

Comments

Tree Planters' Notes

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Editor-in-chief: Rebecca Nisley

Advisory editors: James Barnett, Steven Grossnickle, Robert Karrfalt, Thomas Landis, Clark Lantz, Robert Mangold, John Mexal, Kenneth Munson, and Ronald Overton

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Cover: Fir and aspen, Grand Mesa National Forest, Colorado (Photograph by R. E. Grossman, USDA Forest Service).

Will We Run Out of Wood in the South?

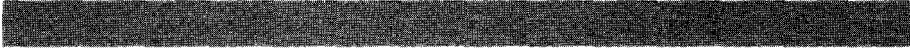
Less and less timber has been cut on federal lands in the last few years due to the current cloudy climate of environmental and political controversy. As a result, forest industries are producing more wood from fewer acres and many non-industrial private forest (NIPF) landowners nationwide are responding to this opportunity by "cashing in" their timber to take advantage of high prices. Currently, in the South, stumpage prices are at an alltime high and reports of over \$500 per thousand board feet of pine timber are not uncommon. Can NIPF landowners help meet this demand for timber without compromising good forest management principles and long-term productivity? *Will they have the foresight to make the down payment on the next harvest by following good reforestation practices?*

Fewer and fewer harvested acres in the South are being replanted— acreage figures have been decreasing steadily over the last 6 years. Currently only 50% of the NIPF acres harvested are replanted (source: Southern Group of State Foresters). In some states, only 20 to 30% of these acres are replanted! Current reforestation rates must be increased if a reliable longterm timber supply is to be assured from southern forests. *This is not just a regional issue but one with national and global consequences.* Our industrialized society has a large appetite for wood products. Just as a sharp reduction in timber harvest on federal lands in the West caused a sharp increase in harvests in the South, a reduced supply of southern timber will cause a shift in focus to other regions or to tropical forests, which are already under great pressure.

Although natural regeneration will keep many acres in production, often these areas will never reach their full potential. Natural seeding from residual and adjacent seed trees often results in low-quality trees, whereas planting genetically improved seedlings would result in 10 to 15% more wood per acre per year than allowing natural regeneration to reforest these lands. In areas where there is no natural seed source present, harvested acres left unplanted will quickly revert to "brush fields." Low-quality hardwoods, greenbrier, honeysuckle, and/or kudzu will take over, requiring substantial site preparation work before productive trees can be reestablished. This situation results in delayed production as well as additional cost.

Thus, there are economic, environmental, and silvicultural reasons for aggressively replanting harvested acreage in the South. Avoiding any future "timber shortfalls" will require a well-coordinated effort by the entire forestry community in two areas:

- Educating NIPF landowners
- Fine-tuning the reforestation system



Educating NIPF landowners is a continuing challenge to state service foresters, extension foresters, county agents, forestry consultants, and industrial "landowner assistance program" foresters. Information can be transferred via workshops, shortcourses, field days, demonstration plantings, and publications. One of the most effective methods is a demonstration area where local landowners can see the results of good reforestation work accomplished by one of their neighbors.

"Fine-tuning" the reforestation system requires teamwork and coordination within the organization. Any system is only as effective as its weakest link. Neither the tree improvement workers, nor nursery workers, nor managers work independently. All groups must work together as a team for the most effective results. An estimate of accomplishment such as plantation survival often serves to focus attention on the need for teamwork.

Likewise, there must be continued and intensified cooperation among forestry organizations. Reforestation accomplishments in the South have come about through the spirit of teamwork developed through the federal and state reforestation programs, the industrial landowner assistance programs, and the nursery and tree improvement cooperatives. Technical assistance provided by the state forestry agencies to NIPF landowners is a critical link in the reforestation system. Often the county forester is the only local professional source of information on species, seed source, and reforestation techniques available to the NIPF landowner. Likewise, the seedling storage and delivery system is unique to the state forestry agencies and it is essential for maximum seedling survival and growth. When all of the local forestry agencies work together as a team, everyone will benefit, including the landowners, the logging or site preparation contractors, forest industries, the local economy, and the state forestry agencies-as well as the resource itself. *Let's all work together to help provide a continued supply of high-quality timber in the future!*

Clark Lantz
USDA Forest Service
Cooperative Forestry
Atlanta, GA

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Note: Our concept of this editorial space is that it should be a place to publish opinions and ideas relating to the reforestation profession. We invite you to submit ideas for commentaries. The views expressed here are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the *Tree Planters' Notes* editorial staff, the Forest Service, or the U.S. Department of Agriculture.