

*In 2015 the Texas A&M Forest Service marked one hundred years of forestry in the Lone Star State. This article focuses on the agency's first quarter-century (1915–1940), its visionary founder W. Goodrich Jones, and the first two state foresters—John H. Foster and Eric O. Siecke—who were responsible for laying a solid foundation.*

# BRINGING FORESTRY TO TEXAS

*THE FIRST QUARTER-CENTURY  
OF THE TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE*

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**A**s the nineteenth century was coming to a close, the virgin forests of longleaf pine in East Texas were rapidly disappearing. Most had been felled in fifty-plus years of cut-out-and-get-out lumbering. Extensive acreages of stumps, burned-over landscapes, and streams filled with silt provided testimony to

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careless logging practices, frequent unsuppressed wildfires, and lack of reforestation. It was the story of America's forests, this time playing out in the Lone Star State.

W. Goodrich Jones, a banker from Temple, Texas, followed in the footsteps of many other pioneering conservationists. He was not a trained forester, but his life experiences had created a deep passion for trees and a deeper concern for the future of forests. As a child, he had visited Germany's Black Forest and its forestry schools, which had left a lasting impression. After graduating from college in 1883, he returned to Texas and in 1888 settled in Temple, a small railroad town without a tree in sight. He encouraged his fellow citizens in Temple and elsewhere in central Texas to plant trees. Soon he began campaigning for conservation, helping to establish a state arbor day seven years later.

Getting Arbor Day on the calendar was a relatively easy job. Bringing forestry to Texas proved more difficult for Jones. In 1899, at the urging of Bernhard E. Fernow, head of the United States Division of Forestry (which became the U.S. Forest Service), Jones surveyed the pine forests of East Texas by horse, buggy, and train. In his 1900 report, the man later recognized as the Father of Forestry in Texas wrote, "Like the buffaloes, the timber is going fast: what escapes the big mill is caught by the little mill, and what the little mill does not get, the tie cutters and rail splitters have soon cut down."

For the next decade and a half, Jones worked tirelessly to convince his fellow citizens of the need for forest management in Texas. Undeterred by the widespread indifference, he created one organization after another to generate interest and help get

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**BY RONALD F. BILLINGS**

legislation on the books. Meanwhile, the pace of logging and milling accelerated. By 1912, estimates of remaining pine timber in East Texas had dropped from 67.5 billion board feet in 1890 to 25 billion board feet, and volumes continued to dwindle rapidly. By 1914, Jones realized he could not accomplish his goal of creating a state forestry agency, so as an interim measure, to help push for such an agency, in 1914 he set up the Texas Forestry Association (TFA). At the organizational meeting that November, participants agreed with Jones that TFA should be nonpartisan and non-profit, with the primary goals of forming a state forestry agency and developing a statewide plan for forest conservation.

To help achieve those two aims, TFA raised \$350 from its members to bring J. Girvin Peters of the U.S. Forest Service's State Cooperation Division to Texas. Peters went on a month-long tour of East Texas to visit prominent lumbermen and view for himself the condition of the state's once magnificent forests. Returning to Temple, Peters worked with Jones to write a bill calling for a department of forestry in Texas (later labeled House Bill No. 9, An Act to Promote Forest Interests in the State). To gather further support for the measure, Peters wrote a leaflet entitled "A Forest Policy for Texas." Where similar bills had failed twice before, House Bill No. 9 succeeded in 1915 because of the strong support of state Representative Richard F. Burgess of El Paso and William B. Bizzell, president of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas (now Texas A&M University), among others. Jones, gathering support from a handful of conservation-minded forest industry leaders such as John Henry Kirby and J. Lewis Thompson, entrusted Burgess to guide the law to Governor James Ferguson, who signed it on March 31, 1915, creating a state forestry agency.

