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How to Save Southern Ontario's Woodlots

By M. D. KIRK, R.P.F.

"As the hardwood famine in Southern Ontario becomes more pressing, many wood-using industries will either relocate in other hardwood producing areas or simply close down."

Abstract

Farm woodlots are the principle source of quality hardwoods on which many wood-using industries of Southern Ontario and the St. Lawrence Valley depend. They are now seriously depleted to the point of exhaustion. The economic consequences will be felt most in regions where the influx of other industry is insufficient to absorb the slack. To avert this trend, a system of astringent controls over the privately owned woodlots is recommended.

Résumé

Comment sauver les boisés du Sud de l'Ontario

Les boisés de ferme demeurent la source principale de bois francs de qualité dont plusieurs industries des bois dépendent, dans le Sud de l'Ontario et la Vallée du Saint-Laurent. Le déboisement de ces terres est tel que l'épuisement approche. On ressentira les ré-

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percussions économiques de ce fait, surtout dans les régions où l'implantation d'autres industries est insuffisante pour remédier à la baisse de l'activité. Pour parer à cette situation, il semble recommandable d'établir un système de contrôle sévère à l'égard des boisés privés.

The thousands of private woodlots in Southern Ontario are still an important source of wood for the hardwood-using industries of the Province. No other region of Canada grows such a variety of high-grade hardwood close to both industry and market. Despite the importance of these woodlots to our economy, they continue to decline steadily in productivity. This decline is due to the absence of even the most rudimentary forestry practice in a majority of the woodlots, and to the absence of government controls to ensure their proper management.

It is not necessary to more than mention the auxiliary benefits of some forest cover in the agricultural region, such as run-off control, oxygen production, recreation and aesthetics.

These are well known to "Chronicle" readers. Such values are not generally threatened at this time, since woodlands are no longer disappearing. In fact, in some areas they are expanding. The crux of the problem lies in the bare truth that privately owned woodlots are to a great extent no longer producing the quality of logs now demanded almost exclusively by woodworking industries. This shortage is reflected in the dependence of some industries upon the hardwoods of Algonquin Park. The extensive timbered areas adjoining the Park and south of it no longer produce sufficient volumes of good grade sawlogs.

Most wood-using industries locate their plants where the raw materials grow, since timber is bulky and heavy. As the hardwood famine becomes more pressing, many of these industries will either relocate in other hardwood producing areas, (if there are any left not utilized) or simply close down (Figure 1). In spite of the many substitutes for wood in the furniture industry, the demand for hardwood increases. People want wood, and the shortage of supply is accelerating price increases.

Southern Ontario's economy may be booming, but many wood-using industries are located in those regions of Ontario that have escaped the post-war expansion. The family owned plant, employing local labour, does not tend to diversify. It simply folds. The owners have accumulated sufficient capital to survive, but unemployment or migration face the skilled and semi-skilled workers. Annual economic reports from less industrialized regions of Ontario usually note the closing or departure of one or two wood-using industries each year. The writer knows of two major wood-users in his locality with payrolls totalling 800. Having no timber limits or company owned woodlands, their dependence on exhausted farm woodlots will eventually

force upon them a sad day of reckoning — whether to import American logs or to pick up and move. American directors of branch plants may naturally be directed to big stocks of quality hardwoods in United States.

All this need not happen. The neglect of the past will last for many years, but considering the high growth-rate and great potential of our upland hardwoods, astringent controls can forestall the worst economic consequences, while giving the woodlots time to re-stock (Figures 2 and 3).

By pin-pointing briefly the various malpractices that have reduced the productivity of Southern Ontario's woodlots, a plan of action can be formed.

Fig. 2. Southern Ontario's hardwood bush, which can be a continuous source of high grade logs.

Fig. 1. A 400 man payroll could vanish if this woodusing plant, lacking its own timber limits, is forced out of business by shortage of raw material.

Fig. 3. After intelligent removal of mature trees, the young growing stock will mature quickly.

Most foresters who are still reading this article will recognize the old familiar refrain, but it still rings true.

Livestock grazing of woodlots is so extensive that surveys made by the Ontario Government's Conservation Authorities Branch in agricultural areas report that three quarters of the woods suffer in varying degrees from this abuse (Figure 4). Restocking of quality species is poor to absent in these woodlots (Figure 5). The present-day farmer, plagued by labour shortage and depressed prices, has little incentive to fence out the cattle (Figure 6).

The new agro-businessman generally does not consider the woodlot sufficiently rich in annual yield to merit much attention. Current changes in the economic base of agriculture will not help the woodlots. Fences decay, cattle enter hitherto ungrazed woodlots and destroy good regeneration.

Destructive logging, without regard for a future crop, is an old vice recently given new impetus. The

Fig. 4. Three quarters of our farm woodlots are pastured to a damaging degree. (Photo by Conservation Authorities Branch)

Fig. 5. Intensive grazing permitted only ironwood regeneration to succeed the intensive cut. Grass inhibits regeneration of valuable species from remaining seed trees.

