

*When Elihu Stewart was appointed in 1899 as the first Director of what was to become the Canadian Forest Service, he quickly saw that public support was essential to developing forestry programs. At his encouragement, the Canadian Forestry Association was formed the next year, in 1900. After organizing a first National Forestry Congress in 1906, the CFA began national programs in support of forest conservation and protection and tree planting. Robson Black's article reflected his ongoing concerns about the state of public knowledge and efforts needed to both educate and obtain support—"plus ça change, plus c'est le même chose"—the need remains!*

# PUBLIC OPINION AS A FOREST FIRE EXTINGUISHER

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR EVERY OWNER OF STANDING  
TIMBER WHO SEEKS A REDUCTION OF HIS FIRE LOSSES

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To develop an intelligent and progressive view concerning the forest resources is the special business of the Canadian Forestry Association. To us, as we work in our campaigns, a well informed public is only another term for standing timber, and for permanent pulp and paper and lumber mills and thriving population. We are not theorists. We are timber dealers. The man of practical affairs shies at public sentiment. The thing looks like an eiderdown cushion and it may continue to look that way until some day it hits him in the jaw and then he realizes that the real source of horse power is not Shawinigan and Niagara Falls after all.

The special commissioner of the Canadian Pulp and Paper Association, Mr. Beck, was sent to Scandinavia and other countries a year ago to report upon forest conditions and particularly the relation of the State to the solution of forestry problems. I believe that Mr. Beck's outstanding impression from his visit was not that Scandinavian forests were superior in quality or that growing conditions differ materially from those of

Quebec or Manitoba, but that the public knowledge of the national forestry problem has so permeated all classes of people that progressive and sane forest legislation had been made possible and that through this educational impulse the State, the people and the industries, were marching forward to ideal forestry conditions in perfect harmony. The first and most startling effect of this aroused public opinion in Scandinavia has been an almost complete suppression of forest fires. If an attitude, if public opinion, will stop forest fires in Sweden why not in the Clay belt or on the Miramichi?

## EDUCATIONAL PATROL

In recent years, fire rangers, inspectors, managers of the forest protective associations, the responsible officers of the government forest protective bodies have come to the conclusion that, while mechanical equipment and ranger patrol are absolutely essential and that a strong dose of police authority here and there exerts beneficial effects, the permanent solution of the forest fire problem must



come from intensive educational propaganda. These men in the field face the daily fact that nine out of ten forest fires are started by human beings and that the chief reason is not malevolence but ignorance and a general attitude of "don't care." These people who start the fires are amenable to reason. They are open to a variety of intelligent influences and wherever such educational pressure has been utilized intelligently remarkable results have followed. In a great many districts of this province the reason for the decrease of fires within recent years has been not an application of court fines and police action but in persuading the man who caused the fire to look upon forest protection as all a piece with his self-interest, and his duty to community.

The man who leaves out the general public in his campaign for better forest protection and for intelligent forestry methods in Canada leaves out the judge

and jury. He is wasting his effort on the court lawyers and the doorkeepers. In the first Victory Loan campaign 30,000 people, mostly professional investors, were persuaded to buy bonds of the Dominion Government. Recognizing that the mass of people must be persuaded to purchase bonds the Minister of Finance began his next campaign by a hard-hitting and inspirational advertising campaign on the simplicity and profit, and patriotism of bond buying. As a result 800,000 people purchased Government bonds. A short time ago the Coca Cola Company of New York sold their goodwill for three million dollars. That three million dollars was paid for an attitude, not for anything substantial or tangible. The money was paid because an idea has been firmly implanted in the minds of millions of persons that a particular drink was worth buying. More recently, the United States private-owned railways sought a remedy for their troubles under public operation by carrying their case to the general public. As a result the private railway managements secured an almost unanimous verdict in their favour which certainly would not have been possible had they not called in the jury of public opinion.

## COCA COLA AND FIRE PREVENTION

Is not fire protection as palpable and plausible as Coca Cola, or a Victory Bond? Is not the Canadian citizen, with a high average of education and a keen sense of fair play, as ready to back forest

protection as he is to back a telephone company or railway? Emphatically he is. During the past ten years we and other agencies have proved it so. Others have proved it so. Many lumbermen can vouch for the fact that one or two live men in a community can change over the record from a debit of annual fires to a credit of no fires at all. This has happened again and again and is only an illustration of the everyday triumph of the right idea.