### ORGANIZING THE DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY

Texas became the thirty-fifth state in the nation and the seventh in the South to establish a state forestry agency, but it was the first in the nation to establish its forestry agency as part of a land-grant college, in this case Texas A&M. (Four other states—Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, and North Dakota—later did the same.) The agency's headquarters was established and has remained in College Station. Originally known as the Department of Forestry, it changed its name to the Texas Forest Service in 1926, and then to the Texas A&M Forest Service in 2012; it still goes by the initials TFS, however.

With the Department of Forestry finally created, Goodrich Jones placed a help-wanted ad in the June 1915 issue of the *Gulf*

*Coast Lumberman* seeking "an orator, a lecturer, a mixer," and "a highly trained specialist" willing to work for \$3,000 annually. The last requirement set Texas apart—it was the first state in the Deep South to hire an experienced, technical forester. The top applicant was John H. Foster, a native of Vermont who had graduated from the Yale Forestry School in 1907 and then joined the U.S. Forest Service. Foster worked in the Rocky Mountains, the South, and

in the Northeast, turning out reports on numerous topics, and became assistant chief of state cooperation within four years. He gained valuable experience in the Forest Service as a national Weeks Act inspector; knowledge he would later put to immediate use as a state forester in Texas. In 1911, he left the Forest Service to become head of the forestry department at New Hampshire State College and forester with the New Hampshire Agricultural Experiment Station.

His extensive experience in both academia and federal administration prepared him for his work as the first state forester in Texas, where he held two other titles. As chief of the Division of Forestry in the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, he was expected to conduct research. As professor of forestry, he taught five forestry courses at the college and ran the forestry department. And in March 1916, he assumed the responsibilities of secretary-treasurer of TFA and worked closely with Goodrich Jones to coordinate activities between the Department of Forestry and the association.

To supplement the \$10,000 annual budget the Texas state legislature had appropriated for the fledgling agency, Foster promptly applied to the federal government for matching funds for fire protection under Section 2 of the Weeks Act. With the \$2,500 of supplemental federal funds in hand, Foster organized the first system of forest fire protection in Texas, covering more than 7.5 million acres of the "Pineywoods" of East Texas. But in this, Texas was no different than any other state in declaring fire as the enemy. It was not until much later that scientists and forest ecologist realized that fire was essential for longleaf pine to thrive, and not until 2009 that the state, working with officials in Louisiana, formed a longleaf restoration task force.

On September 1, 1916, he hired six local men to serve as seasonal fire patrolmen, stationing them initially in Linden (Cass County), Longview (Gregg County), Tenaha (Shelby County), Lufkin (Angelina County), Livingston (Polk County), and Jasper (Jasper County). Each patrolman was given a radius of about 25 miles surrounding his headquarters, or 1,256,640 acres, and instructed to ride 15 to 25 miles per day, meet all citizens and



*W. Goodrich Jones, a banker and pioneering conservationist, was largely responsible for creating both the Texas Forestry Association and the Department of Forestry (now Texas A&M Forest Service) in Texas.*

TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE AND TEXAS FORESTRY ASSOCIATION



TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE AND TEXAS FORESTRY ASSOCIATION

*In 1916, W. E. Wells and five other forest patrolmen were hired to fight small fires and educate the public about fire prevention. Each patrolman cover 1.25 million acres of land on horseback.*

residents, acquaint them with the importance of fire prevention, and urge them to cooperate with the state and federal governments to this end. With help from locals and available hand tools, putting out small fires a patrolman encountered in his travels was another of his duties.

Being part of a land-grant institution, the agency has always considered research and education important aspects of its mandate. The Department of Forestry's Bulletin 3, *General Survey of Texas Woodlands, Including a Study on the Commercial Properties of Mesquite*, resulted from an early research project carried out under Foster's leadership. This pioneering study pointed out that the state's valuable wood resources were not limited to just East Texas. The administrative and financial support allocated to applied research, coupled with employment of knowledgeable scientists, distinguished Texas from most other state forestry agencies, few of which conducted research.

