

Current Forestry Concerns in Canada

by Teja Singh



Forestry is Canada's largest industry. It is the major contributor to Canada's balance of trade, bringing in about \$13 billion (Canadian) each year from exports. The annual domestic and foreign sales of forest products total nearly \$25 billion (Canadian) in trade and provide about one million jobs. Revenues from forestry exceed the combined net contributions from agriculture, mining, petroleum fuels and fisheries.

There is an ever growing concern, however, that this valuable natural resource of Canada is showing a steady decline in productivity. The forest-related industries are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain the needed raw resources from readily accessible locations—something that had long been taken for granted. The commonly held notion that forests are an inexhaustible renewable resource of Canada is fast changing over most of the country.

Canada's national elections in September 1984 ushered a Conservative government into power in Ottawa. The new Government has focussed on current concern over forestry to some extent. It was more than 18 years ago that Canada last had a separate Department of Forestry at the federal level. In the intervening years the highest representation for the forestry portfolio was rarely even that of an assistant deputy minister in charge of forestry. The new Government's concern about the rapidly depleting forestry resource has now resulted in appointment of a Minister of State for Forestry. This is partly due to the opinions expressed by important bodies like the Science Council of Canada which recommended, in 1983, the upgrading of forestry to a federal ministry of its own. Other important recommendations of the Council included the nine points which follow.

1. The federal government should commit resources to rebuild the long-term R&D (research and development) capability of the Canadian Forestry Service with annual budget increases of 10 per cent in real terms until an appropriate level of research has been achieved.

2. The Canadian Forestry Service should assume leadership in research

and encourage greater participation by provinces, universities and industry.

3. Priority in research should be given to three areas: basic research, forest production, and forest protection. In particular, basic research should be conducted in biotechnology, genetic engineering and forest genetics; tree physiology; ecosystem functioning; and soil chemistry. Under research in forest production, major efforts should be directed toward techniques of reforestation and intensive stand management; harvesting and mechanization of silviculture; and forecasting techniques. Forest protection research should emphasize overall strategy and tactics to reduce reliance on chemical pesticides; and studies are needed of fire behavior as well as development of systems for forest fire management.

4. Federal-provincial roles in research related to forestry and forest management need to be clarified by finalizing federal-provincial agreements with all the provinces.

5. Federal-provincial agreements should be used to stimulate greater provincial and industrial investment in research.

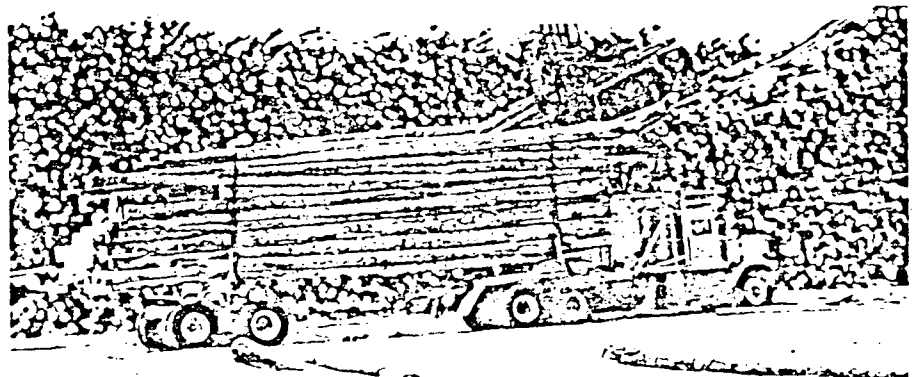
6. A mechanism should be established to set regional priorities in research needs and to coordinate the na-

tional research effort across the spectrum of forestry.

7. Development of forestry schools should be aided to enable the Canadian universities to produce the needed quality professionals. This can be accomplished by increasing block grants from the Canadian Forestry Service to the schools and making the grants available over several years. Greater interaction between government laboratories and the forestry schools will also aid in their development.

8. Long-term funding of university research for forestry in all sectors should be assured. This can be achieved by providing sufficient funding for new chairs in forestry at the universities; by permitting federal scientists to participate in teaching and in transfer of research results; by providing more, and larger, scholarships, fellowships and assistantships to improve the quality of research; by increasing the amount of grants available on a competitive basis for forestry research; and by allowing for increased hiring of forestry students for research work in the summer.

9. A renewable resources management grants selection committee should



be established under the Forestry Development Program in order to stimulate research that is related to advanced practices in forest management.

The Science Council believes that the prospects are good for implementation of its suggested remedial actions. The Council has stated that, "fortunately, there are both solutions and a growing realization of the urgent need to act. Industry and government are recognizing the need for better management of this renewable resource. New attitudes, like those of the farmer toward crop lands, are developing....The need for scientific silviculture, much like scientifically based agriculture, is beginning to be appreciated." Even with these positive signs, however, the Science Council insists that a definite action is needed now more than ever before.

According to Gerald Merrithew, the Minister of State for Forestry, forest renewal is a major problem which the federal and provincial governments, and the private sector, must start dealing with immediately. In his view, "An awful lot of land in Canada is not sufficiently restocked....We have to do something or we're not going to have the resource 20 years down the road."

Is this the beginning of a new era in forestry renewal and research in Canada? The signals from Ottawa and the provincial governments confirm the determination of all to improve the existing and future quality of available forest resources. Only concrete, well-thought-out and positive strategies will provide reliable solutions to the problems facing this vital sector of the Canadian economy.

At present there is only one forester

engaged primarily in forest management per 380,000 hectares (approximately 939,000 acres) of forest land in Canada. This compares with one professional forester per 15,000 hectares (37,000 acres) in Scandinavia and the U.S.A. By the time a better ratio is attained in Canada, the ratio in these countries will have improved to about 10,000 hectares (24,700 acres) per forester. These and other indicators of forest training, research and management have to be improved to rectify the past shortcoming and misuse.

REFERENCES

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