Twenty-two years ago the Canadian Forestry Association came into existence with three or four basic ideas on which to found its future. First, that the forest with agricultural lands, constitutes the great pillar of Canadian prosperity. Second, that if the forests fail every other national activity goes to the wall. Third, that the fact of a constantly decreasing forest asset comes into direct and violent collision with our duty of preparing for a larger population and that the enormous advantages in export trade given to this country by virtue of forest possessions can be retained only as the raw materials are retained.

Such facts appeal to thousands of men brought within the influence of the Canadian Forestry Association; business men, who in thousands of instances have no identification whatever with the wood-using industries but who feel that public action in forest conservation was demanded as a matter of public safety, and commercial common-sense. They believe that the governments having retained the ground rights to more than 85

per cent of the forest area of Canada have retained thereby the main legal and moral responsibility for handing on the forest resources to the next generation in as good condition as when received. They believe that as time goes on exploitation must give way to regulation and that the State, as in almost every land on earth, is the inevitable forest regulator. From this, men made the simple deduction that only by putting the mass of people into possession of the forestry point of view can the State carry out its function competently. Now, the implication is this, that in a democratic land governmental action in forestry, as in road building, does not commonly venture far in advance of what the masses of people understand or sanction. Upon these various beliefs, entirely in tune with the policies of the Canadian Pulp and Paper Association, a body of influential public opinion in Canada has been reared.

## THE TWO STREAMS OF OPINION

In our experience public knowledge or lack of knowledge of the country's forest problems divides into two streams. The first reflects the educational process of the Canadian Forestry Association and of other agencies in the following beliefs: First, that the interest of the State and of the lumber and paper industry are identical and that the policy that serves one well must be of advantage to the other; Second, that logging is not a way station to agriculture, but that the

*The two major concerns about forestry at the time of Black's article were tree planting on the prairies and forest protection/conservation. The railways supported both causes and, in areas served by their lines, provided dedicated railway cars to enable the CFA to reach people on the land.*





*In days before movie theatres and TV in the rural and settlement areas, the arrival of the CFA railway cars offering free movies with sound—"talkies"—was a great event which drew students, teachers, and parents from great distances around the stopping points.*

wood-using may be and should be regarded as permanent as fruit farms. Third, that fires in the forest represent wholesale devastation and that the popular remedy of tree planting is merely a matter of retail restoration; Fourth, that there are more areas that have been mistakenly stripped of trees and that must eventually be returned to forests than there are acres now under timber that can ever be profitably cleared for farms; Fifth, that from the point of view of the right use of land 60 per cent of Ontario, and more of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Quebec must all be kept under timber crop or be regarded as a no-man's-land forever.

But there is another branch of the river of public opinion, bigger, more influential. It reflects the prejudices of the early farmer against the forest. It cannot forget what has been carelessly printed for the last quarter century about lumber barons and timber scandals. It knows, with all the certainty of ignorance, that there is more timber than will be needed in three centuries. This

misinformation and prejudice is the real fire-bug in Canada. It started probably about a thousand out of Ontario's fifteen hundred forest fires last year. That misinformation costs the limit holders of Canada as is well-known millions of hard cash a year. That misinformation always stands ready to impose on you by its enormous political power, unfair legislation, price control boards, and whatever novelty future emergencies may develop. Every unit of the great industry pays the short for public prejudice and pays it by the dram, whether or not it spends a dollar in counter-acting it or in building up a sane antidote. Last year, half of New Brunswick's forest fires were caused by parties of jolly fishermen. The thing that made that possible can be reduced to a general proposition: That an aggressive public having no regular diet of fact takes the next best thing, and the limit holder and the government pay the piper. Give these men the honest and convincing facts, or, better, give them to their children, and four times in five you can change the tune of

the entire community in a surprisingly brief time.

May I again emphasize that timber conservation, whether in the form of fire protection or in the securing of new laws and changes in administration, is a thing to be argued upon and advised upon by the limit holders and the industries, but the steam power to action is turned on only when the public gives the signal. This public is interested by its ownership of the timber lands, by its sense of authority, by its desire to promote basic industries, by its duty to future generations. Does not that public, the power vested in that public, give the solution of nearly all the major worries, except marketing, that harass the pulp and paper industry? Why not harness this power to forest protection? Why not harness it to the forestry programme of the pulp and paper industry as it has been harnessed to good roads and workmens' compensation and other things with which you agree or don't agree but which have gone through all the same? □