Foster himself wrote and edited as many as eight bulletins, including Bulletin 1, *Grass and Woodland Fires in Texas*; Bulletin 2, *Tree Planting Needed in Texas*; Bulletin 5, *Forest Resources of Eastern Texas*; Bulletin 6, *Forest Fire Prevention in Co-operation with the Federal Government*; and an extension bulletin, *Farm Forestry*. He remains the most prolific writer of any state forester to date. He accomplished this in less than three years with support from forestry assistant Harry B. Krausz and East Texas agents George W. Johnson and F. H. Millen. The bulletins served to identify problems facing forestry in Texas and established recommendations for addressing them. Indeed, the tax policy projections and future TFS needs he described to the state legislature (including the need for increased agency funding, decentralization of staff, more personnel at the field level, and a revised tax code for forestlands) were prophetic. Nearly every aspect of what Foster envisioned or set in motion eventually came to pass, and he launched the Department of Forestry in Texas on a successful and productive trajectory.

### CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Frustrated by his unsuccessful struggles with the Texas state legislature to increase funding for the forestry service, Foster resigned in February 1918; he eventually became the second state forester of New Hampshire. He was replaced by Eric O. Siecke, former deputy state forester of Oregon, who led the agency for the next 24 years. Siecke's knowledge of forestry and his strong leadership skills provided a solid foundation for the young forestry agency. Under his direction, TFS developed rapidly in forestry education, wildfire prevention and suppression, forest management, and research.

In a 1980 interview, D. A. "Andy" Anderson, interim TFS director in 1948 and head of the TFS Information and Education Department in the late 1960s, characterized Director Siecke as



John H. Foster, a New England native, served as the first state forester in Texas (1915–1918).



Eric O. Siecke (right) moved from Oregon to become the second state forester in Texas and served until he retired in 1942.

TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE AND TEXAS FORESTRY ASSOCIATION

“a straight-shooter. He was German, a strict disciplinarian, and demanded work from his people. He received it. He had, however, respect from all. He would do anything for anybody who worked for him. He had a heart. And, above all, he knew politics and how to get things done.”

Unlike his predecessor, Siecke was successful with the state legislature. In the 1919 legislative session, the trio of Siecke, Texas A&M President Bizzell, and Goodrich Jones, in his role as president of the TFA, orchestrated a substantial increase in state appropriations for the Department of Forestry. As Jones related in a 1944 memoir: “Old King Sisyphus of Greece was condemned to roll in perpetuity an enormous boulder uphill, which always rolled back to the bottom. When Dr. Bizzell and Mr. Siecke began to roll their \$10,000 a year appropriation, as it went uphill, it became \$20,000 and then \$30,000, getting heavier the further up it went, and it never fell back on those valiant pushers.” The expanded budget allowed Siecke to increase his headquarters staff in 1919 to include two assistant state foresters, Gordon D. Markworth and Lenthall Wyman, plus an office secretary. (Today, with the recent addition of 75 wildland firefighters, TFS employs 545 people and has an annual budget of about \$82.4 million.)

In addition to significantly increasing the financial support for the agency, Siecke was the shepherd for a timber supply study and subsequent recommendations for a forest policy in Texas. He succeeded in having a rider attached to the 1921 appropriations bill to relieve the state forester of his time-consuming teaching responsibilities. This allowed him to focus efforts on the primary objective for which the agency had been established—creating public awareness and a positive attitude about forests and encouraging landowners to practice forest protection and forestry.

To help meet those objectives, the Department of Forestry, jointly with Texas Forestry Association, began publishing *Texas Forest News* in August 1919. This was the first forestry newsletter issued by a state forestry agency in the nation. As described in the



Eric Siecke (back left), assistant state foresters Gordon D. Marckworth (left) and Lenthall Wyman, and a secretary in the TFS headquarters office, 1921.

first issue, the purpose was “to create an interest in forestry within the state, to bring up forestry points of interest from time to time, and to keep our readers informed of the progress of forestry in Texas.” After 1932, *Texas Forest News* was prepared, published, and distributed solely by TFS. The publication’s name was shortened to *TFNews* in 1970, then changed to *Texas Trees* in 1989; publication ceased two years later because of high costs.