Fig. 6. Years of grazing meant the end of this woodlot, when the mature trees were cut.

Fig. 7. Carelessly used mechanical equipment has destroyed much of the young growing stock in this hardwood bush.

high price of labour and the increasing mechanization of all operations has brought mechanical extraction to the woodlot — wheeled skidders, swamp buggies (Figure 7). Some vendors of this equipment go so far as to claim that selective logging no longer pays — no longer pays immediate dividends, that is. There are few wood jobbers making money today who do not employ these machines in a destructive manner. Immature trees are left after logging with broken tops, stripped bark and damaged roots, so that the chances of economic maturation in the lower diameter classes of mixed-age hardwoods are very poor (Figure 8). The aesthetics of such practices are to be questioned, in a country-side increasingly valuable for scenery and recreation. Here is a direct application of Stuart Udall's remark that we are sacrificing long term environmental health for short term profit.

Fig. 8. Regeneration will be slow where the damaged trees remain to shade the ground.

Fig. 9. High grading has left a stock of noncommercial trees preventing adequate regeneration.

High-grading is practised more intensively than ever, although this custom is as old as commercial logging in Southern Ontario. As industries demand a higher grade of log, the woodlands are combed for superior trees. Those trees which would not meet the standards set at the mill or factory are left standing, since fuelwood is no longer in demand. The defective trees shade the ground and inhibit the development of the next crop of timber (Figure 9). Many of those green and pleasant woodlots seen from a car window are non-productive.

The system of timber sales from privately owned woodlands remains unchanged, and is highly prejudicial to the practice of forestry. The busy understaffed landowner can no longer employ his sons or neighbours to log the woods in winter (Figure 11).

The woods are sold on the stump to the highest

bidder. Bidding is now so competitive that the successful tenderer must extract every stick at the maximum speed to show a margin of profit. In many cases, a farmer witnessing the rape of his woodlot reflects that he is taking the first step in his migration to the town.

A more recent development is the hobby landowner from the city, who will not risk the reduction of his amenity by allowing a logger in his woodlot. The mature trees do not reach the market where they are needed.

Profit from the regular sale of timber is classed as taxable income, but the outright sale of the woodlot to a wood-jobber is classed as nontaxable capital gain. This clause in the Federal Income Tax Act has for decades militated against the conscientious woodlot owner who wishes to apply some forestry, and has been the chagrin of professional foresters since the nineteen twenties. Numerous representations to Ottawa have never changed this

Fig. 10. Many green and pleasant woodlots seen from a car window are not growing much timber.

Fig. 11. In former years logs were snaked out by team, causing minimal damage during extraction to the young growing stock.

harmful policy, and it stands today as a reflection on the forester's professional influence.

It can be seen that powerful economic forces outweigh any strides made in forestry education or extension services on the public. Obviously, we have quite a mess on our hands, the weakest sector in the resource management spectrum.

If the thousands of acres of private woodlands in Southern Ontario were owned and managed by one company or government agency, application of good forestry practices would be largely a matter of staff and administration. This is an idle supposition, for these woodlands are in the hands of thousands of small landowners, and will continue to be so in the foreseeable future.

Two excellent attempts are being made by public agencies to maintain a supply of timber in Southern Ontario. Both efforts fall far short of the needs.

Ontario's Department of Lands & Forests initiated the Woodlot Improvements Act of 1966, providing incentive for landowners to manage their woods and to plant open areas in trees. Through long term agreements, the Department will manage existing woodlands and will furnish and plant trees (largely conifers) on open areas. This Act affects only a small percentage of landowners at the moment. Many will remain indifferent to the opportunity, and no government could afford the great staff required to service a majority of woodlot owners, should they wish to come under agreement.

Initially, the Counties were encouraged by the Ontario Government to acquire land suitable for forestry purposes. As the Conservation Authorities grew, they added rapidly to the stock of public forest land. Today, some 225,000 acres of County and Authority lands are managed under long-term agreements by the Department of Lands and Forests. Nonetheless, this sizeable acreage represents only a small proportion of the total woodlands of Southern Ontario. Escalating land prices are bringing to a standstill further expansion of Agreement Forests. In addition, the expense of managing these forests intensively by government staff may not survive a cost-benefit analysis. Perhaps intensive forest management is best conducted by private enterprise.

In the free-enterprise Canadian economy, controls are not popular. Yet they exist. If most citizens were confronted with a choice between controls or the loss of an industry, they would choose controls. If we wish to restore the productivity of southern woodlands, and quickly, we shall require more forceful measures than cash incentives, extension services, voluntary associations, or public education.

In the near future, Regional Governments may be established throughout Ontario. Private woodland regulations could be applied through this tier of government, from policies enacted at Provincial level.

