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A VISIT TO THE WHITE MOUNTAIN
NATIONAL FOREST

a statement by William L. Hall

In October 1954 the writer again visited the White Mountains, after an absence of some thirty-seven years. He wanted to see the changes that have taken place and he was not disappointed. From the few thousand acres which had been acquired in 1917 the Federal ownership had increased to some 722,000 acres. Most of the Forest is in New Hampshire but several thousand acres are in Maine.

1917

By the courtesy of Lawrence W. Rathbun, Forester of the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests and members of the U. S. Forest Service personnel, he had the pleasure traveling a large part of the road system of the Forest, under most favorable weather conditions. Even the hurricane, Hazel, brought only a night of heavy rainfall, with little or no damage to the Forest.

One of the first notable improvements to attract my attention was the excellent system of highways traversing the Forest. It was possible to see many of the more interesting areas of the Forest under favorable weather conditions, without hurrying too much. The road system of the Forest is a most important feature, as viewed by this observer. It affords access to much of the lower portions of the tributaries of the important rivers which have their origin in the higher mountains. These roads are maintained in excellent condition. Everywhere the roadside scenery is pleasing and in places it is truly lovely. In certain places the white birches completely arch the roadways to form a scene of incomparable beauty and charm. The forest, extending back from the roads, is attractive too, especially to one who enjoys a forest that is well-cared for. That is strikingly true of the roadside views of the White Mountain National Forest.

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A second important feature is the present condition of the forest. The fire scars of forty years ago have disappeared. The ground is well-covered with young timber, with many trees of small merchantable size. There has been a striking change in the composition of the timber stands, as a result of the treatment they have received. It was evident that much cutting had been done. The rough or damaged old trees which were prominent in the stands when I saw them last are gone. Probably some of them could be used in later cuttings, others were deadened and had fallen. Anyhow they are not there now.

With the old, rough trees disposed of and the area protected from fire the stands now appear to be in excellent condition for growth. The stands however, so far as this observer noted, are quite complicated, with many species represented. Both hardwoods and conifers are present. Of hardwoods birch, beech and maple are to be noted. In softwoods pines, spruces and firs are present almost everywhere. Because of so many species the stands in many places are quite complex. This condition probably intensifies the management problems. It may be presumed that the early cuttings will remove some of the hardwoods in order to give the conifers a chance for further growth and development. It is assumed that the conifers will eventually develop into stands of high value.

The hardwoods appeared to be growing faster than the conifers but the conifers seem to be holding on. Whether the conifers will in time overgrow the hardwoods at present seems uncertain. This writer is of the opinion that generally they will. Management will have much influence on the outcome. The conifers being quite shade-enduring will hold on and grow slowly. The hardwoods will grow more rapidly and before many years pass will become merchantable and in part, can be removed, giving the conifers the sunlight they need to become the dominant factor in the stand, as the original forest indicated.

It is probable that the foresters of the White Mountain area even now know well the procedure that can best be followed to advance the stands in volume and value. The writer did not have opportunity to discuss this phase of management with the personnel of the Forest. His chief impression was that it will be a very interesting problem for foresters to work out.

Advancement of industry, making use of wood as a raw material, in the White Mountain area, is impressive. Industry appears to be making steady development. That of course means increase of population and development of new sources of income. It all contributes to steady, sound ~~development.~~ ^{expansion} development. This influence centering in the White Mountains and adjacent areas appears to be extending in all directions.

~~Industries are developing,~~ Population is increasing. Forest fires on the National Forest to a large extent are being controlled, educational facilities are steadily expanding as are the churches and other public activities. In every way it appears that sound regional development is going on and will long continue.

These are secondary developments resulting from the Weeks Law. They were not foreseen when the proposed legislation was being urged on Congress. They are now commanding a great deal of attention.

Development of the National Forest

An office statement by the Forest Supervisor in 1952 gave the bare purchase price of the lands and timber for the White Mountain National Forest as of June 1951 as \$5,489,325. Adding to this the costs of purchase, such as cruising timber, title clearance and surveys, plus expenditures for structures, roads and other facilities, the capital investment would amount to some ten million dollars.