In the early 1920s, Siecke argued for a fair and equitable taxation system for forestland to replace a tax regime that encouraged liquidation of timber and discouraged reforestation. This situation attracted much attention across much of the nation, but remained unresolved until a change in the federal tax code in 1944. He also advocated that forests and forestry remain in the hands of private citizens and not with federal or state government, stating in the 1924 annual report: “Public ownership should be minimized and private ownership and initiative should be encouraged in the great task relating to the renewal and proper management of forests.” (This has been the sentiment of most Texans ever since; today, 95 percent of Texas land remains privately owned.) Between 1924 and 1928, four state forests totaling just under 6,300 acres were established from cutover lands primarily for education and demonstration purposes.

### TEXAS FORESTRY COMES OF AGE

Forestry in Texas came of age in 1926, when the college’s board of directors officially recognized the Department of Forestry as one of the four major administrative divisions of the college, thus

giving it a rank equivalent to that of the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station and the Texas Agricultural Extension Service. The state forester was given the title of director, and annual salary for the position was increased to \$4,500. The department’s name was changed to Texas Forest Service. Statutory recognition for the agency would not come until 1951.

From its inception as a small state agency consisting of six fire patrolmen on horseback to address wildfires across 7.5 million acres in the Pineywoods, TFS made great strides in wildfire

#### Texas has had eight state foresters, plus two interim directors:

John H. Foster (1915–18)  
 E. O. Siecke (1918–42)  
 William E. White (1942–48)  
 Sherman L. Frost (Interim, April 1–June 30, 1948)  
 David A. Anderson (Interim, July 1–December 31, 1948)  
 A. D. Folweiler (1949–67)  
 Paul R. Kramer (1967–81)  
 Bruce R. Miles (1980–96)  
 James B. Hull (1996–2008)  
 Thomas G. Boggus (2008–present)

management in the 1920s and 1930s under Siecke's leadership. To deal with the continuing threat of wildfires, Siecke established the Forest Protection Division in 1922, the first division in the Department of Forestry and a clear indication of the importance of combating forest fires. In subsequent years, separate divisions would be created to expand the department's other activities in forest management, reforestation, research, and education. The following year, after intensive lobbying by the TFA Legislative Committee, the state legislature passed several laws addressing various wildland fire issues, including ones requiring spark arrestors on locomotives in forested areas and regarding the setting of fires.

Observers perched in tall trees were the agency's first fire spotters. During a 30-year career with TFS, Knox Ivie worked his way up from smoke chaser to patrolman, then to a construction engineer whose first assignment was to build more than two dozen tree cabs, or "crow's nests," and equip them with telephone lines, tables, and maps. He sited each one in the tallest tree on a hilltop or in high country. Ivie recalled, "Sometimes three or four of us boys would camp out until our work was done. We would work hardest to get a platform built at the top of the tree where we could make our beds. Many times at night, the wolves would wake us up with their howling. Then after the mosquitoes and ticks got through with us, we might manage to get a few hours' sleep. Our main meal was pork-and-beans, cheese and crackers, sardines, and peanut butter." This was what the men could afford with their expense account of fifty cents per day.

Fire spotters soon traded one precarious worksite for another. The first wooden fire detection towers went up in East Texas in the early 1920s, replacing Ivie's tree cabs. Because a wooden tower cost six times as much as a tree cab to construct but would not last any longer, in 1926 the division used funding from the U.S. Forest Service to build its first steel fire tower on State Forest No. 1 (later named E. O. Siecke State Forest, in honor of the second state forester). By 1930, the division included four protection inspectors, forty-two fire patrolmen, and an assistant division chief. In the mid-1920s, automobiles replaced horses as the chief means of transportation for forest patrolmen and expanded their firefighting equipment to include fire rakes, shovels, flappers, and backpack pumps.