Plan of Action

1. All woods operators should be licensed, and all timber sales should be registered at the local Registry Offices.

2. Regional Government cut-control officers should be appointed, and vested with powers to enforce proper cutting practices. They must be empowered to revoke licenses where proper cutting practices are not observed, whether the woods be owner-cut or jobber-cut. Similar recommendations have already been made by the O.P.F.A. to the Lands & Forests Study Unit. Felling licenses are required on private lands in Germany and Britain based on national interest.
3. The cut-control or forestry officer (call him what you may) must be able to cope with the vital issue of the fencing of woodlands from livestock. Powers of enforcement can be combined with financial incentives such as are already supplied by the Department of Agriculture toward farm pond construction, fence-bottom removal and municipal drains. There is ample precedent in our land-use policies to support this measure.
4. Present diameter limit bylaws passed in some Counties under the aegis of the Provincial "Trees Act" could be scrapped, once new legislation becomes law. These bylaws are not considered good forestry, and their lack of enforcement in some Counties has been a bit of a joke. Nevertheless they have saved many a woodlot from total destruction.
5. After, and only after, the necessary control of private woodlots is in hand, should we promote industries that utilize low-grade timber to set up in Southern Ontario. There have been some glaring examples here and in the Maritimes, where consumers of low-grade wood have led to the devastation of woodlands, due to absence of cut controls.

Fig. 12. Clear cutting of upland hardwoods in the past has left only poor coppice regeneration, which seldom produces a commercial sawlog. Industries utilizing low grade hardwood without concurrent controls have turned the clock back.

6. The presence of cut controls will force manufacturers of logging machinery to develop smaller, more sophisticated units, and at the same time force operators into more careful use of logging machinery, with less damage to young growth.
7. When a capital gains tax comes with the revised tax structure, the prejudicial effects of the present Income Tax on timber sales will likely disappear. We can only hope so.

It might be encouraging to those in our government structures who are fearful of an outcry against cut controls on private lands to know that most owners and woods operators will welcome regulations. All will be made equal on the market place. Without controls, both good and bad operators will

eventually go under, along with the woodusing industries, if the source of raw material disappears.

Senior Governments often exhibit a conditioned reflex to public problems by calling for research and investigation, even though the conditions and solutions are well known to those who encounter the problems daily. Len Webster, writing in "Water and Pollution Control" magazine, says —

"to commence a research and study is far easier than evolving corrective or punitive legislation and trying to get it through the various legislative houses, or attempting to put together a group of practical minded people intent on getting things done."

Let us hope that the official reaction to the current woodlot crisis will be one of positive action. There really isn't much time.

The Need to Establish a National System of Natural Forested Areas

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Abstract

"... There is a need for, and indeed there will have to be, some type of national coordination in the choice and maintenance of the forested natural areas."

Since there is no national system of recognizing, preserving and registering undisturbed examples of the different types of forest cover in Canada, it is proposed that the Canadian Institute of Forestry initiate such a system, similar to one established by the Society of American Foresters many years ago in the United States. The system could be set up in cooperation with the Regional Panels of the International Biological Programme — Conservation of Terrestrial Communities Subcommittee (IBP-CT). It is suggested that if foresters do not take the initiative, other groups will, and some of the results may not be pleasing to foresters.

Résumé

Nécessité d'établir un réseau national de surfaces boisées naturelles

Comme il n'existe aucun système national pour reconnaître, enregistrer et conserver des exemples intacts des différents types de groupements végétaux forestiers au Canada, on propose que l'Institut Forestier du Canada mette en marche un tel système, semblable à celui que la Société des Forestiers Américains établit il y a plusieurs années aux Etats-Unis. Le système pourrait être instauré en coopération avec les sections régionales du Programme International de Biologie, sous-comité de la Conservation des Communautés Terrestres (IBP-CT). On dit même que si les forestiers ne prennent pas l'initiative, d'autres groupes le feront et certains résultats pourraient bien déplaire aux forestiers.

At the moment there is no one Canadian reference or organization to turn to when looking for specific examples of certain types of forest. Even if by chance you do know the location of a certain type or stand, or know somebody who knows where there is one, there is a fair chance it may have been recently cut, burnt or disturbed. If Canadian foresters find it difficult to locate certain types of forest, think how much more difficult it is for scientists, naturalists, visiting foresters and students to find examples, on the ground, of the types of forests they read about in books.

Why Natural Areas?

Why should foresters and scientists be interested in setting aside natural areas? The following are some of the main reasons: —

Natural areas are valuable as:

(1) Living museums of primeval nature, maintaining the complex environment necessary for survival of equally complex living forms, in a world whose current tendencies are to destroy, modify and simplify all that is not immediately useful to man. The diversity of life in the natural biota is a national and international treasury.

(2) Outdoor laboratories for study of natural phenomena by biologists, wild-life specialists, soil scientists, micro-climatologists, geomorphologists, and many other research workers. Such studies will serve the dual purposes of pure science and resource management.

(3) Outdoor classrooms, for the education and aesthetic appreciation of the increasing numbers