The report further states: "Even though it is more or less taken for granted, water is pretty certainly the most important product of the area.

Flowing out in all directions, either on the surface or through the ground, it is the very lifeblood of interior and surrounding communities. The report further states 'The local Forest force has been able to map and otherwise record all the known municipal and community domestic water developments on and around the Forest, mostly surface developments. The investment totaled 3,482,000 dollars.'

"This is entirely additional to the influence on the flow of navigable rivers which in large part have their headwaters in the White Mountain area, namely the Connecticut, Saco, Merrimac and Androscoggin river systems. The protection of these watersheds was the constitutional basis of the Weeks Law." Before final passage however the Weeks Act was expanded to cover the entire United States, and was based wholly on the protection of the watersheds of navigable streams.

Response to Great Attractions

The Forest itself with the good road system penetrating it is an attraction of great importance. A few hours travel with stops here and there will give some idea of what the White ^{Mountain} National Forest looks like. It shows what can be done on almost any forest by right treatment. The White Mountain National Forest is a good example which anyone who visits that area can see.

Another phase to this attraction is the building of summer homes on the highways near the Forest. This tendency is very impressive to one who knew the locality years ago but had not seen it for a long time.

The Forest Service does not permit private developments on the National Forest. It feels that the wisest course is to permit no occupancy that might cause contamination of the waters that flow out of the National Forest. This means a great deal, for an enormous volume of pure water flows out of that area. Even now it flows out in great volume through pipelines. This supply

of pure water will without doubt come to be used in great volume and be extended to many areas of New England and serve millions of people.

A great change has come about in the use of the White Mountains for recreation. Fifty years ago the visitors came by train. They stayed at hotels some of which were of high class and of course costly. The grand hotels are still there but they take care of only a small percentage of the area's visitors. Patrons come mostly by auto and stop at motor courts. In consequence there have been great developments in facilities for motor travel. It has many advantages that appeal to the motoring public. It is the simplest way to travel. It affords the best way to see and enjoy the Forest and indeed the whole White Mountain area. Visitors can see more and at less cost than in the old days. The publicity of the area emphasizes the claim that half the population of the United States can reach the White Mountains in a day's travel by auto. The writer does not know whether this claim is true or not. But he does know that lots of people can reach the White Mountains in a day's travel.

Having participated in a small way in the movement that resulted in the passage of the Weeks Law in 1911 and after that having organized the force that brought about the actual purchases of lands for the Weeks Law National Forests, both in the White Mountains and the Southern Appalachians, it was with a great sense of satisfaction that he visited the White Mountain area again in October 1954 and personally saw some of the benefits of the White Mountain National Forest.

According to information made available to me by the office of the Forest Supervisor the timber cut in the twenty year period 1916 to 1935 totaled 100,879 feet, board measure. The quantity cut in the sixteen year period 1936 to 1952 was 349,552 feet. The increased cut in the second period was partly due to increased acreage and partly to results of

good management. The writer has noted the same trend in well-managed forests in other timber regions. Also it is to be remembered that the area involved has been built up through a considerable period of time. Probably much of it has been acquired during the last twenty years. It takes a long time to build up a timber stand that has suffered heavy damage in cutting and by fire.

In addition to the Federal purchases the State of New Hampshire and the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests have, during the years in which the National Forest has been built up, acquired considerable areas of forest lands which while not particularly important to the Federal project, were desirable from the viewpoint of the State and Society. Some of these lands were given by the owners, others were purchased. This movement does indicate clearly the cooperative attitude of the people of New Hampshire toward the building up of the forests of the White Mountain area and also in the building up of the forests of the State of New Hampshire.

The movement has gone further than that. Some forest owners are now following the guidance of the State foresters and the foresters of the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, in the handling and development of their personally-owned forest lands. There is sound basis for belief that good forest practices will steadily expand in the White Mountain and adjacent regions.