

Sustained-yield management, defined as long-run plans for production of logs or major forest products over an extended period of time, is something that is not only expensive but very unprofitable to forest enterprises; other industries may prosper with more serious problems. The basic difference is that what one comes to a real problem in forest management, with actual prices and costs, the conclusion becomes unavoidable that forestry is a safe investment in the long run; it is in the short run that they will be in a position to pay what we ask for them. In short, we don’t know what that demand for forest products will be at any level of assumed prices. We don’t know what will happen to the price of lumber, and in any case the costs of forest management are likely to be much higher. We know that this country’s industry is adept at shifting to new materials when they appear slightly more economical.

Altogether too much has been written in the national and international forestry press of an "unassisted demand" for lumber. This is prominent as well material presented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Much is made of the international "demand" for forest products, but little said of the foreign exchange crisis in the United States. The foreign exchange crisis is a serious blow to sales abroad. The export market is the largest single source of revenue for most forest products managers. The declines in the export markets are significant and will persist. A change in the export market will be equivalent to a change in the domestic market. The long-term future of forest products is inextricably linked to the fortunes of the foreign market.

In conclusion, it is clear that the future of forest products is uncertain and unpredictable. The uncertainty is high and the effects of change are large. In the future, the pace of change is likely to be even higher. The best way to manage a forest is to establish forest management which depends upon stability and predictability for long periods into the future.
for gear-work and rules of thumb, but this is for the
to the alternative to recognizing the difficulties of the
tion of which it doesn’t believe.

In short, I suggest that forest managers should make
plans for no more than ten years ahead, probably;
general plans for 20 years may be ok for small
areas for no more than twenty-five years. And even
more. I think, that foresters would earn more respect from the
harder-headed public if they would ad-
vice if they would condense their advice to themes such
as these. Note, if you please, Rawlings comment 4 that in
his area the average tenure of land under forestry is
seventy years. Unrecorded investments might be ner-
occupied by the next occupant, but will it next occupant be will-
ing to take over a complex management plan in mid-
stream? What of the land that is rented? Half
the farms in the nation are rented, and the census has been for
one third of the tenants to move every year. What
That this imply for farm forestry?

I have completed the argument; now for the appli-
ation. What should Black Rock Forest learn to do in the face of these
problems?

I submit that Black Rock Forest should learn more of its
neighborhood, in terms of interest in forestry. We
know that farms and farming have been abandoned, but
we don’t know much about land-use for which persons hold land, the size of the blocks, the possi-
bilities for forest activity. If there has been a surv-
over of these matters, I haven’t been able to learn of it. It
is a proper responsibility of the School of Forestry to
inform the State and local agencies of these problems
—but their answers to my letters have not indicated much
activity along these lines. So, I am looking upon the future, and little of the real
needs in the area. I submit that since we can expect the
Forest to best leave the settlement of these problems to
agencies charged with the responsibility to
respond to these uncertainties as data of its problem, and devote
its energies to the one factor most surely fixed—pure
science.

I’m sure that there’s lots to be learned about how
groves grow; lots that could be learned which is of
no immediate importance, yet which will be of fundamental
importance in the unknown future. Perhaps some day
the Forest will contribute to the welfare of the world by
sponsoring study of the respiration of the scarred wood. We
don’t know what will be ‘practical’ in the fu-
ture, even the quite near future. So, I suggest concen-
tration upon pure knowledge, let us say to the extent
of seventy percent of the research budget. The remain-
er of the budget might then be used for applying what
is known of the world so far. I even go so far as to suggest that it might be wise to allow others to come
to the Forest with problems as they see them, rather than to think up a reform and to try to peddle
it. This is pretty far from forest-idealism, but I think it
is common sense. I would not preach forestry to peo-
ple as an abstract virtue; I would let its imminent
merits sell it. Above all, in this ad hoc forestry pro-
gram, I would be ready to change signals with every
new incense in the wage-rate of unskilled labor, and with every new extension of the tax base for
philanthropy. I don’t think Black Rock Forest should ever be ex-
pected to pay its own way. To make it so would be
impossible since the reality goes way beyond the period.

Paying its way would prove only that a forest of
size and in those conditions can pay its way in the pres-
cent. The present is the most temporary short period, and there are
few, if any, similar blocks of land with similar con-
ditions. But to use the resources for pure research in
forest biology, and to have a belt forfty years to
be applied to any forest stand in the neighborhood with
appropriate trimming to meet local conditions—this
makes sense. Further, this makes so much sense that
the necessary funds should be forthcoming from agen-
cies and institutions and just plain people interested in
having the problems solved.

Possibilities for ad hoc short-run adaptations of
forest knowledge are well enough known to all of us. There’s farm forestry— In which it must be remen-
tioned that the national and state forestry depart-
ments— The forest is small, very important plans are under way at the Littauer Center in
Cambridge. I urge your collaborating with this group
in any excursions into farm forestry research or waste-
land forestry research emanating from Black Rock For-
est.
Marketing of forest products is not a proper area for
Black Rock Forest activity; this is taken care of under the Forest Practice Act. Building and locating
wood-working industries is similarly a State responsibil-
ty; the State College of Forestry has written me that a new list of wood-working industries is on its way. There
are neophyte possibilities of hardwood pulp, and of
using whole hardwoods in making roofing paper. There’s
even the talk about livestock feed from sawdust. All
this is in the province of the Northeastern Wood Utili-
ization Council in New Haven. That’s the picture as I see it, and I’d like to close with a final comment from Gifford Pinchot,

[Text continues]