Early leaders in the Department of Forestry recognized that state forests needed to demonstrate successful methods for establishing and growing trees and forests. Five state forests, comprising about 100,000 acres total, were established under Siecke's administration: Siecke State Forest (in Newton County), I. D. Fairchild (Cherokee County), W. Goodrich Jones (Montgomery County), John Henry Kirby (Tyler County), and Mission Tejas State Forest (Houston County), which later became a state park. The first tree nursery and first plantation of slash pine (a nonnative species in Texas) were established on Siecke State Forest in 1926. Indeed, it was the impressive growth of this slash pine plantation (Plantation 26-C) that would encourage the construction of a kraft pulp mill in Lufkin, the first mill to produce paper from southern yellow pine in the South. The TFS Forest Products Laboratory, created in 1939 by the state legislature, conducted some of the early research that supported the pulp mill operation.

During the Great Depression, President Franklin Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) established several camps in East Texas. Under the leadership of TFS Fire Chief William "Bill" White, the first four CCC camps were set up in May 1933, with eight additional camps established the following month throughout



FOREST HISTORY SOCIETY PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION, FHS3634

*Tree cabs, sometimes called "crow's nests," were forerunners of wood and steel fire towers.*

East Texas. Between October 1933 and October 1935, TFS was responsible for planning and supervising the fieldwork of 2,400 to 4,000 enrollees at seventeen CCC camps across East Texas. Crewmen constructed roads, bridges, and small dams, and fought forest fires. Bill Hartman, a former TFS employee, recalled, "At one time we found out that young girls were setting fires so they could meet the CCC boys when they came out to fight them."

When the four national forests (Davy Crockett, Sabine, Angelina, and Sam Houston) were established in East Texas in 1934, CCC crews planted trees on the cutover and burned landscapes. They also built the many stone buildings and shelters still present today in these federal forests and in many Texas state parks.

As early as 1936, TFS Director Siecke created the position of district forester and placed these deputies throughout East Texas.



A fire plow attached to a World War II surplus military jeep was used by TFS crews to build fire breaks in the 1940s.

Then and now, each district forester supervised a staff responsible for providing technical assistance and increasing public awareness about forestry, fire prevention and control, forest management, and other forestry activities to private landowners within an assigned number of counties. Decentralization, with a district forester overseeing several counties, was not fully implemented until the 1950s, at the direction of State Forester A. D. Folweiler.

By 1940, when TFS celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, the agency had added four divisions—Forest Products, Information, Silvicultural Research, and Industrial Forestry—bringing the number of divisions to six (including Forest Protection and Forest Management). The Forest Products Laboratory (later called the Forest Products Department), the first in the nation for a state forestry agency, operated for sixty years, helping to grow the state's fledgling forest products industry. The department was disbanded in 2000, a victim of budget cuts and a dwindling staff; the research work is now carried out by the research staffs of the forest products industry once aided by the lab.

Near the end of Siecke's administration and under Anderson's direct supervision, the seventy-three-acre Indian Mound Nursery was established in Cherokee County in 1940. This nursery initially produced some 22 million pine seedlings per year. In operation until 2008, when it was shut down because of high operating costs and competition from forest industry seedling nurseries, Indian Mound produced 1.2 billion pine and hardwood seedlings, enough to reforest some 2 million acres in East Texas.

By the time Siecke retired in 1942, forest fire fighting had progressed from men using hand tools and green pine branches to the deployment of mechanized crawler tractors for plowing fire-breaks. A fleet of small fixed-wing aircraft for fire detection and surplus military jeeps mounted with fire plows (introduced in the 1940s) and tilt-bed trucks carrying massive bulldozers (1950s) would soon follow. Today, the TFS Forest Resource Protection Division and its numerous partners have expanded statewide and address fire prevention and suppression with the latest technology and equipment, as well as the latest research that shows the essential role of fire in forest ecosystems. Balancing public expectations of protection from fire with the need for allowing fire in certain landscapes will be just one of several issues like urban forestry and water resource protection that will continue to challenge the service in its second century. But these challenges are ones TFS is well equipped to meet in no small part because of the strong foundation built by its first leaders, John Foster and E. O. Siecke. □

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